

# **PFLAG** Palm Springs / Desert Communities

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## **THE BANNER OF THE DESERT**

The Newsletter of PFLAG Palm Springs/Desert Communities Chapter  
Our twenty-third year. March 2018, Volume 23, No. 3

**PFLAG Meeting**  
**Sunday, March 18, 2:30 pm**  
**Cathedral City Library, Community Room**  
Info: 760-202-4430 – [info@PSpflag.org](mailto:info@PSpflag.org)

Dan Smith will facilitate the meeting and the discussion topic is:  
Is our chapter serving the people who could use our assistance?  
What are some ways that we could do a better job at outreach?  
Let's see what ideas we can come up with.

Light refreshments provided by Mike and Carol Balasa

Volunteer to provide a light refreshment for  
future meetings (cookies, cake ...): email [info@PSpflag.org](mailto:info@PSpflag.org)

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### **A Message From The Editor - Mike Balasa**

It seems everything has changed. Until Trump's unlikely election, I, and I'm sure most people, felt that progress in LGBTQI civil rights was steady and certain. We knew there were still some religious bigots making outrageous statements about sexual minorities; especially, transgender people. Regularly there would be news reports about a baker or photographer who refused services to same-sex couples seeking help with their weddings. Several state legislatures were passing or proposing so called "religious liberty" bills to allow businesses to refuse services to people who offended their religious beliefs. Still we believed that these were only a few people and involved only a few extremist churches.

We were wrong. It turns out that 80% of religious fundamentalists, the so called Evangelical Christians, supported Trump. The Evangelicals by best estimate make up nearly 25% of the US population. Worse, they are well organized through their churches and they don't fail to vote. It was difficult to believe that the Evangelicals who profess high moral standards and "family values" would support a candidate with a background of bankruptcies, failed businesses, cheated investors, failed marriages, numerous adulterous affairs and charges of accosting women. They were outraged by President Clinton's affairs. They support laws to make divorce difficult. Sanctity of marriage is important to them and same-sex marriages are offensive. Yet all of that was unimportant in choosing Trump.

Many experts believe that they overlooked Trump's sins; because, the important results they wanted: to overturn same-sex marriage and outlaw abortions, were only possible with

conservatives controlling the government and appointing the right judges to Federal Courts.

Their rejection of morality will eventually come to an end. There is a growing awareness of their hypocrisy and hateful behavior. Polls indicate that the younger generation is disgusted with them. Our hope is that goodness and compassion will yet triumph.

### **BILLY GRAHAM DIES**

There is confusion about where Graham stood on LGBTQI issues. This could be explained by the fact that he seldom spoke of this issue. Compared to his son, Franklin, who regularly makes inflammatory statements against same-sex marriage and transgender rights, Graham was less strident. On his website Franklin claims that Satan is behind LGBTQI rights and activism. There is “no place for compromise” on same-sex marriage. He has praised Russia who he said have “stood steadfastly against the rising homosexual agenda in their country.” Billy Graham was clear; however, when asked about his stand on LGBTQI people, “Let me say this loud and clear. We traffic in homosexuality at the peril of our spiritual welfare.” He called homosexuality a “sinister form of perversion” that was contributing to the decay of civilization. At one time he did apologize for saying that he thought it might be possible that AIDS was a judgment of God.

Perhaps the worst consequence of Billy Graham’s agenda was the role he played in involving right-wing politics with religion. Heather White, a professor of religion at University of Puget Sound wrote, “Graham was perhaps the most important figure foundation-builder for the evangelical coalition that came together in the late 1970’s as the Christian Right. He helped unite factionalized fundamentalists, hippie Jesus people and conservative-leaning white Mainline Protestants into an evangelical coalition.” Graham’s first entry into the political arena came in the 1960’s when he led his newly formed coalition into the Republican party with the support of Richard Nixon for president. His organization under the leadership of his son, Franklin, urged the Evangelical voters to “hold your noses and go vote for Trump”.

Graham was 99 when he died. In 2011, in an interview with “Christianity Today” he expressed regret in getting involved in politics. He told the interviewer that he should have “steered clear” of politics and that sometimes he “crossed the line”.

A friend, Doug Jones, had a letter published in the “Los Angeles Times” and I think he summed up the legacy of Graham very well, “Graham was no saint. His stance toward gay people was miserable and unchanging. He would not have approved of my marriage to my husband. Yet despite his lousy stance on LGBT rights, in general, he tried to make the world a better place. Sadly, his evangelistic movement was hijacked in the 1980’s by self-serving ideologues like Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority, who moved Evangelism into politics and the culture wars. Graham himself publicly stated his regret for having been drawn into politics. Even more tragic, Graham’s son Franklin, who has moved his father’s organization to the extreme far right. Evangelicals would be wise to look back to Graham’s early days when his goal was simpler: to get people to live better and more loving lives.”

Both former President Barack Obama and current President Trump, expressed public condolences at Graham’s passing. There is no denying that Graham was a major influence on the current climate in this country. What he started has led to a nation that is divided and angry. Maybe the loving part of his legacy will yet prevail.

## **BERMUDA REJECTS SAME-SEX MARRIAGE**

Bermuda House and Senate passed a bill to abolish same-sex marriage and the Governor, John Rankin, signed it. The bill will allow for civil unions with same-sex partners having all the legal rights of legally married Bermudans, but it will not be called marriage. Marriage was made legal in Bermuda in May of 2017 when the Bermudan Supreme Court ruled that banning same-sex couples from marriage was unconstitutional. Those marriages performed while it was legal will remain legal marriage.

In June 2016, Bermudans were asked to vote on a referendum on same-sex marriage and civil unions. Both were defeated by 70% and 60% respectively. Bermudans have long registered their resistance to civil rights for the LGBTQI community. In 2006 an attempt to add LGBTQI people to a human rights act was overwhelmingly defeated.

There is no apparent reason why Bermuda is strongly anti-sexual minority. The culture is a combination of American and British influence. The largest religion, Anglican, is not known for anti-LGBTQI stances. Evangelical sects make up only about 10% of the population. The economy of Bermuda depends on tourism and having anti-LGBTQI attitudes is not good for the economy.

Bermuda is a British overseas territory. The governor is appointed by the British government. However, Bermuda has its own constitution, legislature and courts. Britain provides only defense and foreign representation.

The British Prime Minister, Theresa May, issued a statement saying that the decision was “seriously disappointing”, but Britain must respect the right of Bermuda to self-govern.

Ty Cobb, director of Human Rights Campaign Global, said, “This decision strips loving same-sex couples of the right to marry and jeopardizes Bermuda’s international reputation and economy.” Cobb vowed the HRC will continue to fight for the right for every Bermudan to marry.

## **MR. ROGERS WAS A MODEL OF LOVING CHRISTIANITY**

Fred Rogers was obviously a loving and caring person. Watching him on TV it was evident that he was never angry or bitter, that he always looked for the best in people and was completely free of prejudice. On his program he reminded viewers daily that he, and God, loved everyone just as they were. He was a vegetarian; because, he explained that he didn’t ever want to eat anything that had a mother. His daytime children’s show was successful - he won 4 Emmys and a Lifetime Achievement Award for Daytime Television. He was awarded the President’s Metal of Freedom, elected to the Television Hall of Fame and his trademark sweater is exhibited at the Smithsonian’s Treasures of American History exhibit.

Rogers was also an ordained Presbyterian minister. He was ordained in 1963, but never worked in a church. Starting in the early 1950’s he worked in television productions, first in Canada then in the U.S. with PBS. Rogers said he made television his ministry, “I went into television because I hated it so, and I thought there’s some way of using this fabulous instrument to nurture those who watch and listen.”

What is seldom known about Rogers was his support for LGBTQI people. He hired two gay men to appear on his program, John Reardon and Francois Clemmons. Reardon played

many different characters on the show and he was often called upon to use his operatic singing abilities. Reardon was an opera singer who appeared many times at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Clemmons, who is Black, played a recurring role as a police officer.

Clemmons, in an interview on NPR, told of an episode where Rogers was soaking his feet in a plastic tub. Mr. Rogers invited Officer Clemmons to join him. In 1969, this was a poignant image of two men one Black, one White, their feet next to each other in the tub. Afterwards Mr. Rogers helps dry Officer's Clemmons' feet. A Biblical image with a message of love and acceptance.

The only downside, Clemmons told NPR, was that because of fear of reactions from bigots, Rogers asked him to not come out of the closet or allow himself to be photographed in a gay bar. He reassured Clemmons that he respected him and did not think he was immoral. Eventually, Rogers recanted and told Clemmons to lead his private life as he saw fit and even encouraged Clemmons to find a man he could be happy with. Clemmons recounted an episode when at the end of the show Rogers gave his closing lines, "You make every day a special day just by being you, and I like you just the way you are." When he said these lines, he was looking directly at Clemmons. Later when asked, Rogers told Clemmons that he was talking at him, "I have been talking to you for years. But you heard me today."

Both Fred Rogers and Billy Graham were major cultural influences in the culture of our country. Today the vast majority of citizens support LGBTQI civil rights. I think we can thank Mr. Rogers for influencing young people to grow into loving and caring adults. Thank you, Mr. Rogers.

## **MY HOMETOWNTON**

*by Bob Warburton*

Everyone has a home town, but different people will delineate a different category of town to be that "home" one. What is your home town? Is it the town where you were born and raised and went to school? It is easy to name that place as your home town. With me, I was born in Conroe, Texas, but I hate to name that as my home town as I stayed there only 9 months and lived in the area of South East Texas only until I was three years old. Add to that the only people I know there moved there from Wyoming.

No, I choose my home town to be where I lived off and on for most of my teens and twenties. Add to that my Mom lived there for a long time, and Casper, Wyoming became my home town. And today I can have a bit of pride because this self-proclaimed "Oil Capital of the Rockies," which is a strong hold of Trumpism, just passed a resolution supporting the entire LGBT Community on a 7 to 2 vote. Add to that, this City of 80,000 is celebrating the fact and looking ahead, not lamenting the fact and discussing how to repeal something they just passed. Casper said "No" to hate and discrimination. discrimination.

Yet, this is just a resolution and not an ordinance. This is the City Government with the backing of a large number of businesses saying we love the Community and we welcome you, but there are no penalties if you do discriminate, fire, or refuse to rent to Gay people. Since there are no State anti-discrimination laws in Wyoming, not even anti-hate crime laws, the LGBTQIA person is literally legally defenseless. Still, this is a big step for Casper and Laramie that did the same thing two years ago to make. First it means the Community really wants a statement that they have value, even if they cannot yet receive protections.

For the City it is a statement that their neighbors are valued.

And even though there are no legal protections, this resolution took a long time and much work in order to succeed here. The local PFLAG Chapter started having meetings over a year ago, and then started attending every City Council Meeting. The 2016 election saw a contentious Council replaced by a Council that was determined to get along. The Latino Mayor who is a long time Peace and Justice Social Studies teacher joined with a liberal lawyer with whom I went to college to work out the language that all could support. Yet, it is the local PFLAG Community who has been around in some form or other since the early 1980s who did most of the work to gain the victory. Congratulations! Now everyone knows this is only the first step as Wyoming needs legal protections.

### **GEORGIA TARGETING SAME-SEX COUPLES SEEKING TO ADOPT**

The Georgia State Senate passed a bill that would allow adoption agencies to refuse services to same-sex couples. The bill, “Keep Faith In Adoption And Foster Care Act”, is now headed to the House. Already there are outcries from the business community who fear customer backlash against Georgia based businesses if discriminatory bills are passed. Georgia Equality and the Family Equality Council are rallying supporters to fight this bill. Both Democratic candidates for Governor spoke out against this bill.

Supporters of the bill insist that Christian based adoption agencies need assurance that they will not be forced to abandon their faith. Children they place for adoption or foster care must go to a family that has the same religious beliefs of the agency. Opposition to the bill pointed out that same-sex couples were likely to have the same religious beliefs as the agency; otherwise, they would have gone elsewhere.

Jeff Graham, executive director of Georgia Equality said, “This mean-spirited legislation that hurts Georgia’s families, does an incredible disservice to the thousands of children in the state foster care system, and really threatens our ability to attract vibrant businesses that strengthen our communities... No one is trying to undermine freedom of religion in Georgia - that’s why religiously affiliated adoption agencies already enjoy the freedom to work exclusively with families that share their faith values. This legislation goes out of its way to make it harder for loving and committed same-sex couples to start a family - and unfortunately, it’s children in need of permanent homes who will pay the steepest price”

### **FIRST OPENLY GAY MEN IN WINTER OLYMPICS**

Adam Rippon and Gus Kenworthy are the first openly gay U.S. men to join the Olympic team. Rippon is part of the figure skating squad and Kenworthy is on the ski team. Kenworthy was on the 2014 team and won a silver medal in freestyle skiing. In 2014, however, Kenworthy had not yet come out as gay.

They both have publicly denounced the choice of Vice President Pence to lead the U.S. team to South Korea. Rippon complained that Pence’s notorious anti-LGBTQI comments and history of pushing discriminatory laws make him a poor choice to lead the delegation.

**Time To Join PFLAG? Time To Renew?  
PFLAG Membership**

If you would like to join PFLAG Palm Springs/Desert Communities, print and mail the form below or join [online](http://www.pspflag.org/joindonate) at [www.pspflag.org/joindonate](http://www.pspflag.org/joindonate).

All our expenses go to furthering our mission. Our expenses are for materials that we supply to individuals, schools and supporting organizations; the information phone line, newsletter production, support to local schools' Gay Straight Alliances; and, many other occasional expenses such as the Pride Parade.

When you join and support the local PFLAG chapter with a membership of \$30 or more, we send your name and a portion of the fees (\$15) to PFLAG National, making you a member of both the National and our local chapter of PFLAG. You will receive all publications and notices.

Members sometimes don't realize that if you join National PFLAG directly you are not on the membership rolls of the PFLAG Palm Springs/Desert Communities. PFLAG National does not notify us that you joined and they do not share any of the membership fee.

**PFLAG PALM SPRINGS/DESERT COMMUNITIES MEMBERSHIP FORM**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Names: \_\_\_\_\_

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

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Suggested Membership Donation:

Family \$50: \_\_\_\_\_ Individual \$30: \_\_\_\_\_ Other Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

We appreciate any dollar amount.

Budgetary restraints will not keep anyone from being part of our PFLAG family.

Make check payable to PFLAG and mail to:

PFLAG 611 S. Palm Canyon Drive / 7-262

Palm Springs, CA 92264

Info: 760-202-4430 – [info@pspflag.org](mailto:info@pspflag.org)

Chapter Officers: President: Mike Balasa, Vice-president: Carol Balasa

Secretary: Christine Hammond, Treasurer: Peter East

Directors: Dan Smith, Sly Zelnys