What Lies Below

Catholic League responds to GMHC’s safer sex ads

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FOLLOW-UP: POZ No. 1 reported on the “Young, Hot and Safe” safer sex advertising campaign by Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC) which targeted New York City’s HIV vulnerable teens by depicting young, interracial, same-sex and opposite-sex couples in affectionate poses brandishing condoms, dental dams and rubber gloves. Conservatives, including New York Post columnist Ray Kerrison, were aghast because the ads, which they said promoted promiscuity, were placed in the city’s subways. They called on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to remove the ads. Nevertheless the ads were praised by cit officials and public health experts and they remained to inform New York City’s 1.5 million daily subway commuters.

Now the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights has joined the heat of the fray where it began -- underground. The Catholic League has printed 2,500 posters to run in the subway which ask, “Want to Know a Dirty Little Secret?” and answer, “Condoms don’t save lives.” Public health experts and AIDS advocates quickly denounced the ad. “It’s absolutely, unequivocally misleading,” said the Rev. Margaret Reinfeld, an Episcopal priest and director of education for the American Foundation for AIDS Research (AmFAR). GMHC’s Mike Isbell said of the ad, “It’s simply irresponsible,” while Allan Rosenfeld, dean of the School of Public Health at Columbia University called the ad a “major public health threat.” Catholic League President William Donohue suggested that GMHC’s original ad was the irresponsible one, saying, “We want to challenge the moral irresponsibility of GMHC for suggesting to young people that condoms are safe.” U.S. Government tests have shown that latex condoms are 95 to 98 percent effective in preventing the transmission of HIV.

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