

# San Francisco Chronicle

## Gay leaders angered by Obama prayer pick

By Meredith May and Leslie Fulbright, Chronicle Staff Writers  
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San Francisco's gay community, which threw its political weight behind Barack Obama's campaign, is protesting the president-elect's decision to invite an evangelical pastor known for anti-gay comments to give the inaugural prayer.

Rick Warren, pastor of the 20,000-member Saddleback Church in Orange County, was a major force in the passage in November of Proposition 8, which eliminated the right of gay people to marry in California.

Warren invited Obama to his church during the presidential campaign and more recently ignited a major controversy when he compared same-sex marriage to pedophilia, incest and polygamy during a video interview posted on Beliefnet.com and widely circulated on YouTube.

Obama, who opposed Prop. 8 but has also said he opposes same-sex marriage in favor of civil unions, defended his choice at a news conference Thursday, saying, "a wide range of viewpoints" will be presented during the inaugural ceremonies on Jan. 20.

Warren and Obama do share some common ground, especially regarding Warren's work in Africa on AIDS/HIV issues and his efforts to build schools there.

And Warren, who also opposes abortion, has drawn ire from within his own ranks for associating with Obama.

But gay leaders and supporters in San Francisco and across the nation said they are having a hard time understanding how a man who they see as associated with hate speech is worthy of giving the inaugural prayer. It is directly counter, they say, to Obama's campaign theme of unity and his promises to heal a legacy of cultural and racial divisiveness in his new administration.

Equality California, which led the fight against Prop. 8, has gathered 8,000 signatures since Wednesday night asking Obama to choose someone else, said Executive Director Geoff Kors.

Several gay civil rights groups issued Web statements asking Obama to reconsider, including the Human Rights Campaign, **the National Religious Leadership Roundtable and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.**

Mayor Gavin Newsom, a strong supporter of gay marriage, knows Warren personally. He said he has conflicting thoughts on Obama's decision.

"Rick Warren is one of the most prolific religious leaders in the world, so from that perspective it is not a surprising choice," Newsom said in a phone interview. "He is redefining the evangelical movement by expanding it beyond guns, gods and gays to issues of poverty and global warming and peace."

### **Newsom disappointed**

The mayor said the decision is painful for the gay and lesbian community, especially in California, where people are still reeling from the passage of Prop. 8.

"The gay community has every right to be upset," Newsom said. "I hope people appreciate that Rick Warren was not just indirectly involved but very involved in taking people's rights away. I'm disappointed, but I understand the decision."

"Rick Warren is not someone who has been a champion of gay rights, and the president-elect could not be naive to that, yet he felt that the other attributes outweighed that," Newsom said.

Warren's other attributes are not enough for state Sen. Mark Leno, D-San Francisco.

"His work on HIV/AIDS is laudable, but that doesn't change the fact that he thinks I am a second-class citizen and should be denied fundamental rights guaranteed to me in a constitutional democracy," Leno said.

"My concern is the selection of Rick Warren goes far beyond Proposition 8. He has spent a lifetime disparaging and disregarding the LGBT community," Leno said.

Obama's choice appears to fulfill his campaign promise of bringing opposing groups together to heal, said Sue Kuipers, the youth pastor at Christ's Community Church in Hayward, whose Christian parishioners spent 40 days studying Warren's book, "The Purpose Driven Life."

"It's sad that it's become political," Kuipers said. "We can agree to disagree, but that shouldn't interfere with our ability to pray for each other as a nation."

San Francisco Supervisor Bevan Dufty first heard of Warren's selection in a text message from a friend in South Africa.

Dufty said he is perplexed but is giving Obama the benefit of the doubt.

"It's difficult to understand, but I would like to look back on this in a year or two and see it was a longer-term effort to heal division in this country," he said. "Maybe strategically we'll see something positive in this in the future, but right now, it doesn't make much sense."

### **Signal of anti-gay policies?**

Andrea Shorter, campaign director for And Marriage 4 All, a Northern California gay marriage advocacy organization, is worried that Obama's choice could signal four more years of anti-gay presidential policy.

"Rick Warren is clearly divisive and anti-gay. He is a kinder, gentler dose of Jerry Falwell and Oral Roberts. He presents himself as a warm and fuzzy new-age version of the same old stuff," she said.

"I think Obama did this because he has been under such scrutiny throughout the campaign about his legitimacy as a person of Christian faith. Maybe he sees this also as a way to give a nod of thanks and gratitude to voters who come from the evangelical right."

The Rev. Amos Brown, head of the San Francisco NAACP, campaigned heavily against Prop. 8.

"I'm very upset. I can understand that Obama wants to be inclusive but not at this moment in his life and the life of this nation. We should be pulling people together. It is most unfortunate. Rick Warren belongs to a conservative evangelical group that is divisive and in some regards mean-spirited."