

bethel church conversion therapy

Bethel Church and Conversion Therapy: A Controversial Intersection

Introduction

Bethel Church, a prominent megachurch based in Redding, California, has been at the center of numerous controversies, one of the most significant being its stance on conversion therapy. This practice, aimed at changing an individual's sexual orientation from homosexual or bisexual to heterosexual, has been widely discredited and condemned by major medical and psychological organizations. Despite this, Bethel Church has been accused of promoting conversion therapy through its various ministries and social media platforms. This article delves into the church's practices, the broader implications of conversion therapy, and the ongoing debate surrounding this contentious issue.

Bethel Church: An Overview

Bethel Church is known for its charismatic worship style, faith healing, and a strong emphasis on supernatural experiences. Founded in 1952, the church has grown significantly, boasting a congregation of around 9,000 members. It operates numerous ministries, including the Transformation Center, which offers counseling, coaching, and addiction recovery programs¹.

The Controversy

The controversy surrounding Bethel Church's involvement in conversion therapy primarily stems from its promotion of the CHANGED Movement. This initiative, part of the church's Equipped to Love ministry, claims to help individuals "leave homosexuality behind" and embrace a heterosexual lifestyle². Critics argue that this constitutes conversion therapy, a practice that has been banned in several states and condemned by organizations such as the American Medical Association and the World Health Organization².

What is Conversion Therapy?

Conversion therapy encompasses a range of practices aimed at changing an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity. These methods can include talk therapy, aversion therapy, and even more extreme measures such as electroshock therapy. The practice is based on the belief that being LGBTQ+ is a mental disorder that can and should be cured. However, this notion has been debunked by extensive research, and conversion therapy is widely recognized as harmful and ineffective³.

The CHANGED Movement

The CHANGED Movement, promoted by Bethel Church, encourages individuals to share their testimonies of "freedom from homosexuality." The movement's website and social media platforms feature stories of people who claim to have left their LGBTQ+ identities behind after embracing Christianity². While the movement does not explicitly use the term "conversion therapy," its goals and methods align closely with those of the discredited practice.

Legal and Ethical Concerns

Conversion therapy has been banned in 20 states and numerous municipalities across the United States. These bans are based on the overwhelming consensus among medical and psychological professionals that conversion therapy is not only ineffective but also harmful. Individuals who undergo conversion therapy are at a higher risk of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation³. Despite these bans, organizations like Bethel Church continue to promote practices that many consider to be conversion therapy under a different name.

The Impact on the LGBTQ+ Community

The promotion of conversion therapy by influential organizations like Bethel Church has significant implications for the LGBTQ+ community. It perpetuates the harmful notion that being LGBTQ+ is something that needs to be fixed, contributing to stigma and discrimination. Moreover, individuals who undergo conversion therapy often experience long-term psychological harm, including feelings of shame, guilt, and self-hatred³.

Bethel Church's Response

In response to criticism, Bethel Church has maintained that its ministries, including the CHANGED Movement, are about offering individuals a choice and helping them live in accordance with their faith. The church argues that it does not force anyone to undergo conversion therapy and that its programs are voluntary and based on personal testimonies². However, critics argue that the church's messaging and practices still promote the harmful idea that being LGBTQ+ is inherently wrong and needs to be changed.

The Broader Debate

The debate over conversion therapy is part of a larger conversation about religious freedom, LGBTQ+ rights, and the role of faith-based organizations in society. Proponents of conversion therapy often frame it as a matter of religious freedom, arguing that individuals should have the right to seek counseling that aligns with their beliefs. Opponents, however, contend that the practice is inherently harmful and that protecting individuals from its effects is a matter of public health and human rights³.

Conclusion

The controversy surrounding Bethel Church and conversion therapy highlights the ongoing tension between religious beliefs and LGBTQ+ rights. While Bethel Church continues to promote the CHANGED Movement and similar initiatives, the broader consensus among medical and psychological professionals is clear: conversion therapy is harmful and ineffective. As society continues to grapple with these issues, it is crucial to prioritize the well-being and rights of LGBTQ+ individuals and to challenge practices that perpetuate stigma and discrimination.

Call to Action

For those affected by conversion therapy or seeking support, numerous organizations offer resources and assistance. The Trevor Project, GLAAD, and the Human Rights Campaign are just a few of the many groups dedicated to supporting LGBTQ+ individuals and advocating for their rights. It is essential to continue raising awareness about the dangers of conversion therapy and to support efforts to ban the practice nationwide.

Additional Resources

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