



Gay Community Center of Richmond

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 26, 2010
Gay Community Center of Richmond
804-622-4646

CONTACT

Gregg Johnson, Director of Development and Marketing
gjohnson@gayrichmond.com

Richmond's LGBT Community Rallies Around Targets of Westboro Baptist Church

Representatives of numerous LGBT and faith organizations met Friday at the Gay Community Center of Richmond to plan constructive and effective ways to respond to next week's planned protests in Richmond by members of Fred Phelps' Westboro Baptist Church. The church has announced its intention to picket at the Virginia Holocaust Museum, the Jewish Community Center of Richmond, the Jerusalem Connection and Hermitage High School on Tuesday, March 2nd via their website: GodHatesFags.com. Area LGBT groups are determined that Westboro will be met with peaceful but clear resistance.

"Richmond's LGBT community stands in solidarity with the Jewish community and the students targeted by these protesters," said Jay Squires, President of the Gay Community Center of Richmond. "Westboro Baptist Church made its name protesting the funerals of gay people including Matthew Sheppard. It's crucial that LGBT people vocally oppose their hatred and ignorance no matter which groups they target."

The LGBT and faith groups decided to endorse a rally at VCU organized by VCU Hillel, Queer Action and Men Against Violence in response to the upcoming protests. "The VCU community stands for, and promotes diversity and we thrive on how well we work together" say the organizers. "This is an opportunity to make a stand against hate and discrimination as one." The rally will be held at the VCU Commons at 1:30 pm on Tuesday, March 2nd. This rally was endorsed by the LGBT and faith groups as the most effective way to promote a message of tolerance and inclusion without engaging the Westboro Baptist Church members directly. The rally is being promoted with its own Facebook page: (<http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=325327553042&ref=mf>) (Facebook membership required.) Information will also be updated on GayRichmond.com.

These groups are also lending their support to the Virginia Holocaust Museum in its efforts to counter Westboro's plans to protest at this solemn memorial to the millions murdered by intolerant bigots. The Virginia Interfaith Center has organized an online "Phelps-a-Thon," to benefit the museum in which they're asking supporters to make a donation for every minute the protesters picket outside the museum. The museum plans to send Fred Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church a thank-you note for the amount of money they raise during the protest. (https://secure3.convio.net/faith/site/Donation2?df_id=1500&1500.donation=landing)

The Virginia Holocaust Museum is using its Facebook page to inform supporters about its planned response to the protest. (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Richmond-VA/Virginia-Holocaust-Museum/25263221630?ref=mf&v=wall#!>)

“We plan to respect the wishes of the Jewish Community Center, Hermitage High School and the Jerusalem Connection who asked that no counter-protests be staged,” says Squires. “We’re focusing our efforts on creating a positive message of inclusion, respect, and support for any and all groups who are targets of ignorance and religious intolerance.”

The organizations endorsing these peaceful efforts include the Gay Community Center of Richmond, People of Faith for Equality in Virginia, First Unitarian Universalist Church, Unitarian Universalist Church of Glen Allen, Metropolitan Community Church -Richmond, Richmond Lesbian Feminists, Mothers & Others, Fan Free Clinic, PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network), the Rainbow Minute, Queer Action VCU, VCU’s Men Against Violence, the LGBT Caucus of the Virginia Democratic Party, Virginia Pride, Equality Virginia, the \$3 Bills, and Richmond Triangle Players.

For more information, please contact Jay Squires at the Gay Community Center of Richmond. He can be reached at 804-622-4646, ext. 20 or at jsquires@GayRichmond.com.

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