

# Bill Hybels, Willow Creek and the homosexuality debate

By [Robert McDowell](#)

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Recently, Bill Hybels responded to a gay activist group which had circulated a petition calling for the CEO of Starbucks to cancel his scheduled talk as part of the annual Willow Creek Association Leadership Summit. The CEO ended up not speaking at the event and [Bill Hybels explained the situation to the summit participants](#).

Included in his remarks was his dismay that this activist group never contacted him or Willow Creek regarding what they perceived to be their anti-gay stance. Hybels went on to explain that that his church is open to all people but reiterated his theological stance that marriage is only for a man and a woman and that all non-married people should remain celibate.

I'm surprised by Bill Hybels' assumption that if this activist group would have called him before the petition that this kind of answer would have changed their minds. The issue for this group wasn't about gay people being welcomed into his church for worship services. The issue is that Willow Creek has a history of seeking to change someone from being homosexual to heterosexual through their ministries.

What would have been more helpful than each side stating their case a part from each other would have been for Bill Hybels and representatives from this activist group to actually meet face to face to sort out the issues. Even though a face to face meeting probably wouldn't have led to any significant compromise, it would have helped Bill Hybels to respond in a more helpful way when he addressed the Leadership Summit participants. Instead, we are left with these two sides (Willow Creek & the activist group) not hearing each other and responding to the wrong questions.

One of the big challenges facing the church in discussions and dialogue around homosexuality is that we rarely have opportunities for different viewpoints to meet

face to face to think through this topic. While minds may not change over this issue through dialogue, at least people might be able to leave from these discussions with a deeper understanding of the other person's viewpoint.

In the recent situation involving the Willow Creek Leadership Summit, it would have been more helpful for Bill Hybels to have said, "Our church and the activist group are operating with two different understandings of the meaning of 'anti-gay.'"

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