

Groups call on SBC to apologize for treatment of gays

by [Bob Allen](#)

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PHOENIX (ABP) – Six groups are joining to call on the Southern Baptist Convention to apologize for its treatment of gays.

A new coalition announced plans June 8 to hand deliver a petition at next week's SBC annual meeting in Phoenix asking the nation's second-largest faith group to "end the harm it is causing the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community by offering a sincere and heartfelt apology."

The [petition](#) accuses Southern Baptists of promoting "discriminatory laws toward LGBT Americans" and "expressions of stigma and hostility" toward LGBT youth and their families. It targets specifically "dangerous, intellectually bankrupt and scientifically debunked 'ex-gay' ministries."

While one "can't 'pray away the gay,' the SBC can change its historical treatment of LGBT people," the petition concludes.

"We call on the Southern Baptist Convention to stop misusing the Bible to promote religion-based bigotry and start recognizing the enormous pain and suffering caused by its mistreatment of LGBT people, particularly vulnerable youth," said Jack McKinney, a former Southern Baptist minister and spokesperson for Faith in America, one of the petition sponsors.

McKinney is former pastor of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C., a congregation expelled by the Southern Baptist

Convention in 1992 for blessing a union of two gay men and one of two churches that prompted the denomination to change its constitution to ban churches that “act to affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior.”

McKinney retired as a pastor in 2009 and [now](#) works as a pastoral counselor and consultant to clergy and organizations with an emphasis on serving the LGBT community.

The petition points to a 1990 SBC resolution apologizing for past discrimination against African-Americans as evidence that the denomination “is capable of reflection and transformation in its efforts to right past wrongs.”

“While we cannot make direct comparisons to different forms of discrimination, most Americans today recognize religion-based bigotry is often an unfortunate common denominator in struggles for human dignity and equality,” said Robin McGehee of [GetEQUA](#) L, a gay civil-rights organization and coalition member.

The petition states that “given the arc of justice and trajectory of history, there is no doubt the SBC will offer a full-fledged apology to the LGBT community in the future. We hope that process begins today.”

“History has not been kind to the Southern Baptist Convention's record on minorities, and it is making the same awful mistake today by perpetuating abuse against gay people,” McKinney said.

Other organizations in the coalition include [Believe OutLoud](#) , recently in the [news](#) after Sojourners magazine rejected their ad welcoming gays and lesbians to church.

Another is Soulforce, an organization started by former Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell ghostwriter Mel White that has protested at SBC annual meetings in the past.

Rounding out the coalition are the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists and Truth Wins Out, a non-profit that monitors anti-gay organizations and particularly “ex-gay” ministries that preach that a person’s sexual orientation can change. One of those groups is the [SBC](#) , which appointed Bob Stith as national strategist for gender issues in 2007.

“I have seen many people walk away from the homosexual lifestyle,” Stith said in a newspaper interview that year. “And they were so joyful, so thankful for what God had done in their life. If you have a strong enough motivation, it is possible.”

Critics say such ministries lead many young gay people to despair. Jerry Stephenson, a former Southern Baptist minister and board member for Truth Wins Out, said Southern Baptists’ anti-gay teachings nearly caused him to commit suicide.

“I entered an ‘ex-gay’ ministry that falsely claimed I could change my sexual orientation and this led to a deep depression,” Stephenson said. “Only after I accepted my true self was I able to reconcile my faith and sexual orientation. The Southern Baptist Convention needs to apologize because its policies are hurting real people.”

[Robin Lunn](#), executive director of the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists, said her organization’s biggest growth right now is coming from former and recent Southern Baptist congregations.

“There is a shift happening here that we want to encourage and support,” she said. “We also want to raise the awareness of those involved that lives are at stake, not just scriptural authority.”

“The Southern Baptist Convention has an opportunity to lead the way for good within the Baptist family of faith,” Lunn said. “We know that as the second-largest

religious community in the U.S., the SBC carries a lot of weight. We believe that this is a moment when our societal awakening will prompt the church in general and the SBC in specific to grow in its faith and understanding on human sexuality and gender identity.”

“We believe that it is God’s Spirit calling the church to move to this new understanding and to give up the prejudice, discrimination and marginalization that has caused so much harm to so many of God’s beloved children,” said Lunn, who has a master-of-divinity degree from Andover Newton Theological School.

"Southern Baptists continue to uphold belief that God’s gift of sex was intended as the sacred union of a husband and wife within the bonds of marriage," said Roger "Sing" Oldham, vice president for convention relations with the SBC Executive Committee. "While we sympathize with those who struggle with same-sex attraction, we affirm the power of the Gospel to liberate those who believe in Jesus Christ from succumbing to the natural desires of the flesh."