

Obama's Christian Appointee to Faith-Based Program Says New Testament Teaching on Homosexuality Is 'Not True'

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By Fred Lucas, Staff Writer

President Barack Obama (AP Photo)

(CNSNews.com) – President Obama has named to his faith-based advisory council a self-professed Christian who holds that the New Testament's teaching that homosexual behavior is unnatural and wrong--which is found in St. Paul's letter to the Romans--"is not true."

The appointee, Harry Knox, has also said that Obama's decision to invite the Rev. Rick Warren to say a prayer at the Inauguration "tainted" the ceremony and that Pope Benedict XVI is a "discredited leader."

Harry Knox, a professed gay Christian who is director of the religion and faith program at the Human Rights Campaign, a homosexual rights group, was named to President Obama's Advisory Council on Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships on Monday. The advisory council gives federal grants to faith-based organizations.

The appointment came after Knox criticized Obama prior to the Inauguration for selecting Warren, a California megachurch pastor and best-selling author, to deliver the invocation. Writing in [The Huffington Post blog](#), Knox said to Obama, "We don't feel hopeful anticipation of a new day in our country, and we don't feel optimism. We feel betrayed."

Knox said in the December article that Warren's invocation would make the Jan. 20 Inauguration a "tainted" event because Warren supported the ballot initiative in California to amend the state constitution to define marriage as between a man and a woman.

On the PBS *News Hour* in December, Knox said that Warren "has in fact leveraged homophobia to get ahead in his career. ... This is the worst possible choice the president could have made. This is a divisive choice. ... We said to the president-elect today in very strong language, the strongest we can think of and be respectful of the office, you have really slapped us. And we want you to think about that and think very hard what your actions will be going forward because this very symbolic, early decision has sent the exact wrong message."

Knox could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

Knox is one of 25 members of the advisory board of the White House Office Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Obama announced the formation of the office in early February, a continuation of a similar office started by President George W. Bush to issue federal grants to faith-based, non-profit charitable organizations.

Other members include Bishop Charles Blake of the Church of God in Christ in Chicago; the Rev. Peg Chamberlin, president-elect of the National Council of Churches USA; Dr. Frank Page, president emeritus of the Southern Baptist Convention; the Rev. Jim Wallis, president of the liberal Christian group Sojourners; and the Rev. Joel C. Hunter of Northland Church in Longwood, Fla.

Knox has been a long-time gay activist focusing on the faith community. He previously worked for the New York-based Freedom to Marry group, for Georgia Equality and Equality Florida. He has won awards from liberal religious organizations.

In a [debate](#) with the Rev. Gino Jennings recorded Nov. 28, 2004 at the First Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ in Philadelphia, the two men sparred over various biblical verses references homosexual behavior.

This included the Book of [Romans](#), in which St. Paul wrote, "Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion."

After reading the scripture, Jennings asked, "Do you believe that? That if a man lie with a man or a woman with a woman it is against nature?"

"I do not believe it," answered Knox, who at the time was the program director for the group Freedom to Marry.

Jennings responded, "So this is a lie?"

Knox affirmed, "That is not true."

"Paul did not have any idea of the kind of love that I feel for a partner when I am partnered. He didn't know what that was about," Knox said. "The straight man, the heterosexual man who got the privilege of writing the book, the educated, rich, heterosexual man, Paul, who got to write the book, didn't think it was natural because for him it must not have been."

Jennings later responded that Paul was not the sole author of the writings. "So you are saying Paul was just closed-minded. I totally disagree because the book says this, the book tells us that all scripture, all of the scripture, not some of it, but all scripture are given by the inspiration of God," said Jennings.

Before starting at the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) in 2005, Knox also worked as development director of Equality Florida and was the executive director of Georgia Equality. While in Georgia, his groups successfully lobbied corporations such as Coca-Cola, Bell South, Delta, and Cingular to extend same-sex benefits to employees.

At the HRC, Knox established a weekly preaching resource that provides scriptural commentary to pastors interested in homosexual perspectives on the Bible. He also helped create a network of 22 "progressive state clergy coalitions" around the country, according to the HRC Web site.

Knox has the potential to be a polarizing figure, said the Rev. Louis Sheldon, chairman of the conservative Traditional Values Coalition.

"Everything he says will be front-page news," Sheldon told CNSNews.com. "He will be a political liability to the president. All the good that the faith-based office does will get buried by a loose cannon that fires over the bow. But that's what Obama wants."

Last month, Knox was quoted in a gay newspaper criticizing the pope and the Catholic group Knights of Columbus, mainly because the Knights supported the traditional marriage amendment to the California constitution.

Knox told the San Francisco-based gay newspaper the [Bay Area Reporter](#), "The Knights of Columbus do a great deal of good in the name of Jesus Christ, but in this particular case, they were foot soldiers of a discredited army of oppression." In the newspaper, he included among the "discredited leaders" Catholic bishops and Pope Benedict XVI, as "A pope who literally today said condoms don't help in control of AIDS."

In a brief interview Monday with CNSNews.com, Knox stood by his comments on the pope.

"The pope needs to start telling the truth about condom use," Knox told CNSNews.com. "We are eager to help him do that. Until he is willing to do that and able, he's doing a great deal more harm than good--not just in Africa but around the world. It is endangering people's lives."

The pope's comments were mischaracterized by Knox, said Catholic League President Bill Donohue.

"When Pope Benedict XVI recently said that condoms are not the answer to HIV/AIDS, he was simply voicing common sense: the promiscuous distribution of condoms has coincided with a precipitous increase in HIV/AIDS," Donohue said in a statement Tuesday. "But to gay activists like Knox, the pope is a liar. Indeed, he instructed the pope to 'start telling the truth about condom use,' holding the Holy Father accountable for 'endangering people's lives.' He never explained how calls for abstinence could possibly jeopardize anyone's life."

In 2000, Knox won the Cordle Award for Promoting God's Diversity, and the Lancaster Theological Seminary's 2005 Robert V. Moss Medal for Excellence in Ministry.

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