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Mom says Riverview church tried to pray the 'demon' from her transgender son

Mom says Metro City Church members laid hands on transgender son, praying to release the "demon" from him

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[[Photo](#): Kim Tooley, shown with her transgender son Seth]



A former member of a Downriver church that is under fire over a planned workshop aimed at "healing" teenage LGBTQ girls said adults at the church once prayed over her transgender son, asking God to release the "demon" from him.

"My son had three adults laying hands on him — (he was) screaming so loud I heard him from the other room — praying that God will deliver him from (the homosexuality) demon,"

Kim Tooley of Brownstown said. "A literal demon. My son thought he had a demon."

Tooley, 40, who said she attended Metro City Church in Riverview from 2012 through 2014, disputed statements from Jeremy Schossau, the lead pastor, who says the church does not use controversial "conversion therapy" methods.

"Jeremy said that they're not beating anybody over the head with the Bible, and I beg to differ," Tooley said.

Schossau, in a text message response to the Free Press, questioned Tooley's account.

"Obviously, we encouraged them to pray! We are a church. That's what we do," Schossau said. "... I do not recall any specific words which we prayed. We are not what is typically referred to as a 'Pentecostal' church and typically do not use language like 'homosexual demon.' But I can tell you that we prayed."

Schossau said that he and the church have been inundated with threats from across the country because of publicity over the planned six-week workshop. He said people are threatening to burn the church or his home down and saying they want to kill him, his family and his staff.

"We have literally ten thousand posts in various capacities that are filled with vile, vulgar hate, profanities," Schossau said. "Our inboxes have been flooded with gay pornography, they have literally co-opted and taken over all of our media. The phone is ringing off the hook. We've had every kind of threat and death threat. Flat out stories and fabrications have been made about me personally and my family."

[\[Sara Cunningham Facebook post\]](#)

An organizer with [Metro-Detroit Political Action Network](#) (MDPAN), which is planning a protest outside the church Thursday evening, said the group does not condone threats or messages of hate.

"This is a peaceful movement," Meeko Williams said. "Anybody that talks with hate or talks negatively will be removed and deleted (from the MDPAN page and the event page)."

MDPAN and others have likened the church's planned workshops to conversion therapy, the practice of using psychology or spirituality to change a LGBTQ person's sexual orientation or identity. Conversion therapy is outlawed in some states, but not in Michigan, [according to the Movement Advancement Project](#).

Metro City Church's original post about the \$200 workshops has been removed from its website, but Schossau said they will still occur. The post appears to reach out to parents and grandparents of girls "by birth," ages 12-16, who are "struggling with the thoughts that they are Bi - Gay or other."

"It doesn't have to be this way. With God's help there can be healing, wholeness and hope.

Through thoughtful, relevant and biblical counsel we will help your girl be unashamed of her true sexual identity given to her by God by birth,” the listing said.

Schossau said the workshop information was removed from the website in order to protect safety of the families participating in the sessions.

“In the mass media or the mass social media world, you think of (conversion therapy) as somebody dragging their kid or forcing their husband into some therapist’s office or some pastor’s office where they beat them over the head with the Bible, where they can pray the gay away, where they can shame them and guilt them,” the pastor said.

“We want nothing to do with that. That is not it at all. We believe in conversation over condemnation. If conversion happens, that is their choice.”

While Schossau said his church believes sexual orientation is a choice — men were designed by God to marry women, and men were created to be men and cannot change — they still welcome members of LGBTQ community to come on Sundays.

“If you choose to be gay ... You are welcomed here. You are part of who we are, you can belong to our community,” he said. “But just understand that we have a belief in certain things.”

[\[Video: A Response to Conversion Therapy Outrage\]](#)

Tooley said this was not her family’s experience.

When her family needed financial assistance after her home was vandalized and she lost her job, she said the church offered to adopt their family for the holiday season. She said support was withdrawn six days before Christmas after Schossau and another church elder found out her then-13-year-old son Seth is transgender.

Thereafter, she said, the church offered counseling because Seth was getting bullied at school at the time. Throughout multiple sessions with Schossau and church elders, Tooley said efforts were made by the church to call Seth by his birth name, Olivia.

The family was also told Seth shouldn’t be in the boy’s youth group and was encouraged to “dress like a female,” she said.

“The pastor and an elder and the elder’s wife, had taken us and gotten us lunch, had a long conversation about how Seth is the way he is because of all the sins from all of our ancestors and the sins of the father, that we had to go home and pray,” Tooley said.

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Tooley said she was eventually told that if she continued to return to the church, her son would have to present as a female and attend the girl’s youth group.

“And I said, 'Hell no,' ” Tooley said.

Schossau on Wednesday said it was "completely false" that the church took back its offer to help Tooley. He said the church helped her move to a new place after her home was flooded, bought her appliances and raised a "bunch of money" at Christmas to help her and other families.

"We were very generous with her family," Schossau said. "She made requests regularly for help from us. But no, we did not decline to help her because Olivia was transgender."

He said the church did "not care how Seth presents." He said it was Tooley who "wanted us to help keep Olivia – Olivia. That's what she told us. Kim said and agreed that we should call her Olivia."

"We did clearly state though that we would not let a girl be in an all 'boys life group,' " he said. "The boys were complaining that they were very, very uncomfortable having a girl in their small group experience. She was highly encouraged to join the girls life groups though. She did not want to. The choice was hers. And we requested that she use the unisex bathroom — we have five of them."

Tooley, who grew up in an Evangelical Christian home, said accepting her son's gender identity has been a journey. She and her son, who is now 17, will be speaking at Thursday's protest.

“He was absolutely born this way,” Tooley said. “I would go toe-to-toe with the devil to protect and defend him.”

“Do I still have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Absolutely. I believe in him, I love him and I believe he loves me. But do I go to a building anymore? I wish I could say I do, but I really don't. It's too painful, thanks to men like Jeremy.”

Tooley said protesters are asking Schossau and his church to put a stop to workshops and undergo sensitivity training with a professional within the LGBTQ community. She said he has said no to both.

Sue Cunningham of Oklahoma City saw the church's workshop posting and created a public post criticizing the ministry on Facebook. A day later, Cunningham said she was contacted by MDPAN and the event page for the protest was created.

“Honestly, I'm glad,” Cunningham said. "It puts pressure on the church that this is no longer acceptable. To agree to disagree on this issue and this type of ministry, is no longer acceptable when lives are in the balance.”

Cunningham is the author of the book “How We Sleep At Night: A Mother's Memoir,” which details her journey navigating Christianity after her now-27-year-old son came out. She said she believes you can be gay and Christian.

“No one has searched the scriptures or the heart of God, or their very selves more, than the gay Christian — or their mother.”

Considering the number of LGBTQ youth who struggle with alienation, separation, at-risk homelessness, depression and self-harm, Cunningham said, what’s happening in Riverview also speaks to a national issue.

“If the type of counseling or services or ministry you’re having will celebrate your child, no matter where they are on the spectrum, and celebrate their spiritual gifts, we can have just a healthy, authentic relationship with our children. The problem is when there is shame involved. When scripture is misused and misinformed. That’s where the damage comes in... That’s where (children) start to disconnect from their faith,” she said.

Schossau said the church will continue its activities, but it supports free speech, the right to assemble and the right to peacefully protest.

“If they or any group wants to protest anything, legally, respectfully, they can stand on the sidewalk like anybody and protest,” Schossau said. “If they break the law by coming on our property ... we will expect the police to enforce the law.”

<https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/wayne/2018/02/08/riverview-church-protest/314348002/>