

## **Church Questions whether Jesus Would Discriminate**

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**For the Republic**

On a recent trip to Indianapolis an unusual yard sign caught my attention: "Would Jesus discriminate?" The thought-provoking slogan displayed on thousands of yard signs, door hangers, bumper stickers, T-shirts and full-page print ads represents a month-long campaign begun the weekend of the Indianapolis 500 intended to spark dialogue over discrimination against gay people. The campaign's national sponsor is Faith in America headed by Jimmy Creech, a heterosexual who was defrocked as a Methodist clergy in 1999 for officiating at a gay couple's union.

### **MCC Campaign**

In Indianapolis and the surrounding area, the campaign is sponsored by Jesus Metropolitan Community Church and asked its members to distribute materials and invite people to a June 15 town hall discussion. "Our position isn't, 'Who cares about the Bible?' but instead that the Bible is being misused," explains the Rev. Jeff Miner, the minister at Jesus MCC. "Jesus wouldn't discriminate."

While the compatibility of homosexuality with Christian teaching is one of the most hotly debated issues in the church today, there is little argument over the outreach of Christ to all people — especially those traditionally considered beyond God's grace.

Jesus' example of ministry to the outcasts of society is well-documented:

- the ethnically impure Samaritans,
- the sick who were believed to be sinners under God's punishment,
- women deemed to be unclean and/or immoral,
- tax collectors,
- Roman soldiers who were regarded as the enemy,
- the poor who lacked resources to maintain rigorous rites of religious purity.

### **Preached to All**

Jesus reached out to each one of these despised and rejected groups, emphatically rejecting a long-held prejudice. Would he not teach the same inclusivity today?

So, as the campaign asks, would Jesus discriminate?

Instinctively, I sense that the answer must be a resounding "No!" Yet many churches are leading the effort to legalize discrimination against gay people.

Why? Probably the biggest reason is we fear what we do not understand.

History has some powerful lessons to teach us regarding how religion was misused to justify such wrongs as slavery, denying women the right to vote and the banning of interracial marriage.

Remember when white-robed Klansmen in front of burning crosses publicly promoted discrimination toward people of color?

### **Against Gays**

Unfortunately, history repeats itself. Today, the cross is used to promote that same attitude toward folks who are gay.

This antidiscrimination campaign is more than just creative. It might prove to be life-altering.

Those who assume that no one can be gay and Christian will be challenged to re-think their prejudice.

This is good. Prejudice thrives when ignored and dies when examined. For Christians who've not yet embraced gay friends and neighbors, a simple question can be wonderfully life-changing: "Is that a very Christ-like attitude to have?"

Jesus' radically inclusive actions branded him a rebel in his time yet changed the course of history.

Courageous acceptance and affirmation of all people will do the same today.