



*A Personal Letter  
from Mel*

## *Evaluating the first twelve years of Soulforce*

The Rev. Dr. Mel White, Co-Founder, Soulforce

**A**fter twelve years on the frontlines of the struggle for LGBTQ equality, I am passing the baton to our wonderful new Executive Director, the Rev. Dr. Cindi Love, and to an impressive new generation of Equality Riders and other spiritual activists, young and old alike.

Because there are new folk among us who don't know our **Soulforce priorities**, Cindi has asked me to look back over the past dozen years, to **list every direct action we've taken against religion-based oppression and to give examples of what those nonviolent actions have accomplished.**

Please read the following pages. You will be amazed at what **thousands of Soulforce volunteers** have achieved in less than a dozen years. **Soulforce has offered a unique, spirit-based activism where we work on reconciliation** with those who oppress us.

What will our LGBTQ justice movement lose if there are **no more Soulforce Equality Rides**; no more **vigils and protests** at denominational meetings or at the headquarters of the antigay televangelists; no more meetings with mega-church pastors, Catholic Bishops or Mormon Elders; **no more nonviolence trainings**; no more Soulforce webpage, booklets or DVDs.

We cannot and will not let that happen! **We are convinced that Soulforce has as amazing a future as it has had a past.** You may have recently received a copy of the Soulforce 2009-2010 Annual Report and an appeal for donations for year end. **We must raise \$150,000 by the end of the year so that we can start the Equality Ride in January**, and with you help WE WILL DO IT. There is SO MUCH TO BE DONE and Soulforce is uniquely positioned to help do it. Will you help us TODAY by sending a tax deductible donation by check or by using your credit card to donate on line at [www.soulforce.org](http://www.soulforce.org)?

Can you make a **personally significant** contribution to the future of Soulforce? Our Equality Riders are giving up **two months** of their lives to go and confront injustice on campuses across the country— something most of us don't have the will or time to do— can you consider giving up **two weeks' worth of wages** to Soulforce? Or can you begin **tithing** to Soulforce now? **Please look in your heart and discover what would be meaningful to you.**

### **EXAMPLES OF WHAT THE SOULFORCE ACTIONS HAVE ACTUALLY ACCOMPLISHED**

**NOTE:** For every story of lives changed by a Soulforce rally, training, protest or vigil there are literally thousands of equally moving stories. We can't even begin to know, let alone share, the accomplishments of the thousands of activists we've trained in person and on-line to work for justice through relentless nonviolent resistance in their denomination or home communities. We are especially proud of the approximately 300 SFQ youth and young adults we've trained and sponsored on the 6 Equality Rides to date and the tens of thousands of students, staff and faculty these SFQ activists have influenced in colleges and military academies.

***First Priority:** To see our own hearts and minds changed by participating in a SF action.*

*"We do it for ourselves. When we take a stand for justice we are inspired and informed by the experience. In Gandhi's words, we set out 'to become the change we seek in the world.'"*

#### **Brian Randall, Chicago [Journey to Lynchburg, 1999]**

*"Thanks to Soulforce, I may be the only openly gay graduates of [Jerry Falwell's] Liberty University who has returned to Lynchburg to face not only Falwell but also my fundamental Baptist heritage... Seeing Falwell and 200 other Baptist leaders meeting with 200 LGBT people and our allies gave me hope for an America where one day we will feel safe at our jobs, at home and in our communities. Thanks, Soulforce. For the first time I feel that Matthew's [Shepard] death was not in vain."*

**Bill Carpenter, Florida [United Methodist General Conference, 2000]**

*“I will never forget my first SF action. I stood before a policeman in Cleveland at the UMC convention. I placed both of my hands out in front of me and allowed him to put restraints on my wrists and to place me under arrest. It was at that moment that I acknowledged my own power as a human and a spiritual being. I became completely clear that I was in charge of my own destiny. I was transformed from being a victim of discrimination and oppression to a leader in bringing down the religious systems that mistreat so many.”*

**Cris Elkins, North Carolina [Habitat House, 2000]**

*“The week I spent with other SF volunteers working eight hours a day on the Habitat House was one of the most soul-satisfying experiences in my life. Since then I’ve never missed a Soulforce action. Now I’m hooked. Doing justice has become my religion and Soulforce is both my church and my family.”*

**Fran Porter [Southern Baptist Convention, 2000 - after 36 hours in the Orlando jail.]**

*“I could not find my voice as a 16 year old child when they barred black people from my church. At last, with Soulforce I have found my voice. Now I can no longer be silent.”*

**Anna, an Equality Rider from Kyrgyzstan, diary entry, October 28, 2009**

*“In the past when I was asked about my motivation for being an Equality Rider, I mostly talked about how the situation LGBT people face in the schools we visit is very similar to that in Kyrgyzstan. But at Dallas Baptist University I realized that if I had the space to tell the Christian girl that I loved when I was 16, I would feel a lot more peace now. Back then, I was too afraid that she would misunderstand because she was so very strong in her faith. I also think that she would have come out had she had the space to do so, because the feelings we share were deeper than friendship.”*

**Fran Taft [at a training rally before a SF direct action at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002]**

*“After 95 years in this world, I dare to dream of a time when my grandson, who happens to be gay, will be judged by the quality of his character and by his contributions to the life of his community and not by his sexual orientation. For years I’ve said if only I were 50 years younger I might say something to benefit the gay cause. This may be my last chance.”*

[A long and tearful standing ovation followed this brief but deeply moving testimony of a 95-year-old grandmother who found her voice at a Soulforce rally in Washington, D.C. The next day, Fran Taft was arrested at a vigil outside the National Cathedral sitting in a wheel chair next to William Sloan Coffin, the civil rights icon and long time Soulforce supporter.]

***Second Priority: To change the minds and hearts of other LGBTQ people and their allies.***

*“We do it so our sisters and brothers (as eye witnesses or through the media) can hear that God created them, too, and loves them exactly as they are.”*

**A Southern Baptist Youth: [Southern Baptist Convention, 2003]**

*“Whether he was gay or not isn’t the important thing here. What is important that he was a youth delegate to the SBC, Phoenix, 2003. For several hours he stood on the sidewalk watching us. Then suddenly he left the Convention Center, joined our vigil line and began to sing. Slowly other young Southern Baptists joined him. When the vigil ended, they thanked us and returned to the SBC event. It was fairly clear that the Soulforce vigil changed their lives that day and gave them a whole new perspective on homosexuality and homosexuals.”*

**A Parish Priest in Rome, Italy [Soulforce Vigil & Protest, the Vatican, 2001]**

*“While preparing for our first vigil and protest at the Vatican, we were contacted by a closeted young priest who was the senior clergy at a rather large Catholic church in downtown Rome. He had read about our action at the National Catholic Cathedral in Washington, D.C. and was inspired to come out as a priest though he would risk his ministry in the process. When our advance team arrived in Rome, Fr. Stephano greeted us, introduced us to various committees he had formed to assist us, provided us meals, guides, interpreters, and led us in an unforgettable worship service in the Circus Maximus where so many Christians been martyred under the reign of the “holy Roman emperors.” On Sunday, Fr. Stephano even invited Mel — a Protestant clergy — to co-celebrate the Eucharist with him. After standing proudly with his Gay sisters and brothers, Fr. Stephano was tried by the Vatican and relieved of his duties as a priest and eventually excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church.”*

**Lesbian Police Officers [United Methodist Protest, Cleveland, 2000]**

*“It happens almost every time that Soulforce protestors are arrested for their act of civil (we call it ecclesial) disobedience. But it was particularly memorable in a tunnel under the Cleveland Convention Center where the police were holding more than 200 Soulforce volunteers on their way to be booked in various jails across the city. (With more than 200 SF people arrested, no one jail could hold us.) Two young policewomen (and forgive my judgment but if they weren’t Lesbians my ‘gaydar’ was broken) approached us while we were taking off our T-Shirts to remove at least a coat or sweater layered under them against the cold. On the front our T-Shirts read: ‘We are God’s children too.’ On the back*

against a bright red stop sign were these words: 'Stop Spiritual Violence!' You could tell that the two policewomen were a bit embarrassed when they asked if they could have the T-Shirts. Every time police are involved with a SF action there are officers (gay and straight) who signal their support and appreciation for our action with a smile, a wink or by waving when no other officers were looking. In one case the officer proved he was on our side by leaving our plastic handcuffs tied so loosely that we could easily escape them."

#### **Nicholas' Equality Ride Diary, October 22, 2008**

"It was 8:30 pm and we had started our hour of silence at Louisiana College with our candles ablaze. It was a beautiful sight to see, all of us united in truth and in love. I have never in my life felt so many emotions at one time. I was scared because some of the students were saying nasty things to us, and I felt threatened. Others were praying in our ears asking God to 'heal us and make us repent.' The last forty or so minutes of the vigil was dedicated to song, and addressing Louisiana College. One alumnus and one former professor of LC spoke about the injustice and mistreatment of LGBT people on the campus that they, themselves, experienced. Hearing them both speak was not only powerful for the vigil line, but I truly believe it sank into the hearts of the student body. The two men who spoke were known by most who were there, and had great courage to put some of those friendships and relationship on the line."

Third Priority: *To change the minds and hearts of the general un-churched public.*

"We do it for our friends and neighbors who have no idea what religion teaches about homosexuality and homosexuals or the consequences of those teachings."

#### **An officer with the Park Police in Washington, D.C. [Soulforce protest at the U.S.C.C.B., 2004]**

At a meeting with a Chief of the Park Police in D.C. we told him that we wished to protest at the Hyatt where America's bishops gather once a year. He was surprised that we would protest the bishops and wondered why. "I'm a lapsed Catholic," he said, "but I don't see any reason to protest the bishops." When we explained to him that the Vatican had declared homosexuals "intrinsically evil, objectively disordered and deplorable dangerous to children, to the family, to the military, and to the nation," the Chief was silent. Finally, he said, "I had no idea that Catholic teachings were so far behind the times. No wonder you want to protest. In fact, I might protest with you." He went on to grant us all the permits we needed and to supply officers at the scene of our vigils that knew why we were there and that their Chief was sympathetic with our cause."

#### **Equality Rider Lauren's diary entry, October 21, 2008**

"Tuesday afternoon we shared a picnic with students from Mississippi College. Curious about our gathering, a woman interrupted her workout to come and join us. She listened attentively as a brave MC student expressed her pain and anguish that resulted from the misguided belief that the love she shared with another woman was sinful and detestable. After a while, the woman returned to the track to continue exercising and we returned to our carrots and hummus. Around 3:00 we began packing up. As we loaded the bus, the woman approached us again. 'Would it be alright if I said a few words?' I leaned back in my seat expecting a sermon. Instead, what I heard were heartfelt words of gratitude and since praise for our work. This stranger from Clinton, Mississippi wanted to share a message with us that she felt God was putting into her heart. 'God desires you,' she said. Since recognizing myself as a member of the queer community, I have often been made to feel unworthy of love, of acceptance of equality. Fortunately, I've learned that simply isn't true."

#### **After an arrest at a SF protest at a denominational conference in a city we've decided not to name.**

"At a nonviolent action protesting denominational policies that denied LGBT persons their rights to ordination and marriage, television cameras rolled while we were searched, handcuffed, booked at a police van, and boarded into busses. During the arrests the sheriff gave each of us a rare opportunity to tell reporters that we were conducting this direct action to help people understand the suffering caused by church teachings that demean and demonize God's gay children. When the arrests were over and we were all sitting quietly waiting to go to jail, the same Sheriff entered each bus and said quietly, 'Well the bad news is you've been arrested. The good news is you were able to tell your story to the press. Oh, yes, one more thing. We are not taking you to jail but to your hotel. There will be no charges filed. Thanks for coming to our town.' We were still handcuffed so we couldn't applaud but we cheered the Sheriff who stood in silence telling us by his smile and by the act of freeing us that he was glad to have had that opportunity to do something for our cause."

#### **The warning from a Jewish mother "They took you first."**

"For our first 'soul force' action at James Dobson's Focus on the Family headquarters our co-founders, Mel White and Gary Nixon, staged a weeklong 'Fast for Understanding' at the base of Dobson's huge campus in Colorado Springs. For one week that ate nothing and drank only Gator Aide. During their first radio interview, they invited families to bring their children up the hill to meet Gay people and to see for themselves how different they were from the ways James Dobson described them. One of the first Colorado families that visited was a Jewish mom and her three children. 'I wanted my children to meet you because last time they took you first and we cannot let that happen again.' She and her children were walking back down the hill before our cofounders were fully impacted by her statement. Of course they knew she

*was talking about the holocaust and the Gay men who were arrested and thrown into prison camps even before Hitler began his Jewish pogrom. But the truth in her historic reference made Mel and Gary realize that something had to be done to confront and eventually end the antigay rhetoric of James Dobson and the other leaders of the 'religious right.' That realization in the shadow of Dobson's radio empire was a primary influence in the founding of Soulforce."*

#### ***Fourth Priority:***

*To change the minds and hearts of the "followers" of those who condemn us.*

*"We do it for the people in the pew who need to see LGBTQ people of faith and to hear the stories of how they suffer because of what their faith community teaches."*

#### **Jimmy Creech after his trial in November, 1999**

*"The presence of SF at my trial made it clear that the trial was about the oppression and persecution of LGBTQ persons by the UMC. SF opened the door and shone light into the Church's closet of shame. You did this with your bodies, with dignity, integrity and courage. No one else was willing to take the direct action that you took. What you did was historic."*

#### **Katie, Equality Rider, diary entry Oct. 24, 2008**

*"Today, as we were on the road to Dallas Baptist University, an old, familiar feeling found its way into my stomach. Here is it was, the Christian school that was going to finally allow us onto campus.. After meeting with the students and the press conference that followed, the bus drove us through the gates and to a meeting hall where I had the honor of sitting with President Cook during lunch. He is a kind-hearted person who was genuinely interested in the Equality Ride. At Dallas Baptist University someone finally said what I've been waiting for months to hear, 'Why wouldn't we welcome you onto campus? We want this chance to talk with you. Would Jesus turn you away?' It seems simple enough to me and we all know the answer."*

#### **Jeaneane Hill [Soulforce protest at the meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic bishops, 2005]**

*"I will never forget how cold it was during our vigils in front of the bishop's meetings at the Hyatt. We looked like little dough boys and girls with layers of clothes under our T-Shirts that read 'Your silence sanctions our suffering.' The most effective part of our SF uniform was our SMILES. I could see the bishops struggling with their own thoughts as they passed us. I began to notice the Catholic military chaplains that came and went with the bishops. When I tried to hand one of our flyers to a Navy chaplain he waved me off with, 'You have to be kidding!' On the last day of our vigil, I thought everything would be the same when the Hyatt doors opened and a group of chaplains charged towards us with steaming mugs of coffee. You could have blown us over. I couldn't even count the number of chaplains because of the tears in my eyes. They must have thought about our vigil and protest for those past three days and then did this very courageous thing. It chokes me up still. I noticed the Hyatt doormen beaming and I caught a tear or two in their eyes as they watched these men in blue and the people of Soulforce share a moment of compassion. By the way, the mugs they brought were stamped 'You can have it all. Army National Guard.' Someday, don't you think?"*

#### **Christian Universities allow gay/straight alliances on campus**

*Abilene, Texas, considered the third most conservative city in the United States has been a stop on two Equality Rides. Two of the universities in the city have now permitted Gay-Straight Alliances and one has eliminated the requirement for reparative therapy for openly gay students.*

#### **Soulforce at work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (A paradigm)**

*The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America had policies in place that denied LGBTQ people the right to ordination and the rite of marriage. Relentless nonviolent resistance was new to our Lutheran sisters and brothers, so at the 2001 General Assembly we did the action together. The Lutherans liked what they saw and asked us to train and lead their resistance (if necessary) at the 2003 GA. At 2005 we stayed around as advisors but didn't join the action. At the 2007 GA they didn't even need SF to advise them. And at the 2009 GA the delegates voted for full inclusion. SF is proud of our friends in the ELCA and when the bans were lifted, we got this note from a Lutheran colleague: Jeannine Janson, long time ELCA activist told Soulforce, "we couldn't have done it without you. That first General Assembly, you led us, the second, we acted together as a team, the third you simply advised and then stepped back to let us take the reins."*

#### ***Fifth Priority:*** *To change the minds and hearts of those who condemn us.*

*"We do it for the televangelists, the mega-church pastors, and for clergy and lay leaders who need to see the tragic effects of their teachings in the lives of the people they are called to serve."*

#### **Southern Voice-A Gay Periodical Read Widely throughout the South**

*Though Jerry Falwell has refused to meet with Mel White after that weekend together in 1999, Falwell has surprised*

many with statements more supportive of LGBTQ rights. Appearing on the Aug. 5, 2005, episode of MSNBC's 'The Situation with Tucker Carlson' Falwell said, "Well, housing and employment are not special rights. It think the right to live somewhere and to live or work where you please, as long as you're not bothering someone else, is a basic right, not a special right." The Southern Voice credited Soulforce's 'longterm persuasion' of Falwell for his change of heart.

### **The Story of Judge Mildred Edwards during the trial of the "DC 3" arrested at a 2003 SF action.**

*"In November, 2003, we gathered for our third action at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. During the Bishop's Mass, three faithful SF Catholics were denied Eucharist, leading them to seek communion in a very public SF direct action the next day at the hotel where the bishops were meeting. They were once again refused communion by the bishops. The three SF Catholics were arrested for trespassing and taken to jail. At the subsequent trial, presiding judge Mildred Edwards, after hearing the testimony, returned her verdict, saying that the three had been found guilty, but her next statement shocked everyone. "I'm going to do something I have never done in my 17 years as a judge," Edwards said. "I'm going to refuse to sentence you," saying that the defendants 'need to go back until the bishops finally hear your message.' Shortly after, Judge Edwards resigned her position on the Federal Court and enrolled in seminary to make a complete career change. Judge Edwards acknowledged to classmates that her decision to resign as judge had been impacted by the trial of the "DC 3."*

### **Honor Code changed at Brigham Young University after visit of SFQ Equality Riders.**

*"Just three weeks after the SFQ Equality Ride visited Brigham Young University this prestigious Mormon school amended the section of the student Honor Code that dealt with sexual orientation. The previous code identified 'any behaviors that indicate homosexual conduct, including those not sexual in nature' as violations of the Honor Code. The revised code states that 'Brigham Young University will respond to homosexual behavior rather than to feelings or orientation and welcomes as full members of the university community all whose behavior meets university standards.... One's sexual orientation is not an Honor Code issue. However, the Honor Code requires all members of the university community to manifest a strict commitment to the law of chastity.' A leader of Equality Utah wrote the Equality Riders: "As a result of your visit, BYU students contacted the administration about the Honor Code. Because of their questions, BYU has changed the code in significant ways.' He described the changed policy as "Do ask. Do tell. Don't do."*

### **The Apology of Gil Moegerle, Co-Founder of Focus on the Family, August 15, 1997**

*Although this amazing change predates the official founding of Soulforce, the 'soul force' principles of relentless nonviolent resistance were demonstrated rather remarkably at the headquarters of James Dobson's Focus on the Family nine years before SF launched our "A False Focus on My Family: Responding To James Dobson's False Charges." From 1993 the founders of Soulforce, Mel White and Gary Nixon, sent letters, faxes, and emails to Dobson and his staff demonstrating the tragic consequences of the antigay rhetoric. Their letters were declined. In 1994, Mel and Gary launched a 'Week Long Fast for Understanding' at the edge of the Dobson campus. There was little sign that they were making progress until August 15, 1997, when Gil Alexander-Moegerle, a co-founder of Focus on the Family, held a press conference to apologize for Dobson's rhetoric. He said: "I apologize to lesbian and gay Americans who are demeaned and dehumanized on a regular basis by the false, irresponsible, and inflammatory rhetoric of James Dobson's anti-gay radio and print materials. I apologize to any American who has felt the sting of James Dobson and the Christian Right wagging their holier-than-thou fingers in your face, shrieking that because your views differ from theirs, you are ungodly, evil and unworthy of the rights of full citizenship."*

## *Soulforce Priorities:*

### **First Priority: To see our own hearts and minds changed by participating in a SF action.**

*"We do it for ourselves. When we take a stand for justice we are inspired and informed by the experience. In Gandhi's words, we set out 'to become the change we seek in the world.'"*

### **Second Priority: To change the minds and hearts of LGBTQ people and their allies.**

*"We do it so our sisters and brothers (as eye witnesses or through the media) can hear that God created them, too, and loves them exactly as they are."*

### **Third Priority: To change the minds and hearts of the general un-churched public.**

*"We do it for our friends and neighbors who have no idea what religion teaches about homosexuality and homosexuals or the consequences of those teachings."*

### **Fourth Priority: To change the minds and hearts of the "followers" of those who condemn us.**

*"We do it for the people in the pew who need to see LGBTQ people of faith and to hear the stories of how they suffer because of what their faith community teaches."*

### **Fifth Priority: To change the minds and hearts of those who condemn us.**

*"We do it for the televangelists, the mega-church pastors, and for clergy and lay leaders who need to see the tragic effects of their teachings in the lives of the people they are called to serve."*

On the following pages, I have summarized the amazing number of direct actions we've taken to reach our priorities since 1999. I promise that you will be informed and inspired if you take the next few minutes to read the entire history of Soulforce. I also promise that if you read these pages you will be deeply moved by the **dramatic true stories of priorities accomplished and lives changed along the way.**

## *Soulforce Actions: 1999-2010*

### **2010:**

**SFO Equality Ride (6)** Once again Riders (25) visited colleges and military academies (15) with admission policies that discriminate against LGBTQ students. At each stop, our young activists presented their message of justice and inclusion to thousands of students/faculty/staff across 14 primarily southern states.

**Presbyterian Church General Assembly (2)** July 7—10. Networking with Presbyterian solidarity groups, SF staffed information booths, greeted delegates daily, and conducted prayerful vigils outside the center. When delegates refused to consider same-sex marriage, SF staged a nonviolent protest with 11 arrests.

**"Equality U" Documentary Released, June 1.** This prize-winning, feature-length documentary follows 34 SF Equality Riders across the US. At some stops they're welcomed. At others they protest and even face arrest. But at every stop they connect with students who've often never met an LGBT person who is "out and proud."

### **2009:**

**SFO Equality Walk(1)** August 7—16. This is the *Right to Marry Campaign* in Phoenix, Arizona.

**SFO Camp** 17 July 10—19. At our "retreat for social change" 17 young adult leaders came together to learn and share knowledge on topics like: nonviolence, anti-racism, queer activism, media and campaign planning, fund development, and religious analysis. Campers left with local strategies and written plans of action.

**SFO International** Feb. 22—28: Strasbourg; May 12-20 Rotterdam, July 26-Aug 2 Copenhagen. **SFO networked with LGBT activists in Russia, Italy and Austria** to empower young activists.

**Sundays of Solidarity** June 28. Soulforce families met with John Hagee, the antigay pastor of a Houston mega-church to share our concerns about Hagee's false claims about LGBTQ people and their tragic consequences. Hagee was impressed and invited our Executive Director Jeff Lutes to work on a committee to discuss these matters at a later date.

**Anti Heterosexism Conference (2)**, November 20—22. Originally our Soulforce *Ex-Gay Survivor's Conference*, the meeting in West Palm Beach, Florida, expanded the program to include an impressive slate of experts on the psychological, sexual, and spiritual roots of heterosexism that support the ex-gay claims to heal homosexuals.



**U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (6)** April 22—24. The Pope opposes UN resolution de-criminalizing homosexuality. After a 2-day vigil, Soulforce has a cordial and productive meeting with the Vatican's UN Ambassador who issues his own separate statement condemning violence against LGBT people.

### **2008:**

**SFO Equality Ride (5)** October 1—Nov. 13. This year's Equality Ride bussed 13 riders to 18 traditionally black colleges and universities with policies denying admission to LGBT students. These Riders also stopped by Falwell's Liberty University to present books on sexual orientation and gender identity but they were refused.

**Seven Straight Nights (2)** September 14—20. Once again SF and various allied organizations staged vigils, protests, and local rallies in 38 cities and 28 states to show support and demand equal rights for LGBTQ people. Each local organizing committee was trained in nonviolence. Local media covered almost every event.

**SFO Right to Marry Campaign March** Our young activists walked 96 miles through Phoenix, one mile for every year Arizona has withheld full rights to its LGBT citizens stopping at churches, town meetings, rallies in our unsuccessful attempt to defeat Prop 102, Arizona's "defense of marriage" legislation.

**American Family Outing** May 9— June 15. SF families engaged families at six of America's leading mega-churches to hear and to be heard. We believe these churches have enormous influence and have the potential to be a positive force in ending the physical and spiritual violence against LGBT people.

**United Methodist General Conference (3)** June 25-27, Forth Worth. Soulforce 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Homecoming and Direct Action included a gala celebration of our past and a strategic look at the future. The UMC direct action included a year of pre-conference lobbying, a rally and vigils to persuade the UMC to end its antigay policies.

**SFO International** Soulforce youth partner on a series of intercultural projects in Russia, Italy and Austria to empower youth activists from Europe and the former Soviet Union. SF's Haven Herrin elected officer in ILGA.

#### 2007:

**SFO Equality Ride (4)** March 8-26. For this very productive month there were two Equality Rides with one bus headed east and the second headed west. A total of 54 riders visited 24 antigay colleges and military academies and spoke to an estimated 20,000 students, faculty and staff. Media responded enthusiastically to the Rides.



**Focus on the Facts Campaign (3)** April 28. Rather than sponsoring a rally at Dobson's headquarters, SF used its resource to produce the colorful booklet: "A False Focus on My Family: Responding to Dobson's False Charges." However to keep pressure on Dobson, various SF couples sat in and were arrested in Dobson's office.

**SFO Right To Marry Campaign** July 14 – 28. 40 young SFQ activists crisscrossed New York State talking to legislators who were preparing to vote on legalizing same-sex marriages.

**Ex-Gay Survivor's Conference (1)** June 29 – July 1. 240 "survivors" of ex-gay ministries gathered to heal the wounds caused by the ex-gay movement. At a SF press conference at the University of California in Irvine, two founders of Exodus apologized for the suffering caused by their organizations.

**Seven Straight Nights** October 7-13. SF and 32 allied organizations staged 28 vigils, protests, and local rallies in 26 states to show support and demand equal rights for LGBTQ people. Each local organizing committee was trained in nonviolence. Local media covered almost every event.

#### 2006:

**SFO Equality Ride (3)** Mar. 10—Apr. 26. For 2 months, 34 young Soulforce Equality Riders visited 19 colleges and U.S. military academies with antigay admission policies in 11 states. When refused entrance, Riders stood vigil or were arrested. Riders spoke to an estimated 10,000 students on campuses where they were welcome.

**1,000 Watt March Vigil and Concert (2)** July 17—22. SF holds another massive rally and vigil on the campus of Focus on the Family in Colorado Springs to protest James Dobson's endless flow of antigay rhetoric on the radio and in print. Judy Shepard and actor Chad Allen led our march and left a "gay family" album at the gates.

**Right to Serve Campaign** Fall, 2006. SFQ trained activists for peaceful protests at military recruiting stations across the US. Soulforce military and marriage campaigns proved our commitment to partner with our allies: Beyond Ex Gay, Faith in America, Service Members Defense League, GLAAD, NGLTF, ACLU, Family Equality Council, People for the American Way, Marriage Equality USA and Statewide Equality Groups



*The beginning of the Young Adult movement*

#### 2005:

**SFO Equality Ride (1)** April 25. Liberty University – Lynchburg, VA. Inspired by the Freedom Rides, Jake Reitan developed his Equality Ride idea. He recruited and trained 50 students from across Virginia. That first trial run gave Riders the chance to meet Liberty students. Falwell asked student body to "trash" SF materials.

**MAYDAY! Focus on the Family Protest** May 1—2. 1,000 SF volunteers trained in advance to circle Dobson's massive headquarters. 100 organizations offered their support. Phil, Randi & Jake Reitan chosen to represent American families. Their arrest is featured in prize winning documentary, "For the Bible Tells Me So."

**Southern Baptist Convention (6)** June 21—23. Nashville, TN. Soulforce held a three-day vigil, distributing SF materials including "What the Bible Says – and doesn't say—about Homosexuality." Once again local and national media covered our SF vigil. 100 allies marched around the convention center 7 times while holding "justice" candles.

**Evangelical Lutheran Church Wide Assembly (3),** August 8-14. Orlando, Florida. After 1,018 delegates defeated LGBT friendly proposals, 100 SF and ELCA partners stood facing the delegates and in spite of protest stayed to make it clear that "the church is ours, too. We are not going away. We want full and equal participation."

**Vigil in St. Peter's Square (2)** Sep. 2. A handful of SF volunteers kept the pledge we made to Vatican officials that we would return

until the Pope opens the Church to LGBT people and tells the truth about the young gay Catholic, Alfredo Ormando, who burned himself to death in St. Peter's Sq. to protest the Pope's homophobia.

**SFO Equality Ride (2) October 21.** Annapolis, Maryland. This second test run delivered a busload of LGBT activists to the U.S. Naval Academy. After a prayerful "Lift the Ban" vigil, riders ignored the warning that they would be arrested, walked through the security gate, met and ate lunch with a handful of brave Midshipmen.

**National Week of Prayer and Vigils (6) November 7-12.** For the second time, Soulforce called for a national day of prayer before meeting with the Catholic Bishops. Rather than focusing on the Bishops meeting in D.C., vigils, rallies, and even Catholic masses were held across the U.S. to change the minds and hearts of the U.S. Bishops.

#### 2004:

**The Trial of the Rev. Karen Dammann, Mar. 16—17.** Bothell, Washington. Methodist clergy refuses to live secret life as a lesbian. SF claims "trial is an unjust assault on sacred worth of all Lesbian and Gay people." 100 SF volunteers block church entrance to stop trial. Trial proceeds but Rev. Dammann declared innocent.

**United Methodist General Conference (2) May 5—8.** Pittsburgh, PA. Delegates approve antigay policies. SF and 400 allies march on to the convention floor, stop proceedings for 20 minutes so that delegates could see the faces of those they condemned. Hundreds including bishops & observers join us singing "We shall overcome."

**Southern Baptist Convention (5) June 13—16.** Indianapolis. Knowing that the Southern Baptists were about to support the Federal Marriage Amendment, 80 SF volunteers on vigil in heat & rain distribute 48 page Soulforce booklet to young delegates: "*Christian Youth: You are an important voice in the struggle for Gay rights in America.*"

**U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (5) Nov. 14—17.** Washington, D.C. Before our 5<sup>th</sup> visit, SF organized silent vigils at Diocesan headquarters in 23 states. In DC we carried photos of gay Catholic saints. Only 4 bishops came out to hear our concerns but courageous Bishop Gumbleton led Soulforce & Pax Christi in peace mass.

**The Trial of Beth Stroud Dec.1—3.** Pennsylvania. Tried for affirming that she was a "self-avowed practicing homosexual" SF Rapid Response Team and United Methodist allies stood vigil in pouring rain declaring the trial another act of spiritual violence against LGBT persons everywhere.



#### 2003:

**The Trial of the "D.C. Three" January 24—25.** Washington, D.C. Judge found "guilty of trespass but refused to sentence them. She apologized for the violence done by Catholics to LGBT people. "I'm a Catholic," she said, "and I want you to go back to that hotel and continue your work until the bishops finally hear you."

**The Trial of Stephen Van Kuiken.** (Presbyterian clergy) April 7—9. Cincinnati. After the Creech trial, SF rapid response teams mobilized the media at church trials condemning courageous clergy for their support of LGTB rights. Rev. Van Kuiken was found guilty but after a national storm of protest, he was acquitted in 2004.

**Southern Baptist Convention (4) June 15—19.** Phoenix, Arizona After a day-long nonviolence training, SF and PFLAG allies held vigils in 110 degree heat. Southern Baptist youth took SF materials, discussed them, and decided to leave the convention center to join Soulforce in a rousing songfest celebration.

**Evangelical Lutherans (ELCA) Churchwide Assembly (2) August 11—17.** Milwaukee, Wisconsin. LGBT Lutherans teamed with SF to prevent delaying a positive report on homosexuality "that might divide the Church." Realizing that their LGBT members and allies were willing to be arrested in protest, the report was released.

**Out & About Lynchburg (2) Oct. 9—12** Second "Pride in the Park Celebration." During our Sunday vigil at Jerry's church he was demanding a Constitutional Amendment banning same-sex marriage while outside Jimmy Creech was marrying same-sex couples and blessing their families with the national media coverage.

**U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (4) Nov. 9—13.** Washington, D.C. Catholic Bishops support Constitutional Amendment. SF writes political and religious leaders to oppose it. John Lewis and other civil rights heroes sign on. SF gives Bishops a powerful case against it then march to Capitol calling for separation of church and state.

#### 2002:

**Southern Baptist Convention (3) June 7—12.** St. Louis, Missouri. Southern Baptists becoming more extreme in their antigay rhetoric. Angry Baptist preacher arrested for harassing a silent SF demonstrator. Eight SF teams of two were arrested inside the Center. 38

arrested in prayerful vigil outside while 200 sang their support.

**Out & About Lynchburg (1) October 25—27.** Lynchburg, Virginia. Soulforce holds the first LGBT “Pride” celebration in park to support the growing “out” community in Falwell’s backyard. After a march through Lynchburg, the SF rally featured southern cooking, country music and speeches by Muslim, Jewish, Catholic and Protestant clergy.

**U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (3) November 10—14.** Washington, DC. SF attends “Bishop’s Mass” at National Shrine (to worship not protest). Three SF Catholic leaders were refused the Eucharist. Next day the “D.C.3” were arrested kneeling in the Bishop’s hotel lobby asking the bishops to “feed their forgotten sheep.”

#### 2001:

**The Vatican Jan. 2—7.** Soulforce prayer circle in St. Peter’s Square on spot where Sicilian gay Catholic burned himself to death protesting Roman Catholic policies that lead to suffering and death for LGBT people. Pilgrims/ nuns/a priest join our circle. Police surround us but release without arrest. Dignity officers were our guests.

**Southern Baptist Convention (2), June 11—13.** New Orleans, Louisiana. Hundreds follow SF Jazz funeral to Superdome carrying casket filled with stories of the suffering of LGBT Baptists. When SF is blocked from entering, the mourners are arrested. New Orleans Sheriff so impressed he arrests us but drives us to our hotels.

**Evangelical Lutheran(ELCA) Churchwide Assembly (1) Aug. 10—14.** Indianapolis. Lutheran LGBT organizations ask SF to lead their first protest. After trainings in nonviolence, volunteers decide to stage a pray in out of concern for the LGBT Lutherans who are victims of Church teachings. 65 arrests.

**U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (2) Nov. 11—15.** Washington, DC. A four day vigil in sleet and snow. Bishops ignored SF until we sang the Taize chant, “Stay Here and Keep Watch with Me.” The Bishops paused. One bishop shook our hands, tears in his eyes. A nun left the bishops meeting and stood vigil with us.



#### 2000:

**Habitat House, Lynchburg, VA., October 3—Dec. 9.** In an attempt to work together for the good of the community, Falwell promises SF to provide builders for this project. Promise not kept. SF built house anyway, donating \$20,000 for supplies and delivering large quantity of food to a nearby homeless shelter/food bank.

**Beware the Fox (Fox TV), February 23.** Pat Robertson is a primary source of antigay rhetoric. SF protests that Robertson’s *700 Club* is seen 3 times daily on the *Fox Children’s Channel*. Los Angeles clergy join SF in closing Fox Towers for 8 hours. Weeks later Fox sells Family Channel to ABC who dumps the *700 Club*.

**United Methodist General Conference (1), May 6—12.** Cleveland, Ohio. “Soulforce University” trains nonviolent activists to protest Methodist “no ordination, no marriage” policies. Gandhi’s grandson, Arun, and Dr. King’s daughter, Yolanda, speak at event along with Methodist civil rights leaders. 250 arrested in nonviolent protest.

**Southern Baptist Convention (1), June 13—14.** Orlando, Florida. Hundreds stand with SF in silent prayerful vigil after SF had spent another year reaching out to Southern Baptist leaders. When the SBC decides to condemn LGBT people, SF blocks doors “No exit until truth enters” signs. Dozens arrested. 36 hours in jail.

**Presbyterian General Assembly (PCUSA) (1), June 25.** Long Beach, California. At least 200 people join in SF “Circle of Concern” at entrance to Convention Ctr. Protesting “no ordination, no marriage” policies. When Assembly refuses to embrace truth, 36 leaders arrested including 2 former Moderators and an 83 year old Elder.

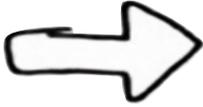
**Episcopal General Convention (1), July 4.** Denver, Colorado. This most liberal Protestant Church still denies LGBT people basic rights/rites. At a nonviolent rally and protest at the entrance of Convention Center featuring “Stop Spiritual Violence,” 70 arrested with SF including Episcopal priests and at least two bishops.

**U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (1), November 12-14.** Washington, DC. After a yearlong letter writing campaign, SF leaders invited to meet with Presiding Bishops who refuse to consider the evidence that homosexuality is neither sickness nor sin. When all our requests are denied, 104 arrested in nonviolent protest.

#### 1999:

**Journey to Lynchburg, Virginia, October 22-24.** Soulforce’s 200 spend a weekend with Falwell’s 200. 183 media teams accredited. *Today/Good Morning America* broadcast live from event. Falwell apologizes to Diane Sawyer for his “overly harsh” attack on gays. The SF message of LGBT equality heard around the globe.

**The Trial of Jimmy Creech, November 17.** Grand Island, Nebraska. United Methodist clergyman tried for marrying gay couple. 60 arrested as SF volunteers and UMC clergy block entrance in nonviolent protest. JC: *“Soulforce opened the door and shone light into the Church’s closet of shame. What you did was historic.”*



**Add to the actions above the list of booklets we’ve written and are on line and/or distributing including:**

*“What the Bible Says — and doesn’t Say — about Homosexuality”*

*“What the Science Says — and doesn’t Say — about Homosexuality”*

*“A False Focus on My Family: Responding To James Dobson’s False Charges”*

*“Christian Youth: An Important Voice”*

*The Rhetoric of “Extremists” like Fred Phelps and the Similarities to Southern Baptist Rhetoric*

*“Civil Rights Activists on Line: Coretta Scott King, Julian Bond, Bob and Jeannie Graetz, James Lawson, etc”*

*“A On-line Training in Nonviolence: 17 Steps”*

Add to the actions about the list of videos we’ve written and are distributing including:

*“The Trials of Jimmy Creech,” “Rhetoric of Intolerance,” “How Can I Be Sure That God Loves Me, too?”*

Friend, I’m 70 years old. I can’t believe it. I’m retiring from the frontlines of leadership but I will never retire from Soulforce.

I am more convinced today in the power of **relentless nonviolent resistance** than I was in 1994 when Gary and I staged our first nonviolent action at Dobson’s headquarters in Colorado Springs.

During our “Seven Day Fast for Understanding” we had **death threats, rocks thrown at our little camper, and counter protesters carrying signs like this one.** A security guard had to jump from his car to warn away one determined late night caller and several times, well after midnight, people honked their horns, spun their wheels or yelled “faggot” as they sped away.

Those were lonely nights. We wondered if anything would come of it. We had no idea that just fifteen years later, **thousands of volunteers would have been trained in nonviolence and mobilized to confront injustice across the US** and even at the Vatican.



So many of you have given so much time, money and talent to support Soulforce in our struggle against religion based oppression. We can only say **“Thanks!”** to you and to our loving Creator for what we have accomplished together.

Celebrate with us the work that has been done and the lives that have been changed while doing it. And join us in an enthusiastic welcome to the Rev. Dr. Cindi Love, our new Executive Director. We have no doubt that the best years are yet to come!

**If your life has been touched by any of these events these past twelve years,** will you please make a donation to the future work of Soulforce? A portion of your income... or \$500, \$250, \$100 . . . whatever you can give in these tough economic times will ensure the work will continue—perhaps lives will be saved. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Mel White, Co-Founder  
Soulforce, Inc.

P. S. — Here’s an email I received on October 4, 2010:

*Dear friends at Soulforce, thank you for paving the way for GLBTQ Americans, showing that they are real people who deserve respect and should be allowed to be in the churches. You have shown how to dream, hope and also to set the wheels in action and get it DONE!! You’ve done a fabulous job and out of all the gay organizations I really feel that you have been able to quietly make a big difference in the heartland as well as the coasts. Your background shows to the Christian right that gays aren’t the creepy perverts that they want to make them out to be!! You are outstanding!!! I’ll never meet you but know that I admire you and hope that you continue to grow the SOULFORCE message.” —ANITA IN KANSAS*