

Press Release

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New LGBT equality effort launched on Valentine's Day

NEW YORK CITY -- To be gay in America overwhelmingly means to be treated as a second-class citizen. While national polls show gradual but consistent increases in levels of acceptance, an exclusionary view of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons continues to hold sway, especially in our churches. In response, several mainline Protestant and secular LGBT advocacy groups launched a new collaborative effort Feb. 14 called *Believe Out Loud*.

Born out of more than two years of collaborative research, planning and development by the country's leading LGBT advocacy groups, both religious and secular, *Believe Out Loud* combines traditional community organizing strategies with new technologies and advanced social marketing principles to accelerate the movement toward LGBT inclusion that already exists within the church. This collaborative effort of several mainline Protestant and secular LGBT advocacy groups is under the management of Intersections International, a multi-faith initiative of the Collegiate Church of New York.

A recent survey of mainline clergy confirms that a pro-gay Christian movement is grounded in a growing base of support: among more than 2,700 congregational clergy responding to a poll conducted by Robert Jones and Daniel Cox of Public Religion Research, 29 percent already are vocal supporters of LGBT rights and another 41 percent are a "moveable middle" that could be persuaded to preach and teach in support of LGBT rights. The goal of this effort is to transform attitudes and beliefs among mainline Protestant clergy and lay leaders regarding full LGBT inclusion as a means of promoting justice for LGBT individuals in the broader society. The effort's organizing premise: *believing that LGBT persons should be welcomed in our churches is not enough; we need to Believe Out Loud*.

The Rev. Robert Chase, Executive Director of Intersections International and Project Manager for *Believe Out Loud*, says, "Thus far, the largely secular proponents of LGBT equality have been unable to craft successful strategies to counter arguments advanced by the religious right and instead have all but ceded organizing in faith communities to some of the staunchest opponents of LGBT justice. The 'God vs. gays' battle continues to rage. *Believe Out Loud* seeks to change that story."

Centered around a sophisticated web hub, www.believeoutloud.com, strategies include advertising (on and offline), community organizing and providing comprehensive tools and

resources for a broad array of stakeholders: clergy, lay leaders, youth, advocates, seekers and the general public. The effort is designed as a multi-year public campaign culminating in a self-sustaining movement.

Michael Livingston, former president of the National Council of Churches and a member of *Believe Out Loud's* Strategic Development Team said, "Real progress toward the full inclusion of all people in the life of church and society is severely hampered by an absence of real honest talk. *Believe Out Loud* aspires to stimulate conversation and help people speak up and speak out: we are all created in God's image — every color, men and women, young and old, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered."

Objectives of this effort include: increasing the number of Mainline Christian individuals and institutions who actively support LGBT rights within the church and society; equipping leaders with the tools to begin the conversation about LGBT inclusion in congregations; and supporting LGBT advocacy efforts within mainline Christianity and the broader society that already exist.

"Valentine's Day marks what we are calling a 'soft launch,'" said Chase. "One advantage of using new technology is that we can monitor, refresh and increase the levels of engagement as we grow. We are thrilled to put an initial set of resources into the public arena and we look forward to adding to our offerings as the Believe Out Loud movement takes root."