

[Across the Ocean, A Movement for Equality in South Africa](#)

PFLAG Interview - March 11, 2009

Many of us working within the LGBT movement think that Focus on the Family, the American Family Association and other such organizations are the struggles we bear, here in our country, to work towards equality. We often do not think about reparative therapy, fundamentalism, and the concept of “ex-gay” outside of this context.

Earlier this week, I had the opportunity to speak with a South African activist, fighting fundamentalism and the ex-gay movement in her country. Christina Engela (pictured) works for [SA GLAAD](#), the South Africa Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. Currently, one of the critical roles this organization is playing is to educate the public about voting in the upcoming election. Religious ideologies affect many of the political parties in South Africa, particularly the religious perspective called dominion theology. Dominion theology is the name of an active evangelical sect in South Africa, which believes that not only should the Bible be proselytized throughout the world, but it should also be the basis for government. People who believe the teachings of this sect believe that many of the rights pertaining to women, racially diverse individuals, and LGBT individuals should be stripped, based upon Biblical passages. The political party that works hardest to protect the secularization of government and the rights of LGBT people in South Africa is the Democratic Alliance.

South Africa has a Constitution with many rights carefully listed for LGBT individuals. In fact, many LGBT activists worldwide consider the South African Constitution to be a model of rights and protections for LGBT individuals. And, with the exception of hate speech, the South African Constitution really does provide rights and protections for LGBT people throughout the language of the document. However, the Constitution is quite new in South Africa, and still can be fundamentally changed. For this reason, the political party that holds power in the country is of great importance, and education about the importance of the separation of church and state must continue. What can PFLAGers do to support Christina Engela’s work in South Africa, as she seeks to educate her community about the separating church and state and ridding the world of harmful so-called biblical teachings?

In Christina’s own words, “Music, literature, and the latest philosophical thought all come from the US. For those of you living in the U.S., make sure that the awareness being spread around the world is about good and accurate philosophical and political thought. The ex-gay movement filtered down from the U.S. to the rest of the world. To counter this movement, we must put accurate information out there about LGBT people and who we are.”

In short, we need to be doing what PFLAGers do best, telling our stories.

Christina went on to say, “A lot of religious people promote love, tolerance, and acceptance.”

Many of PFLAG members are amongst these spiritually-minded people, and we should raise awareness about the ways we have reconciled faith, sexuality, and gender identities.

For Christina, the work will continue. She will educate others every day about the harm of certain religious perspectives upon LGBT individuals, about the importance of keeping church and state separate, and about being informed voters. Just like we talk about how it is not Un-American or Un-natural to be a LGBT person, she will talk to her neighbors, family, and friends about how it is not Un-African to be a LGBT person. She will seek to build solidarity amongst the LGBT community, amongst men, women, gender queer, white, black, and any identification of an individual. Ultimately, her work is not so different from the work we do here at PFLAG. She just happens to live across an ocean. Let's keep our international coalition partners in mind as we continue our work.

- [Kim Jones](#)

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