

# Sexual Identity and the Christian Faith: Two open letters

*On Nov 17, several campus church groups will be hosting Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, a former professor of English and Women's Studies at Syracuse University. Butterfield is the author of "The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into the Christian Faith," which details her conversion to Presbyterian Christianity in 1999 and subsequent lifestyle changes. Those changes included leaving her lesbian partner, quitting her job and becoming a stay-at-home mother. Butterfield is a controversial and polarizing figure, mainly due to her stance against homosexuality and her beliefs about sex and gender. The Collegian has received two open letters, one in support of the event and one against. Here we have reproduced them both in full.*



## *To the Hosts of Rosaria Champagne Butterfield,*

The students of United Campus Ministry, the Society for Gender Equality, HeadStrong, Earth Matters, and Pride at TU want to state publicly that we are outraged that several ministries from the university will be hosting Rosaria Champagne Butterfield on November 17th.

Mrs. Butterfield speaks openly not only about her conversion to Christianity, but also her conversion from lesbianism to straightness.

Mrs. Butterfield believes that being gay or transgender is fundamentally opposed to being Christian.

Inviting someone to speak about orientation as a spiritual or psychological weakness actively creates a hostile environment for all LGBTQ+ students.

Many of the students who are concerned about this speaker's presence on our campus identify as both Christian and LGBTQ+, and we believe that by hosting Mrs. Butterfield, these campus ministries are trying to silence our voices and invalidate our identities.

Just because Butterfield does not openly condemn LGBTQ+ people, does not mean that the things she says are loving.

The absence of explicit condemnation is not love, and in this case serves to hide the subtle message that there is something

wrong with being LGBTQ+.

While we celebrate our country's right to religious freedom, major medical, scientific, and governmental bodies have identified conversion therapy as an unethical, and potentially harmful practice that may increase risk for depression and suicide.

Any discussion or promotion of such practices, or suggestion that sexual orientation is not immutable is discrimination and a threat.

As students gathered to begin crafting this letter, certain themes arose again and again – anger, fear, and shame.

The students who felt outraged enough to attend the letter writing session represented lots of different groups; there were students from a number of racial and ethnic backgrounds, of varying sexual orientations and gender identities, and consisted of both religious and secular students.

We were all able to gather around the table at the Little Blue House in solidarity. Regardless of our backgrounds, when one student is oppressed we are all oppressed.

We are a community that fights for each other and we will not sit back in silence while discrimination and prejudice run rampant on our campus.

We will not allow our community to be

harassed without responding. We will not accept hate speech on our campus without condemnation. We will not allow our loving community to be hurt by this woman's supposed wisdom. We will not be broken by your hate.

As a community, we do not understand why campus ministries would choose to focus on the conversion of LGBTQ+ students.

It is certainly acceptable for a campus ministry to choose to focus on whatever they think is important; however, we believe it is an egregious misuse of Jesus' name to choose to be complicit in oppression, rather than working to address tangible human suffering.

We believe that the role of ministry should be to use our power, energy, drive, and resources to promote love, equality, and safety for all students and our surrounding community.

Let this be an open invitation to all campus ministries to talk about the systematic murder of people of color; to create dialogue to discuss the more than 20 transgender people murdered since January of this year; to show concern for the fact that Oklahoma leads the world in incarcerating women, and that an immense number of Oklahoma children go hungry.

As long as students on TU's campus feel unsafe, United Campus Ministry will be here to support them.

We will be here, fighting for equity and justice, fostering student growth, and creating safety until we have a truly inclusive and kind campus.

We invite every other ministry on this campus to join in our mission, and to help make TU a safe place for all students - regardless of racial or ethnic background, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ability, or religion.

We want to be certain that every student on this campus knows that we will still be here, whether or not other ministries choose to join us, fighting for our kind and loving community.

We will not be broken. Our community is stronger than your hate.

Peace and Grace,

The Students of United Campus Ministry, Pride at TU, the Society for Gender Equality, HeadStrong, and Earth Matters

- The Women's and Gender Studies Department
- The University of Tulsa Institute of Trauma, Adversity and Injustice
- The Student Alliance for Violence Education
- Lisa Wilson
- Evan Taylor, East Side Christian Church
- Rev. Nancy J. Eggen
- Rabbi Micah Citrin
- Ekklesia at Missouri State University
- Rev. Robert Martin
- Fr. Dewayne Messenger
- Rabbi Karen Citrin
- Rev. Chris Moore,
- Rev. Fred Turner
- Rev. Susanna Weslie
- Kelley Friedberg
- Phill Melton
- Sara N. Beam
- Rev. Geoffrey Brewster
- SA President Whitney House
- Pride and HeadStrong President Tara Grigson
- President of Society for Gender Equality Gracie Weiderhaft
- Whitney Cipolla
- Dr. Melinda McGarrah Sharp
- United Ministry Executive Director Jennie Wachowski
- Oklahomans for Equality
- Lamont Lindstrom
- Dr. Maralee Waidner
- Mana Tahaie
- ABC Vice President Kyla Sloan
- Sheridan Turner
- Bridget Branham
- Nicole Nascenzi
- Lauren Jackson
- Karl G. Siewert
- Isaac Sanders
- James Johnson
- Rosie A. Lynch
- Jack Kent Cooke
- Cameron Cross
- Samantha Overstreet
- Sonja Worthy
- Cody Jackson Brown
- Tina Daniels
- Scott Gove
- Mary Wafer-Johnston
- Brynn Jellison
- Zane Cawthon
- Morgen Cavanah
- Elizabeth Cohen
- Brittany Bell
- Justin DaMetz
- Bronte Pearson
- Alyssa Adamson
- Megan Senol
- Melissa Miller
- Casey Martin
- Alex Wade
- Sara Douglas
- Charissa Schaefer
- Emily Landry
- Seton Lazalier
- Michelle Hunter
- Mariah Rubino
- Nicole Flippo
- Ashley Bailey
- Will Schoenhals
- Sierra Dyer
- Ken Leep-Sills
- Sharon Bishop-Baldwin
- Lauren Keithley
- Toby Jenkins
- Don Satterthwaite
- Josh Harris
- Lucille Hengen
- Hayley Harris
- Anna Facci
- Misti Yerton
- Diane Bucchianeri
- Abigail Obana
- Robin Larson
- Jessica Pongonis
- Stephanie Greif
- Megan Curtis
- Scott Arnold
- Jordan Dunn Hoyt
- Mark Archer
- Giselle Willis
- Sarah Hicks
- Carly Putnam
- Conor Fellin
- Ronni Joe Killion
- Julia Evans
- Lisa Dodwell
- Madison Reid
- Ashley Knapp
- Brian Hasse
- Lauren Delucchi
- Chris Madaj
- Shiloh Tune
- Judith E. Nole
- Justin Turner
- Prof. Amy Schachle
- Alicia Ruskey
- Deanna Tirrell
- Casey Copeland
- Shannon Martin
- David Burch
- Aiden Smith
- Sean C. Conner
- Laura Banks
- Phillip Jennings
- Grace Heaberlin
- Daniela Rosales
- Karyn E. Fox
- Paul Meuser
- Stephen Place
- Laci Lynn
- Sean Patrick Rooney
- James Scholl
- Tyler Carter
- Julie Austin
- Kaitlyn Marie Counter
- Carlos Martos
- Benjamin Buchanan
- Adela M. Sanchez

*Signatures as of 5 pm, Friday, November 6*

## *To the TU Community,*

Reformed University Fellowship (RUF), Baptist Collegiate Ministries (BCM), Chi Alpha (XA), and the TU Wesley Foundation, all registered student groups here at TU, have invited Dr. Rosaria Butterfield to come to campus to give both a Lecture and Q&A session on the topic of "Sexual Identity and the Christian Faith" on the evening of Tuesday, November 17 from 7-9 pm in the Great Hall (A) in the Union for this event.

From many personal conversations and from the recent "UCM Open Letter to Campus Ministries" addressed to the Hosts of (Dr.) Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, we understand that there is both outrage and confusion over why we would choose to bring this particular speaker to speak on this particular topic at this particular time.

Our purpose in bringing Dr. Butterfield to campus for this evening lecture offering and Q&A session is to explore the rationale

and phenomenon of having one's sexual identity (wherever that may lie across any of the available spectrums) be one of the primary if not the primary means by which they choose to identify themselves, publicly or otherwise.

As a now-professing Christian and one who devoted years of academic research to these topics, Dr. Butterfield will address this topic from a biblical, personal, and academic perspective.

Her personal spiritual journey (namely, her conversion from unbelief in God/Jesus to belief in God/Jesus and her many subsequent life changes which followed including but not limited to her sexuality) will have particular relevance for the topics being addressed.

After hearing from a number of individuals, we understand there is a concern that Dr. Butterfield would come onto campus as an

advocate of Reparative Conversion Therapy (a course of psychological treatment wherein the goal would be for the subject to "convert" from homosexual desires/orientation to heterosexual desires/orientation).

Dr. Butterfield is not an advocate of conversion therapy. In fact, she explicitly distances herself from this course of therapy, as numerous articles and recorded lectures indicate.

Our intention in bringing Dr. Butterfield to campus is in no way an attempt to make the campus a hostile or "un-safe" place for anyone to hold personal views and live lives as they desire.

Though we are certain some would disagree, through listening to various presentations and reading her published materials, we have not found Dr. Butterfield to be unkind or uncharitable in her demeanor or presentation, nor is she careless in her engage-

ment on these very difficult, often-personal issues. We would never intentionally bring someone to campus who promotes a message of hate or bigotry.

We love TU and its students. Our hope is that this event would promote the concept of the University as being the marketplace of ideas, a true pluralistic society in which all ideas (even contentious ones) are presented and considered and even debated with respect and charity, of course. World history testifies to the truth that ideas matter.

With that in view, it makes sense for Christians to engage in important topics and present the Biblical worldview as a viable way to live and even flourish in the world.

Please consider this an invitation to join us for the lecture and Q&A session.

We hope it is of great service to our university community and that many would benefit from the dialogue.