

PFAW African American Churchgoers 2008 Focus Groups by *brilliant corners Research & Strategies*

People for the American Way, in consultation with *brilliant corners Research & Strategies* conducted four focus groups consisting of two groups of African American church going women and men ages 25-44 who were registered voters in Oakland California on September 16, 2008 and two groups consisting of African American church going women ages 45-64, and African American churchgoing men, age 25-44, who were registered voters in Los Angeles, California on September 17, 2008.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The critical take away from this research is a significant opportunity to achieve longer-term objectives of further positioning the African American church as a coalition partner in the struggle for gay civil rights. Participants indicated that churches, being realistic and not expecting overnight conversion, have an opportunity to talk about tolerance without the congregation revolting. They believed that incremental change is possible, especially if it begins with the concept that a good Christian must first "do no harm".

In moving forward with the dialogue framework, the following suggestions may prove helpful:

- Among African Americans, maintain a narrow focus on Black members of the gay community as an important way to frame the dialogue.
- While some African American churches may indeed be culpable for homophobia -- that is not the most productive area to pursue. Rather than focus on the church's complicity, focus on the church's ability to compassionately help gay members within the community.
- Recognizing some of the tensions related to comparisons to the civil rights movement, focus on those aspects between it and the struggle specifically among gay African American's.
- Keep in mind that this research only touched the surface of the existing cross-pressures indicated by participants' ability to accept some behaviors admonished in traditional Christian teaching and their inability to consider same-gender relationships in the same context.
- This research documented that anti-gay doctrine seems to takes precedence over other Christian teachings. However, this is an area that deserves greater exploration to determine if there is specific scripture that can help combat the influence of cultural traditions supported by the church.

African American Religious Affairs

African American Ministers In Action (AAMIA-C4) and African American Ministers Leadership Council (AAMLC – C3) are projects of the African American Religious Affairs Program (AARA) of People for the American Way and People for the American Way Foundation. AARA endeavors to build a strong network of progressive clergy, theologians, seminarians and lay leaders who will encourage African American churches and communities to become more civically engaged and promote social justice programs and policies in areas of public education, health care, equal justice, civic participation and economic justice for all.