

GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH
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Update on Mayor Parker's "Non-Discrimination" ordinance

Thank you for contacting council members, for spreading the word, and for showing up at city hall for the press conference. Your voice and efforts paid off big time. First, Mayor Parker removed the restroom clause because of you raising your voice and then the vote was postponed two weeks even though she had a victory party planned. **HOWEVER, THIS IS NOT OVER! THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT. . .**

REMOVING THE RESTROOM SECTION HAS MADE THE ORDINANCE WORSE! A man can now go into a women's restroom or locker room without even being dressed in women's attire. This is because of the gender identity definition in the ordinance and the public accommodations clause that gives this protection to the protected class of people. **MAYOR PARKER TWEETED AFTER REMOVING THE CLAUSE . . ."TO MY TRANS SISTERS/BROTHERS: YOU'RE STILL FULLY PROTECTED IN EQUAL RIGHTS ORDINANCE. WE'RE SIMPLY REMOVING LANGUAGE THAT SINGLED YOU OUT"**. She was obviously not honest when she said removing the restroom clause would satisfy our concerns.

It has been stated that we have an emergency in Houston and we must make Mayor Parker's proposed non-discrimination ordinance the law in Houston, Texas. It has been stated that we must pass this ordinance so we can be like the other major cities. It has been stated that we must pass this ordinance because the Super Bowl is coming to town. Neither are acceptable or thoughtful reasons to place the burden of this ordinance on the citizens of Houston and the surrounding area who attend events, do business, or shop in the city of Houston and will be affected by it's requirements. It has been stated by the city attorney and others that we have to address this because we have a serious problem although the actual statistics from the Texas cities who have passed this ordinance say otherwise. Even the city attorney acknowledged in his public comments that we do not have a problem in Houston, Texas. The question begs to be asked . . . **WHERE IS THE EMERGENCY?** Shouldn't we be asking and getting very clear answers to . . . **WHAT ARE THE RAMIFICATIONS OF MAKING THIS ORDINANCE THE LAW IN HOUSTON, TEXAS?** And . . . **DOES THE PASSING OF MAYOR PARKER'S SUPPOSED NON DISCRIMINATION ORDINANCE ACTUALLY DISCRIMINATE AGAINST THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE BY GRANTING SPECIAL PRIVILEGES AND PROTECTED STATUS TO PEOPLE WHO ALREADY HAVE THE SAME RIGHTS AS EVERYONE ELSE?**

We certainly want to see every person respected and valued even if we disagree on issues or lifestyle choices. The issue of non-discrimination is very complicated. Where do you draw the line between where one person's rights begin and another person's rights end? When extending special privileges and protected status to a group beyond the existing rights of the citizenry at large, how do you deal with the violation of those who will now be discriminated against because of your decision to place the rights of one group above the rights of all? These are serious questions with serious consequences and should be very carefully deliberated.

At issue is the question . . . should the LGBT community be given protected status and special privileges beyond what everyone else has? The issue here is not whether someone chooses to be homosexual, (even though there are differing positions on that). That is not the role of Annise Parker as the Mayor of Houston, Texas or the Houston City Council. The issue is that we don't make laws based on people's sexual desires and romantic attractions. The Mayor stated what we all know, "this is personal to her." Understanding that it is, I would respectfully reply . . . you should not hold a public office to further a private agenda.

This is also not a matter of gay and transgender rights. They have the same rights as anyone else. There are existing laws to protect those rights for everyone. There are also existing hate crime laws that address criminal activity against the different social groups in the culture. This ordinance is a matter of restricting the rights of all Christians who believe what the Bible actually says and people of other faiths, who will be forced to violate their deeply held religious convictions. Would the Mayor and Council be willing to include "Christians" as a protected class? What about our rights? This ordinance also restricts the rights of women and young girls to the most basic right of privacy when they are using the restroom, locker room, or community change room labeled "Women". It places the "rights" of a biological male to legally enter the restroom labeled "Women" above the rights of biological women and young girls. This ordinance would overtly discriminate against women and young girls. Removing the "restroom clause" does not fix the problem. It makes it worse. According to our legal team, the Alliance Defending Freedom, a biological man would be able to enter a women's restroom without even wearing women's attire. City Attorney David Feldman, when asked a direct question in the council meeting by a council member about the legal opinion we provided to City Council that stated the above, chose to not answer the council member's question. That should be unacceptable, cause for reprimand, and possible termination. I respectfully request that Mayor Parker instruct City Attorney David Feldman to be present at our community rally at Grace Community Church this Sunday evening (May 18) He should address the question posed to him by the people's council representative at this community rally with the ADF legal counsel present so that the community is fully informed as to the legal realities of this proposed ordinance. He ultimately works for the people and these important questions should be addressed. The people have a right to a clear answer when the city attorney is giving legal opinion and to have that opinion vetted by other legal experts.

There is no comparison between this ordinance and a true Civil Rights bill. Instead, this bill would be the equivalent of forcing a print shop owned by African Americans to print KKK posters. As for those who say that gay is the new black, there is no behavior or lifestyle associated with being black, but there is a definite behavior and lifestyle associated with being gay.

Contained in this proposed ordinance is the criminalizing of Christians for their faith, which violates the very spirit of the First Amendment. Across the country, in state after state, Christians are being fined, taken to court, and even losing their business because of laws like the one the mayor is committed to passing in Houston. The list includes Elaine Photography in New Mexico, fined for declining to photograph a lesbian commitment ceremony; Sweet Cakes by Melissa in Oregon, put out of business because they refused to make a wedding cake for two women; Arlene's Flowers in Washington, sued by the attorney general for declining to do the floral arrangements for the "wedding" of two gay men – and note that, in state after state, based on similar laws, it is the attorney general who is leading the charge. Based on these realities, this is a grave concern because Christian business owners will definitely be prosecuted as criminals and subjected to an onerous process to defend themselves if this ordinance passes in Houston, Texas. The city attorney affirmed this reality in the council chamber when questioned by a council member. There is also nothing to prevent a group or individual from filing numerous complaints against a business owner that vary slightly in content and because of that, will require each one to be prosecuted and defended separately. Small business owners who wouldn't have the resources to hire attorneys to defend themselves, would be forced out of business and also forced to pay a hefty fine.

Deflective language and inflammatory accusations are being used by the mayor, certain city council members, and others. To say that we have spread misinformation is not accurate. On the news, we were labeled as "haters" simply because we hold a view that differs from the speaker. A council member brought the upcoming Super Bowl into the debate.....as if having the Super Bowl is a reason to violate the rights of women, young girls and Christians. That is shameful and is intended to silence honest and open debate between two groups with opposing views. In a civil society, honest and open debate is required if we are to live together as people who are respectful of the views of those who differ from us. The necessary beginning point in achieving consensus is to have the opposing views and decision makers at the table rather than "stacking the deck" with only those

who have your view, eliminating the decision makers from the process, then making it public in it's fourteenth or fifteenth draft and forcing a vote by council members who weren't involved in its's formation nor have time to consult with constituents and being unwilling to let the people "speak" by placing it on the ballot. We remind Mayor Parker and the Houston City Council, THIS IS AMERICA.....THE GOVERNMENT IS SUPPOSED TO BE OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, AND FOR THE PEOPLE! WE RESPECTFULLY DEMAND THAT EITHER MAYOR PARKER AND THE HOUSTON CITY COUNCIL KILL THIS FLAWED, DISCRIMINATORY ORDINANCE OR PUT IT ON THE BALLOT SO THE PEOPLE CAN SPEAK. IF NOT, THEN "WE THE PEOPLE" WILL PLACE IT ON THE BALLOT BY DUE PROCESS.

Since we were never given a seat at Mayor Parker's table to express our views, the choice she leaves us with is to take our reasoned views to the public square. We should not be denigrated by Mayor Parker, certain City Council members, or the press for doing this. The "political" label should not be used in an attempt to silence our voice so that our concerns are not addressed. This is not "political" but rooted in deep values we hold and in legitimate concerns with the implementation and consequences of the ordinance. This has to do with our "rights". Our rights should be respected and our views welcomed and given thoughtful consideration. We are simply responding to what Mayor Parker has proposed, which has been months in it's formation. Our time allowed to respond has been days. The concerns we have raised are based on factual record and respected legal counsel. We have reached our conclusions that this ordinance should not be passed based on our research and on the advice of legal counsel. We again ask Mayor Parker and the Houston City Council to not approve this ordinance.

We are asking all citizens of the greater Houston area to stand against this onerous ordinance by attending a community rally on May 18, Sunday evening at 6:00 pm at Grace Community Church, 14505 Gulf Freeway. Please arrive by 5:45. We are respectfully inviting Mayor Parker and the Houston City Council Members as our elected representatives to attend and also request City Attorney David Feldman to attend.

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT GRACE SHOW UP. WE MUST MAKE A VERY LOUD STATEMENT. THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE FILLING GRACE WOULD BE THUNDEROUS. I AM COUNTING ON YOU. PLEASE BRING AS MANY AS YOU CAN.

IT'S TIME TO STAND!

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“I feel sorry for the man who has never known the bracing thrill of taking a stand and sticking to it fearlessly. Moral courage has rewards that timidity can never imagine. Like a shot of adrenaline, it floods the spirit with vitality”

— Billy Graham

Courage is contagious. When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are often stiffened.
Billy Graham”

“Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer (martyred at age 39)

“Heavenly Father, we come before you today to ask your forgiveness and to seek your direction and guidance. We know Your Word says, 'Woe to those who call evil good,' but that is exactly what we have done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and reversed our values. We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery. We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare. We have killed our unborn and called it choice. We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable. We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self esteem. We have abused power and called it politics. We have coveted our neighbor's possessions and called it ambition. We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression. We

have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment. Search us, Oh God, and know our hearts today; cleanse us from every sin and set us free. Amen!”

— Billy Graham

I WILL SEE YOU SUNDAY NIGHT!

Steve Riggle