

## Gay Religion

### Unprecedented \$1.2 million grant from Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund to support pro-lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender faith work

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*Unprecedented grant bolsters collaboration among Institute for Welcoming Resources and five partner organizations in expanding the number of welcoming and affirming churches*

**The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Foundation's Institute for Welcoming Resources (IWR) and five partner organizations have been awarded a total of \$1.2 million from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund to work jointly to expand the number of churches that are welcoming and affirming of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people and to strengthen their internal capacities.** This funding is significant not only because of its dollar amount, but also because it marks a breakthrough in secular foundation support for LGBT faith organizing efforts.

The recipients are the Task Force's Institute for Welcoming Resources, which works with the welcoming church movement in 30 Christian denominations; Integrity, which works within the Episcopal Church; Lutherans Concerned/North America, which works within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada; More Light Presbyterians, which works within the Presbyterian Church (USA); Reconciling Ministries Network, which works within the United Methodist Church; and the United Church of Christ Coalition for LGBT Concerns.

The grant, which will be paid out over two years, will support a strategic, collaborative effort to expand pro-LGBT faith-based organizing efforts and allow the groups to fortify their respective infrastructures. Through the welcoming church movement, congregations decide — through a formal vote — to offer an unconditional welcome to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. To date, more than 3,100 congregations across the Christian spectrum have explicitly welcomed LGBT people to full inclusion in the life and ministry of their congregations. This is largely due to the longtime and tireless work of these organizations, most of which have worked together for years to build the strong foundation of the existing welcoming church movement.

"We are extremely grateful to the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund for generously supporting this important collaboration," says Rea Carey, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. "The more than 2.5 million individuals in the 3,100 congregations supported by the Institute for Welcoming Resources and these partner organizations are some of our movement's most valuable advocates in promoting understanding, reclaiming what unfortunately has become a narrow view of 'moral values' espoused by those who seek to divide, and advancing LGBT equality. We thank the Haas, Jr. Fund for not only recognizing this, but for providing the critical resources to advance these pro-LGBT faith organizing efforts."

"We are excited that this grant will help the Institute for Welcoming Resources realize its vision to significantly increase the number of local congregations and parishes committed to the full inclusion of LGBT people," says Randall Miller, a program officer with the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund. "We're convinced that this unique partnership among the Task Force's IWR program and denominational advocacy organizations holds the potential to transform the larger LGBT movement by greatly expanding its supporters and extending its reach."

A groundbreaking study titled *David v. Goliath: A Report on Faith Groups Working for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Equality (and What They're Up Against)*, released in 2006 by the Task Force's National Religious Leadership Roundtable, found that conservative organizations and foundations such as Concerned Women for America, Focus on the Family, Coors Foundation, American Enterprise Institute and the Scaife Family Foundation have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in faith-based organizing, while many centrist and liberal organizations have avoided any alliance with or funding of their progressive faith counterparts.

The report also found that organizations surveyed in the mainline Protestant and Catholic churches faced an average 8-to-1 disadvantage in funding compared to anti-LGBT organizations in their denominations. This grant will greatly help to balance those scales.

"A sea change is under way in faith communities across the country," says the Rev. Rebecca Voelkel, director of the Institute for Welcoming Resources. "The day is fast approaching when people will hear the word 'Christian' and associate it with justice, equality and support for all, including LGBT people. This collaborative grant is one concrete way we're going to get there."

The collaboration's main goals are to strengthen the capacity, witness and voice of Christian organizations that support LGBT people and families, and to support the efforts of people within each denomination to increase the number of welcoming and affirming congregations.

What the five partner organizations are saying

"This is the kairós time, the opportune time when the church and the world are about to turn. While full inclusion of LGBT people in the life of the Lutheran communion requires a marathon strategy, what we do in the next 12 months will be critical to the success of the mission of Lutherans Concerned/North America over the next 20 years," says Emily Eastwood, executive director of Lutherans Concerned/North America. "The timely and generous grant from the Haas, Jr. Fund will enable Lutherans Concerned/North America to maximize its strategic impact by increasing organizational and financial capacity, enhancing volunteer and leadership development at the grassroots, fostering continued expansion of our Reconciling in Christ program, and organizing for the 2009 Evangelical Lutheran Church of America synodical and churchwide assembly seasons where major decisions will be made about the full inclusion of LGBT people and families and pastors."

"Haas, Jr. was able to see the longtime activism and organizing in frontier territory provided by Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) for equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons. RMN puts these monies to work immediately building infrastructure, training new leaders, creating networks in new regions and strengthening advocate teams across the United Methodist Church. Such strategic investment allows us to impact denominational change from the grassroots to the worldwide legislative sessions of the church," says the Rev. Troy Plummer, executive director of the Reconciling Ministries Network.

John Clinton Bradley, acting executive director of Integrity USA, says: "We are extremely thankful for this grant. It will enable us to move to the next level of programming and effectiveness as a faith-in-action organization. This includes developing and implementing a systematic process to help Episcopal parishes become more welcoming and affirming of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in their congregations and communities."

"The Haas, Jr. Fund helps the UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns equip volunteers for our mission to educate and advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and their allies and to save lives by training people in suicide intervention," says the Rev. Ruth Garwood, executive director of the UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns. "Developing and vitalizing open and affirming churches that not only welcome LGBT people in, but also reach outside their congregations, makes a difference in both church and society. This investment from the Haas, Jr.

Fund makes it possible for the coalition to build the internal systems that make more effective the hundreds of our volunteers who participate in the movement for LGBT rights."

"As a national grassroots movement working for LGBT equality in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and civil society since 1974, we have been able to accomplish much as a nearly all-volunteer network with one full-time staff person. The funding from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund allows More Light Presbyterians to build capacity and take our next steps as an organization and network by hiring additional staff," says Michael J. Adey, M.Div., Ph.D., executive director and field organizer of More Light Presbyterians in Santa Fe, N.M. "We stand at the threshold of accomplishing policy change and ending discrimination against LGBT persons and their families in the Presbyterian Church (USA) as we enter a national campaign to ratify the recent legislative victory at the 218th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA). This grant makes it possible for More Light Presbyterians to create this national campaign."

Don't miss Many Stories, One Voice: The North American Convocation of Pro-LGBT Christians, a conference convened by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, on Sept. 4–7 in New Orleans, La. Pro-lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Christians will converge on the Big Easy to strengthen the movement of Christian churches that are welcoming and affirming of LGBT people. The gathering will offer new tools and training in the areas of faith-based community organizing, media training, board development, fund-raising, research, biblical studies, theology, capacity-building and other concrete skills. For more information or to register, please visit [www.ManyStoriesOneVoice.org](http://www.ManyStoriesOneVoice.org).