

Soulforce presents . . .

LOVE WELCOMES ALL

How to create a community-based conference to counter the antigay misinformation of Focus on the Family's "Love Won Out"

By Jeff Lutes, MS, LPC



The purpose of Soulforce is freedom for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people from religious and political oppression through the practice of relentless nonviolent resistance.

www.soulforce.org

LOVE WELCOMES ALL:

The **LOVE WELCOMES ALL** conference was created as a community response to stop the spiritual abuse of gays and lesbians by James Dobson's Focus on the Family. Dobson's anti-homosexual fundraiser, LOVE WON OUT, has targeted many communities across the country.



The first **LOVE WELCOMES ALL** conference was developed and directed by Jeff Lutes, MS, LPC and Paul Dodd, DMin, LPC in Austin, Texas on February, 22, 2003 (The name, "Love Welcomes All" came from a Soulforce direct action that took place in Kansas City, Missouri in June 2002). Concerned citizens, mental health professionals, and clergy in Austin rallied together to take a stand against the misinformation and damage caused by Dobson's conference. Since then, cities across the country have followed this idea and created similar conferences when Focus on the Family comes to town. **LOVE WELCOMES ALL** has developed a life of its own and we are delighted that this concept continues to be a positive, truthful, and effective tool for confronting injustice.

The goal of this document is to share the successful strategies and lessons learned in combating the spiritual abuse of LGBT people and their straight allies through the **LOVE WELCOMES ALL** conference. It is meant only as a guide and we encourage communities to tailor these ideas to fit the particular needs of your city. Be creative, have fun, and do justice.

Why LOVE WELCOMES ALL is needed in your community:



According to the Focus on the Family website, more than 200 million people hear the commentaries of Dr. James Dobson every day. He's heard on nearly 4,000 radio facilities in North America and in twenty one languages on approximately 3,300 facilities in over 116 other countries. In addition to radio, he routinely speaks out against gay and lesbian families on eighty television stations, and in books, CD's, and DVDs. Untruth about America's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender citizens flows from the Focus website, daily emails, monthly fundraising letters, and traveling conferences that present homosexuality as a sickness. Backed by an annual budget of more than \$130 million, Dobson's words cause unnecessary fear and panic . . . dividing fathers from their gay sons, mothers from their lesbian daughters, and neighbors from one another.

Dobson's LOVE WON OUT conference travels to an average of four cities each year and uses discredited "science" to perpetuate the fear-laden myth that homosexuals are miserable, lonely, disordered, and in need of so-called "reparative" therapy. The conference speakers teach that homosexuality is caused by family problems and faulty parenting (old theories discredited by mainstream research more than 40 years ago) and then encourage confused parent and friends to place their adolescent or even pre-adolescent child into "therapy" to prevent them from becoming gay. The keynote speaker is usually Joseph Nicolosi, who runs the antigay organization NARTH (the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality) with practices that fall well outside those accepted by mainstream mental health professionals.

Actual quotes from Dobson's LOVE WON OUT conference:
Oklahoma City, 2003

"We advise parents to use clear and consistent messages: 'We do not accept your effeminacy. You are a boy. God made you a boy. Being a boy is special.' When parents do this, especially fathers, they can turn their boys around".

"Like many other adult problems, homosexuality begins at home. Mom and Dad are key players. Research from the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality states, 'One hundred percent of the research participants stated their father/father figure was distant, uninvolved in their upbringing, frightening, and unapproachable. Eighty-seven percent spoke of a mother who was close, controlling, and overbearing' . . . But gender confusion can be reversed. Biological predisposition can be treated. Patterns of attraction and addiction can be understood and reformed. With the right information, the right strategy, and God's help, we can prevent homosexuality."

"We advise fathers: If you don't hug your son, another man will."

"The mother is over-emotionally involved, a dominate, strong personality . . . the father is quiet, withdrawn, non-expressive, and/or hostile."

"I've never met a homosexual man that had a loving respectful relationship with his father."

"I have never seen a male with a homosexual problem think fondly of his older brother . . . I've never heard that . . . never do hear it."

"Homosexuality is a gender identity disorder."

"There is no such thing as a homosexual . . . We are all heterosexual, but some heterosexuals have a homosexual problem."

"Homosexual behavior is always prompted by an inner state of emptiness."

"Homosexuality is about a sense of self. Homosexuality is a masculine inferiority. Homosexual behavior is about striving to connect with the lost masculinity within the self."

"A little pre-homosexual boy came home from school and said 'Mom, we are doing a play at school, and I am playing the part of the father.' The mother got angry and said, 'You go back and tell them you want a speaking part.'"

"Is it possible to be a totally healthy person who is also homosexual? NARTH did a very extensive study . . . and found everything from cigarette smoking, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, greater depression, anxiety, poor long-term relationships, sadomasochism, anonymous sexual encounters, lesbians are more unfaithful to their partners than heterosexual women . . . it goes on and on and on."

Tips for creating a LOVE WELCOMES ALL conference:

- Develop a simple one-day conference with national and local speakers who can present the accurate scientific research about homosexuality, a welcoming and affirming theological position toward the gay community, and personal stories by individuals and/or same-gender families. If possible, get at least one well-known speaker to draw the crowd.
- Some **LOVE WELCOMES ALL** conferences have been held on the same day as Dobson's LOVE WON OUT conference. Other cities have held **LOVE WELCOMES ALL** shortly before or after Dobson's conference. One creative city even offered attendees of Dobson's conference a "discount" to **LOVE WELCOMES ALL** so they could hear the Truth.
- Consider holding your conference in a church that is welcoming and affirming of the LGBT community. This helps convey the message that not all places of worship share the antigay theology of Focus on the Family and the church hosting their conference.
- Some conferences have been held free of charge and others have charged as much as \$40 for the day. Our experience is that most people are willing to pay a fee because they understand that there are expenses involved in presenting a professional conference.
- Be sure to mix in music and video presentations throughout the day. This uplifts and inspires the audience and helps maintain their attention. It is also a great way to demonstrate the talent, creativity, and beauty within the LGBT community (rather than the "lonely & miserable" stereotype perpetuated by the Dobson conference).
- Copies of the Soulforce booklet *"A False Focus on My Family: Why every person of faith should be deeply troubled by Dr. James Dobson's dangerous and misleading words about the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community"* by Jeff Lutes, MS, LPC are a great resource to have available for your conference.

The booklet documents over 50 of Focus on the Family's false claims and responds to each one using the reputable scientific research, the position and policy statements of America's major mental health associations, and the words of civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr.'s widow, Coretta Scott King. To obtain copies of the booklet, go to the Soulforce website, www.soulforce.org.
- Show the 29 minute Soulforce video **"Dear Dr. Dobson: An Open letter Video to Focus on the Family"** during your conference. The video, narrated by Jeff Lutes, MS, LPC includes video clips of Dobson's false claims and an interview with Jack Drescher, MD, who has published extensively on the ethical dangers associated with therapies designed to "change" sexual orientation. It includes an interview with Robert Spitzer, MD, commenting on how his study has been incorrectly used to perpetuate an antigay agenda. Finally, Dr. Judith Stacey summarizes the research on same-gender parents, speaks about how her study has been misused by Focus on the Family in court cases, and confronts Dobson's frequent distortion of the facts in this area. Includes a bonus feature music video by pop artists Jason & deMarco. You can obtain a copy of the video by going to the Soulforce website at www.soulforce.org.



- Develop a website to help promote and advertise your conference.
- Develop press releases and a list of media contacts in your area. Google **LOVE WELCOMES ALL** to find examples of press stories that have been generated in the past. Condense your media message to one or two sentences, especially for television.
- Develop professional brochures and posters/flyers to advertise your conference.
- Ask the mayor or the city council to name the date of your conference as "Love Welcomes All Day" in your city. There is usually a form to fill out and you may be able to suggest the language that will appear on the Certificate of Recognition.
- Consider holding a pre-conference luncheon for community leaders approximately 2-3 months before your **LOVE WELCOMES ALL** conference (a church or other organization might donate the lunch). Ask for donations at that luncheon and print the name of the individual/business/organization in your conference program. Provide packets of printed information to each person in attendance and ask them to help promote the event.
- Create a **LOVE WELCOMES ALL** t-shirt and list sponsoring agencies, organizations, businesses, and churches on the back. Be sure to include your conference website address on the t-shirt. Sell them in advance, give them away to major donors and conference speakers, etc., to promote the event. Sell the remainder at the event.
- Arrange for a local LGBT bookstore to set up a table and sell books during your event. You may be able to suggest book titles to them.
- If any of your speakers are authors, schedule a book signing during the conference.
- Consider forming an alliance of community groups to sponsor the event. For example, in Austin, Texas, **LOVE WELCOMES ALL** was sponsored by Soulforce Austin and the "Austin Alliance for Social & Spiritual Justice" (an alliance formed just for that event) This creates a sense of city-wide ownership.
- Most importantly, please follow the Soulforce principles of nonviolence in all your planning, conference materials, press releases, and interviews with the media.



Remember:

James Dobson & Focus on the Family are NOT our enemies.

Misinformation is the enemy.

After more than 40 years of research, what do the major mental health associations say?

The American Psychological Association

“The research on homosexuality is very clear. Homosexuality is neither mental illness nor moral depravity. It is simply the way a minority of our population expresses human love and sexuality. Study after study documents the mental health of gay men and lesbians. Studies of judgment, stability, reliability, and social and vocational adaptiveness all show that gay men and lesbians function every bit as well as heterosexuals.”

“The literature that classifies homosexuality and bisexuality as mental illness has been found to be methodologically unsound. Gonsiorek (1991) reviewed this literature and found serious methodological flaws including unclear definition of terms, inaccurate classification of subjects, inappropriate comparison of groups, discrepant sampling procedures, an ignorance of confounding social factors, and questionable outcome measures. The results from these flawed studies have been used to support theories of homosexuality as mental illness and/or arrested psychosexual development. Although these studies concluded that homosexuality is a mental illness, they have no valid empirical support and serve as the foundation for beliefs that lead to inaccurate representations of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.”

“Research has indicated no significant differences between the capabilities of lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents when compared to heterosexual parents. However, lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents face challenges not encountered by most heterosexual parents because of the stigma associated with homosexuality and bisexuality. Prejudice has led to institutional discrimination by the legal, educational, and social welfare systems. In a number of instances, lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents have lost custody of their children, have been restricted in visiting their children, have been prohibited from living with their domestic partners, and/or have been prevented from adopting or being foster parents, on the basis of their sexual orientation.”

“Studies comparing groups of children raised by homosexual and by heterosexual parents find no developmental differences between the two groups of children in their intelligence, psychological adjustment, social adjustment, popularity with friends, development of social sex role identity or development of sexual orientation . . . Another stereotype about homosexuality is the mistaken belief that gay men have more of a tendency than heterosexual men to sexually molest children. There is no evidence indicating that homosexuals are more likely than heterosexuals to molest children.”

“Research findings suggest that efforts to repair homosexuals are nothing more than social prejudice garbed in psychological accouterments.”

The American Psychiatric Association

“The APA affirms its 1973 position that homosexuality per se is not a diagnosable mental disorder. Recent publicized efforts to re-pathologize homosexuality by claiming that it can be cured are often guided not by rigorous scientific or psychiatric research, but sometimes by religious and political forces opposed to full civil rights for gay men and lesbians. APA recommends that the APA respond quickly and appropriately as a scientific organization when claims that homosexuality is a curable illness are made by political or religious groups.”

“Whereas homosexuality per se implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability, or general social or vocational capabilities, the American Psychiatric Association calls on all international health organizations, and individual psychiatrists in other countries, to urge the repeal in their own country of legislation that penalizes homosexual acts by consenting adults in private. And further, the APA calls on these organizations and individuals to do all that is possible to decrease the stigma related to homosexuality wherever and whenever it may occur.”

“Numerous studies over the last three decades consistently demonstrate that children raised by gay or lesbian parents exhibit the same level of emotional, cognitive, social, and sexual functioning as children raised by heterosexual parents. This research indicates that optimal development for children is based not on the sexual orientation of the parents, but on stable attachments to committed and nurturing adults. The research also shows that children who have two parents, regardless of the parents’ sexual orientations, do better than children with only one parent.”

“The American Psychiatric Association opposes any psychiatric treatment, such as “reparative” or conversion therapy, which is based upon the assumption that homosexuality per se is a mental disorder or based upon the a priori assumption that a patient should change his/her sexual homosexual orientation. In doing so, the APA joined many other professional organizations that either oppose or are critical of ‘reparative’ therapies, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Counseling Association, and the National Association of Social Workers.”

“The potential risks of ‘reparative therapy’ are great, including depression, anxiety, and self-destructive behavior, since therapist alignment with societal prejudices against homosexuality may reinforce self-hatred already experienced by the patient. Many patients who have undergone ‘reparative therapy’ report that they were inaccurately told that homosexuals are lonely, unhappy individuals who never achieve acceptance or satisfaction. The possibility that the person might achieve happiness and satisfying interpersonal relationships as a gay man or lesbian is not presented, nor are alternative approaches to dealing with the effects of societal stigmatization discussed.”

The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

“We see no evidence that same-sex couples or family units vary significantly from heterosexual couples or family units in terms of aspirations, hopes and goals, or in outcomes for children.”

The American Counseling Association

The American Counseling Association has adopted a resolution that states that it “opposes portrayals of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth and adults as mentally ill due to their sexual orientation; and supports the dissemination of accurate information about sexual orientation, mental health, and appropriate interventions in order to counteract bias that is based on ignorance or unfounded beliefs about same-gender sexual orientation.”

The American Anthropological Association

“The results of more than a century of anthropological research on households, kinship relationships, and families, across cultures and through time, provide no support whatsoever for the view that either civilization or viable social orders depend upon marriage as an exclusively heterosexual institution. Rather, anthropological research supports the conclusion that a vast array of family types, including families built upon same-sex partnerships, can contribute to stable and humane societies . . . The Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association strongly opposes a constitutional amendment limiting marriage to heterosexual couples.”

The American Psychoanalytic Association

“Because marriage is a basic human right and an individual personal choice, RESOLVED, the State should not interfere with same-gender couples who choose to marry and share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities, and commitment of civil marriage.”

The American Academy of Pediatrics

“The AAP recommends that pediatricians become familiar with professional literature regarding gay and lesbian parents and their children; support the right of every child and family to the financial, psychological, and legal security that results from having both parents legally recognized; and advocate for initiatives that establish permanency through coparent or second-parent adoption for children of same-sex partners.”

“Therapy directed specifically at changing sexual orientation is contraindicated, since it can provoke guilt and anxiety while having little or no potential for achieving changes in orientation.”

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

“There is no evidence to suggest or support that parents with a gay, lesbian, or bisexual orientation are per se different from or deficient in parenting skills, child-centered concerns, and parent-child attachments, when compared to parents with a heterosexual orientation. It has long been established that a homosexual orientation is not related to psychopathology, and there is no basis on which to assume that a parental homosexual orientation will increase likelihood of or induce a homosexual orientation in the child. Outcome studies of children raised by parents with a homosexual or bisexual orientation, when compared to heterosexual parents, show no greater degree of instability in the parental relationship or developmental dysfunction in children.”

Please let us know if there is anything more we can do to help your community develop a successful conference. We can provide the names and contact information of many professional scientists and theologians across the country that may be available to speak at your event.

For a free telephone consultation about your conference, call Jeff Lutes, MS, LPC at 512-419-0600.

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