

Dear Friends,

Have you heard? It's true! On May 4 and May 5, 2009 HRC's Religion and Faith Program will present our second [Clergy Call for Justice and Equality](#)! **It is not too early to [register to come](#).** As with our Clergy Call 2007, clergy and religious leaders from every state in the country will gather in Washington, D.C. to meet with members of Congress, take part in a major press conference, and worship together in an interfaith service. With more time to plan and with a faith-based movement for GLBT equality growing exponentially, we have set our ambitions even higher this time to include a transgender educational campaign in key congressional districts and to encourage deeper work on *all* GLBT issues throughout the country. The theme for this Clergy Call, "Moving from Acceptance to Advocacy," is designed to propel faith leaders to organize and advocate locally for GLBT equality. Our experience has shown us that engaged spirit-filled local faith work is the fuel that drives a national movement.

The conception and inspiration for this second Clergy Call came directly from those who came to [Clergy Call 2007](#). These religious leaders returned from their time in Washington energized with a new sense of possibility for change at home and a deeper sense of how their local work could embolden a new dialogue about GLBT people and faith throughout the nation. They didn't just think lofty thoughts however; these leaders prayed with their feet! They visited with their Congressional representatives in their districts; they formed letter-writing campaigns in support of hate crimes legislation and the Employment Non-discrimination Act in their congregations; they met with reporters, wrote editorials and opinion pieces for their local papers; they crafted sermons about their time in Washington; and, they used the model of the Clergy Call for faith-based organizing in their states. In short, they became agents of change.

Their example taught us that Clergy Call 2007 was not the culmination of work; it was a beginning. The months following the Clergy Call have born this out. Although we made historic gains in the House and Senate on the Mathew Shepard Hate Crimes Protection Act, in the end neither the Mathew Sheppard Act nor the Employment Non-Discrimination Act made it to the President's desk. In addition, we witnessed firsthand how much work we need to do to make transgender equality a reality.

We know that transgender people were hurt and angered by the long legislative battles we faced over ENDA in 2007; we have heard and felt much of that pain ourselves. But if this challenging period has taught us anything, it is how difficult it is to pass fully inclusive legislation when the educational groundwork has not been set in our local communities. There has been a lag in transgender education in this country and the effects on transgender people have been devastating. Even if a fair-minded President and Congress is elected next year, without sustained local educational work that engages people of faith, we will not see the fruition of fully inclusive legislation for hate crimes protections and ENDA.

To address this clear educational need, we are asking clergy and their congregations to go deeper and do educational programming in their local congregations on transgender issues. We hope clergy will tell their members of Congress about this education work and the conversations it has inspired among people of faith back home in the district. Congress needs to hear about what congregants learned together about who transgender people are and why they need the protections ENDA and the Matthew Shepard Bill would provide. As we

do this work we also need to continue to educate Congress about the lives of gay, lesbian and bisexual people.

To assist in this work we are producing congregational resources, including an interfaith transgender curriculum from writings and interviews with transgender people of faith, families and congregations. To accompany this curriculum, we have received special financial support to provide transgender educators in targeted districts. We are also creating a study guide to accompany the award-winning film *For the Bible Tells Me So*. Both our interfaith transgender curriculum and *For the Bible Tells Me So* guide, provide a hands on one-session training designed to engage people of faith in rich and faithful dialogue on transgender and LGBT issues. The trainings also encourage participants to take their conversations to the next level and work for change in the public sphere. To facilitate this next step, the trainings will include step-by-step suggestions on how people of faith and congregations can move from acceptance to public advocacy. We know this is often hard work and that to be successful people need readily available resources to deepen their understanding of the issues and to sharpen their faith positions. In addition to the curricula we are, therefore, featuring a collection of resources on our website, including a Biblical guide to gender identity.

As with all of our projects, our work is enhanced by the thoughtful contributions of our coalition partners. Please check out, among others, the faith-based resources that the [National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce's Institute for Welcoming Resources](#) and [the Hebrew Union College Institute for Judaism and Sexual Orientation](#) are creating. In particular, their transgender resources will be particularly useful for congregations that wish to host a series of consecutive conversations in their congregations.

In addition to our resources, we have developed an [interactive story page](#) on our website that will enable visitors to our site to share the work they are doing in their communities. We have also provided information on how to [financially plan and raise money for your trip](#) to Washington, D.C.

If you are inspired by Clergy Call 2009 or have questions, please don't hesitate to write us at religion@hrc.org; we will be delighted to talk with you further. Please also visit our website www.hrc.org/religion often as we are regularly adding further information and new resources.

Finally, please pray for us. We cannot do this work without you.

Blessings,

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