

A Film by Daniel Karlake

FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO

Executive Produced by

Bruce Bastian, Todd & Teresa Silver, Jane & Tami Marquardt Peace & Possibility Project, Richard N. Purington & the Dickinson Family Foundation

Produced by

Daniel Karlake, Sheri Heitker, Barbara Simon

Written by

Nancy Kennedy & Daniel Karlake

Edited by

Nancy Kennedy

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ABOUT THE FILM

From the director/producer of *FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO* comes a new film, *FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO*, a powerful exploration of the intersection of religion, sexual orientation and gender identity in America. The film features four families of faith including Rob & Linda Robertson, who were encouraged by their evangelical church family to put their son, Ryan, in conversion therapy; David & Sally McBride, life-long Presbyterians who were shocked when their youngest boy came out to them as a transgender woman; Victor Baez & Annette Febo, whose Catholic tradition and Puerto Rican upbringing greatly concerned their gay son; and Harold & Coleen Porcher, a mixed-race couple whose child endured self-harm before their parents' acceptance enabled them to come to terms with their gender. Alongside these family stories of faith, rejection, validation, tragedy and triumph, the film weaves together unique perspectives from religious leaders. Through love, reconciliation, and acceptance, *FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO* takes us on a journey of understanding what connects us all and gives us the courage to embrace each other.

DANIEL KARSLAKE FILMMAKER Q&A

- 1. Your previous film *FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO* explored the experiences of religious parents finding out their child is LGBTQ and their journeys to find acceptance. What led you to make *FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO* as your follow-up and how did the Supreme Court legalization of marriage equality influence the focus of the film to examine religion's influence on families with LGBTQ children?**

Making my first film, *FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO*, was an incredible experience, and watching it ignite conversations among communities as the film played at festivals, was translated into 23 languages and had a successful 140-market theatrical run before premiering on streaming services, was really exciting. It has been a great ride, and for a very long time, I didn't think I'd make another film about religion and LGBTQ people. But then America started to change...

When marriage equality became a reality in the U.S. in June of 2015, many celebrated it as a great victory of equality. But for many others on the conservative side of the aisle, it was the last straw...the death knell for a society that had lost its way. Immediately following the Supreme Court decision, we saw a large number of conservative clergy come out strongly against marriage equality vowing not to let the decision stand.

Then I started reading about laws that were being introduced in states across the U.S. that were designed to limit or completely take away the rights of LGBTQ people. Often called "religious freedom" bills, this new tactic from the right to invoke not just the Bible but the U.S. Constitution in their fight to deny equality to LGBTQ folks was alarming and incredibly widespread. In addition, so-called "bathroom bills" started popping up all over the country as well, so it was clear to me that the religious right was up to something big and that many in my own community weren't even really noticing this new tsunami of hate.

Finally, sometime around August of 2015, I started getting threatening email messages and even a few death threats through the *FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO* website. When that film first premiered in 2007, I received a

number of very threatening messages through the website, but I hadn't gotten one in many years. Then, all of a sudden, the threats started up again.

My husband and I live in Berlin, Germany, and we started to wonder "What's going on in the U.S. right now that is empowering people to threaten me because of a film that's almost 10 years old? And if they are threatening ME, then what's happening to LGBTQ kids on school playgrounds and in the halls of high schools and colleges?!"

We knew that the presidential primaries had started, and we noticed that there was a Republican debate that week, so we tuned in. There were eight to ten Republican candidates for President in that debate, and what we found stunning was the fact that at least 80% of them proudly spouted incredibly anti-gay proclamations: "If I become President, gay marriage will end!" "Elect me and I will bring back Don't Ask, Don't Tell immediately!" "God says marriage is between one man and one woman...period!"

That's when I knew I needed to make a new film.

One thing that always bothered me about **FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO** was that we weren't able to address the issue of religious families with transgender kids in that film, so I decided early on that transgender families would be a focus of the new movie. I also knew that though we'd gotten pretty deep into the evangelical world with the last film, many of the most conservative evangelicals still think LGBTQ people are abominations, so I knew I wanted a deeply conservative family in the film as well.

In addition, I wanted to explore this growing issue of "religious freedom" and what the framers of the Constitution really meant by the 1st amendment's "freedom of religion" clause.

2. How did you find the families featured in the film?

When I'm making a film, everyone in my life knows it, so I hear from a lot of people all the time with suggestions of families to cast, issues to tackle, and experts to interview.

A few years ago, my good friend, Matthew Vines, who is the author of a great book called **GOD AND THE GAY CHRISTIAN** and the founder of The Reformation Project, called to tell me about a couple he'd met recently who was deeply conservative, and who had lost a gay son to "reparative" or "conversion" therapy. Matthew had gotten to know them pretty well, and he wondered if they might tell their story in the film.

Once I read all I could online about Rob & Linda Robertson and watched a number of their YouTube videos, I knew I wanted to meet them...which I did a couple of months later with Matthew's help at a Reformation Project Convention in Atlanta. The three of us had an immediate connection, and I knew almost immediately they had to be in the film.

Bishop Gene Robinson, one of my best friends, told me about Sarah McBride. He and I were talking about the movie and he mentioned an incredible trans woman, Sarah, with whom he'd worked at the Center for

American Progress. He had recently performed Sarah and Andy's wedding and I found her story incredibly compelling. He arranged for a meeting, and again, I knew instantly that I wanted to tell her story.

One of the communities in which LGBTQ children really struggle is the Latinx community. Not only are most people from conservative Catholic backgrounds but the stereotype of the macho Latin male is grounded in some truth. This hadn't been a community that was served specifically by **FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO**, so I very much wanted to find the story of a Latinx family dealing with LGBTQ issues.

One of my fellow producers, Sheri Heitker, is based in Orlando where there is a large Latinx community, so she introduced me around to a number of people who might be able to find us a story for the movie. One of those great folks, Robin Maynard-Harris, introduced me to Vico Baez Febo, and after a number of extensive conversations with him and then his parents and his grandmother, we knew we'd found our Latinx story.

Finally, I very much wanted to find a family of color dealing with trans issues. It is well known that the murder rate of trans people, in particular trans women of color, has been skyrocketing, so it felt important to find a trans person of color for the movie. Through a number of good friends and colleagues, I met and got to know many trans folks of color, but each time, each of them were ultimately not comfortable committing to the film...which I found totally understandable given myriad issues not the least of which is that I am a man of pallor (white guy) so how could they be sure I would do their story justice?

Finally, an old friend of mine at Auburn Seminary in New York told me about Harold and Coleen Porcher. Coleen had done some work for Auburn so my friend knew her well, and he connected us.

Initially, I spoke only with Coleen, then with Coleen & Elliot, and then finally with Harold, and ultimately they agreed to be part of the project!

3. How did you approach shooting the interviews considering they dealt with such personal and emotional topics?

With each of the families in the film, I made a point to spend a good amount of time with each of them; getting to know them and allowing them to get to know me before a camera was ever introduced to the relationship. We spoke for hours on the phone, went shopping and dining together, and a couple times, I would simply stay with them for a few days, so we could talk about anything and everything.

Once it started to feel like they really had a clear idea about why I was making the film and what I was hoping it would accomplish, then I would ask if they were comfortable with beginning to shoot...and things would proceed from there.

4. The film features interviews with a number of religious leaders and constitutional scholars including Bishop Gene Robinson, Pastor Delman Coates, Rev Dr Jacqui Lewis, and Rev Cynthia Alice Anderson and also video footage of far right conservative churches preaching anti-LGBTQ rhetoric and support for conversion therapy. How did you go about finding these experts and how readily available was the footage of Anti-LGBTQ sermons?

Because I've done so much television and film work dealing with religion, sexual orientation and gender identity, I already knew a number of the clergy/experts in the film. Bishop Gene Robinson told his family story in **FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO**, and ever since, he and I have been very good friends. Reverend Dr. Mel White, is also in **FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO**, and has a well-earned reputation as one of the smartest and most insightful members of the clergy who speak on these issues.

I had heard Reverend Dr. Delman Coates give a lecture at Chautauqua Institution a few years ago, so when I decided to make the film, he was one of my first calls.

I met Reverend Cynthia Alice Anderson at a huge screening of **FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO** at her church, Christ Church Unity, in Orlando back in 2008, so when one of our stories, Vico's story, originated from Orlando, I reached out to her to ask if she would be involved.

Finally, my last film, **EVERY THREE SECONDS**, actually premiered at Reverend Dr. Jacqui Lewis' church, Middle Collegiate Church, in New York in 2014, and that's when I met her. I was deeply impressed and since I knew a number of folks who attended the church, I began to go there on Sundays when I was in New York. She is one of the most compelling contemporary voices from the pulpit on any number of current issues; I was thrilled when she agreed to be part of **FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO**.

Finding footage for the film of anti-LGBTQ sermons was not difficult at all. Sadly, as far as the LGBTQ community has come over the last few years, things have definitely gotten worse and more contentious since the new president was elected. Given his wide support by evangelicals, his politics of separation and hate have encouraged a resurgence of bigotry, homophobia, and transphobia from the pulpit that have had a clear and powerful effect in broader society.

5. What is your editing process and how do you work together with co-writer and editor Nancy C. Kennedy?

Many people outside of the documentary world do not realize how vital a good editor is. That's the reason I was so thrilled when we were able to get Nancy Kennedy to cut **FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO**. She is one of the most talented editors in the business, and we had worked together on **FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO**, so we had a history.

Our biggest challenge was that I live in Germany, and she is based in Brooklyn.

We began our process by spending two weeks in Brooklyn last March sitting together and screening all the footage we had shot for the film... discussing in detail the story arcs of each of our four families. Then I returned to Germany, and Nancy started cutting, and sharing those cuts online. We spoke many times a week and then every 2.5 to 3 weeks, I returned to Brooklyn for another 10 days of working together. That continued until we were finished with the film in mid-January 2019.

It was absolutely a challenge for both of us, but in the end, the film came together, and I am in awe of the work that Nancy has done.

6. What was most challenging about making FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO?

1. Raising the money to make the film mostly from wealthy white gay men who often said “we have marriage equality...our fight is over...what still needs to be done?” was super hard.
2. More challenging was the fact that because of the success of FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO, absolutely no conservatives would grant me an interview for this film because that film has been a thorn in their side for a decade. As soon as they or their gatekeepers googled me, they declined the interview request...every time. Because of that, the only way to include the conservative viewpoint in the film was to use archival video of them saying what they say in their pulpits.

7. The film covers how there is still a large section of America that is unfamiliar with the transgender community and the confusion and fear that drives that. How do you think we can better educate and inform?

One of the best ways to break down barriers and to bring people together is to tell human stories. Nothing is more transformative than when you meet someone on screen with whom you identify, and then you watch them change.

For many Americans, the transgender issue is particularly fear-filled and misunderstood because so few people actually know a trans person...or they at least THINK they don't know a trans person.

We introduce all our characters in the film in the context of their families. First you meet the parents who seem like regular people...because they are. Then you learn that these people have an LGBTQ child and maybe you are as “against” that reality as the parents all were initially. But then you watch as these mothers and fathers start to educate themselves and evolve...and that evolves the viewer as well...at least a little bit. Indeed, being an eyewitness to the positive transformation of a family is a very powerful thing.

8. What do you hope audiences will take away from the film?

The power of conservative religion in America is surging. The 2016 election has breathed new life into the part of Christianity that doesn't understand and doesn't want any part of the LGBTQ community, and this can be deadly for young LGBTQ teens who find themselves in one of those families who think they can either embrace their religious beliefs or their child, not both...and they very often choose their religion over their son or daughter.

I hope this film offers an alternative to religious families caught in those crosshairs. It is not mutually exclusive to love your child for who God made them to be AND to stay true to your faith. The four families in the film prove that.

And for those LGBTQ kids (or adults) whose religion makes them question their own worth and value, I want them to hear loud and clear that they are beloved and important exactly as God made them to be!

9. How can those interested in protecting LGBTQ rights in America help take action?

There are so many ways to work toward equality for everyone.

If you're an ally, then stand up and be heard. Make it clear in your family, in your community, in your workplace, and in your church, that you are fully supportive of all people, and that you are there for anyone who doesn't feel that kind of support in their own home.

There are many great organizations doing important work for equality and they all need support. Sarah McBride, for example, works for the Human Rights Campaign, the largest LGBTQ rights organization in the world. They always need funds and volunteers!

A quick Google search will reveal many more that need your help!

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Daniel Karlake (Director/Producer)



Daniel Karlake is an award-winning American director and producer whose highly acclaimed work deals with pressing issues of national and international social justice.

Prior to FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO, he completed EVERY THREE SECONDS, a film examining practical solutions for global poverty and hunger; Karlake began this project as a visiting scholar at Stanford University. Before that, Karlake directed and produced his feature documentary about the intersection of religion and homosexuality, FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO. It premiered in the American Documentary Competition at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival and the film went on to win 10+ festival audience awards, the GLAAD Media Award for Best Documentary, and was shortlisted for a 2008 Academy Award. FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO had a successful 140-market theatrical run before it premiered on multiple streaming platforms and was released on DVD. It has been translated into more than twenty languages, and ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY listed the movie in 2010 as one of five documentaries that has “changed the world.”

Karlake lives in Berlin with his husband Russ and their two cats, Rocky and Fred.

Sheri Heitker Dixon (Producer)



Sheri Heitker Dixon is the co-executive producer of EVERY THREE SECONDS, a feature doc about ending poverty. She is also the founder and executive director of Keep Her Safe, a non-profit mobilizing parents to stop campus sexual assault. She lives in Orlando with her husband, Mark, and their daughter, Cecelia.

Barbara Simon (Producer)



Barbara Simon is a two-time Emmy Award-winning producer, one-time GLAAD award nominee, and full-time passionate advocate for (and occasional practitioner of) great storytelling. She is a producer for CBS News' Emmy-nominated morning news program, CBS THIS MORNING, where she produces interviews with presidential candidates, governors, CEOs, brain surgeons, country music stars, terror analysts and vigilante moms of Baltimore. In 2014 she won a Wilbur Award from the Religious Communicators Council for CTM's interview with Cardinal Timothy Dolan and Archbishop Edward Kurtz on "The Francis Effect," noting the changes in the American Catholic Church in Pope Francis' first year in the papacy. She lives in New York with her wife, Margaret, and their son, Nicholas.

Nancy Kennedy (Writer/Editor)



Nancy Kennedy has edited several award-winning films, including Sundance Grand Jury winner *Why We Fight* (2005), *For The Bible Tells Me So*, (Sundance Festival 2007), *Einstein's Letter*, (Emmy for best doc series 2006), *Riding the Rails*, and *Thank You and Goodnight*, both Sundance award winners. She has also co-directed and edited several independent documentaries, including *Who Does She Think She Is?*, *Bluegrass Journey* and *Who's On First?* Her most recent projects are the feature documentaries *When The Drum Is Beating*, *Orchestra of Exiles*, and *Gregory Crewson: Brief Encounters*. Her many editing credits include work at all the major networks on such television series as *Great Performances*, *American Experience*, *60 Minutes*, *American Masters*, *Saturday Night Live*, and *National Geographic Specials*, among others.

Amy Bronson (Director of Photography)



Amy Bronson is a filmmaker currently living in Salt Lake City, Utah. She is the Executive Director of Reel Advocacy, a nonprofit video production company that focuses on humanitarian causes. Amy also teaches two courses at the University of Utah: Documentary and Social Justice, and Himalayan Film for Learning Abroad – a three-week documentary course/humanitarian trek in Nepal.

ABOUT THE FAMILIES

The Robertson Family



Linda & Rob Robertson are evangelical Christians who live in a suburb of Seattle, Wash., where they enjoy long bike rides, lots of Starbucks coffee and a thriving, involved community that cares about making a real difference in the world. Linda's passion and prayer is that Ryan's life and death will matter – and that the mistakes they made, as conservative evangelical parents with a young gay son, will serve to help someone else learn to really love their children, just because they breathe.

The McBride Family



Dave and Sally McBride and their three sons were the all-American family living in Wilmington, Delaware. When their oldest son told them he was gay, they adjusted. Then their youngest child came out as a transgender woman, saying simply that she's always known herself to be Sarah. Sarah McBride then made national headlines when she came out publicly as transgender while serving as student body president at American University. She soon became the first transgender intern at the White House and continues to shatter stereotypes and to break new ground.

The Báez Febo Family



Victor Báez, Sr. & Annette Febo were middle school sweethearts in Barranquita, Puerto Rico before they married in 1987. The family moved to Florida for Victor, Sr.'s construction job but after he graduated from high school, Victor Jr., moved back to Puerto Rico to live with his Catholic grandmother. When his grandma soon discovered that Victor Jr. was gay, she banned him from her house and outed him to his mom & dad...his greatest nightmare.

The Porcher Family (Cast)



Coleen and Harold Porcher were so excited when their daughter was born. There had been challenges starting their family, but now they were on their way, and they couldn't have been more thrilled. Growing up, their girl was a real tomboy who loved snakes and insects, but they didn't think much of it. But in eighth grade when she came to Coleen and Harold, and asked, "could you love me even if I were a boy?" ...their lives changed forever.

ABOUT THE EXPERTS

Bishop Gene Robinson



Bishop Gene Robinson is an American retired bishop of the Diocese of New Hampshire in the Episcopal Church in the United States of America. Robinson is widely known for being the first priest in an openly gay relationship to be consecrated a bishop in a major Christian denomination believing in the historic episcopate. The story of Gene and his family was featured in FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO, and he's back in the new film talking not only about God's love for all people but also about his latest work of uncovering affirming messages for transgender people in the Bible.

Reverend Dr. Jacqui Lewis



The Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis is Senior Minister at Middle Collegiate Church, a 1000-member multiracial, welcoming, and inclusive congregation in New York City. She is an activist, preacher, and fierce advocate for racial equality, economic justice, and LGBTQ equality.

Pastor Delman Coates



The Reverend Dr. Delman Coates is an American Christian minister and the Senior Pastor of Mt. Ennon Baptist Church, a megachurch located in Clinton, Maryland. He is a board member of the Parents Television Council, and National Action Network. He is a member of the Society of Biblical Literature, Morehouse College Board of Preachers, NAACP, and a board member of the Parents Television Council, The African American Pulpit, and National Action Network. Dr. Coates is a religious progressive who argues quite persuasively against the cries of “religious freedom” coming from conservatives who want to use their religious beliefs as an excuse to discriminate.

Reverend Cynthia Alice Anderson



Rev. Cynthia Alice Anderson has been serving as senior minister at Christ Church Unity in Orlando, Florida since 2007. Under her spiritual leadership, Christ Church Unity continues to be a thriving ministry of community outreach, diversity and soul growth. Christ Church Unity is a welcoming community, dedicated to transforming lives, celebrating diversity and supporting soul growth.

CREDITS

Directed and Produced by Daniel Karlake
Edited by Nancy Kennedy
Written by Nancy Kennedy & Daniel Karlake

Producer Sheri Heitker
Barbara Simon
Executive Producer Bruce Bastian
Todd & Teresa Silver
Jane & Tami Marquardt Peace & Possibility Project
Richard A. Purington & the Dickinson Family
Foundation
Associate Producers Danielle Chu
Kiera Lewis
Joseph Broom
Director of Photography Amy Bronson
Doug Candler
Music Supervisor Susan Jacobs

Music by Chris Maxwell and Phil Hernandez as Elegant Too

Post Production Supervisor Helen Mendoza

Cast

Rob & Linda Robertson
Lindsey Robertson
Don Mueller
Randy Thomas
David & Sally McBride
Sarah McBride
Vico Baez Febo
Victor Baez
Annette Febo
Vicnette Baez Febo
Iris Delia Collazo
Robin Maynard-Harris
Harold & Coleen Porcher
Elliot Porcher
Bishop V. Gene Robinson
Reverend Dr. Mel White
Reverend Dr. Jacqui Lewis

Reverend Dr. Delman Coats

Boris Dittrich

Paul M. Smith

Reverend Cynthia Alice Anderson