



HARVEST USA started in downtown Philadelphia in 1983. After dark, the blocks surrounding our office became the domain of male prostitutes, drug addicts and assorted people of the night. For them, despair was never far away.

But one autumn night, someone came to our doorstep and painted a single word in black paint: MERCY.

We don't know why. We'll probably never know who it was. Maybe it was a cry for help; maybe it was meant to be a message of hope to all who saw it. For us it was, and still is, a reminder of what has been done for each of us by the death of Jesus Christ, and what we in turn must now hold out to all who cross our doorstep.

### About HARVEST USA

HARVEST USA is a ministry of biblical truth, love and compassion to both those affected by sexual sin and to those in the local church who want to minister to them.

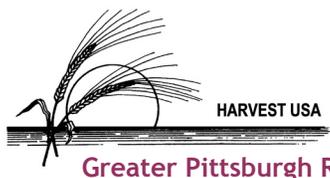
We do this through one-on-one ministry to men, women, young people, and family members who have been affected by sexual sin and sexual brokenness. We lead biblical support groups for many who want to walk in increasing repentance from their sexual struggles. We also work with churches, campus ministries and other para-church organizations, helping them understand sexuality from a biblical perspective and helping them minister to others affected by sin of a sexual nature.

HARVEST USA is a non-profit organization supported by the generous, tax-deductible gifts of God's people.

### About Tim Geiger, Director of HARVEST USA Greater Pittsburgh Region

Tim came to HARVEST USA himself for help in 1997. As a Christian, he struggled for 20 years with homosexuality and other types of sexual sin (part of his story is on Page 5). By God's grace, Tim has been walking in increasing repentance for many years. He is married, and he and his family live in Pittsburgh. Tim went to Westminster Theological Seminary and is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in America.

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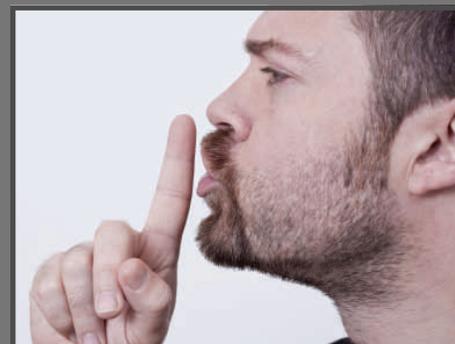


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# How Can Christians Respond To

# The National Day of Silence?



## What is the Day of Silence?

Friday, April 16, 2010 is the 14<sup>th</sup> annual National Day of Silence sponsored by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). According to GLSEN's web site, "hundreds of thousands of students... from more than 8,000 K-12 schools, colleges and universities" are expected to participate.

The purpose of the event is to "call attention to the serious problem of anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) bullying, harassment, name-calling and discrimination in schools" (GLSEN web site). Why a day of silence? Because LGBT students are often forced into silence and isolation by bullying and out of fear of discrimination.

So, many thousands of students across the country will take variations on a day-long vow of silence and wear Day of Silence pins, t-shirts and gay emblems to make the point that our society—and even more specifically, that our schools—must become a place of welcome, understanding and compassion for LGBT persons. (GLSEN would probably also stress the wholesale acceptance of other sexual orientations, although this is not the specific focus of the Day of Silence.)



You'll note that these questions are all concerned with getting to know the individual and his/her situation. Only as we grow in understanding of the other's perspective, and only as we grow in love for them, *flowing out of our being loved by Jesus*—can we gain the perspective and the right to speak the truth in love. As you get to know the other person, you'll begin to see some of the lies that he/she has grown to believe, some of the false ways that he/she perceives themselves, God and others. Then, bit by bit, you can begin to offer truth that will make a difference—truth that changes lives, because in it people experience the life-changing love of God.

It's a messy process, there's always the risk of failure, and it's very time-consuming. It might take months or years for such a relationship to bear fruit (or, it might never...) But it is the way Jesus engaged people stuck in the deceptiveness of sin. And it is the way in which he calls his brothers and sisters to do the same.

We are blessed that we have a gracious God who did not remain silent when he had every right to turn away from us. Rather, he said, "How can I give you up? How can I hand you over? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender" (Hosea 11:8).

The Bible tells us that Jesus, God's Son, is the one who stood in the place of guilty sinners and received the silence and rejection of God, in order that those who trust in him would receive grace and mercy, and God's words of forgiveness and affirmation. Will you invite others to trust in that same Savior, to receive that same grace?

HARVEST USA can help you follow up with men, women and young people with whom you begin a dialogue on the Day of Silence. Contact us for more information on how.

Getting to know,  
getting to love

HARVEST USA  
can help  
you follow  
up

were they?

⇒ What did these experiences lead them to believe about themselves, God and others?

Focus here not on the sexual sin, but on the big-picture issues. Try to discover how the person to whom you're speaking would answer these questions: Who am I as a person? How do I relate to God? How do I relate to others? What hasn't worked out well in my life? What about my relationships with God and other people haven't worked out? What about my life is broken, and what have I done to try to fix it?

Homosexuality, among many other things, can be a coping mechanism to get through life. It's not a one-time decision, but the product of a lifetime of experiences and knowledge that have led an individual to conclude things like this: "Homosexuality is one way in which I can make sense of my life, my feelings and my circumstances. So much else of life has been disappointing and disillusioning. But here's a way I can fit in, a way in which I have value, a way in which I can be understood and loved."



Many young people in your church or campus ministry will encounter Day of Silence participants in school or in their circles of friends. And it's difficult to know how to respond. Should they look the other way? Argue for a different position? Stage their own protest? None of these responses will do anything except perpetuate the core problems that have led to the development of the Day of Silence in the first place.

How then can Christians respond to the National Day of Silence and to its appeal for an end to harassment, bullying, name-calling and discrimination? How can we engage people who take part in the Day of Silence? And should we?

To remain silent would do a grave injustice to the Gospel and to the people to whom we are called to minister. To combat Day of Silence participants by telling them that they're wrong probably won't be effective, either. More likely, such a reaction would only serve to polarize both sides even more.

The answer is that we, as Christians, must respond. Yet our response must be very personal, patient, humble, and gentle.

We must appeal to the timeless and inerrant truth of Scripture. However, to do so outside the context of a gracious invitation to know the gracious God who loves and redeems sinners from *all types of sin* is, at best, problematic and largely ineffective—and at worst, legalistic and damning.

There is tension, then, in having this discussion with another person. *And that is good.* If you feel as though you want to engage someone who participates in the Day of Silence, or someone in the LGBT community, you *must* experience that tension. You must wrestle with it. Why? The tension you feel is that of how to **speak the truth in love**. The tension exists because, as sinners, we tend to always favor one over the other.

Why should Christians speak up?

Now, there is no *natural* tension between truth and love. Before sin entered the world, the two were seamlessly linked. Nothing was ever spoken that was not completely truthful. Nothing was ever spoken that was offered in malice, self-righteousness or envy. But since the Fall, the two have been difficult to reconcile. We mistrust the motives of others. We feel threatened by them. Even at our best, we blur the lines of distinction between objective truth and our opinion.

But God is reconciling all things to himself in Jesus Christ, including truth and love to each other. More specifically, as God's people grow in the knowledge of him and his grace, we are able to communicate the call of the Gospel compassionately to others. In Chapters 4 and 5 of Ephesians, Paul makes ten distinct statements concerning how we ought to speak to others (4:2-3,15, 25, 26, 29, 31; 5:4, 6, 11-12, 19), highlighting the importance of offering truth—the truth of his love for his people in and through Christ—in love and compassion.

In his Church, God is restoring the unity of two principles of life that never should have been separated. He says that everything we say ought to be objectively truthful—not our spin on the truth. And everything we say, whether to believers or unbelievers, ought to be offered in love, for the glory of God and the good of the other. Only by the grace of God, with faith in the completed work of Jesus Christ, and with the sanctifying work of the Spirit can we do this.

To put it practically—how can we, as Christians, warn others engaged in sinful lifestyles of the dangers of their decisions, unless we likewise invite them into the same hope and grace that we have received through Jesus?

One way to incarnate the love of Christ is to ask questions, and therefore get to know the individual and his/her situation.

**Ask why they are involved in the Day of Silence.**

- ⇒ Are they LGBT themselves?
- ⇒ Are they a straight ally (a straight person sympathetic with the LGBT cause)? If they are an ally, why?
- ⇒ What do they hope to accomplish through participating in the Day of Silence?
- ⇒ Why is this particular cause important to them?

**Ask about their experiences with LGBT bullying, harassment, name-calling and discrimination.**

- ⇒ How have they experienced this personally?
- ⇒ How has it impacted them?
- ⇒ What wounds has it inflicted?
- ⇒ How has it kept them, or those that they know, in silence?

Confirm to them that God disapproves of such behavior, too (perhaps even cite Ephesians 4:29). Affirm that Jesus is able to sympathize/empathize with them in their experience, no matter how marginalized or isolated they might feel. He, too was harassed, called names, and discriminated against (Hebrews 4:14-16). You can empathize with them, too—discrimination and rejection is a common experience. Let them know how such circumstances in your life have impacted you, too—and how Jesus helped comfort you.

**Ask them, if they are LGBT, how did they come to that realization?**

- ⇒ How did they first become aware that they were LGBT?
- ⇒ Are they still questioning?
- ⇒ Have there been any experiences that stand out as seminal moments of awareness that they were LGBT (what were the “eye-opening” moments)? If so, what

## Breaking the silence

We break the silence through **acknowledging the reality of the discrimination, the harassment, the name-calling**. We also acknowledge that this behavior is sinful and not God's intent for his people. Paul warns us in Ephesians 4:29 that no corrupting talk should come from our mouths.

We also do that through **humbly engaging in dialogue with Day of Silence participants**... not preaching to them, as might be our tendency. We engage in dialogue because this is precisely what Jesus did. Sure—there were times when he did preach—but many other times, he dealt with people one-on-one, as a peer who cared for their souls and pursued them as would a friend, with compassion and patience. Remember the woman at the well (John 4:7-30), the many tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 9:10-12), and Nicodemus (John 3:1-21). He got to know them, their beliefs, their circumstances, and lovingly challenged them and invited them into something far better.

Why engage in dialogue? Can't Scripture just speak for itself? Well, yes, it can—and it does! But Scripture was never meant to operate in isolation from relationship. God made relationship with us and within the context of that relationship, gave us his Word. Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh. And Christians, the body of Christ, are called to encourage one another with the Word daily (Hebrews 3:13) and to share this good news with the world (Matthew 28:19-20). God's intent is that his Word would be communicated *within the context of relationship*.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says in his book *Life Together* that God has given us his Word—but he put it in the hands and mouths of people, that we should communicate it to one another within the context of our experiences. The Word is meant to be delivered incarnationally—that is, delivered in such a way as we'd see it at work in the lives of others, delivered in such a way as we'd encounter Jesus himself as we speak with one another about it.

Any dialogue with a Day of Silence participant must be within the context of **incarnational relationship**—*a relationship in which we live out, in the lives of others, the love and compassion of Christ*. If not, it's moralism.

First, the Day of Silence makes a valid point. There is harassment and discrimination of LGBT persons in schools, in the community—even among Christians. There is bullying in schools. Sometimes it takes the blatant and form of name-calling and public humiliation. Sometimes, it is far more invasive, relentless and very private—taking the form of cyber-bullying—using email, texting, or social networking technology to harass or spread rumors about students. Yet other times, it takes the form of exclusion—the deliberate and painful disregarding of another.

Lest we think that bullying is not a legitimate problem, *it is!* The Lord tells us in Proverbs 18:21 that “death and life are in the power of the tongue.” Our words can—and ought to—build others up (Ephesians 4:29). But words spoken sinfully can “crush the spirit” (Proverbs 15:4). Yes—“sticks and stones may break my bones”... but bones usually heal. The “names” that “will never hurt me,” however, often inflict deep spiritual wounds that lead to greater hopelessness, and often, greater bondage to patterns of sin.



## How should I respond?

## One personal story of bullying

As a boy and a young man, I wrestled with same-sex attraction and homosexuality for 20 years. In school, I was frequently the victim of bullying. That bullying did three things for me and in me. First, it *reinforced* the notion that I was different from everyone else, and would never fit in. Second, it forced me into increasing isolation. The only way to protect myself was to keep as far away from everyone else as possible. Third, I chose to miss a lot of school—some years, I was out as many as 40 days.

Once I graduated, I thought things might be different. I didn't want to continue giving into the temptation to act out sexually. I desperately wanted to ask someone in my local church for help. But I never did. Why? Because what I heard from the pulpit and from private conversations and jokes among the members—my friends, and brothers and sisters in Christ—was that “God hates gays” and that “AIDS is God's curse on gays.” I certainly wasn't going to entrust this most delicate of secrets to these people!

So I remained silent. I should say, though, that even more devastating than these peoples' comments was the message it (wrongly) communicated to me about God—that I was the object of his wrath, rather than of his mercy. I felt conflicted, comfortless, hopeless for years as I sought a closer relationship with God and his people, yet always felt fearful of taking that risk. *God could never love someone like me*, I thought.

That “***the God of the Bible could never love someone like me***” is what a lot of people in the LGBT community believe... not simply because of their sexual identity, but because of the underlying, often life-long circumstances in their personal experiences that have led identifying as a LGBT person a viable lifestyle for them. Some of these typical circumstances are pervasive cycles of loneliness, rejection, lack of relational intimacy, poor self-image, failure, and isolation.

That “*the God of the Bible could never love someone like me*” is also the lie that we must help people to overcome. We do this through doing exactly what the Day of Silence intends—to break the silence!



## A commonly-believed lie