

Illinois Megachurch Denies Anti-Gay Stance After Starbucks CEO Cancels

An “anti-gay” church controversy that’s been brewing has finally become frothy.

Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz has canceled his speech at an influential megachurch in Illinois. The decision comes as a response to a petition that cast anti-gay aspersions on the congregation. At the same time, a Christian group that opposes homosexuality is also picketing the church.

The petition accused Willow Creek Community Church of “anti-gay persecution” based on its past association with Exodus International, a Christian ministry that works to help gays and lesbians leave homosexuality. Meanwhile, Americans for Truth About Homosexuality is upset because Willow Creek, an evangelical church in South Barrington, Ill., broke ties with Exodus in 2009.

The Americans for Truth About Homosexuality is holding what it calls a “peaceful sign vigil” outside Will Creek during its Global Leadership Summit, whose past speakers have included President Bill Clinton, pop singer Bono and GE’s Jack Welch.

The banners read, “Is Willow Creek Qualified to Lead?” and “Willow Creek Caves to Gay Activist Pressure” in a move to highlight what it perceives as the influential megachurchs’ failure to boldly proclaim the gospel’s life-changing truth.

“Christians across the nation were stunned to learn that Willow Creek had abandoned its friendly working relationship with Exodus International, the world’s largest ‘ex-gay’ ministry,” says Americans for Truth About Homosexuality President Peter LaBarbera. “Worse, the break came in 2009,

shortly after Willow Creek's leaders met with Soulforce, a homosexual activist group. Soulforce activists target megachurches and Christian ministries like Focus on the Family—demanding a politicized 'dialogue' even as they accuse leaders who defend the Bible's clear, historic prohibition of homosexuality of 'spiritual violence.'"

Bill Hybels, pastor of the Willow Creek Community Church, told *USA Today* that Willow Creek does expect its members to follow biblical ethics and reserve sex for marriage between a man and a woman, but welcomes worshippers of all backgrounds.

"To suggest that we check sexual orientation or any other kind of issue at our doors is simply not true," Hybels told *USA Today*. "Just ask the hundreds of people with same-sex attraction who attend our church every week."

Watch a video of Hybels announcing Schultz's withdrawal below.