

[MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATION ARTICLE]

Soulforce to Confront Discriminatory Church Policies at Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting, June 7- 11 in St. Louis

Soulforce, an interfaith movement committed to ending spiritual violence perpetuated by religious policies and teachings against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, will continue to challenge discriminatory church policies at the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in St. Louis, June 7 – 11, 2002.

Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi and founder of the [MK Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence](#), will be keynote speaker and a workshop leader, along with the Rev. Dr. Mel White, co-founder and executive director of Soulforce, during the **Soulforce Institute for Nonviolent Change**. The Institute, which will offer training in the principles of nonviolent resistance, will be held June 7-9.

"**Sharing Our Stories**," in which Baptists will describe their faith journeys, will be held the morning and afternoon of June 10. That evening, Soulforce's "**24 Hours of Justice**" will begin with continued training in the techniques of nonviolence and direct action, and resume the next day with prayerful vigils at the America's Center, where the SBC annual meeting is being held. The purpose of these vigils is to put a face and a name on the suffering that Southern Baptist discriminatory policies and teachings have caused to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals and their families. There is the possibility of a direct action on June 11, with acts of civil disobedience and arrests (people are always free not to take part in the arrests).

Hundreds of Soulforce supporters, from many spiritual paths and denominational affiliations, have taken part in vigils, trainings in nonviolence and direct acts of civil disobedience at national denominational conventions over the course of the last few years, including those of the United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Episcopal Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), and U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

This will be the third year that Soulforce has been present at the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention. The actions at the SBC have taken place after attempts have failed to dialogue with Dr. James Merritt, president of the SBC, and other SBC leaders.

As an ever-expanding movement, Soulforce is asking people of all faith paths to come together in St. Louis to show Southern Baptist leaders that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals can live with honesty and integrity and be healthy, whole, and happy children of God.

Already, many people have come to realize the importance of supporting one another in confronting Christian homophobia, regardless of faith or creed. Advocacy groups from

the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, including the Extraordinary Candidacy Project, Lutherans Concerned/North America, Wingspan, and Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries, have pledged their support and commitment for this action. Individuals from PFLAG, Equal Partners in Faith, Metropolitan Community Church of Greater St. Louis, and former Southern Baptist ministers and other free and faithful Baptists are joining together with many others to support one another in this important event.

Over the past two years, Soulforce has helped mobilize and motivate thousands of people to action, and those who have participated say their lives were transformed by the experience. For more information, contact Karen Weldin at karen@soulforce.org, 1-877-705-6393 or (918) 452-2761. To register to participate in the event, visit the Soulforce website at <http://www.soulforce.org>.