



Baptists Drop HoJo's for Planning 'Beat Me in St. Louis' Sex Bash

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Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — The Southern Baptist Convention, the nation's largest Protestant group, said Thursday it will urge members to boycott Howard Johnson during its annual meeting because of one hotel's plans to host a "private sex bash."

The Baptist group was referring to the three-day "Beat Me in St. Louis" seminar being held at a Howard Johnson hotel April 26-28 near Lambert Airport by St. Louis Leather & Lace.

Leather & Lace's Web site said the group endorses and educates about "free expression of alternative lifestyles and forms of loving," including bondage, domination and sadomasochism, regardless of sexual orientation. Leather & Lace also hosts a "SpanksGiving" event each fall.

During "Beat Me in St. Louis," the Baptist Convention said, the hotel's 4,500-square-foot conference center will be home to "Dungeon Parties," complete with medieval torture devices, demonstrations and workshops covering caning and whipping. The convention cited a "Beat Me in St. Louis" page on Leather & Lace's Web site, though links to that page were not working Thursday.

In a letter April 4, the Baptist Convention canceled its Howard Johnson reservations for its two-day June conference here, calling "Beat Me in St. Louis" a "direct attack on the fabric of traditional family values and the Biblical heritage of our denomination and its churches."

"It is extremely unfortunate that your hotel and parent corporation has chosen this departure," Jack Wilkerson, vice president of business and finance with the Baptist Convention's executive committee, added in the letter.

With all Howard Johnson hotels franchised and individually owned, New Jersey-based Cendant Corp. — HJ International Inc.'s parent and the world's largest lodging franchisor — does not interfere with guest-related decisions by individual hotels as long as the sites remain law-abiding, Cendant spokeswoman Liz Ryan Sax said.

"In respect to the event in St. Louis," she said, "it's our understanding the owner and general manager has met with local police and this group (Leather & Lace) to ensure they will be abiding by state, federal and local laws."

Messages left for the manager of the Howard Johnson hotel near Lambert Airport were not immediately returned Thursday.

E-mail interview requests to Leather & Lace representatives got no response.

Wilkerson said more than 4,000 hotel rooms have been blocked for those attending the Baptist Convention conference. It was unclear how many rooms at the questioned Howard Johnson the Baptists had pre-booked, or that convention's expected turnout. Last year's Baptist Convention meeting in New Orleans drew about 9,100 people.

"Any Southern Baptist impacted by this will be relocated to another hotel," Wilkerson said in a statement Thursday.

"Beat Me in St. Louis" also has drawn outrage from Concerned Women for America, which urged Howard Johnson and other hotel chains to "stop hosting these sex-torture conventions which are morally wrong and medically unsound."

"Most Americans can't understand how a perverted mind works, and they find these behaviors repulsive," said Joey Davis, CWA of Missouri's director. "The bigger problem is that in an 'anything goes' society, a distorted tolerance has replaced common sense and decency. As long as this behavior is allowed, we hold wide open the doors to perversion."

The CWA made similar claims in February in protesting a group's staging "Vicious Valentine 5," which was held at a suburban Chicago Ramada hotel — a Cendant-controlled franchise — after a Radisson site there withdrew as the venue.

Police said that convention qualified as a private one held in a segregated area and protected by First Amendment rights.

Afterward, organizers cheered the three-day event as a "another great weekend of pansexual dungeon play and outstanding workshops."

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