

## **‘Homosexuality and Christianity’ lecture raises questions of controversy for USF students**

Respective members of religious based and Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered organizations sought to set a mutual tone of respect for opposing views for the Homosexuality and Christianity lecture which was held Monday night at USF’s Marshall Student Center amongst controversial subjects and viewpoints.

Reformed University Fellowship, RUF, invited for Rosaria Butterfield Ph.D to speak on behalf of her own personal journey of discovery as a self-proclaimed former lesbian and now born again Christian. People Respecting Individual Diversity and Equality Alliance, PRIDE Alliance brought their organization members to be among the many students to attend the Homosexuality and Christianity lecture given by Dr. Butterfield. In lieu to the expected controversial atmosphere, both leaders of PRIDE Alliance and RUF instructed members to be respectful to Dr. Butterfield and other opposing views. Whether or not this plan was successful remains questionable for the student body.

Jeff Lee, the campus pastor for RUF who originally got Dr. Butterfield to speak at USF regarded Luke Blankenship, president of PRIDE Alliance, as a good friend. According to Lee, he and Blankenship have developed a mutual admiration for each other and have since shared their differing beliefs on the relation between homosexual orientation and the Christian faith. These respectful albeit disagreeing conversations have seemingly posed as a model of solidarity for the two, exemplifying what they both have desired for the entire student body.

Luke Blankenship, president of PRIDE Alliance had urged organization members to treat the guest speaker with respect. His reasoning behind the instructions derived from his conducted research that Butterfield’s character which has found to be of great respect and kindness.

“Don’t attend and don’t try to start an argument and be disrespectful to this woman because you will, in the end, have a negative light,” said Blankenship prior to the lecture. “Because she’s going to be the most respectful and kind person in the world and if you are disrespectful to her it’s going to make you and your cause look bad.”

Other Christian students, some members of religious-based organizations, agree with the importance of establishing mutual respect in order to avoid conflict.

“There’s not going to be anything to gain from yelling or trying to oppose your beliefs in a strong manner,” said Itam Antigha, a member of Christians In Action, CIA. “I think always the best way to do things is to form a relationship with that person and then you go from there.”

Katlin Winters, LGBT Advisor in the Office of Multicultural Affairs, was among many members of university staff whose primary concern was to establish a safe environment for the lecture. Winters found that the proper amount of respect and understanding, would unfortunately difficult to achieve in the lecture-oriented atmosphere of the event.

“It’s not in a manner where you can sit down and talk,” said Winters. “It’s a place where people are saying this is what’s wrong and what’s right.”

Many may agree with Winters, questioning the success of the event. Throughout the lecture came about various cheers, boos, arguments, gasps, awkward laughter and a visual display of protest by a whole row of standing students. Many students continue to question how this event reflects the efforts of all organizations as a whole. Many students question and hope for a time where opposing views can have a discussion-based atmosphere, to promote respect for diversity.

“I think they would just prefer that these communities would get along better as opposed to being against each other,” said Ashley Barzaga, PRIDE Alliance member.