

Equity Award - Organization

Honoring

Myers Park Baptist Church
Charlotte, North Carolina

The Equity Award - Organization recognizes an outstanding organization that has furthered the progress for civil rights for LGBT people. The organization creates and sustains policies and practices to combat heterosexism, and exemplifies the HRC mission statement. HRC and the Board of Governors believes Myers Park Baptist Church absolutely exemplifies the attributes of this award.

These opening words were in a November 13, 2007 press release from HRC about our award recipient. "The North Carolina Baptist Convention voted this morning to expel the Myers Park Baptist Church for welcoming and affirming gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) Baptists in their congregation. Last year, the North Carolina Baptists decided to expel any member church that openly accepts and affirms GLBT persons and same-sex relations from the Baptist community." This ousting by the Convention was the result of many historic actions by Myers Park Baptist Church led by its senior pastor, Rev. Dr. H. Stephen Shoemaker, its Board of Deacons, and its 1,970 congregants.

The North Carolina State Baptist Convention, North Carolina's largest religious denomination, passed a resolution on November 14, 2006 to oust all churches from its membership which knowingly act to affirm, approve, endorse, promote, support or bless homosexual behavior. In opposition, several churches resigned. Myers Park Baptist Church took another approach.

A Statement of Response was immediately posted on the church's website and was read by Dr. Shoemaker on several newscasts. The statement professed that "We will not allow our conscience to be coerced by [the Convention's] exclusionary conditions of membership, and we reaffirm Christ's welcome to all persons and our commitment to a ministry of reconciliation that seeks to be a healing witness in a world of divisions and hatreds and a part of God's dream to make all things one."

In the interest of being Christian advocates for all GLBT persons, in the interest of being a witness to Christ's welcome to all persons, and in the interest of social justice, the Board of Deacons decided to "out" Myers Park Baptist Church as a church that is "welcoming and affirming to all persons, including gay and lesbian persons who wish to follow Christ with us, participate fully in our faith community and serve as leaders in our Church." The letter was mailed to the Convention and to the media on February 22, 2007 and invited the Convention to visit. "Come, let us reason together, as the prophet said, and seek the Spirit of Christ in these matters." No response was ever received.

On November 12, 2007 Myers Park Baptist Church sent Dr. Shoemaker, Barbara Mishoe – Chair of the Board of Deacons, and Nancy Walker – a lesbian and Secretary of the Board of Deacons to meet with the officers and Executive Committee of the Convention. Dr. Shoemaker and Ms. Walker had the opportunity to address the full membership of the Convention for one last appeal for its delegates to act in an inclusive way to all persons. Their final effort was the last step before the Church was expelled by the Convention.

It is for the brave and outstanding ally behaviors exhibited by this organization that HRC extends the 2008 Equity Award – Organization to Myers Park Baptist Church.