

# SOULFORCE

## The American Family Outing

Mother's Day through Father's Day 2008



*A collaborative project of Soulforce and the  
Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, the  
National Black Justice Coalition, and COLAGE*

*[www.soulforce.org](http://www.soulforce.org)*

**The American Family Outing**

**Mother's Day through Father's Day 2008**

*Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People & Their Families Visit  
Six of America's Most Influential Evangelical Leaders & Their Mega-Churches*

## Goal

To begin a process of changing hearts and minds in today's largest mega-churches led by some of our country's most well-known pastors, and to educate the national public through the media on the issues of faith, family, and sexuality.

## The Challenge

The deaths of Jerry Falwell and D. James Kennedy in 2007 underscore an important shift within the leadership of the American evangelical community and the Religious Right. While older leaders like James Dobson and Pat Robertson continue their strident tenor and harsh antigay rhetoric, a younger generation of mega-church pastors is emerging, some with a style that is more pragmatic and politically sophisticated. While the older and newer generations of Christian leaders are identical in doctrine on the issue of gay rights—both are strongly opposed—some of the emerging leaders are striving to change the tone of the national political debate with messaging that is less punitive, therefore making religion-based discrimination seem more palatable to the mainstream American public. As their message permeates into the larger culture through church ministries, radio, television, and best-selling books, many Americans go to the polls and vote according to the cultural stereotypes supported and perpetuated by these ministries.

Six of the most well known and highly visible leaders of this younger generation are Joel Osteen, Bishop T. D. Jakes, Dr. Rick Warren, Bishop Harry Jackson, Jr., Bill Hybels, and Bishop Eddie Long (read more about them under *Brief Church Leader Biographies*).

These leaders are highly involved in American politics. When black America was outraged over the Administration's handling of the Hurricane Katrina crisis, President Bush was photographed with Bishop T.D. Jakes. Jakes has called homosexuality a "brokenness," said he would not hire a sexually active gay person, and endorsed the so-called *Truth For Youth* campaign which distributed specially-made antigay Bibles to high school students around the country. During the 2004 election, Bishop Harry Jackson played a prominent role in efforts to encourage African-Americans to vote for President George W. Bush and in 2007 was a keynote speaker for the *Family Impact Summit* in Tampa, Florida, with an emphasis on rallying voter's against the "homosexual agenda." Bishop Eddie Long called homosexuality "a manifestation of the fallen man" and has hosted events attended by four U.S. Presidents. Bill Hybel's mega-church has featured former president Bill Clinton and other prominent national leaders as guest speakers, and one of its ministries is an ex-gay program that tries to change gays to straight. On CNN's Larry King Live, Joel Osteen was asked about his views on homosexuality and stated "Well, to me, Larry, it's not God's best. It's not, you know, the scripture clearly defines that it's not — it's considered a sin". When asked what he would say to a gay person in his congregation who wanted to marry his partner, Osteen replied "Well, I just never encourage it because, you know, our — I didn't make the rules. But if you go back to the scripture, it talks about, you know — it's all — seen throughout the whole Bible that marriage is between a man and a woman." Dr. Rick Warren, who has ties to Bill Gates, Rupert Murdoch, and other corporate executives, sent a letter in 2004 to 150,000 pastors, urging "those of us who accept the Bible as God's word" to get out the vote for George Bush. Although he doesn't emphasize these views, Dr. Warren is on record as saying he believes homosexuality is a sin and Jews will go to hell.

In each of these mega-churches (and hundreds more around the country) the concepts of *family*, *family values*, and *traditional marriage* are paramount as the images of heterosexual moms, dads, and children in these churches are used to advance a political and social agenda that denies, hides, and rejects the reality of the truly diverse forms of family in America – including families headed by same-gender parents.

## The Soulforce, UFMCC, National Black Justice Coalition, and COLAGE Response

From Mother's Day Weekend (May 9–11, 2008) through Father's Day Weekend (June 13–15, 2008), Soulforce and our collaborating partners will sponsor The American Family Outing—a positive visibility and educational campaign featuring diverse forms of family - including same-gender couples with or without children, supportive straight couples and families, single-parent families, and single individuals who want to participate with a member of their extended family. Families will travel by air and by bus to the mega-churches of Warren, Jakes, Osteen, Hybels, Long, and Jackson to engage their congregations in dialogue about faith, family, and the damaging impact of religion-based discrimination on our lives and civil rights. Through our visibility we hope to peacefully challenge the false stereotypes about LGBT people and same-gender families, and educate the public through authentic and personal conversations—real parents sharing their stories and describing the hurtful effects of prejudice and religious condemnation. Our visit will include the attendance of a worship service, but we will also require a forum for more personal and direct interaction and dialogue. We will contact church leaders in advance of our visit and negotiate the parameters of our time together, which might include a family picnic—their families and ours sharing a meal and engaging in informal conversation - or a more structured exchange, such as family-led panel discussions and presentations.

The principles of nonviolent direct action taught by Gandhi and King instruct us to first make every effort to dialogue, and we believe that several of the mega-churches we plan to visit will indeed welcome us for both discussion and worship. If we are denied conversation however, both Gandhi and King encourage us to engage in creative and visible nonviolent direct action in an effort to change hearts and minds. The specifics of these direct actions will be developed at a later date, but for example, might include a candlelight vigil around the church or some other form of peaceful engagement. We also hope, through the implementation of a well-designed national media effort, to educate the “moveable middle” across America about the religion-based discrimination that threatens both the United States Constitution and our families.

### Recruitment

To execute this plan, forty diverse families will be carefully selected from the cities of Austin, Dallas, San Antonio, and Houston (approximately 10 families per city). We are seeking a wide range of families in terms of race, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation. **All Texas families selected for the project will be required to attend an extensive weekend of training in Austin, February 22-24, 2008.** This weekend will include comprehensive training in nonviolent direct action, media training, and theological preparation. During the training weekend, Soulforce staff will assist each family in creating a personal narrative which will be videotaped and uploaded to YouTube to create energy and anticipation in advance of the action. Childcare for children of all ages, as well as training & preparation for older children, will be provided during the February 22-24 training weekend in Austin.

All forty families will participate in the Mother's Day Weekend (May 9-11) action at Lakewood Church in Houston and the May 16-18 action at The Potter's House in Dallas, Texas. Teams will travel by chartered bus from their respective cities to the designated church and home again on those weekends.



These forty families will then be assigned to one of four teams—*Team Jackson, Team Long, Team Hybels, or Team Warren*. On one of the four remaining weekends, each of the four teams (approximately 10 families per team) will travel by plane to their assigned church across the country and be joined by other same-gender families in the region. Organizers in D.C., Atlanta, Chicago, and the Orange County/L.A. area will help insure that the traveling Texas team is joined by dozens of other families in their cities and surrounding areas. Organizing in this manner, it is our hope to have 40 families or more at each church.

Although each family will prepare for theological dialogue and be intimately involved in conversation with the congregations we visit, each team of families will be led by one or more clergy leaders who will serve as their primary spokespersons. These clergy leaders will be chosen from those who have demonstrated knowledge and skill in articulating an inclusive faith – they may include heterosexual pastors with some notoriety that had a change of heart themselves on the issue of homosexuality.

A national action of this magnitude has many associated costs and therefore we want to be clear about how these funds will be raised, what Soulforce will pay for from these funds, and the financial obligations from each participating family.

## Fundraising

Each participating Texas family must agree to help raise funds (with a goal of \$2,000 per family) during the March 1- June 15, 2008 online fundraising campaign. 100% of these funds will be used to pay for family travel (bus and airfare), as well as other expenses related to the planned church visits.

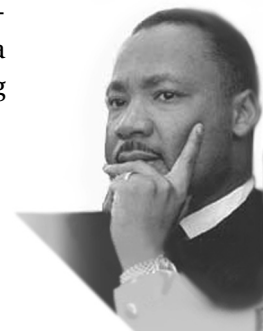
Each family will have a page on our website with a family photo and a personal statement about why you are involved in the *American Family Outing*. During the months of March and April, you can direct your friends and loved ones around the country to this page so that they can make a secure donation (if you have ever walked or done a bike ride for a special cause to get pledges beforehand – this is very similar). People who have never met you or your family may be moved by your story and want to support your involvement in this historic effort. Soulforce will work nationally to secure additional funding through email appeals, mailings to our donor base, and grants.

## Expenses

Soulforce will pay travel costs for each family, including chartered buses for May 9-11, and May 16-18, 2008, and roundtrip airfare for each family member to your team's designated out-of-state church visit (see Family Team Schedule). We will also provide all materials to complete each church visit.

Each family will be responsible for paying hotel expenses and food during each weekend. To assist in keeping family expenses to a minimum, Soulforce will negotiate a special rate at a hotel near each church that will likely include breakfast. Area churches and other organizations may also host other meals to assist us in keeping personal costs to a minimum.

*“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”*  
*Martin Luther King Jr.*



## To apply for the American Family Outing please submit the following three items by no later than January 15, 2008:

- Color photograph of your family.
- Completed application form.
- Signed "Expense & Fundraising" form.

*You can mail the above items to: Jeff Lutes, 515 Congress Avenue, Suite 1330, Austin, Texas, 78701, or email to [jefflutes@soulforce.org](mailto:jefflutes@soulforce.org). Families will be notified by January 27, 2008 about the status of their application.*

## Family Team Schedule

*Details will be reviewed during the required February 22-24 training in Austin*

### Friday, May 9 - Sunday, May 11, 2008 (Mother's Day Weekend)

**Joel Osteen and Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas**

All thirty families in Austin, San Antonio, and Dallas will have a chartered bus that takes them from their respective cities to Houston and back that weekend. These thirty families will join the 10+ families in Houston to implement the action.

### Friday, May 16 – Sunday, May 18, 2008

**Bishop T.D. Jakes and The Potter's House in Dallas, Texas**

All thirty families in Austin, San Antonio, and Houston will have a chartered bus that takes them from their respective cities to Dallas and back that weekend. These thirty families will join the 10+ families in Dallas to implement the action.

### Friday, May 23 – Sunday, May 25, 2008 (Memorial Day Weekend)

**Bishop Harry Jackson, Jr. & Hope Christian Church in Beltsville, Maryland**

The Texas families assigned to *Team Jackson* will travel by plane to Maryland and be joined by other families in the D.C. area.

### Friday, May 30 – Sunday, June 1, 2008

**Bishop Eddie Long & New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia, Georgia**

The Texas families assigned to *Team Long* will travel by plane to Georgia and be joined by other families in the Atlanta area.

### Friday, June 6 – Sunday, June 8, 2008

**Bill Hybels and Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois**

The Texas families assigned to *Team Hybels* will travel by plane to Illinois and will be joined by other families in the Chicago area.

### Friday, June 13 - Sunday, June 15, 2008 (Father's Day Weekend)

**Dr. Rick Warren and Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California**

The Texas families assigned to *Team Warren* will travel by plane to California and will be joined by other families in the L.A., Orange County, and surrounding areas.

For more information please contact us at [info@soulforce.org](mailto:info@soulforce.org)

## Brief Church Leader Biographies

**Joel Osteen**, pastor of **Lakewood Church** in Houston, Texas. Lakewood is North America's largest and fastest growing church averaging more than 42,000 attendees at weekly services, and a television program reaching over 100 million households in over 100 nations. He was featured as one of Barbara Walters' "10 Most Fascinating People of 2006" and was named "Most Influential Christian in America" in 2006 by the readers of *The Church Report Magazine*. His television ministry is the most watched inspirational program in the United States.



**Bishop T.D. Jakes**, founder and senior pastor of **The Potter's House** in Dallas, Texas, a multiracial, nondenominational church with over 30,000 members, nearly 400 staff members, and more than 50 outreach ministries to millions around the globe. A best-selling author, Jakes has been featured on the cover of *Time Magazine* and was named "America's Best Preacher" by the magazine.



**Dr. Rick Warren**, author of *The Purpose-Driven Life* and founding pastor of **Saddleback Church** in Lake Forest, California, one of America's largest and best-known churches with a membership of over 16,000. Warren was named one of "America's Top 25 Leaders" by *U.S. News and World Report* in 2005. He was elected by *TIME magazine* as one of "15 World Leaders Who Mattered Most" in 2004 and one of the "100 Most Influential People in the World" in 2005.



**Bishop Harry R. Jackson, Jr.**, the African-American pastor of **Hope Christian Church** with 3,500 members in Beltsville, MD, just outside Washington, D.C. Jackson was named one of the top 50 most influential Christians in 2005 by the *Christian Post*. His radio commentary can be heard daily on 400+ stations nationally. Jackson is a fervent opponent of gay rights and founded the High Impact Leadership Coalition to promote his "Black Contract With America on Moral Values," a six-point platform which includes the prohibition of same-sex marriage.



**Bill Hybels**, Senior Pastor of **Willow Creek Community Church** in South Barrington, Illinois with 30,000 members. The church has been listed as the most influential church in America the last several years in a national poll of pastors. Hybels started the *Global Leadership Summit* in 1995 as an annual training event broadcast live from the Willow Creek campus in suburban Chicago to 100+ video sites across America, plus later via delay for another 70 international sites. 80,000 attendees were part of the 2006 Leadership Summit.



**Bishop Eddie L. Long**, the African-American pastor of **New Birth Missionary Baptist Church** in Lithonia, Georgia with over 25,000 members and 40 ministries, frequently teaches that "homosexuality is a manifestation of the fallen man" and that God can "deliver" homosexuals. Bishop Long was honored by the Center for Disease Control and the National HIV/AIDS Partnership (NHAP) for his outstanding work in fighting the spread of HIV/AIDS. He was chosen by the family of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 2006 to host and officiate the homegoing ceremonies for Mrs. Coretta Scott King. The event was attended by four Presidents.



## EXPENSE & FUNDRAISING AGREEMENT

We understand that if chosen for *The American Family Outing* our family will be responsible for all hotel and food expenses during the Mother’s Day Weekend Action (May 9-11, 2008) at Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, the May 16-18 action at The Potter’s House in Dallas, Texas, and the one additional weekend when our family visits our assigned out-of-state church (see Family Team Schedule). To assist in keeping family expenses to a minimum, we understand that Soulforce will negotiate a special rate at a hotel near each church that will likely include breakfast (These hotels will be announced during the mandatory February 22-24 training in Austin, Texas). We understand that welcoming and affirming churches in the area, and other organizations, may also host some meals to assist in keeping costs as low as possible for the families that participate.

Our family agrees to help raise funds for this effort, with a goal of \$2,000 raised by our family during the March 1- June 15, 2008 online fundraising campaign. We understand that we will have a page on the Soulforce website, [www.soulforce.org](http://www.soulforce.org), with a family photo and a personal statement explaining why we are joining this effort to bring religious leaders the truth about LGBT people, and families like ours, during *The American Family Outing*. During the months of March and April, 2008, we are committed to directing friends and loved ones to this page so that they can make a secure donation. We understand that 100% of the funds raised will be used to help Soulforce cover transportation and other costs associated with this effort.

In exchange for our assistance in raising funds, we understand that Soulforce will cover the cost of travel during this event. This will include a roundtrip chartered bus from our city (Austin, Dallas, or San Antonio) to the Mother’s Day Weekend action at Lakewood Church in Houston, and a roundtrip chartered bus from our city (Austin, San Antonio, or Houston) to the May 16-18 action at The Potter’s House in Dallas, Texas. Soulforce will also provide roundtrip airfare for each member of our family listed on this application to our assigned out-of-state church (see Family Team Schedule).

Finally, we understand that to participate in the historic event, our family must participate in the February 22-24, 2008 training in Austin, Texas and that all travel and hotel expenses for the training weekend are our responsibility. Upon notification of acceptance, our family will be supplied with details about the designated hotel for the training, and the training schedule. We understand that we will be meeting other same-gender families from the state of Texas, developing a spirit of teamwork and unity, and may have photographs and video taken of us for promotional purposes. We understand childcare will be provided for all ages and older children will receive training for participating in the American Family Outing.

We acknowledge that we understand and agree to all of the above:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date





**APPLICATION FOR THE AMERICAN FAMILY OUTING**

*Do justice & create family memories that will last a lifetime!*

*Please attach a color photograph of your family and return this completed application, along with the signed "Expense & Fundraising" agreement form by no later than January 15, 2008. You can mail to: Jeff Lutes, 515 Congress Avenue, Suite 1330, Austin, Texas, 78701, or email all three items to [jefflutes@soulforce.org](mailto:jefflutes@soulforce.org). Families will be notified by January 27, 2008 about the status of their application.*

**Your Information (the primary contact person):** PLEASE PRINT

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State & Zip-Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Profession/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Race & Nationality: \_\_\_\_\_

Sexual Orientation: \_\_\_\_\_ Religious Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Church Attended: \_\_\_\_\_ T-shirt Size: \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of partner (or other member of your extended family) participating with you:** PLEASE PRINT

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address:  same as above

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State & Zip-Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Profession/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Race & Nationality: \_\_\_\_\_

Sexual Orientation: \_\_\_\_\_ Religious Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Church Attended: \_\_\_\_\_ T-shirt Size: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Children's Information (if Applicable)

**Child # 1:**

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ T-shirt Size: \_\_\_\_\_ What would else you like us to know about this child?

**Child # 2:**

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ T-shirt Size: \_\_\_\_\_ What else would you like us to know about this child?

**Child # 3:**

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ T-shirt Size: \_\_\_\_\_ What else would you like us to know about this child?

**Child # 4:**

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ T-shirt Size: \_\_\_\_\_ What else would you like us to know about this child?

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**For the following questions, please use additional paper as needed:**

For couples: How long have you and your partner been together? \_\_\_\_\_

What are the strengths of your family?

What challenges do you face as a family?

What is your greatest blessing as a family? Please explain:

How “out” is your family at work, at church, in your personal lives, with neighbors, and with other family members?

How did you reconcile your faith and your homosexuality? How do you know that God loves you and your family exactly as you are?

For each adult: Tell us a bit about your faith/church experiences growing up?

If you got the chance, what would you say to Joel Osteen on Mother’s Day or Dr. Rick Warren on Father’s Day?

Would each person in your family be willing to speak to and be photographed by the media?

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If you were to be interviewed by the media, what would be your message? (Soulforce will assist you with messaging, but we want to know your personal touch):

Please take a moment to craft a brief statement about why your family (if chosen) has decided to participate in *The American Family Outing*. This statement will be used on our website in conjunction with your family photo. You may want to think about this for awhile and practice writing it out elsewhere before you print the final version here (use additional paper as needed):

All families will participate in the Mother's Day Weekend (May 9-11) action at Lakewood Church in Houston and the May 16-18 action at The Potter's House in Dallas, Texas. Teams will travel by chartered bus from their respective cities to the designated church and home again on those weekends.

I understand that my family will then be responsible for flying to one of the following four churches on the designated weekend. I understand that families will be assigned to a church based on several factors, including racial diversity, so that our group of families mirrors the congregation we are visiting as closely as possible. My family's preference, if possible is:

\_\_\_\_\_ Friday, May 23 – Sunday, May 25, 2008 (Memorial Day Weekend)  
Bishop Harry Jackson, Jr. & Hope Christian Church in Beltsville, Maryland

\_\_\_\_\_ Friday, May 30 – Sunday, June 1, 2008  
Bishop Eddie Long & New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia, Georgia

\_\_\_\_\_ Friday, June 6 – Sunday, June 8, 2008  
Bill Hybels and Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois

\_\_\_\_\_ Friday, June 13 – Sunday, June 15, 2008 (Father's Day Weekend)  
Dr. Rick Warren and Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California