

BANDINGS

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Winter 2008/2009

In a First, Gay Rights Are Pressed at the U.N.

By Neil MacFarquhar
The New York Times
December 18, 2008

An unprecedented declaration seeking to decriminalize homosexuality won the support of 66 countries in the United Nations General Assembly on Thursday, but opponents criticized it as an attempt to legitimize pedophilia and other “deplorable acts.”

The United States refused to support the nonbinding measure, as did Russia, China, the Roman Catholic Church and members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. The Holy See’s observer mission issued a statement saying that the declaration “challenges existing human rights norms.”

The declaration, sponsored by France with broad support in Europe and Latin America, condemned human rights violations based on homophobia, saying such measures run counter to the universal declaration of human rights.

“How can we tolerate the fact that people are stoned, hanged, decapitated and tortured only because of their sexual orientation?” said Rama Yade, the French state secretary for human rights, noting that homosexuality is banned in nearly 80 countries and subject to the death penalty in at least six.

France decided to use the format of a declaration because it did not have the support for an official resolution. Read out by Ambassador Jorge Argüello of Argentina, the declaration was the first on gay rights read in the 192-member General Assembly itself.

Although laws against homosexuality are concentrated in the Middle East, Asia and Africa, more than one speaker addressing a separate conference on the declaration noted that the laws stemmed as much from the British colonial past as from religion or tradition.

Navanethem Pillay, the United Nations high commissioner for human rights, speaking by video telephone, said that just like apartheid laws that criminalized sexual relations between different races, laws against homosexuality “are increasingly becoming recognized as anachronistic and as inconsistent both with international law and with traditional values of dignity, inclusion and respect for all.”

The opposing statement read in the General Assembly, supported by nearly 60 na-

tions, rejected the idea that sexual orientation was a matter of genetic coding. The statement, led by the Organization of the Islamic Conference, said the effort threatened to undermine the international framework of human rights by trying to normalize pedophilia, among other acts.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference also failed in a last-minute attempt to alter a formal resolution that Sweden sponsored condemning summary executions. It sought to have the words “sexual orientation” deleted as one of the central reasons for such killings.

Ms. Yade and the Dutch foreign minister, Maxime Verhagen, said at a news conference that they were “disappointed” that the United States failed to support the declaration. Human rights activists went further. “The Bush administration is trying to come up with Christmas presents for the religious

right so it will be remembered,” said Scott Long, a director at Human Rights Watch.

The official American position was based on highly technical legal grounds. The text, by using terminology like “without distinction of any kind,” was too broad because it might be interpreted as an attempt by the federal government to override states’ rights on issues like gay marriage, American diplomats and legal experts said.

“We are opposed to any discrimination, legally or politically, but the nature of our fed-

eral system prevents us from undertaking commitments and engagements where federal

authorities don’t have jurisdiction,” said Alejandro D. Wolff, the deputy permanent representative.

Gay-rights advocates brought to the conference from around the world by France said just having the taboo broken on discussing the topic at the United Nations would aid their

battles at home. “People in Africa can have hope that someone is speaking for them,” said the Rev. Jide Macaulay of Nigeria.



A Catholic Rebellion?

In contrast to the homophobia of the Pope, Catholic bishops in England and Wales are urging acceptance of gay people

By Peter Tatchell
Guardian.co.uk
December 15, 2008

A pastoral leaflet authorized by the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales is creating more than a few ripples throughout the Catholic world. In a marked departure from the constant stream of anti-gay denunciations by the Vatican, it urges clergy and churchgoers to be respectful and welcoming towards lesbian and gay people.

The leaflet, which is distributed to dioceses, is entitled: “What is life like if

you or someone in your family is gay or lesbian in their sexual orientation? ... and what



Peter Tatchell

can your parish family do to make a difference?” Unusually for an official Catholic publication, it acknowledges the “oppression” suffered by homosexuals:

“As a group that has suffered more than its share of oppression and contempt, the homosexual community has a particular claim on the concern of the church.”

Indeed, the leaflet includes a disarmingly honest admission of the role played by the Catholic Church in the

victimization and marginalization of lesbian and gay people. It quotes comments

received from lay Catholics during its Listening Day survey:

“The continual message from the church is that homosexuality is so, so dreadful. Our gay son just hasn’t stood a chance ... My brother is gay; the church has been very intolerant of him.”

This frank admission of past failings is brave and honorable, as is the suggestion that Catholics should “express appreciation for the gifts that homosexual Catholics bring to their faith community”.

Exuding love, compassion and empathy, the leaflet goes on to advise priests and parishioners:

“Try not to assume that everyone is heterosexual ... Avoid stereotyping and condemning ... Remember that homophobic jokes and asides can be cruel and hurtful; a careless word can mean another experience of rejection and pain.”

The leaflet’s suggested reading list of seminal Catholic statements on homosexuality does not, notably, include any statements from the Vatican. It omits all papal documents denouncing homosexuality and endorsing legal discrimination against lesbian and gay people.

Catholic traditionalists have, predictably, condemned the leaflet’s liberal message and accused the English and Welsh church of defying Vatican orthodoxy.

One English critic, Father Ray Blake, has described the leaflet as “troubling” because it does not mention the traditional Catholic teaching that homosexuals should live a life of chastity.

Although I am an atheist and a strong critic of Catholic homophobia (and sexism), I applaud this leaflet. It is a welcome, positive initiative which will bring great comfort to gay Catholics and their families. Its sympathetic, understanding message is a huge improvement on the stern, uncompromising homophobia of most Vatican pronouncements on homosexuality.

Be careful not to offend gay worshippers, Catholic priests warned

By Simon Caldwell
Dailymail.co.uk - London, England
November 29, 2008

Roman Catholic priests have been banned from using ‘heterosexual’ language in their churches in case they offend gay worshippers.

They have been told by their bishops not to assume that every churchgoer is a heterosexual and to reflect this ‘in language and conversation’.

‘Remember that homophobic jokes and asides can be cruel and hurtful - a careless word can mean another experience of rejection and pain,’ say the bishops in a leaflet advising priests and worshippers how to be more welcoming to gay people.

Activists say any moves by the Catholic Church to be more tolerant of homosexuality

are undermined by Pope Benedict XVI’s opposition to gay marriage

Priests are also encouraged to put up posters advertising ‘support services’ for homosexuals, a move bound to infuriate many Catholics who believe gay sexual activity to be sinful.

The advice was welcomed by gay rights campaigner Peter Tatchell as a ‘positive initiative which will bring great comfort to gay Catholics and their families’.

He said: ‘Its sympathetic, understanding message is a big improvement on the past homophobia of some Catholic pronouncements on homosexuality.’

However, he said the ‘laudable change of tone’ was undermined by the ‘homophobic content of the Catholic Catechism’ and

by Pope Benedict XVI’s opposition to gay marriage.

The advice was criticised by Lynette Burrows, a Catholic commentator, as ‘pitiful’.

She said it was ridiculous that Church leaders appeared to be ‘grovelling’ to a secular agenda.

‘It is things like this that are enfeebling the Church at the moment - the concentration on things that don’t matter and missing the things that do,’ she said.

‘What is pitiful as well as demeaning is that the Church is running after homosexual opinion but nothing is going to make homosexuals like the Catholic Church.’

‘This is because the Catholic Church teaches that homosexuality is a disorder and whatever the bishops say will not change that.’

Continued on page 4

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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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News from New Ways Ministry

By Francis DeBernardo, Executive Director

The closing of 2008 and the dawn of 2009 might have been what Charles Dickens was thinking about when he opened "A Tale of Two Cities" with the famous line, "It was the best of times. It was the worst of times."

Daily headlines proclaim the truth of this sentiment for the national mood in the U.S. While people are elated and overjoyed at the historic election of our first African-Ameri-

can president, Barack Obama, the decline in the economy has put many people into extremely dire circumstances.

As we review events in the arena of lesbian/gay issues in the Catholic Church, the same Dickensian sentiment expresses the mood, too. The last few months have been months of struggle, as the stories in this issue of *Bondings* indicate.

In California, the electoral battle over legalizing same-sex marriage brought out two courageous priests who spoke their consciences on the issue. While the restrictive Proposition 8 ultimately passed, two Catholic prelates in California called for toleration of opposing views. Sadly, these bishops' calls for toleration didn't stop some protestors from vandalizing Most Holy Redeemer parish church in San Francisco, one of the nation's leading gay-friendly parishes.

Messages from the Catholic hierarchy also contained paradoxical news. Just days after Catholic bishops in Great Britain called for pastors to use more sensitive language concerning lesbian/gay people, the Vatican announced that it would oppose a United Nations resolution to support human rights for GLBT people all over the globe. Similarly, the pope seemed to ignore the advice about using more sensitive language when he compared new gender relationships and understandings to the destruction of the rainforest.

As you read through this issue of *Bondings*, you will learn about all these controversies and many other bits of news as well. As I perused these stories, I was struck by a paradoxical feeling similar to the Dickens lines: "How far we have come!"

How far we have to go!"

When I became involved in lesbian/gay ministry over 15 years ago, I never thought that we would be at a point where same-sex marriage is not only openly discussed, but legal in some places. Even five years ago, I never thought that we would see priests publicly break rank with their bishops on lesbian/gay issues. Similarly, I was not prepared for the Vatican to go against its best thinking on the protection of human rights by opposing a UN measure to protect those rights for sexual minorities around the world.

Because it some times feels like "the worst of times" for Catholics involved in lesbian/gay ministry, we continue to do our work at New Ways Ministry. Because we are supported by so many good people, who, like yourselves, are helping to bring about a more just and equal church, we more often feel like these are certainly "the best of times."

Financial Statement July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008

Statement of Revenue and Expenses

Revenue	Total	% of Total
Contributions	78,285.72	42.6
Grants	39,600.00	21.5
Investments	16,567.54	9.0
Programs	46,152.45	25.1
Publications	1,836.78	1.0
Other	1,498.34	.8
Total Revenue	183,940.83	100.0

Expenses	Total	% of Total
Contributions	4,145.00	2.4
Salaries and benefits	94,324.90	54.1
Telephone, supplies	3,155.57	1.8
Postage and printing	10,944.70	6.3
Occupancy	4,903.18	2.8
Travel, conferences	39,348.45	22.6
Depreciation	3,030.00	1.7
Fees, payroll taxes	7,192.95	4.1
Staff Dev., consultation	7,386.89	4.2
Total expenses	174,431.64	100.0

Fund balance, beginning of year	423,711.11
Excess for year	9,509.19
Other changes in net assets	3,057.34
Fund balance, end of year	426,277.64

*Approximately \$331,000 of the current fund balance represents a reserve for 22 months operational expenses. The fund balance also includes land, building, and equipment assets of approximately \$95,000.

The Pope's Christmas Gift: A Tough Line on Church Doctrine

By Jeff Israely

Time Magazine

December 12, 2008

Those nicknames from the past — God's Rottweiler, the Panzer cardinal — don't seem to stick anymore. After acquiring a reputation as an aggressive, doctrine-enforcing Cardinal, Pope Benedict XVI has surprised many with his gentle manner and his writings on Christian love. But with the Christmas season upon us, there is growing proof that the 82-year-old Pope is also quite willing to play the part of Scrooge to defend his often rigid view of Church doctrine.

Benedict's envoy to the United Nations, Archbishop Celestino Migliore, has announced that the Vatican will oppose a proposed U.N. declaration calling for an end to discrimination against homosexuals. At first blush, no one should be surprised to find the Catholic Church hierarchy butting heads with gay rights activists. But this particular French-sponsored proposal, which has the backing of all 27 European Union countries, calls for an end to the practice of criminalizing and punishing people for their sexual orientation. Most dramatically, in some countries, including Iran and Saudi Arabia, homosexuality can be punished by death.

Papal spokesman Father Federico Lombardi was forced to clarify that the Vatican continues to condemn the use of the death penalty for any crime, including those associated with homosexuality. Instead, Migliore said the Vatican's opposition to the U.N. proposal was driven by concern that countries that prohibit gay marriage would somehow be targeted.

Said Migliore: "Countries that don't recognize the union between people of the same sex as marriage will be punished and pressured."

The U.N. declaration does not in fact mention gay marriage, and most of the nations that support it themselves don't allow people of the same sex to wed. Archbishop Migliore confirmed on Tuesday that the Vatican had also refused to sign a U.N. document last May in support of the rights of the disabled because it did not include condemnation of abortion, and the rights the fetus with birth defects. Vatican officials nevertheless voiced support for the central principles of the disabled rights document, which Migliore helped craft before the final decision to withhold the Holy See's signature.

The Italian gay rights association Arcigay says the Vatican's opposition to the anti-discriminatory measure is "unprecedented," and the citing of gay marriage is an "excuse" to distract people from the real intent of criminalizing gays. One Rome-based priest was disappointed that the Vatican decided to publicize its opposition to what appears a rather innocuous declaration. "When you're always trying to look for new ways to make your point, you lose credibility," says the priest. "Better sometimes to keep quiet."

Benedict has said repeatedly that the Church is forced to speak out against the tide of secularization, especially in Catholicism's home turf in Europe. His kindly manner notwithstanding, Benedict does not seem to hesitate doing or saying what he deems necessary to keep Catholicism from straying too far from its doctrinal tradition.

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Your submissions requested! If your organization, parish or religious community is doing something to promote dialogue about lesbian/gay issues, send us a photo and short article to include in the next issue of *Bondings*.

Gay priest is true to his faith, at odds with his church

By Steve Lopez
Los Angeles Times
October 26, 2008

So who is this Catholic priest from Fresno who stood up and spoke out against Proposition 8, putting his career on the line? As a gay man who finds the church's views on homosexuality so objectionable, why has he been a priest for more than 20 years and subjected himself to such moral conflict?

After reading my colleague Duke Helfand's story about Father Geoffrey Farrow and his recent career-suicide from the pulpit, I was curious.

Farrow agreed to meet me for lunch in the middle of a schedule that's gotten very busy since he became persona non grata to his employer. He's been asked to appear all over the state for rallies against Prop. 8, which would amend the California Constitution to say marriage can only be between a man and a woman.

Father Farrow, who was suspended by his bishop two weeks ago, strolled into the lobby of the Kyoto Grand Hotel in downtown Los Angeles wearing the collar.

"I'm still a priest," he said over lunch, though he fully expected to be disciplined for speaking to his congregation about Prop. 8 and wouldn't be surprised if he's ultimately fired.

For the moment, he's staying with friends in Los Angeles. Farrow, 50, doesn't know what he'll do after the election. He was suspended without pay and said his medical benefits run out at the end of the month.

Farrow, who lived in Cuba until the age of 4, grew up Catholic in Florida and knew as a teenager that he was gay. He dated girls "to keep up appearances" but was miserable about it, and he began questioning his faith.

"If God is omnipotent, why is there evil in the world?" he asked himself as body bags returned to the U.S. from Vietnam.

He looked into agnosticism and atheism, neither of which offered the answers he wanted. In his first year of college in Florida, he studied philosophy, read Cicero and mused on the meaning of history, civilization and the nature of God.

"I have a hunger for the transcendent," Farrow said. "This is too precise," he said of man and the universe, "to be a coincidence." And so he became a believer, once more, in the church he had been "carried to in diapers."

When I told Farrow that as an agnostic, I don't understand that leap, he described God as love and faith as trust.

"Trust is fundamental of all human relationships," he said. "Part of the attraction of the relationship with that person is that you're always familiar with them and yet always discovering them."

I love and trust my wife, I said, but she's real and doesn't need to prove that she exists.

"Precisely," Farrow said with a smile, as if I'd described his relationship with God.

When his family moved from Florida to Redondo Beach in the 1970s, Farrow, still closeted as a gay man, joined St. John's Seminary in Camarillo.

Is it possible, I asked, that becoming a priest was a way of avoiding coming to terms with his sexuality? Farrow had, after all, once prayed to God to "please make me normal, please make me normal."

"That's a valid question," he said, but he believes he was addressing his spiritual rather than sexual identity in becoming a priest.

Wasn't it a suffocating compromise? I asked. He had given himself over to a church that has, despite moderating its views in recent decades, condemned homosexuality and marginalized gays, even though in Farrow's opinion a sizable percentage of priests are gay. Farrow conceded that he has considered church teachings "monstrous," especially given the history of violence and suicide victimizing gays. But he said he has always believed in the church, if not in the men who led it. It's like loving a family member despite a falling out, or loving your country even as you doubt its leaders.

"I'm not happy with the current administration," Farrow said, "but I haven't shred-

ded my passport."

I asked if he'd had any relationships while serving as a priest.

Yes, he confessed. He seemed near tears and stopped short of sharing the details. But he said it had ended.

I wondered again how anyone could go through such an ordeal and remain committed to a church that considers it a sin for a



Rev. Geoffrey Farrow

gay person to act on biological urges. Whom do you even talk to for help? I asked.

"There are a lot of clergy who deal with this," Farrow said, telling me many priests in the Fresno diocese are gay. "You speak to each other."

But that's a form of silence as well as hypocrisy, and Farrow was increasingly troubled by his double life. Not long ago, he saw a woman crying in a church hallway and asked what was wrong.

"My son just came out to me," she said. "I was having a dinner party and I told him he couldn't bring his boyfriend."

"Do you know what you just did?" Farrow asked her. "You just told your son he was not as important to you as your dinner guests."

Farrow then had his epiphany when he

was asked by a Prop. 8 supporter in Fresno to speak up in favor of the measure. He knew he couldn't and that in fact he had to do just the opposite.

"I am morally compelled to vote no on Proposition 8," he told his congregation, saying he had to break "a numbing silence" about church prejudice against homosexuals.

Among the critics in his own parish and beyond, there are those who quote the Bible to condemn homosexuality and gay marriage.

"The Bible is not a book, it's a library written over 15 centuries," Farrow told me, suggesting that Christianity has and should continue to evolve. "People who approach scripture in a literal fashion are attempting to manipulate God himself."

To Farrow, condemning gay and lesbian marriage is as offensive as the condemnations of interracial marriage not too many decades ago.

"Think about the children," they said, and they're doing the same with this," Farrow said indignantly. "If a child is raised in a home where he's loved, that's a good home."

So why not just quit his job rather than wait to get fired?

Farrow said he still sees the church as home, and believes his new mission is to force this issue whether he's wearing a collar or not.

"They said I've caused scandal to the church," he said. "I think the real scandal is the thousands of gay and lesbian children who feel abandoned by the church of their baptism."

When he was in seminary, Farrow interned as deacon at St. Vincent's Medical Center and worked with terminally ill patients. As the end nears, Farrow told me, people say the things they never could utter. They are "more alive than ever . . . because they realize the futility of fear." He found them all contemplating the same questions.

"Were you true to your conscience? Did you do what you felt was right?"

And one more -- "What do you have in the end but the love you gave away?"

San Francisco archbishop defends role in Prop 8 passage

By Matthai Kuruvila
San Francisco Chronicle
December 4, 2008

San Francisco Catholic Archbishop George Niederauer, in his first extensive explanation about his role in the passage of Proposition 8, on Wednesday defended the church's actions in the successful ballot initiative.

"Religious leaders in America have the constitutional right to speak out on issues of public policy," Niederauer wrote in a statement posted on the archdiocese's Web site. "Catholic bishops, specifically, also have a responsibility to teach the faith, and our beliefs about marriage and family are part of this faith."

Niederauer, who has declined interview requests, wrote that "to insist that citizens be silent about their religious beliefs" would have had a detrimental effect on history, gagging the voices of important abolitionists and people in the civil rights movement.

Niederauer's statement, coming more than a month after the vote to ban same-sex marriage in the nation's most populous state, underscored the complex role he plays. As archbishop of San Francisco, Niederauer is the ultimate teacher of Catholic doctrine in a

region at the forefront of gay and lesbian rights.

During the campaign, Niederauer issued statements, sent flyers and gave a videotaped interview posted at www.marriagematterstokids.org. But Niederauer's most prominent action was drawing in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, whose members responded with intensive grassroots organizing and an estimated \$20 million in campaign contributions from individuals that accounted for half of the Yes on 8 campaign's total.

Niederauer noted that many other Christian denominations supported Prop. 8, including evangelical Protestant, Orthodox and historically African American churches.

The Mormon church has said Niederauer, previously the bishop of Salt Lake City for 11 years, played a pivotal role in its joining the cause.

"We were invited to join the coalition," Michael Otterson, managing director of public affairs for the church, told The Chronicle in an interview shortly after the election. "We didn't unilaterally go into the battle."

Otterson said Niederauer's letter persuaded the Mormon church that they wouldn't be fighting this battle alone, a status that would have made them vulnerable.

"Having Catholics, evangelicals and Jews in a coalition was exactly the right way to do it," Otterson said. "We knew someone would make this a Mormon-versus-gays battle."

In his statement Wednesday, titled "Moving forward together," Niederauer urged both sides to tone down the rhetoric and move toward a common cause.

"Tolerance, respect and trust are always two-way streets and tolerance, respect and trust often do not include agreement, or even approval," he wrote. "We need to be able to disagree without being disagreeable. . . . We need to stop hurling names like 'bigot' and 'pervert' at each other. And we need to stop it now."

"We churchgoers need to speak and act out of the truth that all people are God's children and are unconditionally loved by God," he wrote.

Kevin Sullivan, a gay parishioner at St. Dominic's in the Fillmore district, found Niederauer's letter to be "very condescending" and said the archdiocese deserves the moniker of being bigoted.

"The actions of our archdiocese and this archbishop in no way spoke of tolerance, respect and trust toward gay Catholics," said Sullivan, 50. "It will take the gay community

a very long time to forgive our archdiocese for this."

The Rev. Donal Godfrey, who profiled a largely gay Castro district parish in the book "Gays and Grays" and is executive director for university ministry at the University of San Francisco, took Niederauer's statement as an affirmation that all views are welcome and encouraged in the archdiocese.

"Archbishop Niederauer is a pastoral, caring and intelligent man," said Godfrey, adding that most Catholics he knew opposed Prop. 8. "He knows Catholics disagree in good conscience. By saying this, he's saying (he) won't judge their motives."

Bill May, chairman of Catholics for the Common Good, who helped coordinate statewide Catholic support for the measure, appreciated that Niederauer took time to explain that there are "strong and legitimate reasons for supporting marriage between a man and a woman."

May also echoed Godfrey's praise.

Niederauer "is a very loving person," May said. "He expresses the teachings of the church in a very pastoral way. He is expressing the fundamental understanding of the Catholic Church that every human person has intrinsic dignity that must be respected."

Archdiocese at odds with gay marriage foes

By Michael Paulson
The Boston Globe
October 11, 2008

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston, although staunchly opposed to gay marriage, is declining to support an effort to gather signatures at Masses for a referendum that would bar out-of-state same-sex couples from marrying in Massachusetts.

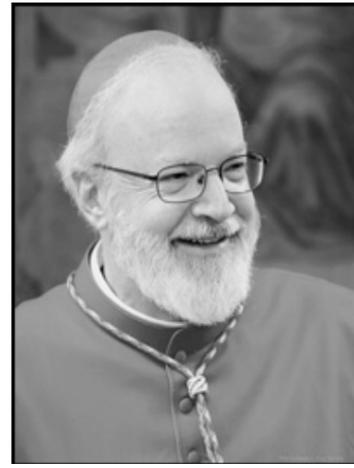
The controversy apparently began last weekend, when Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley, at the annual Walk for Life event, signed a petition supporting the referendum. Then the organization supporting the referendum, MassResistance, wrote to parishes, citing O'Malley's support and asking priests to gather signatures. That prompted the following e-mail from the archdiocese to pastors:

"It is has come to our attention that you may be receiving a letter from the organization MassResistance, signed by Mr. Brian Camenker, concerning Cardinal Sean having signed a petition pertaining to Massachu-

setts' '1913 Law', which deals with out of state couples seeking to marry in the Commonwealth. The letter also solicits your help in gathering petition signatures at masses this coming weekend. Please know that the Archdiocese was not contacted about this letter prior to its having been mailed. Additionally the letter presumes to speak of Cardinal Sean's personal disposition and activities he would undertake as a private citizen. Neither the Archdiocese nor the Cardinal were consulted about these matters at any time. Further, the Archdiocese would not ask pastors or any other persons to gather petition signatures at masses. The Archdiocese's position concerning political matters is that materials shall not be distributed unless authorized by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), or the Massachusetts Catholic Conference (MCC), or the

Ordinary of the diocese. Regarding the Archdiocese of Boston, none of these has authorized the MassResistance mailing."

The proposed referendum to reinstate the so-called 1913 law, which had been interpreted as barring most out-of-state same-sex couples from marrying here, has been controversial even among opponents of same-sex marriage. The Massachusetts Family Institute, one of the leading opponents of same-sex marriage, has declined to support the referendum, saying: "Massachusetts Family Institute is not participating in the referendum effort to reinstate the so-called 1913 Law because there is



Cardinal Sean O'Malley

no winning on this issue. By the time the measure reaches the ballot in 2010, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of out-of-state same-sex couples already will have married in Massachusetts. More importantly, even if the referendum effort were successful at the ballot in 2010, this Governor and legislature—bent on exporting the same-sex marriage experiment—could easily pass another repeal in 2011."

But the cardinal's decision to sign the petition and then bar parishes from col-

lecting signatures is drawing criticism from some conservatives. Over at "The Lady in the Pew," blogger Kelly Clark has an e-mail alert from MassResistance saying the development is "truly unbelievable. It's as if the world is turning upside-down."

"Gay persons are good and part of God's creation"

California Catholic Daily
October 13, 2008

Another priest has broken ranks with California's bishops on the Protect Marriage initiative, telling his parishioners in the church's weekly bulletin, "I cannot in conscience unequivocally support Proposition 8."

The remarks came in a "dear parishioners" letter published Oct. 5, by Claretian Fr. Steve Niskanen, pastor of San Gabriel Mission in the Los Angeles archdiocese.

The same day that Fr. Niskanen expressed his opinion in San Gabriel, Fr. Geoffrey Farrow told parishioners at the St. Paul Newman Center in Fresno following his Sunday morning homily that he opposed the marriage initiative – and admitted during a television interview before the Mass that he was a homosexual.

In his "dear parishioners" letter at San Gabriel Mission, Fr. Niskanen went through each of the ballot measures endorsed by the Catholic bishops of California one by one.

He said he supports Proposition 4 – the family notification before a minor's abortion initiative, and that he opposes Proposition 6 – the "Safe Neighborhoods Act," which would add new crimes and tougher penalties to state law. Fr. Niskanen's positions on Props 4 and 6 are in line with the recommendations of the bishops.

But when it came to Proposition 8, which would amend the state constitution to outlaw same-sex marriages, Fr.

Niskanen disagreed. After reprinting a portion of the bishops' arguments in favor of the proposition, he wrote: "I deeply respect and submit to the authority of our bishops and the force of traditional Catholic teaching limiting sexual relations to the love and life-giving commitment of heterosexual marriage. But I cannot in conscience unequivocally support Proposition 8 because I cannot in my heart of hearts say with certainty, at this time, that God would not call His gay and lesbian children into a faithful and life-long covenant with one another."

Fr. Niskanen's letter continued, "Some members of our families and of our parish family are gay and lesbian. Studies estimate

that between 5-10% of the human race, across cultures, has a predominantly same-sex ori-

entation. I believe that we as a Church need to learn from their stories of rejection and alienation, of faith, hope, and love, so as to better discern with them God's will for their and our lives.

"My belief is that gay persons, as gay, are good, and part of God's diverse creation. Their expression of love,

though different from the majority, does, I believe, participate in both the weakness and selfishness of sin and the generosity and kindness of God's love. They, like all of us, are called to chastity; that is, sexual self-control and loving respect of the other in conformity with one's calling in life. In the pastoral statement, Always our Children, the US Bishops' Committee on Marriage and Family concludes with a consoling word to our gay brothers and sisters, "Though at times you may feel discouraged, hurt, or angry, do not walk away from your families, from the Christian community, from all those who love you. In you God's love is revealed. You are always our children."



Rev. Steve Niskanen

A Catholic Rebellion?

Continued from page 1

Indeed, I hope the Catholic Church in England and Wales will encourage the Vatican to adopt this leaflet for use by Catholic dioceses worldwide. Its broader dissemination would help counteract the ignorance and prejudice that exists among many clergy and laity.

But I would also add the following caveat: the loving, respectful tone of this pastoral leaflet is undermined by the homophobic content of the Catholic Catechism and by the Pope's frequent endorsement of discriminatory, anti-gay laws. In particular, the Vatican policy of condemning loving, stable same-sex relationships is not only ethically wrong; it risks undoing the good, kind intentions of this leaflet.

The Catechism, which sets out the basic doctrines of the Roman church, reflects the pre-scientific ignorance and anti-homosexual prejudice of the medieval era; describing same-sex acts as a "grave depravity" and "intrinsically disordered". It states that lesbian and gay relationships are "contrary to natural law ... and do not proceed from genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved."

The Vatican identifies homosexuality as a deep-seated personality disorder and psychological flaw; variously condemning same-sex acts as "grave sins ... objectively disordered ... (and) intrinsically immoral".

Even people who have a gay orientation but abstain totally from sex are condemned by the Pope as possessing a "tendency to-

wards an intrinsic moral evil". In October, the Vatican ruled that chaste gay men should be barred from the priesthood and this month it again vilified same-sex marriages and announced its intention to oppose a UN general assembly statement calling for the decriminalization of homosexuality worldwide.

The English church's pastoral leaflet challenges these outdated, bigoted attitudes. It reflects the growing acceptance of loving, loyal, long-term lesbian and gay relationships by grassroots Catholics. It is also a fitting tribute to the late Cardinal Basil Hume and a continuation of his valiant, but often tortured and incomplete, attempts to move English Catholicism towards the acceptance of gay people and gay human rights.

I know from my personal dialogue with Cardinal Hume in the 1990s that he was personally pained by the Vatican's intransigent, heartless homophobia. He tried, as best he could, to distance the English church from Rome, with nuanced theological pronouncements that discreetly differed from those of the Pope. Although his distancing was far too subtle for my liking, I appreciated his efforts.

It is good to see Cardinal Hume's more gay-sympathetic theology reflected in this pastoral leaflet. He would be happy and proud. Congratulations and thanks to the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales. Now please reform the Catechism – or publish your own non-homophobic English version.



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Vatican Attacked for Opposing Gay Decriminalization

By Phillip Pulella

Reuters

December 2, 2008

Gay rights groups and newspaper editorials on Tuesday condemned the Vatican for its decision to oppose a proposed U.N. resolution calling on governments worldwide to de-criminalise homosexuality.

The row erupted after the Vatican's permanent observer to the United Nations told a French Catholic news agency the Holy See would oppose the resolution, which France is due to propose later this month on behalf of the 27-member European Union.

Archbishop Celestino Migliore said the Vatican opposed the resolution because it would "add new categories of those protected from discrimination" and could lead to reverse discrimination against traditional heterosexual marriage.

"If adopted, they would create new and implacable discriminations," Migliore said. "For example, states which do not recognise same-sex unions as 'matrimony' will be pilloried and made an object of pressure," Migliore said.

A strongly worded editorial in Italy's mainstream La Stampa newspaper said the Vatican's reasoning was "grotesque."

Pointing out that homosexuality was still punishable by death in some Islamic coun-



Franco Grillini

tries, the editorial said what the Vatican really feared was a "chain reaction in favour of legally recognised homosexual unions in countries, like Italy, where there is currently no legislation."

Franco Grillini, founder and honorary president of Arcigay, Italy's leading gay rights group, said the Vatican's reasoning smacked of "total idiocy and madness."

"The French resolution, which is supported by all 27 members of the European Union, has nothing to do with gay marriage. It is about stopping jail and the death penalty for homosexuals," Grillini told Reuters.

The resolution is to be presented by

Rama Yade, France's state secretary for human rights.

Human rights groups say homosexuality is still punishable by law in more than 85 countries and by death in a number of them, including Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Yemen.

Vatican spokesman Rev. Federico Lombardi said "no-one wants the death penalty or jail or fines for homosexuals" but defended Migliore's comments, adding that the Vatican was in the majority on the issue.

"It's not for nothing that fewer than 50 member states of the United Nations have adhered to the proposal in question while more than 150 have not adhered. The Holy See is not alone," Lombardi said.

An editorial in Rome's left-leaning La Repubblica newspaper said the Vatican's position "leaves one dumbstruck." Margherita Boniver, a leading member of the Italy's leftist Democratic Party, called it "alarmingly anachronistic."

Grillini, the gay rights activist, said he feared what he called another "Holy Alliance" between the Vatican and Islamic states at the United Nations to oppose the proposed resolution.

At a major U.N. conference on the family in Cairo in 1994, the Vatican teamed up with Islamic and Latin American countries to defeat an abortion rights proposal.

The Catholic Church teaches that while homosexuality is not sinful, homosexual acts are. But in October, a leading Vatican official called homosexuality "a deviation, an irregularity and a wound."

Vatican Backs Decriminalization, Not U.N. Measure

By Phil Stewart

Reuters

December 19, 2008

The Vatican Friday urged governments around the world to decriminalize homosexuality but said a proposed U.N. resolution on the issue went too far.

Vatican spokesman Rev. Federico Lombardi said the Holy See's delegation explained the position at the United Nations late on Thursday, criticizing the wording of a European-backed text that champions decriminalization of homosexuality.

"The Holy See continues to advocate that every sign of unjust discrimination toward homosexual persons should be avoided and urges States to do away with criminal penalties against them," read the delegation's remarks, released by the Vatican on its website Friday.

"At the same time, the Holy See notes that the wording of this declaration goes well beyond the above mentioned and shared intent."

The Vatican singled out the categories of "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" in the text, saying "these would create serious uncertainty in the law"—in what appeared to be reference to its well-known concerns about gay marriage.

The Vatican's permanent observer to the United Nations, Archbishop Celestino Migliore, has previously warned the pro-

posed European-backed text could lead to reverse discrimination against traditional heterosexual marriage.

"If adopted, they would create new and implacable discriminations," Migliore told a French Catholic news agency. "For example, states which do not recognize same-sex unions as 'matrimony' will be pilloried and made an object of pressure."

The Catholic Church teaches that while homosexuality is not sinful, homosexual acts are. It also opposes gay marriage and, in October, a leading Vatican official called homosexuality "a deviation, an irregularity and a wound."

Sponsors of the European text point out that homosexuality is still punishable by law in 77 countries and by death in seven of them. This includes Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Yemen.

An opposing Arab-backed statement, read out at the United Nations Thursday by Syria, said the European text could lead to "the social normalization, and possibly the legitimization, of many deplorable acts including pedophilia."

"We note with concern the attempts to create 'new rights' or 'new standards,' by misinterpreting the Universal Declaration and international treaties," it added.

Lombardi told Reuters that the Vatican did not support the Arab-backed statement either.

Pope accused of stoking homophobia after he equates homosexuality to climate change

By Phillip Naughton

The Times - London, England

December 23, 2008

Pope Benedict was accused of stoking homophobia today after a speech in which he declared that saving humanity from homosexuality was just as important as saving the rainforest from destruction.

The Pontiff made the remarks yesterday in an end-of-year address to the Curia, the Vatican's central administration. He said that humanity needed to listen to the "language of creation" to understand the intended roles of man and woman and behaviour beyond traditional heterosexual relations was a "destruction of God's work".

"The tropical forests do deserve our protection. But man, as a creature, does not deserve any less," he told scores of prelates gathered in the Vatican's Clementine Hall.

"What's needed is something like a 'human ecology,' understood in the right sense. It's not simply an outdated metaphysics if the Church speaks of the nature of the human person as man and woman, and asks that this order of creation be respected."

It is not the first time that the Pope has used the Curia speech to throw out a controversial idea — two years ago he complained that Islam had yet to learn the lessons of the Enlightenment — but the comments were quickly denounced by gay and lesbian groups, both inside and outside the Church.

The Rev. Sharon Ferguson, chief executive of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, described the Pope's comments as "totally irresponsible and unacceptable in any shape or form". She said: "It is more the case that we need to be saved from his comments. It is comments like that that justify homophobic bullying that goes on in schools and it is comments like that that justify gay-bashing."

"There are still so many instances of people being killed around the world, includ-

ing in Western society, purely and simply because of their sexual orientation or their gender identity.

"When you have religious leaders like that making that sort of statement then followers feel they are justified in behaving in an aggressive and violent way because they feel that they are doing God's work in ridding the world of these people."

Her views were echoed by the Reverend Dr Giles Fraser, the vicar of Putney and president of Inclusive Church, the pro-gay Anglican movement. "I thought the Christmas angels said 'Fear not'. Instead, the Pope is spreading fear that gay people somehow threaten the planet. And that's just absurd ... Can't he think of something better to say at Christmas?"

Pam Spaulding, a leading lesbian blogger from the United States, was even more direct. She said: "The Prada Papa Ratzki opens his trap again, and the homophobia stinks like trash piled up during a NYC garbage strike."

The Catholic Church teaches that while homosexuality is not sinful, homosexual acts are. It opposes gay marriage and, in October, a leading Vatican official called homosexuality "a deviation, an irregularity, a wound".

The Pope's speech was also seen, however, as a denunciation of "gender theory" — the study of how gender assignments affects the behaviour of individuals. The Catholic Church has repeatedly spoken out against gender theory, which gay and transsexual groups promote as a key to understanding and tolerance.

"That which is often expressed and understood by the term 'gender' in the end amounts to the self-emancipation of the human person from creation and from the Creator," the Pope said.

"Human beings want to do everything by themselves, and to control exclusively everything that regards them. But in this way, the human person lives against the truth, against

the Creator Spirit."

Mark Dowd, campaign strategist at Operation Noah, the Christian environmental group, who is a gay man and a former Dominican friar, said that the Pope's remarks were "understandable but misguided and unfortunate".

He said that he understood the Pope's vision of creation in which rainforests were protected and men and women "complement one another, reproduce and live happily ever after".

But he said: "The problem is that if you study ecology seriously as any intelligent man would do, and the Pope is a fantastically intelligent man, you realise that ecology is complex, it has all sort of weird interdependencies and it is the same with human sexuality.

"It is not a one-size-fits-all model, there are lots of differences, so therefore I think it is really sad that these comments betray a lack of openness to the complexity of creation."

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Bishop backs gay move by parish

By **Graham Downie**
The Canberra Times
 November 3, 2008

Bishop Pat Power says he has sympathy for Catholic parishes that reach out to gay people and try to make themselves more relevant to their congregations.

The Auxiliary Catholic Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn was commenting yesterday on an ultimatum by Brisbane Archbishop John Bathersby to St Mary's South Brisbane Parish that it would close if it did not change some of its practices.

Bishop Power said the parish was a haven to people who had been excluded from their own parishes Catholic and otherwise.

"At times there are a lot of people who



Bishop Pat Power

can be disillusioned, and it is good if there is a place where they can feel at home." The parish has been taken to task by Archbishop Bathersby after complaints to the Vatican and subsequent pressure from it on the archbishop.

Concerns include blessing of homosexual relationships, women preaching homilies, and the priest, Father Peter Kennedy, not wearing prescribed vestments during mass. In 2004, claims that incorrect language was being used during baptism at

St Mary's were upheld and hundreds of baptisms conducted there were ruled invalid by Archbishop Bathersby.

Yesterday, Bishop Power said canon law required homilies at mass must be preached by a deacon or priest.

"I have difficulty with that ruling, but that is how it is." He did not accept all goodness and knowledge resided in priests. Parishes such as St Mary's pushed the Church ahead.

"I think the day will come when that sort of thing will happen." St Mary's is one of Brisbane's most active Catholic parishes, with up to 700 people attending weekend services. Father Kennedy has led the parish for about 28 years.

Bishop Power described Archbishop Bathersby as Australia's most open and accommodating archbishop, who was committed to dialogue.

"I would have sympathy for a parish

which is reaching out to gay people," Bishop Power said. "So often they feel no one wants to know them. But a bishop has difficulty with those things. I recognise their desire to be part of the Church.

"I have a lot of sympathy and admiration for a parish like this. I know it is hard to find the middle ground." The Queensland bishops were generally open and accommodating and generally progressive in terms of the second Vatican council.

Archbishop Bathersby has outlined his concerns in a three-page letter to the parish.

"At the present time they're not in communion with the Church and they have to make that significant decision about it," he said.

More than 500 people attended a meeting on Saturday to consider the future of St Mary's. They agreed to establish groups to examine matters raised by Archbishop Bathersby.

UT Catholic organization launches gay prayer group

By **Edna Solis**
The Daily Texan - Univ. of Texas
 February 10, 2009

The principle behind UT's University Catholic Center's founding of a gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender support group is that in God's eyes, we are all the same.

Group meetings will begin this week, where members will come together for discussion, prayer and fellowship.

"We want to provide a safe place for young people to talk about this issue — how does it fit in with the Catholic Church teachings?" said the Rev. Ed Koharchik, associate director at the center. "Whether one is gay or straight, it's morally neutral."

In recent weeks, the center has promoted the support group, whose purpose is to shed light on the "misconstrued teachings of the

church" with respect to non-heterosexual lifestyles, Koharchik said.

"It's about this group of people and how to stay within the teachings of the church and yet still identify as being of that orientation," said Michael Jungwirth, a Middle Eastern studies graduate student. "It sounds reasonable."

Koharchik said he hopes to deter Catholics from breaking off their relationship with God due to their sexual orientation. He said he wants community members to know that sexuality is not tied to an individual's personhood and that linking the two together could "cut off awareness to goodness."

Koharchik and UT alumna Chelsea Griffo enlisted the support of Bishop Gregory Aymond from the Diocese of Austin to implement the program.

Koharchik and Griffo said they believe that Aymond's approval of the group will ap-

pease possible protesters who deem the forming of the group a sanction of same-sex relationships.

"There is a lot of hatred out there," Koharchik said. "There's a lot of anger."

History and finance senior Jennifer Marquess said she first heard about the group three weeks ago after a Mass.

"I think it is awesome that they were able to get the support of the bishop for the group," Marquess said.

Student members of the center expressed their accord with the group.

"I think they brought it up last semester," said Eugene Martir, a biology and linguistics junior. "They had thrown out the ideas, and it seemed like a really good idea at the time."

When asked about any concerns regarding opposition to the support group, the students shrugged it off.

"People will protest anything," Martir said.

Koharchik said the center is not attempting to keep the announcement of the group under wraps and that the center is actively seeking to promote the support group.

"Whenever you start a group, it's going to be slow at first, unless it's something immensely popular," Jungwirth said.

Among other pastoral recommendations aimed toward church ministers, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops suggests in its pamphlet, "Always Our Children," that religious entities "help to establish or promote support groups for parents and family members" of gays and lesbians.

Koharchik's goal for the support group is to encourage a chaste lifestyle for every person and to encourage members to "live morally good and make proper decisions.

Gay-Friendly Catholic Colleges

Below is a partial list of known "gay-friendly" Catholic colleges and universities, that is, those Catholic colleges that have some type of gay and lesbian student group, support group, ally group, etc. Thank you for helping us add to this growing list! If you are aware of such a college that is known as welcoming to gay and lesbian people, please let us know. Tell us if this welcome is because of a club, support services, participation in gay community events, or simply the friendliness of faculty and staff.

Arizona

Tempe: All Saints Catholic Newman Center

California

Belmont: Notre Dame de Namur University
Goleta: St. Mark's University
Los Angeles: Loyola Marymount University
Moraga: Saint Mary's College
Rancho Palos Verde: Marymount College
San Diego: University of San Diego
San Francisco: University of San Francisco
Santa Clara: Santa Clara University

Colorado

Denver: Regis University

Connecticut

Fairfield: Fairfield University,
 Sacred Heart University
New Haven: Albertus Magnus College
West Hartford: Saint Joseph College

District of Columbia

Georgetown University

Florida

Miami Gardens: Saint Thomas University
Miami Shores: Barry University

Illinois

Chicago: DePaul University,
 Loyola University, Saint Xavier College

Indiana

Notre Dame: Holy Cross College, Saint Mary's College, University of Notre Dame

Iowa

Dubuque: Loras College

Kentucky

Louisville: Spalding University

Louisiana

New Orleans: Loyola University New Orleans

Maryland

Baltimore: College of Notre Dame of Maryland,
 Loyola College of Maryland

Massachusetts

Boston: Emmanuel College, Boston College
Chestnut Hill: Boston College
Easton: Stonehill College
North Andover: Merrimack College
Weston: Regis College
Worcester: Assumption College,
 Holy Cross College

Michigan

Ann Arbor: St. Mary Student Parish

Missouri

St. Louis: Saint Louis University

Minnesota

Collegeville: Saint John's University
Saint Joseph: College of Saint Benedict
St. Paul: St Thomas University
Winona: Saint Mary's University of Minnesota

Montana

Helena: Carroll College

Nebraska

Omaha: Creighton University

New Hampshire

Nashua: Rivier College

New Jersey

Jersey City: St. Peter's College
South Orange: Seton Hall University

New York

Albany: College of Saint Rose
Bronx: Fordham University, Manhattan College
Buffalo: Canisius College
New Rochelle: College of New Rochelle, Iona College
Poughkeepsie: Marist College
Riverdale: College of Mount Saint Vincent
Rochester: Nazareth College of Rochester
Syracuse: LeMoyne College

Ohio

Cincinnati: Xavier University,
 University of Cincinnati
Columbus: Ohio State University
Dayton: University of Dayton

Oregon

Marylhurst: Marylhurst University
Portland: University of Portland

Pennsylvania

Cresson: Mount Aloysius
Erie: Mercyhurst College
Philadelphia: Chestnut Hill College,
 LaSalle University, Saint Joseph's University
Villanova: Villanova University

Rhode Island

Newport: Salve Regina University

Texas

Austin: Saint Edward's University, University of Texas Newman Center
San Antonio: University of the Incarnate Word,
 Our Lady of the Lake University

Vermont

Colchester: Saint Michael's College

Washington

Lacey: Saint Martin's College
Seattle: Seattle University
Spokane: Gonzaga University

Wisconsin

De Pere: Saint Norbert College
Madison: Edgewood College
Milwaukee: Alverno College, Cardinal Stritch University, Marquette University,
 Mount Mary College

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, or involvement with parents.



Alabama

Montgomery: St. Bede

Arizona

Mesa: Christ the King
Scottsdale: Franciscan Renewal Center
Tucson: St. Cyril of Alexandria, SS. Peter and Paul, St. Pius X, Our Mother of Sorrows, St. Odilia

California

Berkeley: Holy Spirit Parish
Burney: St. Francis of Assisi
Carlsbad: St. Patrick
Claremont: Our Lady of the Assumption
El Cajon: St. Luke
Escondido: St. Timothy
Fremont: St. Joseph - Mission San Jose
Hawthorne: St. Joseph (Spanish)
Hayward: All Saints
LaPuente: St. Martha
Lemon Grove: St. John of the Cross
Long Beach: St. Matthew
Los Angeles: Blessed Sacrament, Christ the King, Mother of Good Counsel, St. Camillus Center-LA USC Medical Center (Spanish), St. Paul the Apostle
North Hollywood: Blessed Sacrament, St. Jane Frances de Chantal, St. Patrick
Oakland: Our Lady of Lourdes
Oceanside: St. Thomas More
Orange: Holy Family Cathedral, Koinoia
Pleasanton: Catholic Community of Pleasanton
Sacramento: St. Francis of Assisi
San Carlos: St. Charles
San Diego: Ascension, Christ the King, San Rafael, St. Jude Shrine
San Francisco: Most Holy Redeemer, Old St. Mary's Cathedral, St. Agnes, St. Dominic
San Jose: St. Julie Billiart, St. Martin of Tours (Emmaus Community)
San Luis Obispo: Old Mission of San Luis Obispo
San Rafael: Church of San Rafael & Mission San Rafael Archangel
Santa Clara: GALA
Santa Cruz: Holy Cross
Santa Monica: St. Monica
Spring Valley: Santa Sophia
Walnut Creek: St. John Vianney
West Hollywood: St. Ambrose, St. Victor
Whittier: St. Mary of the Assumption

Colorado

Arvada: Spirit of Christ
Avon: St. Edward
Colorado Springs: Our Lady of Guadalupe, Sacred Heart
Denver: St. Dominic, Christ the King, Mount Carmel
Fort Collins: Blessed John XXIII
Genessee: St. Francis Cabrini Shrine
Highlands Ranch: Pax Christi
Littleton: St. Francis Cabrini

Connecticut

Hartford: St. Patrick-St. Anthony

District of Columbia

Holy Trinity, St. Aloysius, St. Matthew Cathedral

Florida

Ft. Lauderdale: St. Anthony, St. Maurice
Melbourne: Ascension Parish
Naples: St. John the Evangelist
St. Petersburg: Holy Cross
Winter Haven: St. Matthew

Georgia

Atlanta: Shrine of the Immaculate Conception

Illinois

Berwyn: St. Mary of the Celle
Chicago: Immaculate Conception, St. Clement, St. Gertrude, St. Gregory, St. Peter, St. Sylvester, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Thomas the Apostle
Clarendon Hills: Notre Dame

Country Club Hills: St. Emeric
Evanston: St. Nicholas
Morton Grove: St. Martha
Oak Park: Ascension, St. Catherine of Sienna-St. Lucy
Schaumburg: St. Marcelline

Indiana

Evansville: St. Mary
Indianapolis: St. Thomas Aquinas

Iowa

Iowa City: St. Thomas More

Kentucky

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

Maine

Portland: Sacred Heart-St. Dominic
Saco: Most Holy Trinity

Maryland

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

Massachusetts

Boston: Paulist Center, St. Anthony's Shrine, St. Cecelia
Newton: St. Ignatius
Springfield: Sacred Heart
Worcester: Holy Cross College

Michigan

Ann Arbor: St. Mary Student Parish
Detroit: St. Leo, Christ the King
Kalamazoo: Lambda Catholics
St. Ignace: St. Ignatius Loyola

Minnesota

Minneapolis: St. Frances Cabrini, St. Joan of Arc, St. Stephen

Missouri

Kansas City: Guardian Angels, St. Francis Xavier, St. James
St. Louis: St. Cronan, St. Margaret of Scotland, St. Pius V

Montana

Billings: Holy Rosary

Nebraska

Omaha: Holy Family, Sacred Heart

Nevada

Las Vegas: Christ the King, Guardian Angel Cathedral

New Hampshire

Manchester: Parish of the Transfiguration
Merrimack: St. John Neumann

New Jersey

Clifton: St. Brendan
Lawrenceville: St. Ann
Long Beach Island: St. Francis of Assisi
Trenton Falls: St. Anselm

New Mexico

Albuquerque: Holy Family, Shrine of St. Bernadette
Española: Sacred Heart of Jesus

New York

Baldwinsville: St. Augustine
Bellmore: St. Barnabas the Apostle
Brooklyn: St. Andrew the Apostle, St. Boniface, St. Athanasius, St. Augustine
Deer Park: Ss. Cyril and Methodius
East Islip: St. Mary
Elmira: St. Mary
Fairport: Church of the Assumption
Henrietta: Good Shepherd
Manhattan: Holy Name of Jesus, St. Francis Xavier, St. Paul the Apostle
Melville: St. Elizabeth

Rochester: Blessed Sacrament, St. John the Evangelist (Humboldt St.), St. Mary, St. Monica
Syracuse: St. Andrew the Apostle, St. Lucy
Utica: St. Francis DeSales
Wantagh: St. Frances de Chantal
Westbury: St. Brigid

North Carolina

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

Ohio

Akron: St. Bernard
Cincinnati: St. George-St. Monica
Cleveland: Ascension of Our Lord, St. Malachi, St. Martha
Columbus: St. Thomas More Newman Center
Mentor: St. John Vianney
University Heights: Church of the Gesu
Westlake: St. Ladislav
Wooster: St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception

Oregon

Central Point: Shepherd of the Valley
Portland: Journey and Koinonia Catholic Community, St. Andrew, St. Phillip Neri, St. Vincent dePaul

Pennsylvania

Philadelphia: Old St. Joseph, Old St. Mary, St. John the Evangelist, St. Vincent DePaul
York: St. Joseph

Rhode Island

Providence: St. Francis Chapel
Wickford: St. Bernard

Tennessee

Memphis: Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

Texas

Colleyville: Good Shepherd
Dallas: Holy Trinity
Plano: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Virginia

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

Washington

Pullman: Sacred Heart
Seattle: St. Benedict
Tacoma: St. Leo

Wisconsin

Madison: Our Lady Queen of Peace, St. Benedict Center Sunday Assembly
Menomonee Falls: Good Shepherd
Milwaukee: Good Shepherd, Prince of Peace, Trinity-Guadalupe

Canada

Ottawa: St. Joseph
Toronto: Our Lady of Lourdes

England

London: St. Gregory, Our Lady of the Assumption

To add your faith community to our list, please contact the New Ways Ministry office via info@newwaysministry.org or at 301-277-5674. Thanks!

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Parents of gays, lesbians: stories of love, pain, joy

By Thomas Fox

National Catholic Reporter
November 28, 2008

This is a love story, shaped by sadness, pain and hope, and it began in November 1983 when a 19-year-old boy sat down with his mother on their living room sofa and with tears in his eyes, said, "Mom, I'm lonely. I'm lonely for another man."

As the mother, Mary Ellen Lopata of Rochester, N.Y., tells the story, her son, Jim, wasn't referring to any man in particular. His words, "I'm lonely," simply described his experience of longing for companionship as a gay man. Lopata recounts that it took years from that encounter for her to face and process her pain and years longer before she had the courage to share her story with others. "I was shocked and confused. I cried and cried."

That moment marked the beginning of what for Lopata has been a 25-year journey that has done nothing less than revolutionize her life, and give solace to countless other gay and lesbian children and their parents. Lopata's conversion — and that's what it was — has, by the accounts of many, reshaped the way countless Catholics, and in some cases their bishops, view and receive gay and lesbian persons.

At first Lopata, echoing stories of other Catholic parents of gay and lesbian children, felt isolated. Her son, she said, was the first gay person she had ever known, and just by being himself he challenged the stereotypes she had of gay people.

"The only thing I knew for sure was that I loved my son. Everything else was confusion. Why did this happen? How did it happen? Am I to blame? What does this mean for Jim ... for his family? Is this a sin? What about church? How can we ever tell our friends?"

If knowing other gay persons was a stretch, knowing their parents seemed a further impossibility. She started to research the subject at her local library, being careful not to be too public about the books she was checking out. She said little to outsiders.

In 1987 that Lopata took another step. Her parish decided to hold a workshop on homophobia and homosexuality. She worked behind the scenes to publicize it. "The most important thing that workshop did was to break the silence around homosexuality. I came away from that experience knowing that if I loved my son as I said I did, I could not remain silent. Somewhere along the way, I began to realize what a special gift Jim is to me, to our family, and the whole body of Christ — not in spite of, but because he is gay."

That's the conversion, or core insight, that comes to most parents of gay and lesbian children.

Lopata and her husband, Casey, got increasingly involved in gay and lesbian organizations: New Ways Ministry; Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG); and Dignity.

In 2004, the Lopatas, attempting to fill a gap in the gay and lesbian persons network, formed Fortunate Families, based in Rochester, with the mission of ministering to Catholic parents of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children. It has grown since, becoming a national network that reached out with support and encouragement. As Fortunate Families states: "We connect parents to work for welcome and justice in the church for their lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) children."

Catholic parents of LGBT children are not just grateful for the organization, they are fervently so.

Terri and Rich Dalke, parents of a gay son, wrote in an e-mail: "Fortunate Families supports us as we value and treasure our family story, learn to speak it and share it with our friends, our family and our faith family. ... Casey and Mary Ellen are the lifeblood of Fortunate Families ... prophets of our day."

Deb Word, mother of a gay son, wrote: "Casey and Mary Ellen have great insight and a wealth of resource materials. By keeping in touch with Catholic parents on a monthly basis through their newsletters they remind us that the struggle still goes on in other homes. They remind us of the need to reach out to our church fathers, to tell our stories, to 'put a face' on the issue that our church would sometimes like to sweep under the rug."

Part of the Fortunate Families culture involves encouraging parents to honor, value and share their stories to break the silence of isolation and oppression. "Once parents reach a point of understanding and affirmation of their LGBT daughter or son," Mary Ellen Lopata said, "we encourage them to channel their frustration and anger — which is part of the journey — into constructive action to educate others, especially in the church, about the whole and holy lives of gay and lesbian people, and then to stand together for justice."

"Parents are in a unique position to make a difference. Others may not agree with us, but no one, no institution can deny our experience. It is essential that parents first let those in authority know what it is like for parents of LGBT daughters and sons in the Catholic church; and second, be out-and-proud role models for other parents who may not yet know they have an LGBT daughter or son."

Word says her son is a musician who teaches in urban minority schools. She writes that having a gay child has opened her eyes to other gay children in her parish and diocese who "can't be out with their own parents." She is more "out," she adds, than her son, "because I feel like

I can be an activist in ways a gay school-teacher can't."

The Dalkes say that their son has provided "endless blessings," among them "a deeper level of intimacy and trust among the three of us, an opportunity to face our own homophobia, to become educated, to live our own 'coming out' process as parents, a deepening of our faith, and experiences unlike any others we had ever taken."

"The greatest burden," they added, "was to learn that our son was in so much pain and we didn't know it. That he felt his choices were to come out to us or to commit suicide. He said he felt that by coming out to us he risked losing us forever, due to our active involvement within the Catholic church, basing that on things he read and heard the hierarchy of the church write and speak regarding homosexuality."

Ten years ago, the Dalkes began their own parish ministry called "Outstretched Hands," ministering locally to the parents of gay sons and lesbian daughters. "What we

have learned is that there are families further along in this process and others just beginning."

Fortunate Families encourages Catholic parents of LGBT children to share their stories as a means of breaking their silence. In 2003, Mary Ellen Lopata wrote a book called *Fortunate Families*, a resource book that tells parents' stories.



Members of Fortunate Families join the gay pride parade in Rochester, NY, in July 2007.

To get a wider understanding of the situations of these Catholic parents, Fortunate Families took a survey last year. Through its growing network it sent out forms that were completed by 229 parents reporting on 242 LGBT children. Among the principal findings were these:

- * Parents are significantly more comfortable now than when they initially learned they had a LGBT child.

- * Parents who know at least one other parent of a LGBT person are significantly more comfortable now.

- * Parents with higher comfort levels are more likely to share their stories.

- * Parents said that advocating for justice in society and church were helpful experiences.

- * About half the parents said they were willing to counsel parents of LGBT children.

- * Asked if anything else would be helpful to them, one theme eclipsed all others: Parents want the institutional church to be more accepting of LGBT persons.

The pain and discouragement many Catholic parents of LGBT children feel is difficult to measure from the outside. That's why storytelling has been so important to them...

In October 1997, in part reacting to the seeming lack of compassion toward LGBT Catholics, and getting input from people like the Lopatas, the U.S. bishops issued a 20-page pastoral message called "Always Our Children," aimed at the parents of LGBT children. It is the most compassionate and welcoming statement of its kind. It reads in part:

"Every person has an inherent dignity because he or she is created in God's image. A deep respect for the total person leads the church to hold and teach that sexuality is a gift from God. Being created a male or female person is an essential part of the divine plan, for it is their sexuality — a mysterious blend of spirit and body — that allows human beings to share in God's own creative love and life."

Especially encouraging to the Fortunate Family network of parents were words that described their children as children "of God, gifted and called for a purpose in God's design." The statement was supportive and compassionate, welcoming and embracing, and came under fire from conservatives in the church.

But the Catholic church's continued official ambivalence in its response to gay and lesbian persons became clear in November

2006, when the U.S. bishops voted overwhelmingly in favor of a new document called "Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination." In that declaration they asked Catholics again to welcome gay and lesbian persons into their organizations while using words taken from the 1986 Vatican statement about "disordered" orientations...

To get a sense of how it was received by parents, consider a letter written by a mother of a gay son, sent to the Lopatas about the same time.

"This has been a 10-year journey," the mother wrote. "With the love and respect of those who came before us, we have been able to move from the pain and sadness, loss and grief, to joy, courage and passion, to have a voice in places that our son cannot, to carry the message that God's love is given to every person, that this precious son of ours is the same son that we and God conceived, carried, gave birth to, and had baptized into the Catholic family. Although he feels too tired

to fight for a place at the table, we will spend our last breath carrying the message that God loves each of his precious children and we do too."

In the final analysis, it's difficult to gauge the impact of the Fortunate Families network, the Lopatas say. "Impact is not always tangible. We talk with people in person, or on the phone, or have e-mail exchanges. Sometimes, not often, we hear back from them that our conversation or the resources we had to offer were helpful in healing a relationship between a parent and a child. Sometimes, often years later, we learn that a parent has attained the knowledge, wisdom, confidence and tenacity to start or be a part of a local Catholic parents of LGBT children's group, for faith-sharing and community. Most often we don't know how the story ends."

But the Lopatas are hopeful. "In the 24 years or so that we've been attending and facilitating parents' retreats and days of reflection, the atmosphere has changed significantly. In the early years, Kleenex stock must have done well as most parents cried and expressed their fears. Now, stock of companies dealing in blood pressure pills must be doing well as most parents express anger, primarily at the institutional church, for how it treats their LGBT daughters and sons."

Asked what parents without LGBT children do not know about families with them, the Lopatas were quick to offer a hefty list. On the list were these:

- * Families without LGBT children may think of sexual orientation only as a "sexual issue." In fact, this is not about an "issue," but about who they are.

- * They might not know of all the injustices suffered by LGBT persons. They might not realize their duty to stand up for the rights of all God's children.

- * Families with LGBT members know that "gay rights" are not "special" rights, but equal rights.

- * Parents without LGBT children will never know that unique assurance that God's love, of course, extends to an LGBT child exactly as he or she is — without footnotes or an asterisk. Parents of LGBT persons experience the revelation of God's love in unexpected ways.

- * Families not blessed with LGBT children do not realize that families with known LGBT members are fortunate families. Indeed, if you spend much time with a group of Catholic parents of LGBT persons, a whole new stereotype of gay people emerges — one where gay people are paradigms of love, caring and spirituality.

A love story, indeed.