

BONDINGS

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Gay Catholics protest bishops, avoid arrests Some see progress at meeting, others discouraged

By Adrian Brune

The Washington Blade

November 19, 2004

It was just minutes before the start of the plenary mass for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and devout Catholics Kara Speltz and Mike Perez were running late. With the clock ticking and the 200 or so bishops lining up for the procession, they finally abandoned their spots on the picket line outside to take their carefully selected seats in the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, just as they have for the past four years.

Perez wore a rainbow sash, something the bishops have found offensive in the past, and Speltz wore a rainbow cross, both symbols in full view.

An hour into the lengthy ritual, the gay activists rose for communion. As he has

for the past two years, Monsignor Walter R. Rossi, hesitated when he saw them. He offered Perez only a blessing, and in a show of solidarity, Speltz refused the host.

It was an about-face from two years ago when Rossi mistakenly denied Speltz, too, and she protested vociferously, leading to her arrest after which she was jailed for 30 hours. The incident received national attention.

But Speltz's resolve to see her church change has not weakened.

"Our goal is to help these bishops have the courage to tell the truth they know in their hearts," Speltz said.

Each November, bishops from all over the country come to Washington to discuss the church's pastoral needs, followed by dozens of gay protesters who stage long vigils outside of the Hyatt Regency hotel where they

congregate.

But the perennial showdown takes place at the Shrine, before what Catholics say symbolizes the body of Christ. The church says it won't tolerate a group of people using the sacrament as a protest tool. The gay Catholics contend they're not; they're just asserting the fact that they exist.

"The protesting is taking place outside," said Brian McNeill, the head of the Rainbow Sash Alliance, the group that has raised the ire of Catholic leaders. "We're just wearing who we are."

The communion controversy represents myriad issues gay Catholics have with their church these days, but mostly they want an end to "spiritual violence," a term they use to describe adverse teachings from the pulpit. Though many believe their visibility has resulted in some recognition and therefore, progress, with

more and more stringent language coming from the Vatican, bishops still remain reluctant to engage them, at least publicly.

Many bishops have come to accept the gay protesters and passively take their brochures. However, after four days of long vigils and run-ins with angry Catholics, there's little visible support for the gay cause within this very hierarchical religion.

"I haven't given their literature deep reflection yet," said New Orleans Auxiliary Bishop, Roger Morin, after picking up a Soulforce "Stories of Courage" pamphlet, "but I have no feelings of animosity toward them."

The protesting began early Sunday, as bishops arrived at the Hyatt Regency near Capitol Hill. Dignity USA, the most familiar of the gay Catholic groups, had

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Mary Ellen, J.A., and Casey Lopata

Catholic parents as 'secret weapons'

A gay son talks to his Catholic parents about grassroots support, challenges from church hierarchy, and their new book 'Fortunate Families'

By J.A. Lopata

In Newsweekly

Boston, Mass.

July 2004

ROCHESTER, NY — When I came out to my parents in 1983, while support resources for young gay men like me were blossoming, there were precious few places for Catholic parents to turn for their questions of faith and belief. Their search for reconciliation with the love they felt for me and the anti-gay messages coming from Catholic Church authorities led them to founding their own ministry of working with Catholic families who have gay and lesbian members. They call these families "Fortunate Families" after a term from Native American Plains Tribes who value families with unique individuals in them. For her master's thesis, my mother, Mary

Ellen Lopata conducted a descriptive survey of Catholic parents with gay sons and lesbian daughters. She asked about their religious background, their reaction to learning of their child's homosexual orientation and what kind of pastoral response they received from their church. She also collected actual stories and experiences from Catholic parents. My dad, Casey Lopata, who has a master of divinity degree from the Roman Catholic St. Bernard's Institute, provided some perspectives on Catholic doctrine and theology. All of this resulted in the book, "Fortunate Families: Catholic Families with Lesbian Daughters and Gay Sons." I asked my parents a few questions on a recent visit home.

in newsweekly: You've been working in ministry to Catholic families with gays for over 12 years now. What's the status report?

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BONDINGS

Fall-Winter 2005

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Bondings is a seasonal publication designed to keep our subscribers informed of issues that pertain to lesbian and gay people and the Catholic Church.

Founded in 1977, New Ways Ministry is an educational and bridge-building ministry of reconciliation between the Catholic gay and lesbian community and institutional structures in the Roman Catholic Church.

New Ways Ministry seeks to eradicate prevalent myths and stereotypes about homosexuality and supports civil rights for lesbian and gay persons in society.

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Dioceses fund campaign for same-sex marriage ban

National Catholic Reporter
October 29, 2004

LANSING, MI – The Catholic dioceses of Michigan have provided more than half of the \$1 million raised thus far to secure voter approval of a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage in the state.

According to campaign finance reports filed Oct. 8 by the Citizens for the Protection of Marriage, the dioceses of Detroit, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Saginaw, Lansing, Gaylord and Marquette have contributed \$505,000 through Oct. 1 to the effort to pass Proposal 2. All told, the group raised \$1,006,989 and spent \$552,472.

The Coalition for a Fair Michigan, the group opposing Proposal 2, reported raising \$194,815 and spending \$154,406. Group officials say they hope to raise \$1 million for their campaign to urge a "no" vote.

Proposal 2 says, "The union of one man and one woman in marriage shall be the only agreement recognized as a marriage or similar union for any purpose."

Opponents of Proposal 2 argue that the term "similar union" would bar future legislatures from providing same-sex couples the legal benefits of marriage through civil unions. Supporters say the reach of

Proposal 2 will be decided in the courts.

Parish priests across Michigan were urged to preach in support of Proposal 2 during Masses the weekend of Oct. 8-10. Cardinal Adam Maida, Michigan's church leader, has also taped an endorsement.

In that message to parishioners, Maida said, "We have an opportunity this fall to make sure that our government does not change the meaning of marriage for us today or our children tomorrow.

"If we change the meaning of marriage, then marriage loses its meaning and the family, the bedrock institution of society, would be jeopardized."

He does not condemn homosexuality in the message.

The Coalition for a Fair Michigan includes the Michigan State AFL-CIO, the Michigan Education Association and Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

Granholm, a Catholic, has also been at odds with the church over her 2003 veto of a bill criminalizing some late-term abortions.

Dana Houle, spokesman for the coalition, said, "At a time when the Catholic church is closing churches and cutting programs, spending \$500,000 for a ballot proposal is stunning." ■

Gay Catholics protest bishops

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scheduled a lay liturgy—most bishops have orders not to preside at any of their meetings—but the group didn't show.

"We didn't have the numbers to do anything," said Matthew Gallagher, Dignity's executive director. "From talking to our members, I sense real discouragement."

Later that afternoon, about 50 members of Soulforce, an interfaith movement, and Rainbow Sash arrived for their vigil. They received significant media coverage, but little clerical attention.

However, on Monday as the bishops were electing USCCB's new president, Bishop William S. Skylstad of Spokane, Wash., a bishop who plans to declare his diocese in bankruptcy due to sexual abuse claims, the protesters were demonstrating in full force.

Again, Soulforce stood in solidarity, while SNAP, the Chicago-based Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, expressed grave concern.

"We see with the elevation of Skylstad that the problem is not being fixed in the church," said David Clohessy, SNAP's national director. "Bankruptcy obscures the truth and delays healing; it sets up another arbitrary and unjust deadline by which victims must immediately come forward or be left out in the cold again."

Disappointed and defeated, SNAP had put forward a list of candidates, but was also rebuffed; the group departed later that afternoon, leaving the more optimistic contingency of Soulforce alone in front of the Hyatt.

Before the plenary mass that evening, which celebrated the 25th anniversary of the U.S. Bishops' pastoral denouncement of racism, Speltz arranged to

see Msgr. Rossi, the priest who refused communion to three Soulforce Catholics, including Speltz, in 2002.

Though Rossi has changed his view of the rainbow cross to a symbolic "affirmation of faith" he remained firm on the sashes: No communion for those who wore them.

"The Eucharist is a moment of community and a sign of our unity," said Susan Gibbs, the spokesperson for Washington, D.C. Archbishop Theodore Cardinal McCarrick. "We have all come together to celebrate Christ above all else. It's not an appropriate place to break that communion."

"It also doesn't get their message across to disrupt mass; it turns people away from their message."

With diminished momentum, Soulforce continued its silent vigils through Tuesday and then Wednesday.

Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton of Detroit, gay Catholics' sole visible ally, came out to greet the demonstrators, as did one other unidentified bishop.

But other bishops responded to them with downward stares and furtive glances. Occasionally, a support staff member or hotel guest confronted them, mentioning either the sin of Sodom or a psyche ward.

When asked how they regard gay Catholics only two answered.

"I see them as sons and daughters of God. I operate from that point of view," said Bishop J. Terry Stein of Memphis, Tenn. "I pray for their welfare and ensure that as members of the church they are given their dignity." ■

Gay ministry at a crossroads

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Michael Reinbold. Born into the church, he left as a young adult when he believed Catholic teachings excluded him. He said that about the time he was in college and studied church history, he realized "this is not what I want to belong to. So I left."

Years later, his body succumbing to an HIV infection, Reinbold accepted an invitation from his sister to attend Easter service at St. Joan of Arc. "We were in for such a surprise at St. Joan's," he said.

The church bulletin listed events for the gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people. The priest only occasionally delivered the homily himself, allowing guests instead to speak during the part of the mass in which the parishioners are instructed on how to live.

"It was exciting," said Reinbold. "It was like going to a place of enlightenment. I joined right away in probably one of the most crucial times in my life, when I needed spiritual awakening."

It's not hard to find people at St. Joan's who, like Reinbold, say the things they found at St. Joan's drew them back to the Catholic Church after years away.

Reinbold sings in the choir and writes for the parish's Web site. He said he feels that he is a part of the ministry. "We're asked to grow," he said. "We're asked to question."

Reinbold said he regards Wertin "as my spiritual father. His homilies never preach 'that you must be saved,' but rather insist 'you've already been saved, so get on with your life and commit to social justice.'"

Though the past several weeks have been a struggle for Catholics such as Reinbold, parish administrator Peter Eichten said: "I think there is consensus among the staff that we are not going to leave."

Parishes that have left have not fared well on their own, Eichten said. There's no reason for new people to come to that church, and though the original members may have felt they had good reason to strike out on their own, they eventually die off and there's no one to replace them, he said.

"We are the church," he said. "We cannot let the institution and the hierarchy become our view of the church. That's part of the church, but it's not the totality of the church. We ... need to stay in it to make it better."

"We're Catholic," he said at the meeting for gay and lesbian parishioners. "And we're staying Catholic." ■

Gay-Friendly Parishes

Below is a partial list of known "gay-friendly" Catholic parishes and faith communities. Thank you for helping us add to this growing list! If you are aware of such a parish that is known as welcoming to lesbian and gay Catholics as members and active parishioners, please let us know. Tell us if this welcome is because of a support program, spirituality group, mission statement, participation in gay community events, involvement with parents, or simply the friendliness of pastoral staff.



Alabama

Montgomery: St. Bede

Arizona

Mesa: Christ the King
Scottsdale: Franciscan Renewal Center
Tempe: All Saints Catholic Newman Center
Tucson: Ss. Peter and Paul, St. Pius X, Our Mother of Sorrows, St. Odilia

California

Berkeley: Holy Spirit Parish
Claremont: Mother of Good Counsel, Our Lady of the Assumption
Eagle Rock: St. Dominic's
Galeta: St. Mark's University Parish
Hawthorne: St. Joseph's (Spanish)
La Puente: St. Martha
Long Beach: St. Matthew's
Los Angeles: Blessed Sacrament, Christ the King, Loyola-Marymount University, Mother of Good Counsel, St. Camillus Center-LAUSC Medical Center (Spanish), St. Paul the Apostle
North Hollywood: St. Jane Frances de Chantal, St. Patrick's
Sacramento: St. Francis of Assisi
San Diego: Christ the King, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, St. Didicus
San Francisco: Most Holy Redeemer, Old St. Mary's Cathedral
San Luis Obispo: Old Mission of San Luis Obispo
San Rafael: Church of San Rafael & Mission San Rafael Archangel
Santa Clara: GALA, Santa Clara University
Santa Cruz: Holy Cross
Santa Monica: St. Monica's
Spring Valley: Santa Sophia
Valinda: St. Martha's
West Hollywood: St. Ambrose, St. Victor's
Whittier: St. Mary of the Assumption

Colorado

Arvada: Spirit of Christ Catholic Community
Boulder: St. Thomas Aquinas
Denver: St. Dominic's

Connecticut

Hartford: St. Patrick-St. Anthony

District of Columbia

Dahlgren Chapel-Georgetown University,
Holy Trinity, St. Aloysius, St. Matthew Cathedral

Florida

Casselberry: St. Augustine
Ft. Lauderdale: St. Anthony, St. Maurice
Melbourne: Ascension Parish
Naples: St. John the Evangelist
Winter Haven: St. Matthew

Georgia

Atlanta: Shrine of the Immaculate Conception

Illinois

Berwyn: St. Mary of the Celle
Chicago: Loyola University, St. Clement, St. Gregory
Country Club Hills: St. Emeric
Morton Grove: St. Martha

Indiana

Evansville: St. Mary
Notre Dame: GALA, Notre Dame/St. Mary's College

Iowa

Iowa City: St. Thomas More

Kentucky

Louisville: Epiphany, Cathedral of the Assumption, St. William's

Maine

Saco: Most Holy Trinity

Maryland

Baltimore: Corpus Christi, Loyola College, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Philip and James
Columbia: St. John the Evangelist
Gaithersburg: St. Rose of Lima
Hagerstown: St. Ann
Severn: St. Bernadette

Massachusetts

Boston: Boston College, Jesuit Urban Center, Paulist Center, St. Anthony's Shrine
Newton: Our Lady Help of Christians
Provincetown: St. Peter the Apostle
Sharon: Our Lady of Sorrows
Ware: Holy Cross College

Michigan

St. Ignace: St. Ignatius Loyola

Missouri

Kansas City: Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, St. Francis Xavier
St. Louis: Holy Family, Holy Innocents, St. Cronan, St. Margaret of Scotland, St. Pius V

Minnesota

Minneapolis: St. Frances Cabrini, St. Joan of Arc, St. Stephen
St. Paul: College of St. Catherine, Univ. of St. Thomas

New Jersey

Clifton: St. Brendan
Wayside: St. Anselm

New Mexico

Espanola: Sacred Heart of Jesus

New York

Baldwinsville: St. Augustine
Brooklyn: St. Andrew the Apostle, St. Boniface
East Islip: St. Mary
Fairport: Church of the Assumption

Long Island: Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Deer Park; St. Bridget's, Westbury; St. Elizabeth, Melville
Manhattan: Holy Name of Jesus; St. Joseph, Greenwich Village; St. Francis Xavier; St. Paul the Apostle
Rochester: Emmanuel Church of the Deaf, St. Augustine, St. John the Evangelist (Humboldt St.), St. Mary's, St. Monica
Syracuse: St. Andrew the Apostle
Utica: St. Francis DeSales

North Carolina

Charlotte: St. Peter
Durham: Immaculate Conception
Fayetteville: St. Patrick
Raleigh: St. Francis of Assisi

Ohio

Akron: St. Bernard, St. Martha
Cincinnati: Lesbian/Gay Ministry, Xavier University, Newman Center, University of Cincinnati
Cleveland: Ascension of Our Lord; Gesu Parish University Heights; St. Ladislav, Westlake; St. Malachi; St. John Vianney, Mentor; St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Wooster
Columbus: Newman Center, Ohio State University
Dayton: University of Dayton Campus Ministry

Oregon

Central Point: Shepherd of the Valley
Portland: Koinonia Catholic Community, St. Andrew, St. Phillip Neri, St. Vincent de Paul

Pennsylvania

Philadelphia: Old St. Joseph's, Old St. Mary's, St. John the Evangelist, St. Vincent de Paul
York: St. Joseph, San Damiano

Rhode Island

Providence: St. Francis Chapel & City Ministry Center

Texas

Austin: University Catholic Center-Univ. of Texas
Dallas: Holy Trinity
Plano: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
San Antonio: University of the Incarnate Word

Virginia

Arlington: Our Lady Queen of Peace
Richmond: Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Sacred Heart Parish
Roanoke: St. Gerard's
Virginia Beach: St. Nicholas

Washington

Seattle: St. Benedict

West Virginia

Shepherdstown: St. Agnes

Wisconsin

Madison: St. Benedict Center Sunday Assembly
Milwaukee: Prince of Peace, Trinity-Guadalupe

Gay, Catholic and confused

As the pope demonizes gay relationships, some local parishes are clearly not getting the message that gays are not wanted.

By Kevin Naff
The Washington Blade
November 26, 2004

The Catholic Church is mired in an identity crisis. Pope John Paul II, sounding more and more like an out-of-touch curmudgeon clinging to by-gone days of 1950s-style morality, again this week intoned against tampering with the “irreplaceable” institution of marriage.

Meanwhile, as Catholic bishops met last week in Washington, D.C., there were signs that not all bishops are towing the Vatican line against gay relationships. As gay protesters descended upon the Conference of Catholic Bishops, at least two bishops, including auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton of Detroit, greeted demonstrators, while others merely glanced away and walked by quietly.

Word of the pope’s staunch opposition to gay rights initiatives, and same-sex marriage in particular, is clearly not trickling down to all of the church’s local pastors.

Informal exorcism at St. Paul Cathedral prompts investigation

Star Tribune
St. Paul, Minn.
Nov. 24, 2004

ST. PAUL – Police are investigating an informal exorcism at the Cathedral of St. Paul, which was directed at gay Roman Catholics and will cost thousands of dollars to clean up, police and church officials said.

They said the ritualistic sprinkling of blessed oil and salt around the church and in donation boxes earlier this month amounted to costly vandalism and possibly a hate crime.

The damage was discovered Nov. 7 after the noon Mass, and after words were exchanged between members of the Rainbow Sash Alliance, a gay rights group, and the opposing group, Catholics Against Sacrilege.

Police speculate the damage could have been done anytime between late Saturday afternoon and during the Mass itself.

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Just three months ago, my sister was married in a Catholic church in Baltimore. Fearing Old Testament-style tirades against gays and warnings to my sister that she obey her husband, I visited the church for a Sunday morning Mass prior to wedding day. My fears about the church couldn’t have been more offbase. Upon arriving at the church, I was greeted enthusiastically by a rather effeminate priest. Granted, it’s a stereotype, but I’ve run into enough closeted priests at Central Station and the Hippo to know that all these guys aren’t exactly adhering to their celibacy vows.

I read a copy of the church bulletin while waiting for mass to begin and was surprised to see an ad publicizing a meeting of the church’s gay and lesbian ministry.

It was then that I started noticing all the gay and lesbian faces in the half-empty pews. This beautiful, historic church with 100-year-old stained glass windows, mosaic tile floors, marble-covered walls and sturdy mahogany pews offers just

one Mass each Sunday. And the church was half empty.

“White flight” has depleted this church of its congregants and it seems the only worshippers left are a few hardy old-timers along with pioneering gay men and lesbians who are buying up and restoring properties in the old neighborhood.

To their credit, officials at this church, which I won’t name so as to spare its priests certain ex-communication, are openly welcoming gay worshippers. During my visit just before Fat Tuesday this year, the priest and deacon even wore Mardi Gras beads during the service. The priest urged everyone to “party hearty, because after Tuesday, it’s all over!”

Was this a Catholic Mass or a circuit party?

A few weeks later, my sister received a letter from the parish explaining that the church welcomes everyone, including gays. The letter added that the local parish does not agree with the Vatican’s

denouncement of gay relationships and gay rights initiatives. Mixed messages indeed.

As the wedding approached, I met the priest who would marry my sister. He had been alerted that the bride’s brother is gay, has a partner, and would be serving as a groomsman.

After being introduced to me at the rehearsal, the burly priest with a booming voice wrapped me up in a warm embrace, assuring me that this is the most gay-friendly church in Baltimore.

Since the Catholic Church is not a democracy, it is unclear how this struggling little inner-city church can get away with its gay outreach, other than by flying below the radar. Surely, no bishop or other official in the church hierarchy saw that letter or knew of this church’s status as “gay friendly.”

The problems of repression in the church go beyond the failure of church leaders to cope responsibly with the sex abuse scandal. That same culture of fear, silence and denial that enabled pedophile priests to shift around from parish to parish is restricting the ability of local pastors, priests and deacons to deal honestly and fairly with the question of how to welcome gay worshippers.

Individual priests know who their gay parishioners are—they are active in their churches, donate time and money and, in some instances, even operate outreach programs to other gays in the community.

But the Vatican, and this narrow-minded, misguided pope in particular, are preventing the full acceptance and open, honest participation in the life of the church by gay Catholics.

If only more Catholic officials would acknowledge publicly what they privately know to be true: that gay and lesbian parishioners are already playing vital roles in their churches and deserve to be recognized instead of demonized.

The church has seen what happens when its leaders keep quiet and choose secrecy over honesty. If they have learned anything from the sex abuse scandal, it should be the need for more openness and honesty in church life.

It’s time for all those pro-gay priests who whisper words of quiet support for their gay parishioners to stand up for the full, proper inclusion of gays in church life. As Christmas approaches, there could be no better gift for gay Catholics. ■



Rainbow sashes at Mass

Unidentified men wearing rainbow-colored sashes stand after being denied Communion at a Nov. 15 Mass at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington during the U.S. bishops’ conference meeting. Unlike some other bishops across the country, Archbishop Harry Flynn of Minneapolis-St. Paul has allowed Communion to be given to members of the pro-gay rights group known as Rainbow Sash. That has prompted criticism by some Catholics in his archdiocese, and at one Mass a group of lay people tried to block the aisles to prevent sash-wearers from receiving Communion. Flynn said he discussed the issue in a private meeting in Rome in early December with Cardinal Francis Arinze, head of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments. Flynn said he was not asked to change his policy. “I got the clear understanding that this is recognized as a very complex pastoral issue which must constantly be looked at in all its ramifications,” Flynn said. “It needs to be handled prayerfully and reflectively,” he said.

-National Catholic Reporter, Dec. 24, 2004

Liberal Nuns Denounce Gay Marriage Amendment

By Kevin Eckstrom
Religion News Service
August 26, 2004

WASHINGTON, DC – A group of liberal Catholic nuns said it is “politically and morally wrong” to deny gay couples the right to marry, and said church teachings against homosexuality are “unjust.” The 500-member National Coalition of American Nuns approved the statement during its Aug. 18-21 convention in Denver. The sisters also approved resolutions against war, nuclear weapons and sexual abuse by nuns.

“‘Liberty and justice for all’ means that the political definition of marriage must not be discriminatory,” the nuns said. “If heterosexual unions or marriages are recognized by the state, not recognizing same-sex unions or marriages is unfair. Such unfairness is politically and morally wrong.”

The nuns said all people have a right to “choose how they fulfill the divine command to love one another,” and said a proposed constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage is “nothing more than an attack on gay and lesbian people and their families.”

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has endorsed the proposed amendment banning gay marriage.

“The bishops are very clear on the position that it is important to uphold the sanctity of marriage as defined as the union of a man and a woman,” said Sister Mary Ann Walsh, a spokeswoman for the bishops.

In other business, the nuns called for a top Vatican cardinal to “step aside” and be replaced with “a feminist woman” after a recent document was critical of the “lethal effects” of feminism.

The nuns said the letter by Cardinal

Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, was written by men about women without consulting women, and makes the church appear “ludicrous and out of touch.”

“Where is the document that speaks of men’s lack of fidelity to women, men’s unwillingness to participate in the raising of children, men’s workaholic and alcoholic behaviors, men’s attitudes toward marriage relationships that do not honor the God-given talents of women?” the nuns said. ■

Gay ministry at a crossroads

By Matt McKinney
Star Tribune
St. Paul, Minn.
December 13, 2004

MINNEAPOLIS – The two visitors to the meeting were quick with their comments — and their exit moments later. Gays have no place in the church, they said. Stop making trouble.

Then they left the gathering of gay and lesbian parishioners at St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church in south Minneapolis, a wave of confusion and anger closing in behind as the others watched them leave.

“I try not to listen to that crap,” a lesbian parishioner said as she relayed the conversation to others a few moments later. She started to say something else but then, shaken, stopped.

The encounter at St. Joan’s last month, brief as it was, was like a window into the soul of the Catholic Church today. The tension among straight and gay Catholics has become a persistent and personal one illustrating both the rising power of the American gay rights movement and the nation’s rightward shift on social issues.

“I really think this is part of a much larger struggle,” the Rev. George Wertin, the pastor at St. Joan’s, told the gay and lesbian parishioners at last month’s meeting. He then referred to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s that helped overturn discriminatory laws. “What happened for black people has to happen now for a new group of people.”

The conflict in the Twin Cities among Catholics has flowed beyond St. Joan’s of late. Twice this year people have protested at the Cathedral of St. Paul, the archdiocese’s home parish, including a group known as the Ushers of the Eucharist whose members knelt in church aisles to block members of a homosexual advocacy group known as the Rainbow Sash Movement from participating in mass.

And the road ahead for St. Joan’s and other parishes sympathetic to gay and

lesbian causes remains as uncertain as ever.

Wertin was ordered in mid-October to remove extensive Gay Pride material from his church’s Web site after an anonymous complaint to church authorities. A directive from the Vatican was delivered in person by two bishops. The Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis also told the church to stop allowing the unordained to speak during mass, a longstanding practice at St. Joan’s in which guest speakers talk about everything from scripture to American history to overseas missionary work to homosexuality.

The consequence for future violations could mean removal of Wertin, St. Joan’s longtime senior priest, and installation of a replacement chosen by the archdiocese.

A request to interview Archbishop Harry Flynn about St. Joan’s is pending. A church spokesman said that Flynn was not immediately available because of a busy schedule, but that he would talk to the *Star Tribune* at a later date.

The archdiocese distributed a statement several weeks ago that called on St. Joan’s to return to more traditional practices: “Pope John Paul II has announced the coming liturgical year as ‘The Year of The Eucharist’ and as part of that observance has called for ‘unity of purpose and commonality of practice,’” the statement read.

Still, one of St. Joan’s more vocal critics says it’s hard to see that much has changed at the parish since the directive was handed down.

St. Joan’s Web site still carries an abundant amount of information for gay and lesbian Catholics, and also a link to a Web site for gay dating that promises, among other things, “romance.”

“It seems to me the only thing they pulled off the Web site [was a photograph of the Gay Pride week],” said Al Matt, editor of the *Wanderer*, a Twin Cities Catholic newspaper that takes a

decidedly orthodox posture and is a longtime nemesis to the Twin Cities archdiocese from the polar opposite ideological spectrum of St. Joan’s.

Earlier clash

St. Joan’s has been censured before. Kathy Itzin, a religious education coordinator at the parish, was denied an award from the archdiocese last year because she is a lesbian in a committed relationship. Flynn withdrew the award after Catholic Parents Online complained to him in a letter. That decision

led to a protest by about 200 church members in favor of Itzin.

As for Catholic teaching on homosexuality, gays and lesbians are welcome to full participation in the Catholic mass as long as they are celibate. The same teaching holds true for heterosexuals who are not married. Same-sex unions are forbidden, and priests must be celibate, regardless of sexual orientation.

That falls short for Catholics such as

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Informal Exorcism

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The groups are at odds over gays participating in communion, one of the holiest rites in the church. Earlier this year, about 40 men, members of the group Ushers of the Eucharist, knelt in the aisles at the Cathedral to block Rainbow members from taking communion.

The Rev. Michael Skluzacek, rector of the cathedral, said he immediately understood the symbolism when he was told that someone had sprinkled the oil and salt around the church.

“It’s a sign of exorcism,” he told the *Star Tribune* of Minneapolis. “It’s a sign of casting out the power of evil.”

He said salt is used to bless holy water, and the oil, once it is blessed by a bishop, is used for consecrations. By sprinkling the salt and oil, he said, the vandals thought they were making the church holy again.

“Regardless of why they did it, it was a very disruptive act,” Skluzacek said.

He estimated the clean up cost at thousands of dollars, involving crews working three days to remove the oil and salt and cleaning the doors, steps and boxes.

A report was filed with St. Paul police, who said the case could be prosecuted as a hate crime if someone is arrested.

“It does have an element of hate and bias to it,” said police spokesman Paul

Schnell, who noted that the incident seemed aimed to coincide with the presence of the Rainbow Sash group.

Schnell said police have no leads, but several religious people familiar with the case said it is probably the work of fringe Catholics who advocate using sacramentals, or holy objects, to cleanse places where gays take communion.

“I don’t know who did it,” said Dr. David Pence, a member of Ushers of the Eucharist. “I do know that some people have used sacramentals to engage in some kind of holy war against people. Nobody wants to see church property damaged in the name of an exorcism.”

Michael Bayly, coordinator of the Catholic Pastoral Committee on Sexual Minorities, an advocacy group for gays and lesbians, said such fringe groups perceive gays and lesbians who take communion as evil.

He said he received an e-mail Nov. 5 from a man who threatened to douse Rainbow Sash members at the Nov. 7 Mass with what he described as “exorcised” oil blessed by a priest.

Bayly said the same man often appears at CPCSM and Rainbow Sash events and prays the rosary while walking apart from group members.

“I didn’t make the connection until now,” Bayly said Tuesday. ■

South African bishop battles church in battling AIDS

By G. Jeffrey MacDonald
National Catholic Reporter
April 16, 2004

CHESTNUT HILL, MA – For a soft-spoken country priest with a gentle smile, Kevin Dowling has an uncanny knack for ruffling feathers. But to him, conflict and controversy seem a small price to pay in a home-front war against a rampaging AIDS virus.

Over the past four years, this Catholic bishop of Rustenburg, South Africa, has grabbed headlines worldwide for challenging his church's absolute ban on condom use. He has also gained reputation as a fierce government critic by assailing policies that haven't dented the disease that now infects close to 30 million in sub-Saharan Africa and kills 600 a day in South Africa alone.

Now Dowling is bringing his battle to a new front: the minds and purses of developed nations, beginning with the United States. On March 30, for example, he delivered his plea for help to about 200 people at Boston College.

"We're at risk of losing entire nations to this disease," Dowling said, noting for instance that almost 39 percent of Botswana's population is HIV-positive. "Are we going to become a global community or a world where nations always compete with each other in a way that causes the poor and marginalized to always fall through the cracks? We cannot do it alone. We need a global solidarity movement."

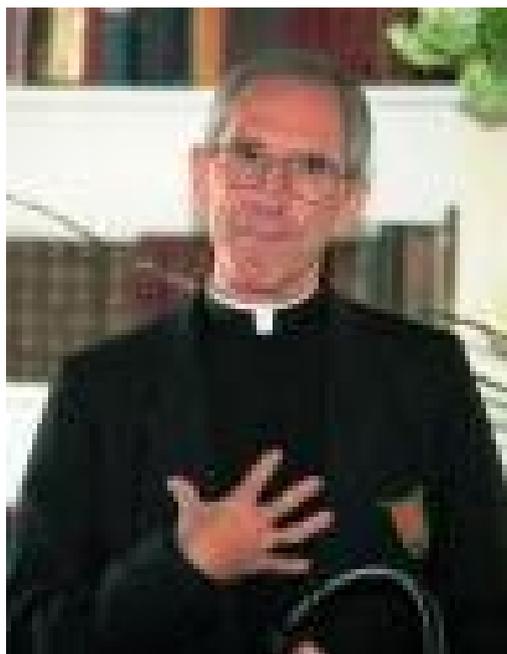
Dowling's priority is a project to establish 24 church-run treatment clinics across South Africa. More broadly, South Africa needs \$200 million by 2005 to treat about half of the 5.3 million who suffer from the disease. To reach these goals, Dowling said, Western nations will need to follow where the private sector has already gone to help subsidize treatment programs beyond the reach of African budgets.

Over the long term, Dowling aims to convince the world that the Catholic church brings a compassionate and relevant response to today's crisis. Toward that end, he aims to reshape church policies that prohibit all forms of birth control. His authority to address the subject seems to be growing with each year spent studying AIDS and ministering to its weakest victims.

"He is the AIDS bishop," said James Keenan, professor of moral theology at Weston Jesuit Theological Seminary

and visiting scholar at Boston College. "Not many bishops are actual AIDS ministers, but he is. There is not a bishop in the world who has done more work with AIDS patients. That's why we brought him here."

In his presentation at Boston College, Dowling showed clips from a news report featuring his work at Freedom Park, a shack village for mostly illegal immigrants near one of the world's richest platinum mines. In the clip, the



Bishop Kevin Dowling

bishop's bright white shirt and clerical collar give sharp contrast to the residents' dark skin and the muddy floors of their unlit, makeshift homes. He listens as young, single women tell of their desperate search for money to feed children and siblings. He concludes that some turn to prostitution as their sole alternative, and for them the church's ban on condoms becomes a "death-dealing" code.

To date, the Vatican has not censured him for defying the church's prohibition on contraception, Dowling said, because "I'm too small-fry to worry about, way down at the bottom of Africa."

Yet his attempts "to construct an ethic and moral theology around survival" — and to render condom use as a pro-life measure or even a moral imperative in certain circumstances — have led a number of church officials to publicly discuss their view of condoms as evil instruments.

"Condoms may even be one of the main reasons for the spread of HIV/AIDS," wrote members of the Southern African Bishops' Conference in July 2001 in the aftermath of Dowling's advocacy for condom usage. "Apart

from the possibility of condoms being faulty or wrongly used, they contribute to the breaking down of self-control and mutual respect."

Last year, Vatican Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo said condoms could not be trusted to prevent the spread of HIV. The World Health Organization quickly condemned the Vatican claim as "incorrect" and "dangerous."

At his speech here, Dowling faced further criticism from a Catholic physician in the audience.

"Condoms are not the answer," said Dr. Gilbert Lavoie of Boston. "People realize they only bring half the pleasure, so they stop using them. Let the public health people focus on the condoms. You [Dowling] focus on the abstinence."

Despite a wave of criticism, Dowling believes the church might be making progress to overcome its stigma in southern Africa as an out-of-touch and uncaring institution. The church provides more AIDS services in the region than any other nongovernmental agency, he said. What's more, Catholic hospitals and clinics now hand out information about the potential health benefits of condoms, although they stop short of distributing condoms on site. And the more the church publicly debates prohibitions on condoms, he said, the more the conversation "brings the church into ridicule and causes us to reconsider."

To advance his cause, Dowling has gained support from a number of Catholic theologians in North America and

'Family's more than just sharing a roof'

Associated Press
October 12, 2004

MEXICO CITY – A prominent Mexican cardinal denounced legalisation of same-sex weddings in an interview published on Tuesday, saying it would be like considering cockroaches as part of a family.

Javier Lozano Barragan complained that defenders of homosexual marriage argue that people living together constitute a family, according to the newspaper *Reforma*.

"They even give cockroaches the rank of family now because they live under the same roof," Lozano was quoted as saying. "If there's a cat, a dog, two lesbians and everything living there, it's a family."



Europe. For Margaret Farley, a Yale University ethicist and advocate for HIV-infected African women, Dowling is charting an important course by identifying that African women are seldom free to make ideal moral choices.

"Many African women have very little choice in the exercise of their sexuality," Farley said. "If, for example, husbands want sex, wives are expected to respond, even if the husband is infected. It seems to make utter sense what [Dowling] is saying, to allow and even encourage condoms, not as a contraceptive but as an instrument to prevent the spread of disease."

To those who would support him and need a rebuttal for purist critics, he offered one.

"We need to affirm the sacredness of life in the poorest of the poor," Dowling said. "What concrete action can we offer as a way out of this misery? To present an impossible ideal is worse than useless because it creates a sense of hopelessness." ■

Lozano, the Vatican's health secretary, was complaining about a proposal by Spain's government to legalise same-sex marriages.

"One of the great goals of the culture of death is destruction of the family," Lozano said, "so on all sides, not merely in Spain... there are these proposals that say that the family consists of all those who live beneath the same roof."

Lozano was participating in the 48th International Eucharistic Congress, which has drawn thousands of Catholics to the west-central Mexican city of Guadalajara.

As the congress began this week, bishops called for renewed efforts to halt the loss of members and denounced uncontrolled capitalism. ■

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Briefs

CBCP: No to gay seminarians, priests

By Nikko Dizon
The Philippine Star
Manila, Philippines
November 11, 2004

An updated manual for priestly formation released by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) has expressly stated the Church's disapproval of gay priests and seminarians.

"Issues regarding homosexuality need to be calmly surfaced and clarified," said the 63-page Philippine Program for Priestly Formation, which puts emphasis on the human development of seminarians.

Bishop Deogracias Iñiguez, chairman of the CBCP's Commission on Public Affairs, said in an interview that while the subjects of chaste celibacy and sexuality were included in the old manual, the new edition has put down in

Catholic leaders: Gay unions would be 'like virus' in Spain

Associated Press
The Washington Blade
October 1, 2004

MADRID — The Catholic Church blasted the Socialist government's plans to legalize gay marriage, saying Monday it would be like releasing a "virus" into Spanish society. The Cabinet was expected Oct. 1 to pass a bill allowing same-sex marriages, setting predominantly Roman Catholic Spain on course to join largely secular northern European countries that allow gay marriage or some version of it. Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero took office



Prime Minister Zapatero

in April with an ambitious agenda of social reforms, such as streamlined

divorce and a relaxed abortion law. The church spoke out Monday with some of its harshest words yet on one of Zapatero's boldest endeavors, gay marriage. Juan Antonio Martinez Camino, spokesperson for the Spanish Bishops Conference, said the church had nothing against gays but feels a union of two people of the same sex is simply not a marriage. Allowing this would create "a counterfeit currency in the body of society," Martinez Camino said in an interview on Spanish National

Television. Such legislation, he said, is like "imposing a virus on society, something false that will have negative consequences for social life." ■

black and white the Catholic Church's preference for heterosexual priests.

But while active homosexuality is not acceptable, Iñiguez said effeminate traits are.

"Active homosexuals do harm to others through their victims. They do harm to the Church," he explained.

Iñiguez said the Catholic Church had dismissed homosexual Filipino priests found guilty of abusing young boys.

"It is not only the Catholic Church in the United States that had to deal with such incidents. It has happened even here," Iñiguez said without elaborating.

Iñiguez said the issue of homosexuality should be explicitly included in the manual to make clear to aspiring priests what the Church requires of its clergy.

Seminarians discovered to be active homosexuals are expelled outright, Iñiguez said.

The manual, which serves as the curriculum for seminaries, gives administrators the responsibility to help their students confront and deal with such issues by creating an "atmosphere where seminarians could be more open and honest to them regarding issues they concretely confront in the area of sexuality and celibate chastity."

Iñiguez added that it is the seminary administrators and formators who determine whether a seminarian is a practicing homosexual.

"This is actually a (difficulty), that's why having psychologists will really help us," he said.

Iñiguez said seminary formators would sometimes make inquiries regarding a seminarian reported to be gay but added that this technique has rarely helped in determining the truth.

The manual emphasized that seminaries should be vigilant on the "presence of sub-cultures... that undermine genuine communion," which include the code of silence, machismo, convenient sex and the gay culture, among other things, that have negative effect on seminarians.

The manual also stresses that such vigilance and having "a healthy community life in the seminary must continue in a vibrant community of priests after ordination."

Iñiguez said the Church is aware that there are instances when a seminarian recognizes his homosexuality only after he has been ordained a priest.

The manual was the central topic of discussion during the recently concluded launch of the Church's Institute for Seminary Formators held Oct. 21-27 at the San Carlos Pastoral Formation Center in Makati City.

The work to update the Philippine Program for Priestly Formation was begun in 1995 by the CBCP Episcopal Commission on Seminaries then led by Manila Archbishop Gaudencio Rosales, in consultation with seminary personnel nationwide.

Upon assuming Rosales' post in 1999, Bishop Benjamin Almoneda continued the archbishop's work, this time including the "societal realities" voiced out by some seminary personnel.

The board of drafters was composed of Almoneda and Fathers Aloysius Cartagenas, Carmelo Diola, James Agoo, Timoteo Ofrasio, Rodol Cajot, Eddie Mercado and Augusto Angeles.

The draft was revised and finalized by Bishop Luis Antonio Tagle and Fr. Danny Huang, SJ, in June 2003, and was presented to the plenary assembly early this year. ■

Cardinal challenged to gay debate

Australian Associated Press
The Australian
Sydney, Australia
Sept. 7, 2004

Lesbian activist Monica Hingston has challenged her cousin, Catholic Cardinal George Pell, to a public debate on the church's attitude towards homosexuality.

Cardinal Pell is well known for his public sermons against homosexuality and sparked controversy when, as Archbishop of Melbourne, he refused gay activists holy communion.

In January, he refused to respond to a publicized letter from Ms. Hingston calling on him to condone same-sex relationships, an action the Vatican has ruled out.

In her latest invitation, Ms. Hingston, a former Catholic nun, urged her second cousin to debate the issue with gay Catholics at the closing of gay film festival QueerDOC.

"I encourage my cousin George to attend this event and join in the vital debate that the Catholic Church can no longer afford to ignore," Ms. Hingston, 64, said.

The forum will follow a screening of *In Good Conscience*, a film about lesbian Sister Jeannine Gramick who was stripped of her ministry by Pope John Paul II in 2000.

"Cardinal George Pell was a member of the congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, the body that attempted to silence Sister Gramick," Ms. Hingston said.

Ms. Hingston, who has lived with her partner Peg Moran for 19 years, said she would be "delighted by surprised" if Cardinal Pell took up her offer.

"I'm always hopeful that he will respond one day to a request to have the church's hurtful stance explained, but it's really not likely," Ms. Hingston said.

She said the church was determined to take away the basic rights of homosexuals.

"I am very much concerned that the separation of church and state is becoming less so," she said.

"We are frighteningly moving down the path of the USA, where religious fundamentalist leaders and Republican politicians run the country together." ■

Catholic parents as 'secret weapons'

continued from page 1

Mary Ellen Lopata: Well, I think there are two different tracks. One is what we read in the newspapers. Mostly what makes headlines are pronouncements from Rome and from many U.S. bishops that are hurtful and insensitive to gay and lesbian people. If that's all you look at, your sense would be that things are getting worse. However, most of our time and energy is spent talking with real people, Catholics who go to church every week, who are really involved in their faith community. What's happening there is a very different picture. There is immense acceptance and affirmation of gay and lesbian people in many, many parishes in the United States. In all of them? No, but in many of them. I think people would be surprised at the acceptance there is at the grass roots.

Casey Lopata: There are a lot of people working on the local level, especially a lot of parents who have started ministries in their parishes.

in: If the hierarchy of the Church is going in a different direction, which it sounds like, then why even bother with the Catholic Church?

Mary Ellen: Because I believe that the Church is the people of God. I think that the official phrase is *census fidelium*, the sense of the faithful is a part of the essence of the Church. So it's not just pronouncements from Rome that make Church. When I was growing up — and I went to Catholic school — there was never any teaching about homosexuality. Until probably the '70s, you didn't hear in Catholic venues about those six [anti-gay] passages in the Bible. The parents of my generation at least, and there are many of subsequent generations I believe, get to the heart of Christ's teachings, which are love God and love your neighbor as yourself, that God's love is for everyone. When parents hear these recent teachings from Rome they find them contradictory to what they've grown up with. Is your question, why do I stay with the Catholic Church?

in: Yes.

Mary Ellen: I feel a responsibility. As a part of the people of God, it is, I believe, my responsibility to speak my truth, my experience. If I don't do that, then I should leave. The Roman Catholic Church is one of the most powerful institutions in the world. There's a great power for good and there's a great power for hurt or harm. And in this particular case, I think that power is hurting. And so what ever little bit I can do, I have to try. That's why I stay.

Casey: It's not all the hierarchy that's going in a different direction. [Detroit] Bishop Thomas Gumbleton is a wonderful ally. And my favorite quote in this ministry is this one from former Saginaw [Mich.] Bishop Kenneth Untener: "When we die, and as a moral theologian I don't say this lightly, the only thing that will matter is how we treated each other."

in: One of the reasons that you're involved in this ministry now is because I came out to you. How would you feel if I turned my back on the Catholic Church and left?

Mary Ellen: I would say that you and every person has to follow his or her own conscience. And if in order for you to be free and live a life that is true, you have to leave the Church, then that's what you have to do. Would I be sad? I don't know.

Casey: There's a passage in the Catechism. It says that everyone must obey the certain judgment of his or

her conscience. And then it goes on to say that if he or she acts against it, he or she would condemn himself or herself. It is not a new teaching. It is a core teaching of the Catholic Church.

in: What should our response be to someone like Archbishop Sean O'Malley, who requires that priests in his diocese read from the Sunday mass pulpit that civil marriage for gays and lesbians is a "national tragedy"?

Casey: Well, we wrote him a letter. We told him that we disagree. There's an English theologian James Alyson. He took this whole issue and said, "OK, here's what the Vatican and the bishops are saying. OK, I'll grant them the right to say what they want, but the issue comes down to, "Is it true?" Don't get too upset with them, but keep coming back and ask, "Is it true? Where's the data that shows that lesbian couples or gay male couples adopting kids put those kids in a violent environment? Show me. Show me. Is it true?"

Mary Ellen: Don't be silent. Write letters to him. Write letters to your editor. Talk to people. Explain that he does not know gay and lesbian couples or he would know their loving and faithful relationships are not a national tragedy. He is wrong. Bishops can be wrong. You have to refute what you know to be untrue.

in: You've been an advocate of having parents in particular speak to priests and bishops about their experiences parenting gay children in the Catholic Church. Why parents?

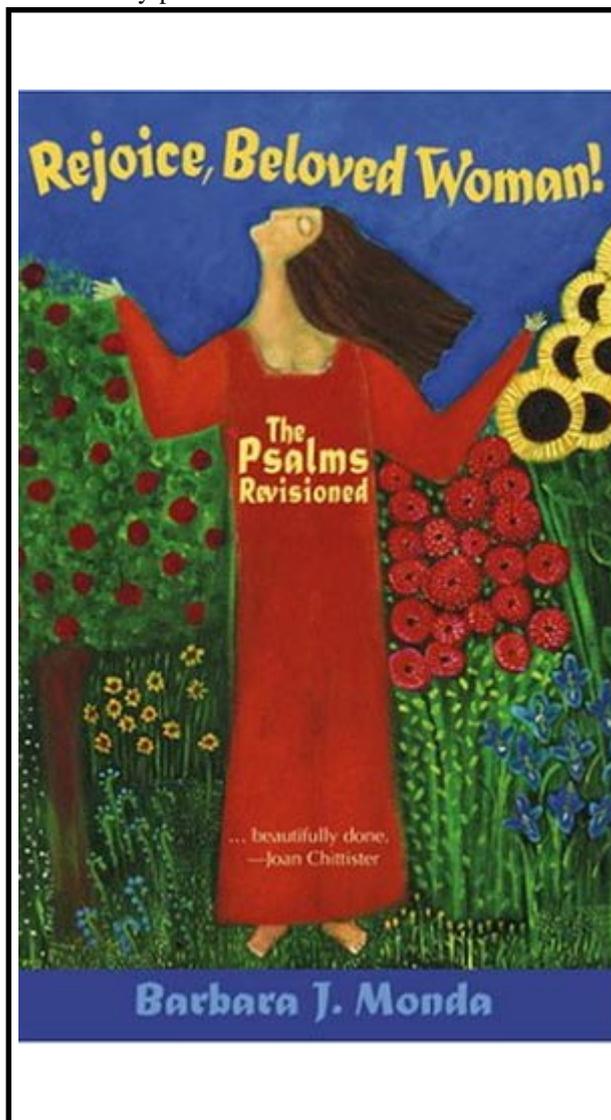
Mary Ellen: I think that parents bring an experience of some of the pain and struggle that their children experience in coming out. Certainly not the same degree, but they understand that process. They can speak about their own pain and fear for their child, and about their profound sadness that many, many of their children do not feel welcome in the Church, and will not go where they are not welcome. And I think that pastors and bishops, hearing that message from parents, might hear it more readily. The same stories from their children might be perceived as self-serving. But a parent puts those concerns in the context of family, which is a very important value to the Church. Your Dad likes to say that parents are the secret weapon in this whole struggle.

in: What are your hopes for this ministry for the future?

Casey: One of the things I feel good about is the number of people we have dealt with who are more involved, more willing to speak, more willing to write letters, more willing to do work publicly on behalf of gay and lesbian people, than if we hadn't been there. That's what ministry is really about — empowering and encouraging others to speak their truth.

Mary Ellen: My hope is that someday the Church in Rome will come back to the Gospel teaching of love and justice. I have the hope that will happen. Because I think the Holy Spirit is at work in this Church. And I do believe that that spirit does work from the bottom, from the people of God.

For more information about the book "Fortunate Families," connect to www.fortunatefamilies.com. ■



Rejoice, Beloved Woman: The Psalms Revised

By Barbara J. Monda

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