

SPIRITUAL INSTITUTE

THE BACK STORY:

True Colors produces the largest lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth conference in the country. In the past, the conference has had five or six workshops dedicated to the spiritual needs of LGBT youth. During the summer of 2009, a Connecticut anti-gay organization objected to the inclusion of affirming spiritual traditions. Because True Colors accepts some state sponsorship to cover costs associated with the conference, this group alleged that the state was unfairly privileging one religion over another.

Initially, the conference organizing committee at True Colors feared that they might only two, equally terrible options – include anti-gay perspectives that are damaging to LGBT youth or don't include any spiritual workshops at all. As it turns out, True Colors found a far better solution. Rather than let these objections divert us from our mission to protect and support youth, True Colors put together a coalition of LGBT affirming spiritual traditions which then created a privately funded, separate event focusing exclusively on the diverse spiritual needs of our youth.

Hosted by Storrs Congregational Church, the first Spiritual Institute launched on Friday, March 12, 2010 with a diverse opening panel of speakers who explored the concept of radical inclusivity from a variety of religious and spiritual traditions. Saturday's keynote speaker was Reverend Irene Monroe, the Coordinator of the African American Roundtable of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry (CLGS) at the Pacific School of Religion, a Huffington Post blogger, and a syndicated religion columnist. In addition, we offered workshops that included LGBTQ and the Power to Forgive; Got Purpose? Developing an LGBTQI Faith-Based Life; Yes, I am Gay and Muslim; Creating Safe Spaces for LGBT youth in Catholic Schools; Taking your Faith Public; Homosexuality and the Bible, and Peer Support for Catholic Parents when our Children Come Out.

OUTCOMES: AFTER THE CONFERENCE

Approximately, 50 -60 people participated in the event with the largest turnout on Friday (contrary to our expectations that Saturday would be the larger day) . While participants and presenters indicated that the experience was very worthwhile, the overall numbers were lower than expected and only a small number of youth participated. Because the event was not in the same venue as the conference, it seemed that youth were unwilling to leave their friends to go to a separate event. In addition, True Colors did not fully recover the costs of organizing the event with free will donations. As a result, the organizing committee determined that a separate institute held in concert with the conference was not the best solution. So how do we help ensure that the spiritual needs of LGBT youth are met in an affirming way?

WHERE WE ARE NOW:

The committee decided to continue meeting to explore and begin to resolve that question. The primary mission of the group is to "create safe opportunities for LGBT youth to do their spiritual work". The two primary objectives of this mission are to: Create a set of workshops that can be incorporated in some way into the annual true colors conference without violating the church/state separation and to Identify, prioritize and produce some number of activities during the year in support of the mission. What those activities should/could look like will be the focus of the next meeting (June 1, 5:30 – 7:00 PM, Center Congregational Church, 474 Broad Street, Meriden)

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED:

Call: Robin @ 860.232.0050, ext 302; email: Director@ourtruecolors.org ; on the web: ourtruecolors.org