



## Not playing dead

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### **PRAISE ACADEMY OF DANCE's theatrical production *Speak Life* hit a dead end when it was recently rejected by judges in the National Independence Festival of Creative Arts (NIFCA).**

This has sparked outrage from members of the local, regional and international religious community, including founder and artistic director of Praise Academy, Marcia Weekes. She has denied the delivery of the piece was aggressive and that they were using children to promote discrimination, particularly against the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community.

Weekes told the **DAILY NATION** yesterday they were still concerned by the disqualification, which was made on October 27. She cited a release that said the disqualification "may impact, if left unchecked, how we in Barbados and the Caribbean express our faith on issues of gender and sexuality in the future".

**Speak Life** is based on a 15-year-old girl, "Zoe", who struggles with her gender identity and finds it in God. The submission was written and expressed from a biblical world view and based on biological science, Weekes said.

The musical production premiered on August 26 at the Combermere School Hall and was later submitted to **NIFCA** for judging.

In the release, Praise Academy said that during the verbal delivery last month, the **NIFCA** panel of judges indicated that the production denounced a particular community; was not in good taste and was defamatory; that the emotion behind the delivery of the piece was aggressive; and there was concern that children were being used to promote discrimination.

The group said it also received a formal notice of disqualification from the National Cultural Foundation (NCF), which highlighted Section 9 (b) of the **NIFCA Performing Arts-Theatre Rules 2023: Non-professional Adult & Junior Categories**.

"If, during the process of the competition, an entrant or any of his/her supporting team makes any gesture or utterance that exceeds the bounds of good taste (whether on or off stage), the entrant may be disqualified from the competition. The judges shall determine whether behaviour is indecent, obscene and defamatory, or in excess of the bounds of good taste," the regulations stated.

Praise Academy said it was not its intention to promote discrimination and it will air its grievances, contest the decision and press the NCF for