



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN®

June 12, 2014

Rev. Ronnie Floyd
President, Southern Baptist Convention
901 Commerce Street
Nashville, TN 37203-3699

Dear Rev. Ronnie Floyd,

I wanted to take this opportunity to write and congratulate you on your election as President of the Southern Baptist Convention, the nation's largest Protestant denomination. As a fellow Arkansan who was brought up in a Southern Baptist household I feel a sense of pride that a local pastor now holds such an austere position.

Growing up Southern Baptist in Arkansas, I understand the power of faith in the daily lives of Americans. Like you, the rhythms of my childhood were set by Bible study, Sunday worship, and church potlucks. We looked to our ministers, our lay leaders and our Bibles for guidance on how to respond to the big moral questions and the daily challenges of life. Church was what bonded us to each other and to our higher power.

Yet as a gay man I can tell you from personal experiences how excruciating it is when the community that forms you and loves you is also the one that rejects you when you come out as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. As I travel across the country I hear over and over again tragic stories of young people who have felt they could no longer have a spiritual home or one where they could be fully out without fear of rejection and brutality. This fear of rejection doesn't just affect LGBT people; I have talked to hundreds of parents of LGBT kids who have been forced into the impossibly cruel position of having to choose between fully loving their child or staying with their Church, often the bedrock of their community. These faithful Americans are often most hopeful to worship again in the traditions they grew up in and love.

In my heart of hearts I do not believe Southern Baptists wish to cause such harm to the LGBT community. Nineteen years ago the SBC made a public apology for its past contribution to slavery and racism and asked for "forgiveness from our African American brothers and sisters, acknowledging that our own healing is at stake." That was a noble move toward reconciliation that showcased Southern Baptists at their best--as people who not only recognized their past mistakes but understood that their own salvation was connected to ending oppression. The country desperately needs to see that spirit again from Southern Baptists.

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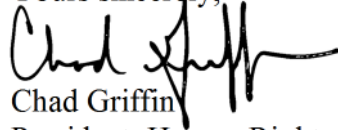
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Sadly, though, policies like the transgender resolution that passed recently at your national convention in Baltimore only take us farther backwards. On Tuesday the SBC voted that gender identity is determined by biological sex only, which effectively dismissed the lived experiences of transgender people as invalid. This action was not only misguided and wrong but also mean-spirited. Transgender Americans are often the most marginalized, the most misunderstood and the most targeted members of our community. While all of us need loving religious homes, it is particularly disheartening to see such a home effectively denied to transgender people who encounter daily harassment from so many sectors.

We can and must do better. I know that the idea of the head of the Southern Baptist Convention and the head of the largest LGBT organization breaking bread together may seem preposterous, but I have seen miracles in my lifetime when faith leaders and LGBT advocates came together in the spirit of reconciliation.

Please consider this an open invitation to meet to discuss our mutual areas of interest. As you start your new presidency, I offer an open hand and a pledge to work with you to find a new way out of the culture wars so that all of us can live up to Jesus' commandment to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chad Griffin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Chad Griffin
President, Human Rights Campaign