

Madame President Dempsey, Mr. Acting Vice President Hughes, Madame Attorney General Lewis, Honorable Members of the Cabinet and Legislative Board, Honorable Senators, Fellow Students, and members of the Campus Media:

On Friday, March 10, 2006, I took part in a non-violent action event coordinated by Soulforce, an organization which works to end religious-based discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. The event was the first stop in an 18 campus tour of the Equality Ride, which is crossing the country to protest religious and military colleges and universities which prohibit the enrolment of open LGBT students through policies which openly condemn LGBT people or so-called homosexual conduct. The Equality Ride was created by recent college graduate and Soulforce Youth Coordinator Jake Reitan who was inspired by the non-violent movements of the Civil Rights Era, including the Freedom Rides of 1961.

This physically and verbally non-violent action event took place at Liberty University, the school founded by the Reverend Jerry Falwell, a school where LGBT students are not allowed to be themselves openly and honestly. LGBT students at Liberty University, and many other schools like it across the country, face daily torment in being told that they are sick and sinful. Many LGBT students face the more than real possibility of expulsion and for those at military schools, the end of their military careers.

At every stop in the tour, including Liberty, Soulforce and Equality Ride participants seek to step onto these campuses and talk peacefully with students and faculty, working toward understanding through love and reconciliation. Some of the colleges and universities, acting in true Christian love, have announced they will let the Equality Riders onto campus. The Chancellor of Liberty University, the Reverend Jerry Falwell, however, declined to let us do this on Friday.

Twenty-four activists, including myself, were arrested one by one as we stepped pass the gate-house at the entrance of Liberty University. After being warned we would be arrested, we told the police of our intentions to speak to students. We were arrested and taken to a Lynchburg, Virginia, magistrate where we were all charged with trespassing.

As a person vested into a position within this Student Government, and being advised by Madame President Sandy Dempsey, I felt as though I would be obligated to make this Body, as well as the Student Body and campus media aware of the events of Friday, March 10, 2006. Recently, problems regarding communication have become clear and this statement is an attempt to open up those lines of communication.

I pray that this Body and the leadership of Student Government will be able to understand the reasons why I took part in this non-violent action event at Liberty University. I would like to read an excerpt from the statement we read as we walked onto the campus:

We come to Liberty University today seeking to foster understanding. Understanding that the Bible has been used for centuries to exclude and discriminate. The Inquisitions, the Crusades, the justification for slavery, the second-class status of women, and the rejection of the disabled are all examples of

biblical misuse. Today it is the exclusion of gay and lesbian people. Today it is gay and lesbian people who are the other — the outcasts of the Church. We must learn from history and end religion-based discrimination. Dr. Falwell, you yourself can learn from your own history. Around 40 years ago you used to not let African-American people into your church and you misused the Bible to justify your discrimination then. Today you don't allow gay and lesbian students into your school and you use the Bible to justify discrimination now: same script... a different cast of people.

You once called the Civil Rights Movement the “civil wrongs movement”. When you did this Jerry Falwell, you misused your position as a pastor to convince other followers of Christ that God believed the races should be separate. Today you say that gay and lesbian people are sick and sinful. You blamed the terrorist attacks of 9/11 on us. You said you'd rather see Liberty University burn to the ground if it ever accepts or acknowledges our equality. In making such statements, you once again misuse the Bible, and misuse your position of power in the Church to teach others that Christ would reject us, that Christ would make outcasts of gay and lesbian people as you have done.

And so we come to your school with the understanding that once and for all we must learn from history, your history, and end religion-based discrimination. Yes, we come to your school to foster understanding: the understanding that when we profess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, that our profession of faiths does not end there. It's bigger than that. We must also determine who this man, who this Son of God was. Indeed, Jesus was a man who widened the circle, who welcomed the people into the Church, and who told those who tried to exclude and discriminate that while you know the law by heart that you forgot the heart of the law. And that is to love God with all your heart, mind and soul and to love your neighbor as yourself. Indeed, Jesus loves the outcast best. He welcomed the outcasts of his day. He called them friends; he called them children of God...

I hope that the intentions of the Equality Ride, and my intentions of participating in this non-violent action event, are clear to you all and, again, I pray that you will understand my reasoning for deciding to put my body and my life, not to even mention my once clean criminal record, on the line for LGBT students like me who have no voice, no support and no acceptance.

In conclusion I would just like to say that on Friday I learned first-hand just how important it is for all students and for all people to have a voice and for it to be heard. Because of that lesson and based upon my already established beliefs of equality and fairness, I still full-heartedly support that the Student Government hold another election so that all students may have the chance to have the voices heard. I would also like to make this Body, the leadership, the Student Body and campus media aware that I am conceding to Acting Vice President Donald Hughes in the elections held February 26-28, 2006. I would also like to withdraw my nomination and participation as a candidate in any future re-election Student Government may have as a result of the events surrounding the first.