



## The sin of peddling ignorance

By Bill Maxwell

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I predict that one day in the distant future, the clarity of biology, along with the old standby common sense, will irrefutably demonstrate that homosexuality is as normal as heterosexuality.

That clarity will give us reason to look back on homophobia and wonder how on earth anyone, even right-wing politicians such as Hillsborough County Commissioner Brian Blair, ever believed that an omniscient and omnipotent God would have created a group of people to be despised, denigrated and killed because of their sexual orientation.

We will realize that our ignorance, our violent actions and our acceptance of violence against homosexuals are the real sins.

Some clarity already is in plain sight, both biological and psychological, regarding homosexuality, but an overwhelming number of us are so filled with hatred or blinded by religious dogma that we cannot accept the truth or will not acknowledge it.

As far back as 1975, the American Psychological Association, following the lead of the American Psychiatric Association, removed homosexuality from its official list of mental disorders.

All this brings me back to Brian Blair, who is running for re-election against Democrat Kevin Beckner, who is openly gay.

A few days ago, according to the *St. Petersburg Times*, Blair sent a mass e-mail to "friends" asking them to protest the annual "Day of Silence" to be held at several area

schools on April 25. The observance, which is not school-sponsored, urges students to make a pledge of silence and to distribute cards explaining their reason for remaining silent.

This year, the event is being held in memory of Larry King, a gay eighth-grader at E.O. Green Junior High in Oxnard, Calif., who used to come to school wearing makeup, earrings and high heels. On Feb. 12, another student, 14-year-old Brandon McInerney, shot King twice in the head, police say. The killing took place in a computer lab.

Students at the middle school told officials that many boys regularly taunted King, threw wet paper towels at him in the bathroom and called him insulting names. King would return the taunts and insults.

"He didn't like people insulting him," Miriam Lopez, 13, one of King's friends, told the Associated Press. "Larry was brave enough to bring high heels and makeup to school and he wasn't afraid of anything."

For his sexual orientation and his bravery, this young student was killed in a classroom. Other students nationwide, including many in our area, want to remember him in an act of silence. Apparently, at least from the tone and content of his mass e-mail, which includes an alert to parents from the right-wing American Family Association of Mississippi, Blair is dismissive of King's murder.

"I have always believed that all citizens are equal and should be treated accordingly," he wrote. "On the other hand, no group of citizens should be given government sanction and support to promote their social and sexual agenda upon the rest of us and especially, our children.

"Considering the fact that the same school system does not want to allow just one Minute of Silence in the classroom for God, this is preposterous."

The American Family Association, relying on pseudoscience and religious dogma, implored parents to tell their children that "homosexual behavior is not an innate identity; it is a sinful, unnatural and destructive behavior. No school should advance a physically, emotionally, and spiritually destructive sexual lifestyle."

Blair and the association are promoting several distortions of the truth, if not outright lies. First, "Day of Silence" is not "government sanction and support" to promote anything, and, second, these students are not out "to promote their social and sexual agenda upon" anyone. They are merely asserting their right to memorialize another kid who was murdered in school for being who he was, and they are asking the rest of us to respect their right to be left alone, to live as they wish.

In time, as a result of science and common sense, we will come to see the wrong of crusades such as that of Blair and the American Family Association. We will come to see that their ignorance and homophobia are the real sin.

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