

# What is the Church to do when “Gay Pride” comes to town?

by Bob Vander Plaats

*The following op-ed appeared in multiple Northwest Iowa newspapers just prior to the first-ever “Gay Pride” event in Northwest Iowa’s Orange City.*

Donna Red Wing is the former head of One Iowa, the state’s most significant advocacy organization for those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or those questioning their sexuality.

I am the president and CEO of The FAMiLY LEADER, a prominent Christian family organization that focuses on inspiring leadership in God’s three institutions: the family, the Church, and government.

Donna and I see the world very differently. We are not natural coffee pals, much less expected to be friends. Yet we are both. It all started when Donna came to one of our annual Leadership Summits and at the lunch break asked if I’d ever entertain joining her for coffee. I said, “Yes.” That conversation began a journey where I got to know Donna and she has gotten to know me. While our views surrounding sexuality and marriage have not changed, we have developed a deep friendship.

Our unlikely friendship has been headlined by the Washington Post and Des Moines Register and has been the video subject of Mutual of Omaha’s “Aha Moment” campaign. In addition, Donna and I have been asked to present at universities, colleges, community leadership seminars, and a host of other forums featuring civil dialogue around deep disagreements. It has been an amazing journey!

I was recently asked, "What is the Church to do when 'Gay Pride' comes to town?" Through the lens of my relationship with Donna, I suggest the following ...

First and foremost, check your heart. The book of Proverbs tells us, "Above all else guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life." If your heart is to win while others lose (in reality or figuratively), back away. In a battle to make the other side "lose," nobody wins, and neither does the cause of Christ. If, however, your heart is filled with love, first for God and then for your neighbors – including those in the parade adorned in rainbow colors and stickers – then engage with a heart of love.

This follows Christ's "new command" to love as He loves (John 13:34-35) in the New Testament. Jesus also reminded us the "first and greatest" commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength, and the second command, like the first, is to love your neighbor as yourself. The people celebrating gay pride in your community are the Church's neighbors. Thus, lead with a heart of love and compassion.

Once the Church, as individuals and collectively as the Body of Christ, checks its heart with these two commands ... then it is the Church's call and responsibility to "speak truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Again, notice the consistent and clear parameters of love: It's a constant check on the Church's heart.

At the same time, it is neither love for God nor for others if we conceal the truth. Donna and I have had many conversations in private and in public regarding truth. It is not a feeling nor an identity; truth is God's Word, and Christ made it clear that He came to "testify to the truth." And speaking truth out of a heart of love is the culmination of loving God and loving your neighbor. Donna may not agree with me, but she does respect me for reaching out to her with truth in love.

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Neither is it love for God and others to remain silent, to ignore our neighbors when we hold God's Word of life and hope and healing in our hands. Pastors, college and university presidents, and other Christian leaders should enthusiastically seize the opportunity to teach God's Word in love when "Gay Pride" comes to town. God's Word is timeless, and its teachings on marriage and sexuality are clear and as relevant as ever.

Thus, encourage your pastor, your college presidents and chaplains, and other noted ministry leaders to open God's Word and to boldly and courageously speak its truth to adequately prepare their congregations, their students, and their communities with a firm foundation prior to "Gay Pride" coming to your town. This is an opportunity to celebrate God's design and desire while being a vessel to reach out with the eternal gift of the gospel.

And one more thing: Remember we all fall short of the glory of God, and we all need a Savior. Donna needs a Savior. I need a Savior. We all need a Savior.

When "Gay Pride" comes, prepare your town for a revival where we all repent of our sins and turn our hearts toward God. What an opportunity for the Church to be the Church!