

December 18, 2008

Dear President-elect Obama,

I am deeply saddened and offended that you have invited Rick Warren to give an invocation at the Presidential inauguration.

This is not about gay marriage; it is not about politics. It is about human dignity.

When Proposition 8 passed in California, the most distressing thing for me wasn't that the LDS church expended an unprecedented amount of resources on the campaign. It was that young, closeted gay Mormon teenagers had to sit around the dinner table for several months and hear about Proposition 8, how they were less than human, and how God didn't love them.

Similarly, eight years ago, when an anti-gay proposition passed in Nebraska—my home state—my concern wasn't primarily about the sanctity of the Nebraska state constitution. Instead, I worried about the emotional well-being of my young, gay friends Nate, Taylor, and Alex, all of whom struggled with depression or tried to kill themselves. Nate succeeded at age 18. To add insult to injury, Nate's funeral was protested by Fred Phelps of the "God Hates Fags" group because Nate had been a political activist helping to start Gay Straight Alliances in Omaha, Nebraska.

Like thousands of others from born-again Christian families, my own struggle for self-acceptance has been messy, painful, and exhausting. Leaders like Rick Warren support the "ex-gay" programs I found myself drawn into as a lesbian teenager in an attempt to create peace within my family. These so-called reparative therapists turn pain and hurt inward, so that I was left with a well of shame. Only when I became involved in political activism, found a healthy relationship, and started talking to others who have faced similar struggles have I been able to overcome the Rick Warrens of the world.

There is a cold reality faced by many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people: we often have to choose between our families of origin and our own sense of self-dignity. This is a miserable, wrong choice. But it's a choice that Rick Warren's ideology forces.

I've done my fair share of trying to find common ground and healing with the evangelical movement. For example, despite my dad's \$5,000+ donation in favor of Proposition 8, my partner and I flew from California to my sleepy hometown in Nebraska to share Thanksgiving with my family. Instead of demonizing evangelicals, I've tried to channel anger and pain into loving resistance.

For me and countless other LGBT young people who come from religiously conservative homes, this work for common ground is not about scoring political points; it's about keeping our families.

So, I understand what you're trying to do by inviting Rick Warren to your inauguration. But in your work to build bridges with evangelicals there must be some rules of the road, some

boundaries that can't be crossed. Inviting Warren to give the *invocation*, a solemn, spiritual message to the country crosses a line. To me, it is an act of spiritual abuse.

Even more disappointing, your invitation to Rick Warren demonstrates that you may not understand LGBT lives and struggles. I cannot express how sad this realization makes me. Perhaps the LGBT movement has not effectively communicated to you the emotional toll anti-gay leaders like Rick Warren exact on LGBT people.

So, let me be clear: LGBT teenagers are *four times* as likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers. Thousands more struggle with internal and external voices that lead them to consider suicide as the only way to escape pain and spiritual abuse. In my experience, the only thing that keeps many LGBT young people from killing themselves is sheer force of will, a spirit that refuses to be broken, and an unshakable *hope* that things will be better "someday."

I had hoped that "someday" had arrived with your Administration. Today, it feels like I was wrong. I urge you to reconsider your decision. To borrow a quotation from Erik Erikson, I hope that "someday, maybe, there will exist a well-informed, well-considered, and yet fervent public conviction that the most deadly of all possible sins is the mutilation of a child's spirit."

This is the message we deserve from a religious leader at your inauguration. Unfortunately, Rick Warren is far from the person who can deliver such a hopeful message of change.

Sincerely,

Angela Clements
Oakland, CA

Cc: Presidential Inauguration Committee