

2015 NEA Exgay Educators Exhibit Report

by Jeralee Smith

To be honest, even thinking about going to the NEA Annual Meeting every June has brought on a sense of dread. Since our Conservative Educator's Caucus started in 2002 in Dallas, I have been to about half of the annual meetings. Of course, after my speech that first NEA in 2002 where I requested that the NEA be inclusive enough to add resources for teachers and students with unwanted same sex attraction, I was never electable again in my California school district! So, going meant the expenses were on me. However, God has His way of getting our attention and last year, the chair of our Exgay Educator's Caucus, Sue Halvorson, came down with cancer. After hearing my pastor speak about "finishing the race," I decided that meant He wanted me to carry the ball and go to the NEA Annual Meeting in Denver. From some of the conversations I was able to have, I was convinced that God wanted the Exgay Caucus to continue on for at least another year. And praise God, Sue's cancer was resolved and she was elected as a delegate this year, her last before retirement.

This year in Orlando also brought a special opportunity: the participation of a real scientist, Dr. Paul Sullins, who I had heard interviewed on American Family Radio on Tony Perkins' show, Washington Watch. I was fortunate enough to reach him and learn he was willing to go with us and face the NEA! He is a devoted scholar and researcher in the field of social sciences and very capable of handling the hard core statistical challenges. He was also very effective at drawing passers-by into discussions about many aspects of human sexuality, including his recent research on same sex parenting.

The general mood at the convention was very festive in celebration of the recent SCOTUS ruling on gay marriage. One lesbian couple was so over-joyed that they took over the mic and displayed an engagement proposal in front of the entire delegation!

Most encounters at our exhibit booth were at least civil and some were even reasonable or supportive. There were a few hostile encounters, too. After reading the title of our caucus (NEA EXGAY EDUCATORS CAUCUS), one older man walked right up in my face shaking his finger and said, "You are damaging children. Shame on you!" He talked over my comment that I support his right to have another opinion. Obviously the good will was not reciprocated! His parting comment as he shook his head in disgust, "God have mercy on your soul." I actually appreciated that!

When asked by Dr. Sullins if he knew what an Exgay was, another man walked by without even slowing his pace and said, "They don't exist."

A couple approached the booth and the husband, a school counselor, I believe, got into a heavy discussion of the research. When his wife had a turn, she explained

how she believes adolescents need to experiment with sexuality to see which direction feels right to them. I interjected, "Do you believe a person finds out who they are by consulting their feelings?" She said, "No," and went on to embellish her previous position but was obviously distracted by my question and her body language told me she was recognizing that perhaps she was saying that feelings tell you who you are. When she finished, I said, "Do you think it's OK if a person wants other parts of them, like their goals to have a family, or their faith, to be a more important source than feelings to tell them who they are?" With a look of genuine discovery on her face, she said, "That's a new thought!"

Another young man came to express his views more than listen to anything we had to say. His comment that stuck in my mind was, "I believe there should be a law against a physician writing a baby's gender on their birth certificate because they're too young to know what they want to be."

During a lull in the traffic, an African American from Cameroon expressed his desire to see polygamy accepted in America. In his Muslim country, he said it is very frustrating and sad when his countrymen came to this country to avoid the dangerous hostility of the Muslim extremists to have to choose one of their 4 wives to bring along and leave the other 3 in danger. He repeated several times that not all Muslims are terrorists. I asked him what he thinks might happen to the homosexuals in the US if Sharia law gains more influence. His reply, "They will put an end to that." He didn't say how.

Some conversations lead to topics of religion and freedom of religion. Many were able to concede that it is OK for a person to make their religion a priority over their sexuality but most were also quick to add, "But it's not OK to make someone feel forced to do so!" Many were suspicious that we were prompting religion and religious tradition on this issue. There were also a few who wanted our information to be fair in presenting all sides of the issue and a few who openly identified as Christians. Unlike last year when a shy convention worker waiting until no one was around, openly said, "God is talking to me here," there were no similar personal conversations that I was aware of. Although we were open to taking conversations into the spiritual aspects of this issue, most conversations centered around sharing of little known research information and discussions of freedom on the issue.

The delegates voted on some troublesome things this year. Right off the bat, the first item put to the vote by NEA leadership in complete denial of recent punitive rulings against Christians, was to use NEA resources to fight "bogus" religious liberty laws that might make discrimination and hatred against LGBT people more entrenched. They also voted to revise history books to make them more "relevant." Another item (NBI #84) attacks the use of the words, "right to work!" There were several transgender supportive business items that passed including allowing children to dress as boys or girls or use whatever restrooms they wished. Many items were disturbing, but this one submitted by vote of state delegations pushed

my buttons: (New Business Item 86) “NEA will disseminate to educators through existing publications current information regarding the methods and damaging effects of anti-gay “conversion/reparative therapies”. This was debated and reworded to tone it down. The item initially supported legislation to make it illegal for counselors to attempt to help a young person with unwanted same sex attraction. During the debate, a delegate raised the question, “Is it the intent of this item to do away with the NEA EXGAY EDUCATORS CAUCUS?” The author replied, “Absolutely not!” I find it interesting that although NEA included the category “Q” (defined by them as “QUESTIONING” as in NBI 78) in decisions supportive of LGBTQ individuals, they also voted to limit the freedom and resources for those who are questioning their sexuality in NBI 86! To view more of the 2015 NEA decisions, go to <http://nea.org>. Look under drop-down menu GRANTS AND EVENTS for “Annual Meeting and Representative Assembly, then click “New Business.” This will give you all the items that passed. To see what business was attempted, you have to click, “Delegate Resources,” and read the 6 issues of ORLANDO RA TODAY.

So, even though we are battle weary and wondering where we might find the approximately \$4,000 to carry on next year when the NEA Meeting goes to Washington DC, it looks like there is enough support for freedom of speech to put up with our dissenting views! Every year, we wonder if it’s time to “shake the dust off our feet,” and so far, the answer has been, “No.” Please pray with us about NEA 2016! God bless you all!