

Middeljans, April

From: Eaton, Philip
Sent: Wednesday, March 14, 2007 2:32 PM
To: !UGStudents (restricted); !Fac/Staff (restricted)
Subject: A Message From President Philip W. Eaton



TO: SPU Faculty, Staff, and Students
RE: Upcoming Visit of Equality Ride
DATE: March 14, 2007

Even though I know this week is stressful and busy for all of you on campus, I wanted to get this notice out before students and others vanish for Spring Break. We will have time to talk about all of this openly when you return.

On Wednesday, April 11, 2007, a group of young people, riding under the banner of Equality Ride, will arrive on our campus for a day of conversation and interaction on the topic of homosexuality. Equality Ride is a bus tour traveling across the country with some 20 to 30 young people, many of whom are gay and lesbian, many of them Christians. They are funded and sponsored by an organization called Soulforce. The purpose of their tour is to visit mostly Christian colleges and universities, all across the country, to challenge the teachings on human sexuality that may be held on each campus. Because the group will also visit Northwest University in Kirkland on the same day, there may be only half the number of visitors on our campus.

Since learning about their intended visit, I have been in conversation over the last couple of weeks with the President's Cabinet, a group of 30 or so faculty, staff, and student leaders, and the Board of Trustees. I have also talked with a number of my colleagues around the country, presidents of other institutions who have or will encounter the tour. Please know as well I have been reading, reflecting, and praying about our position and posture for this visit. As you well know, this issue is very heated and contested within our culture and even in some quarters of the Christian church itself.

Let me tell you what I am thinking. Again, I look forward to continuing conversations as we move forward. First, we will welcome these young people to our campus, extending to them a spirit of hospitality, modeling grace-filled community through our actions. With the scheduling we have done so far, we are planning to worship together, provide moments for conversation, and provide times for open dialogue on the broad issue of human sexuality. We will want to listen to their stories. We will want to engage them in discussion.

Secondly, we will communicate clearly our position on this issue. The position we have held at Seattle Pacific over our long history, in keeping with the ancient teachings of Christian Scripture and the Christian church, is that sexual experience

appropriately resides within the boundaries of marriage between a man and a woman. Our teaching on human sexuality comes from a high view of both creation and marriage. And while we honor and affirm the teaching of Scripture on the beauty of the single life, we promote the historic view of marriage. This position is clearly and fully developed in our [Statement on Human Sexuality](#) and spelled out through our [community lifestyle expectations](#).

We fully recognize that good Christians may disagree on this issue, and yet, even though there is debate within some quarters of the Christian church worldwide, we take the position that the church remains constant with its historic teaching.

As we lift up our convictions about human sexuality, we must also pay attention to our shortcomings of pride, greed, envy, gossip, our tendency to focus on ourselves instead of our neighbors, and indeed our tendency to forget the poor. We recognize as well that the church has not always handled human sexuality well, including harsh treatment of homosexuals. And in all of this, we finally claim the redemptive, transformative power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the promise that finally, at the foot of the cross, we are made whole. We recognize that God wants all of his children to flourish, even when we fall short of this high calling.

My great hope for this day is that we will grow deeper in our understanding of what it means to live and work in Christian community, what it means to hold convictions as a community while at the same time extending the blessing and hospitality of our community to others.

By the way, I might suggest some reading that has been helpful to me. I am thinking here of Richard Hays' chapter on homosexuality in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*; N.T. Wright's commentary on Romans; John Stott's *Same Sex Partnerships? A Christian Perspective*; Philip Yancey's chapter on his relationship with Mel White (the founder of Soulforce) in *What's So Amazing About Grace?*; and our own Professor Rob Wall's lecture on "Human Sexuality of the Heart." These are all writers and thinkers I greatly admire. In each case, I think you will find here thoughtful and substantive treatments of Christian thinking and reflection on these issues.

We have been clear with the leaders of Equality Ride that we will not allow disruption or interruption of our normal activities in the classroom, residence halls, or offices of business. We will agree on a plan of activities, with clear boundaries, and will seek throughout the day to stick by that plan. A website will be created soon where you may access up-to-date information and educational resources, including a list of Frequently Asked Questions.

Please note that we will hold an open forum on both April 3 and 5, 2007, at 9:30 a.m. in the Queen Anne Room in Gwinn, for all faculty, staff, and students. On April 3, I will speak with the community about the visit and frame our position and posture. This will be a time for me to share from my heart and then to engage in dialogue, questions, and thoughts with all of you. Then, on April 5, Rob Wall will present to us a reflection on the teaching of our Scriptures on human sexuality. Rob has led us with wisdom and insight in the past on this issue.

Let's pray that this experience will strengthen us as a Christian community, deepen our understanding of our Christian identity and teachings, and stretch us in our resolve to engage the culture on even the most difficult of issues. Let's pray that we might model our deeply held commitment to be grace-filled, extending courtesy and kindness to each other and to our visitors. Let's pray as well that we might learn even better what it means to be thinking and principled Christians living right at the heart of the Christian story of love and grace and truth while at the same time living radiantly in

the mix of our culture. May we learn even further what it means to engage the culture and change the world. And through it all, may God be present with us.

ENGAGING THE CULTURE. CHANGING THE WORLD.
