

BONDINGS

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Bishops approve guidelines on gays

Same-sex attractions 'disordered,' shouldn't be discussed publicly

By Elizabeth A. Perry
The Washington Blade
November 17, 2006

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops this week overwhelmingly approved its latest document on ministry to gays and lesbians, which maintains the church's long-standing teaching that homosexual activity of any kind is sinful.

The bishops decreed that anyone ministering to gay Catholics must strictly adhere to the teaching that same-sex attractions are "disordered" and added that those with a "homosexual inclination" not discuss it publicly.

The vote passed 194 to 37 with one abstention at a three-day meeting in Baltimore.

The bishops engaged in a debate over the draft document "Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care," written by the bishops' Committee on Doctrine.

Francis DeBernardo, director of the gay Catholic ministry group New Ways Ministry, watched the debate unfold on closed-circuit television. DeBernardo is a former Catholic journalist. New Ways Ministry exists to promote justice and theological dialogue between gays and the church.

DeBernardo said of the 37 bishops who rejected the guidelines, the majority of them thought the document was not strong enough, though some opposed the language altogether. Some had reservations about giving up autonomy with regard to what goes on in their respective dioceses.

"They are not infallible teachings," he said. "They are not rules or norms. Only a bishop can determine the norms in a diocese. Those 37 probably are not going to follow them."

Archbishop Peter Rosazza of Hartford, Conn., proposed an amendment to the document to strike the word "disordered."

Some of the opposing votes came

from retired Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Sullivan of Brooklyn and Archbishop George Niederauer of San Francisco, who DeBernardo described as a "strong advocate of gay rights."

"There were bishops who thought it was a harmful document," he said. "They said it wouldn't be helpful and people wouldn't feel welcome."

In a statement to the *Blade*, Bishop Arthur J. Serratelli of Paterson, N.J., chair of the doctrine committee, said the purpose of the guidelines is to "clarify the whole truth of church teaching in a positive light." He

also said it is important to keep in mind the document is designed for the bishops, so they are able to evaluate their pastoral programs and programs of others engaged in ministry to gays and lesbians.

"Secondly, they challenge every person to a deeper understanding of the teaching as a call to holiness and thirdly, to call forth people to worship and to participate in worship in a welcoming fashion," he said.

The 23-page document was begun in 2002 and released last month. The guidelines state that according to church teaching, gays "must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity." It also condemns "all forms of violence, scorn and hatred, however subtle or overt."

Use of the words "disordered" and "inclination" to describe gay Catholics has

troubled some in the church. In summarizing the guidelines for *The Washington Post*, Serratelli said the church teaches that same-sex attractions are considered "disordered" because they do not lead to procreation. He said homosexual "inclination" is not sinful, but that same-gender sexual activity is a sin, morally unacceptable and "[does] not lead to true human happiness."

"The document is certainly flawed right from the title," DeBernardo said. "Using the word 'inclination' rather than orientation shows the bishops do not have a good understanding of homosexuality."

He said the document's use of the term "inclination" represents a change from what

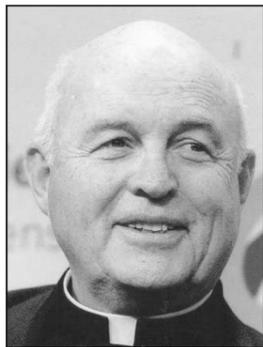
has historically been referred to by the United States bishops as homosexual "orientation." He said the Vatican has always used "inclination."

"It's a word that therapists who believe in reparative therapy use," said DeBernardo. "Because it views homosexuality only as an activity. If you have an inclination, it's a desire for an activity, but if you have an orientation, it implies a direction for relationship. In keeping with this inclination mode, the bishops are emphasizing the fact they view homosexuality only as an activity, not as a relational possibility."

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Archbishop George Niederauer



Bishop Joseph Sullivan

Long Island church pulls info on treating gays

By Sophia Chang
Newsday
Long Island, New York
October 21, 2006

The Curé of Ars church in Merrick has removed copies of a glossy green pamphlet called "Homosexuality & Hope" after receiving complaints about the brochure's assertions that homosexuality was a disorder preventable with psychotherapy.

Homosexuality is considered "intrinsically disordered" in the Roman Catholic Church's catechism. The pamphlet lists possible causes of homosexuality in "at-risk children," including narcissism, alcoholic parents and poor body image.

It also says, "Current clinical therapy shows that there is hope for prevention" and offers information on support groups and research.

Critics said the pamphlet's advice on therapy as a way to prevent homosexuality is not scientifically proven.

The Rev. Charles Mangano, the pastor of the church, said he had first ordered the brochure from the Massachusetts-based Catholic Medical Association in 2005 af-

ter a parishioner called him seeking guidance during a sexual identity crisis. The pamphlet, written by physicians with the association, had been available to parishioners for the past year and a half, Mangano said.

"The content of this pamphlet was intended to offer direction to those who are struggling with their sexual identity and those seeking guidance and conformity with the teaching of the church," Mangano said. Mangano said he decided on Wednesday night to pull about 100 pamphlets from the church's literature racks, with support from the Diocese of Rockville Centre. Mangano said he recently received two complaints about the brochure.

"It was a mixture of theory and Catholic teaching," said Sean Dolan, diocese spokesman. "And the theory in some places is dated."

"I don't think anyone knows what the causes of homosexuality are," he added.

Daniel Araoz, a human sexuality specialist at Long Island University and former

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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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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
Ranchos 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

South Orange: Seton Hall

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

Tarrytown: Marymount College

Ohio

Cincinnati: Xavier University, University of Cincinnati

Columbus: Ohio State University

Dayton: University of Dayton

Pennsylvania

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

San Antonio: University of the Incarnate Word

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

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Long Island church pulls info on treating gays

Jesuit priest, blasted the pamphlet's claims as psychologically unsubstantiated.

"This is a very biased type of propaganda, and it will only create more guilt and confusion in people who are homosexual," he said.

Araoz said he believes people are born homosexual.

The controversy mirrors the larger debate over the church's grappling with homosexuality, an issue that the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is expected to revisit during its conference next month.

"In the Bible, Jesus never mentions homosexuality. What Jesus does mention is love and the need to reach out to the marginalized, to reach out to our brothers and sis-

ters, whoever they may be," said Nicole Soletto of the Catholic church reform group Call to Action, based in Chicago.

According to the pamphlet "Homosexuality & Hope," those with same-sex attraction may have one or more of these in their histories:

"In males, a weak masculine identity and loneliness resulting from a lack of male peer acceptance due to an inability to play team sports requiring eye-hand coordination, such as baseball, soccer and basketball."

"In females, a father who deserted the family or who was angry, critical, distant, selfish or alcoholic; a mother who was emotionally distant, critical or domineering ..."

Welcome gay Catholics, speakers urge

By John L. Allen Jr.

National Catholic Reporter
October 6, 2006

Urging Catholics who minister to homosexuals to regard themselves as part of the ecclesial mainstream, on a par with church-run charities or educational services, retired Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Sullivan of Brooklyn said that gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered persons "have to be brought into full participation in the life of the church."

Sullivan spoke to a conference of the National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian and Gay Ministries, which met at St. Francis College in Brooklyn Sept. 21-24. Offices for ministry to gay Catholics in 14 dioceses, along with 25-30 parishes, were represented at the event.

In his keynote address, Sullivan called the tendency by some church leaders to avoid homosexual Catholics "unkind," arguing that "for a bishop to be an effective teacher, he must be in the mix. He must be like Jesus — with the people."

The heart of Sullivan's argument was that the "ecclesiology of communion," promoted by Pope John Paul II, calls Catholicism not to deny its teaching on homosexuality, but to adopt a pastoral style toward gays and lesbians that is "accepting, welcoming, encouraging, one that does not reject, define and exclude, but that enables and encourages participation."

Sullivan, 76, is former executive director of Catholic Charities as well as vice president of its board of trustees, and former chair of the Social Development and World Peace Department of the U.S. bishops. In the latter capacity, Sullivan was involved with the bishops' efforts in the 1980s to produce major teaching documents on the economy and on war and peace.

Sullivan cited those pastoral letters as examples of teaching rooted in dialogue with people's concerns.

Referring to church documents on homosexuality that have generated controversy, Sullivan said sometimes the problem is one of language. "Often people object not to the content of doctrine, but to the fact that it's not sensitively articulated," he said. "They find difficulty with the language, which might be appropriate in a classroom but not in the public forum."

"That's something we have to learn as bishops," Sullivan said, conceding that "often we're not skilled communicators."

Sullivan referred to a pastoral letter on homosexuality by former Bishop Francis Mugavero of Brooklyn in the 1970s, which called for "a special degree of pastoral understanding and care" for gays and lesbians. Sullivan argued that the approach of

Mugavero, known as "the bishop of charity," stood in contrast to the experience of the New York archdiocese, where he said annual debates over the St. Patrick's Day Parade and other issues have generated an adversarial relationship between the church and the gay community. Jesuit Fr. J.A. Loftus, director of the Jesuit Urban Center in Boston and a psychologist in private practice, argued that Paul's message to early Christians pivoted on the definitive rejection of "purity codes," a point he said with special meaning for homosexual Catholics.

"No one has the power to call you unclean from the outside," Loftus said. "There are no purity codes in our community, however carefully couched in medieval philosophical language."

"In our community," Loftus said, "nobody is really queer ... or maybe everybody is a little queer."

Fr. Jim Schexnayder, cofounder of the National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian and Gay Ministries, told *NCR* that the last five years have seen slow and uneven growth in the number of diocesan and parish-based ministries aimed at homosexual Catholics. He said that more than 50 dioceses were represented at the conference, although he acknowledged that a handful of dioceses have recently closed offices for gays and lesbians.

The Brooklyn diocese was not officially a cosponsor of the conference, but Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio sent a letter welcoming participants, and affirming their

desire "to live the Gospel of Christ faithfully and without compromise."

Fr. Bernard Turner of the Albany, N.Y., diocese, who serves as the association's president, said it had not been particularly hard-hit by the November 2005 Vatican document banning the admission of men with "deep-seated homosexual tendencies" to Catholic seminaries.

"Some individuals may have said, 'This is the last straw,'" Turner said. "There's also a concern about the morale of gay priests, many of whom feel their ministry has been discredited by that document."

Schexnayder said he was unaware of any programming or ministry to gay Catholics closing down in the wake of the document. ☒

Book Review

Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics

By Margaret A. Farley

Continuum, 336 pp., \$29.95

Reviewed by Rev. Paul K. Thomas

Margaret Farley, a Sister of Mercy and professor of Christian ethics at Yale Divinity School, has authored or edited five previous books, including *Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition*. Her latest and long-awaited book *Just Love* is a thoughtful reexamination of "justice in loving" within the sexual sphere, including lesbian/gay relationships. Subtitled *A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*, the new work offers a fundamental but updated set of ethical principles, based on well-articulated norms of justice.

After presenting helpful introductory material, Farley meticulously scrutinizes historical perspectives and cross-cultural differences with regard to sexual ethics. She next explores current meanings of human sexuality and provides several further preliminary considerations, such as methods and sources, but especially discussing the relation of justice to sex and love.

The author then carefully proposes her own central framework of seven ethical norms for contemporary Christian sexual morality. After extensive and insightful explications of each bottom-line requirement, she inserts a clear diagram of all the sometimes overlapping norms (p. 231) which can be listed briefly as follows: No harm, Free consent, Mutuality, Equality, Commitment, Fruitfulness, and Social justice, the latter entailing respect from the wider community as to rights and protection.

In her concluding chapter the ethicist looks at three patterns of relationship in-

volving human sexuality and reflects upon them in light of her proposed framework. These are indeed the contexts for *just love*, for justice in loving: Marriage and Family, Same-Sex Relationships, and Divorce and Remarriage.

Farley includes the LGBT community from the first page of her reflections. In



Margaret Farley, RSM

expounding her specific framework for sexual morality, she clearly indicates that the justice ethic for homosexual relationships is the same as for heterosexual ones (pp. 272, 288).

The professor therefore rightly criticizes Vatican inconsistency in "relativizing" procreative obligations for heterosexual persons — for example in allowing contraceptive rhythm — but then "absolutizing" them in every conceivable instance for homosexual individuals (p. 279). In fact, concerning her aforementioned norm of Fruit-

fulness, she states that objections to gay/lesbian relationships as non-procreative "represent either a failure of imagination or a narrowness of experience" (p. 290). Similarly, she submits some very logical observations with regard to the religious contention that homosexual unions will weaken heterosexual marriage: "It is difficult to make sense of this reasoning, especially since the churches do not mount campaigns against laws" recognizing "the arguably greater threat of divorce" and because "the possibility of gay marriage" might "actually reinforce the value of commitment" for everyone (pp. 293-4).

In her section on Same-Sex Relationships, the author revisits four decisive sources for Christian ethical insight and moral discernment, namely, Scripture, tradition, secular disciplines (such as biology and psychology), and contemporary experiences of human sexuality. She writes that, "given the arguable inconclusiveness" of the first three regarding homosexuality, "concrete experience becomes a determining source on this issue" (p. 287; cf. pp. 277, 280, 285-6). She immediately adds that "we do have clear and profound testimonies...from women and men of integrity...to the intrinsic goodness of same-sex loves...in sustaining human well-being..." (pp. 287-8).

Farley's book can be recommended for scholar and novice alike. The work is eminently readable, despite the profundity of its subject matter. It is extensively documented, with clarifying and often lengthy footnotes, which the average person may simply ignore. A bibliography has not been provided, but nearly 300 works are cited in the explanatory notes. ☒

Gay theology pioneer trusts

By Robert J. McClory
National Catholic Reporter
November 11, 2005

When *The Church and Homosexuality* was published in November 1976, its author, Jesuit Fr. John J. McNeill, became an instant celebrity. A front-page story in *The New York Times* told about the Jesuit theologian who had openly challenged the Catholic church on one of its most closely held doctrines. A few days later McNeill was on NBC's "Today Show," where he was interviewed by a nervous and uncomfortable Tom Brokaw (his first day as host). Stories quickly followed in *Newsweek*, *TIME* and newspapers around the country, and McNeill was a guest on "The Phil Donahue Show." During the next year as the McNeill book tour hit some 20 cities, the priest was portrayed in the press as a radical innovator, and the infant Catholic gay rights movement embraced him as a credible voice and leader.

Now, almost 29 years later, the buzz associated with McNeill has still not entirely dissipated. At the national convention of DignityUSA in Philadelphia last July, McNeill got two standing ovations before he even said a word. One panelist choked with emotion as he told of coming by accident on *The Church and Homosexuality* in the library of the college where he was a student. Profoundly worried about his own orientation, he read the book hidden inside another, lest fellow students would see. "Fr. McNeill," he said, "you saved my life!"

Indeed, life-saving is a fairly common topic when gay Catholics discuss McNeill's influence. Kevin Heffernan, a leader of the Gay and Lesbian Alumni/ae of the University of Notre Dame and St. Mary's College, said, "This guy saved my life, made me realize I can be OK as a gay man and still have faith. His book made so much sense to me when I was in the seminary figuring out who I really was." In early October, Heffernan's alumni group presented McNeill with its Thomas A. Dooley Award at a ceremony in Chicago.

"He stands as a pillar of gay theology," said Jim Bussen, a former national president of DignityUSA. "He was the groundbreaker, the first to give gay folks a legitimate theological voice. Everything that has happened since was built on him."

Like an elderly couple

He is 80 years old now and not as active as he once was. McNeill and his partner of nearly 40 years, Charles Chiarelli, live in a trailer park in Hollywood, Fla. Truth be told, it is the AAA of trailer parks — nicely built, individually-styled "manufactured homes," many with carports and screened porches, spread out along winding streets. A series of small strokes and a touch of diabetes have slowed him down; he walks with a cane and his memory for names and dates isn't as sharp as it once was. But his jaw is as square as ever and his eyes are clear. Seated in the living room of their home, McNeill and Chiarelli seem like any elderly couple, at ease and comfortable in their life together. Chiarelli, 70, a retired electrical engineer, is the junior partner, some-

times assisting McNeill as he stands up, getting books and documents from another room when requested, providing an elusive name or date when needed. "Charlie," says McNeill, "what year did we move down here?"

"September 2001," says Chiarelli, "right after 9/11, remember?"

McNeill is eager to share his latest views on the church, theology and the state of the gay rights movement. Once he starts, it's hard to stop him. "I'm really excited about what is going on," he says. To explain this, he cites Jesus' statement at the Last Supper: "It is much better for you that I go. If I fail to go, the Paraclete will never come to you, whereas if I go, I will send him to you . . . and he will guide you into all truth."

"As I see it," says McNeill, "the whole trajectory of the church is toward the era of the Spirit, when each will know the truth in his heart and there will be no need for extrinsic authority."

He is fascinated with the teaching of Joachim of Fiore, a 12th-century visionary who spoke of three periods in Christian history: the era of the Father, that is, the period of the Old Testament; the era of the Son, during which the institutional church was developing; and the coming era of the Holy Spirit. "I think we're moving into that era," he said, and he sees the gay community as the vanguard. "By being rejected by church leadership, gays and lesbians have had to ask God directly if they can live authentic Christian lives, and they are getting [positive] answers. They've come to see church teaching on homosexuality as destroying their self-image, so they've had to take direct access to God, based on prayer, spirituality and freedom of conscience."

But isn't direct access the Protestant approach, and doesn't this era of the Spirit he's advocating mean the end of Catholicism? "Not at all," says McNeill. "This is where we see the shrewdness of the Holy Spirit. Members of Dignity and other gay Catholics are not leaving the church. They're staying. They value the church, the Mass, the sacraments. There will of course be leaders, priests and bishops in the new church. The people will appoint them, and the one duty of leaders will be to listen. You know, it's already happening all over the world." He sees the priest shortage as one more example of "God's shrewdness," because laity are beginning to name their own leaders, empowering them to do what must be done to preserve the faith.

His life has taken a winding, somewhat mystifying path since he was growing up in Buffalo, N.Y. He was the youngest of five siblings — four brothers and a sister — of first-generation Irish parents. His only clear memory of his mother was the day she was taken to the hospital where she would soon die. He was 4 years old, and he remembers hearing her say, "What's going to happen to my babies?" The wake was held in the family home on Christmas in 1929. McNeill says he mistook the looks of sympathy from relatives and friends as accusations, as though he were somehow responsible for his

potato one day. When McNeill tried to return a gesture of thanks, the man merely made the sign of the cross. In his autobiography, *Both Feet Firmly Planted in Midair*, McNeill wrote, "Here was a man willing to risk his life to feed me, a stranger, and he found that courage and his freedom from fear in his religious faith. I date my vocation to the priesthood from that moment. My constant prayer from then on was that God would grant me the courage to never be ruled by fear."

After being liberated by allied forces and discharged from the service, he attended Canisius College in Buffalo, N.Y., and entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1948. He believed religious life would resolve his problems and questions. As a philosophy student, he found in Maurice Blondel a 19th-century pre-existentialist, a kindred spirit. Blondel, who had his own run-ins with the church, fastened on a text from St. John's Gospel: "One who does the truth comes to the light." He taught that "doing" may be a more important way of knowing than intellectual exploration — that freely chosen action can unite the human spirit with the divine spirit; thus one who loves knows God because God is love. Blondel's approach became the subject of McNeill's thesis, his first published book, and it would become the basis for much of his own doing and thinking later in life.

Ordained in 1959, he quickly discovered that the grace of the priesthood did not stem his sexual drive, and while continuing his studies in Europe, he began acting out his homosexual fantasies. "I searched out sexual encounters," he says, "and became completely demoralized." One day in Paris on the banks of the Seine, he found himself ready to jump into the river and end it all but said he was caught short by a sudden "deep trust," a sense that God was hearing his prayer, "that he would remain close to me, that he would somehow bring good out of this." His bouts with self-hatred, shame and guilt would continue for years as he taught at LeMoyné College in New York.

Then on New Year's Eve 1965 he met Charles Chiarelli in a New York bar. The two have been together as lovers and partners ever since, even though McNeill continued functioning as a Jesuit priest for the next 23 years. Today McNeill says there are some things he is sorry about in his life, but not his alliance with Chiarelli, nor the deception that the breaking of his vows involved. "I prayed about this relationship for a long time," he said, "and I finally got assurance that I had God's approval. If an action is in accordance with the divine will, I believe you will know peace and joy in pursuing it. If something is not in accordance with the divine will, you will experience desolation and unhappiness." Peace and joy, he explained, are all he has known in his 40 years with Chiarelli.

However, he acknowledges that the decision came with a price. After he admitted his own homosexual orientation in the Brokaw interview (though he denied he was sexually active at the time), his



John McNeill and Charles Chiarelli

mother's death. For many years after he would relate to God in fear, as the one who punished him by taking away his mother. His father, a construction worker on Erie Canal projects, soon married his wife's sister, Katie, though they agreed to live as brother and sister, in keeping with an old Irish tradition, says McNeill. His father, he says grew more distant in time, and his stepmother seemed always angry.

As he got older, McNeill struggled with sexual fantasies and questions about his own sexual orientation, all of which made him even more fearful of the God preached at school and in Sunday sermons. In 1942, he enlisted in the Army in what he describes as a government-sponsored hoax to nab 17-year-olds like himself with promises of a "specialized education program."

On the frontlines

His education turned out to be on the frontlines of battle in 1944 near the French city of Metz, where he and his companions were captured by the German army. Thus began five months of horror as a prisoner of war, which saw him nearly die of starvation and abuse. But a single incident during that time changed his life, he said. A European slave laborer, observing McNeill's failing condition, threw him a

'God's shrewdness'

relationship with his three brothers, all now deceased, remained strained; only his sister, a Franciscan nun, offered him prayers and support until her own death. The Jesuit order has essentially exiled him, he said, not acknowledging him as a former member of the order or inviting him to occasional gatherings for those who left or were forced to leave. "I'm sure it's because of all those years when I was under a vow of celibacy and seen as living as a hypocrite," he said.

Ironically, those were the years of intense activity when McNeill, teaching for a time at the Jesuits' Woodstock Seminary, began an in-depth study of homosexuality, especially what psychologists, psychiatrists and sociologists were saying about it. He noted how frequently some experts cited the anger and shame gays and lesbians directed at themselves and how often their relationships with others proved unsatisfying and transitory. Could it be, he wondered, that the shame and anger stemmed from the homophobic messages these people were receiving from church and society? Might it not also be that, besides the troubled gays who were seeking out professional help, there existed a whole subculture of well-adjusted gays about whom the social scientists knew little because they had no need of therapy? He also investigated what scripture scholars, church historians and moral theologians had written about the subject, and he discovered a great divide between traditional assumptions and what modern experts were saying. He came to think the foundations of church and society's opposition to homosexual love were not only outmoded but had been wrong from the beginning.

In the spirit of Blondel, he combined action with research and began to counsel gay and lesbian clients and became involved in the early organizing of the Catholic Dignity movement. In 1970 he published three articles titled, "The Christian Male Homosexual" in the conservative *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*. They urged change in the traditional counseling approach with gays, questioned whether conversion to heterosexuality was practical or even possible, and suggested that, under certain circumstances, homosexual relations could be acceptable as a lesser evil than promiscuity.

Hundreds of calls and letters

McNeill was astonished at the hundreds of calls and letters of support he received. Within Catholic circles the series represented an apparently welcome break in the barrier of absolute condemnation. Over the next three years more questions and criticism of church teaching appeared in publications like *The Thomist*, *Commonweal* and the *Catholic World* and in a book by Fr. Charles Curran, *Catholic Moral Theology in Dialogue*. By 1972 McNeill had his own book manuscript ready, and after his speech at the first national convention of Dignity ran in *NCR*, he got an offer from Sheed & Ward to publish *The Church and the Homosexual*.

At that point the magisterium seemed to become aware of where all this was going. The Jesuit

general, Fr. Pedro Arrupe, ordered McNeill not to publish anything in the popular press and not to address gay groups until further notice. A Jesuit commission, including Jesuit Frs. Avery Dulles and Richard McCormack, among others, studied the manuscript and sent their findings to Arrupe. Said McNeill, "I was given to understand that although the commission didn't necessarily agree with all my conclusions, they did find it a serious and scholarly work worthy of publication."

Arrupe asked to review a copy for his own personal judgment. After further delay, including another Jesuit expert review, Arrupe transferred final authorization to publish to the New York Jesuit provincial, provided McNeill made some clarifications in the work.

Then in early January 1976 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued "A Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics." In the document, the Vatican noted for the first time a distinction between "heterosexuals who indulge in homosexual acts and others who share in a permanent homosexual condition." It labeled such a permanent condition "pathological," adding there could never be a pastoral justification of gay activity.

McNeill feared his efforts had bottomed out, but just 13 days after the Vatican declaration, his provincial granted his book an *imprimi potest*, that is, official permission to publish.

McNeill says he wanted the book to read "like a legal brief," and it does — except it's a lot easier to read. It is tight, consistent, devoid of rhetoric, accusation or anger. Citing a wide range of authorities both for and against his positions, McNeill lays out his case: "Given 1) the uncertainty of clear scriptural prohibition, 2) the questionable basis of the traditional condemnation in moral philosophy and moral theology, 3) the emergence of new data, which upset many traditional assumptions, and 4) controversies among psychologists and psychiatrists concerning theory, etiology and treatment . . . there obviously is a need to open up anew the question of the moral standing of homosexual activity and homosexual relationships for public debate."

According to Charles Curran, "Of all those theologians who have written on the subject since, McNeill through this book is most identified with an acceptance of the moral goodness of homosexual acts within committed relationships. His thinking has come to be shared by many Catholic moral theologians. Among gay persons themselves, his effect is to say you can be who you are and still be a Roman

Catholic."

A little more than a year after publication, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in a letter to Arrupe, ordered the *imprimi potest* removed from future editions. McNeill was ordered henceforth "not to speak on homosexuality and sexual ethics."

He was gravely disappointed but not crushed. He decided the silencing order could be interpreted that he could talk on homosexuality as long as he did not touch sexual ethics and vice versa. He operated for the next eight years on what some colleagues, he said, called this "Machiavellian approach."

While waiting for a decision on the book, McNeill had earned a degree in psychotherapy from the Institutes of Religion and Health in New York. Soon after, he began teaching at the school, developed his own professional practice, cofounded the New York Dignity chapter and gave regular retreats to gays and lesbians. In the 1980s he also worked in a ministry to homeless AIDS patients in Harlem with Franciscan Fr. Mychal Judge, the New York fire chaplain who died at the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001.

In 1986, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, issued a document on the pastoral care of gays. The document called the gay orientation itself "an objective disorder" and signaled a new Vatican crackdown on theologians who publicly taught otherwise. Meanwhile, the Jesuit general, Peter Hans Kolvenbach, came to New York and met for two hours with McNeill, explaining that his public ministry was incompatible with the Jesuit mission and, if he persisted in it, he would be expelled from the order.

Seeing the handwriting on the wall, McNeill announced he could not in conscience abandon what he had begun. More than a year later, his dismissal became official as the New York provincial, in the presence of two witnesses, read to McNeill (in English and Latin) the document of expulsion. He was not laicized, however, so he considers himself still a priest and "a Jesuit in exile."

As it turned out, his departure from the order broadened his ministry beyond the Catholic church, and he has since written two books dealing with the psychology and spirituality of anyone who is gay and Christian: *Taking a Chance on God* and *Freedom, Glorious Freedom*, in addition to his autobiography. He has another manuscript but so far has not

found a publisher. "I've been told it's too Catholic and too scholarly," he says.

McNeill is hopeful, almost buoyant about the future. He sees gay marriage as "a new paradigm" that will in time rescue straight marriages from their present dysfunctional status in modern society. "God created male and female as equals," he notes, "but Western culture has been based on the superiority of the male, the inferiority of the woman, and therefore a fundamental inequality in the relationship." The male is expected to suppress his female qualities and talents, and the female is expected to suppress her male qualities, he explains, inevitably leading to anger, a disruption of sexual intimacy and often a breakup of the union. Gay unions, on the other hand, are based on the full equality of the couple, says McNeill, leaving the partners free to express their male and female sides. The example of stable gay unions, he predicts, will have a salutary effect on all marriages, gay and heterosexual.

He sees legislative efforts to ban gay marriages as a "last gasp" of an outmoded system. Nor does he fear that the priest abuse scandal will raise a determined outcry against gays. "Who knows if abusive priests are gay or heterosexual?" he says. "Abusers are 'self-hating, disturbed people' who don't seek out healthy relationships; they abuse whoever is available. And if the pope issues a letter banning gays from entering seminaries, McNeill is convinced he will accelerate 'the era of the Holy Spirit,' in which clergy and laity will more and more look directly to God for answers and dismiss oppressive, extrinsic authority. 'Just another sign of God's shrewdness,' he explains.

Despite age and infirmity, McNeill is not ready to fully retire. He is on the road at least twice a month giving talks, attending conferences, receiving awards. Chiarelli accompanies him. "I sort of see myself as Sancho these days," says Chiarelli, who has himself survived bypass heart surgery but is more mobile than his partner.

If there is anyone in the wings to replace McNeill when the time comes, that person could be Daniel Helminiak, a 62-year-old psychotherapist and professor of psychology at the University of West Georgia. Helminiak, author of *What the Bible Really Says About Sexuality*, is convinced the old biblical, theological, and psychological disputes have now been resolved in favor of gay and lesbian relationships; he calls the evidence "incontrovertible." The next step, he said, is "political," that is, getting the Vatican to change its stance. He suspects this will be a long struggle. Meanwhile, he is concerned about helping gays "live with a profound spirituality," and he thinks Catholicism, "with its tradition of grace building on nature" may be better equipped to do this than those strains of Protestantism that are obsessed with the depravity of human nature.

Helminiak says McNeill's legacy is assured. "He broke the dam," he says, and the Catholic approach to sexuality has been forever changed. ❖

"As I see it," says McNeill, "the whole trajectory of the church is toward the era of the Spirit, when each will know the truth in his heart and there will be no need for extrinsic authority."

International News

Catholic leaders clash over anti-gay stance of 'rogue bishop'

By Eddie Barnes
Scotland on Sunday
October 29, 2006

The leaders of the Catholic Church in Scotland have descended into an extraordinary public spat over claims by a "rogue bishop" that they do not speak out enough against homosexuality.

In an unprecedented move, the Church's two most senior clerics, Cardinal Keith O'Brien and Archbishop Mario Conti, have moved publicly to rebuff a third bishop, Joseph Devine of Motherwell, after he claimed the Church was embarking on "a policy of appeasement."

Devine wrote in a letter last week that he condemned the actions of a senior Church aide who, he claimed, had failed to express opposition to plans to allow gay

couples to adopt.

The new laws mean that homosexual men and women who have entered a civil partnership can now adopt as a couple. Previously, they were only allowed to adopt on their own.

Devine claimed that John Deighan, the Church's liaison officer at Holyrood, and his fellow Catholic leaders had been effectively bought off by the Scottish Executive on the matter. "They feared there would be a serious risk of the Executive reneging on its intimation to exempt the two Scottish Catholic adoption agencies from the requirements of the Adoption bill, should the Church put the Executive on the rack in the media," he said. "But I was not prepared to be part of this policy of appeasement."

The letter triggered open turmoil in the Church last week, with Church leaders ex-

pressing fury at both Devine and his spokesman Gerry O'Brien.

Aides to Cardinal O'Brien and Conti have privately voiced increasing concern over the tone of Devine's public pronouncements in recent months. He described the Labour-led Scottish Executive as "moral vandals" and "politically correct zealots", prompting complaints from Labour MSPs that he and Gerry O'Brien, a former Tory spin doctor, have been mounting a politically motivated campaign.

Cardinal O'Brien and Conti have kept their silence up until this week, but Devine's new letter appears to have snapped their patience. They and Bishop Ian Murray of Argyll and the Isles issued a public statement, backing Deighan and effectively cutting off Devine.

It is thought to represent the first time that the Church's bishops have ever openly fallen out. The "Bishops' Conference" - which heads the Church in Scotland - is usually renowned for its unanimity.

The statement declares: "Mr John Deighan enjoys the full support of the [Bishops'] Conference to whom he continues to provide an informed and valuable service. This work, together with the efforts of individual bishops, has ensured that relations with the Scottish Executive and the

Scottish Parliament remain constructive and cordial."

It added: "While differences exist between Scotland's Catholic bishops and the Scottish Executive on a number of policy areas it is the intention of the Bishops' Conference to maintain a position of constructive engagement with Scotland's political institutions at every level."

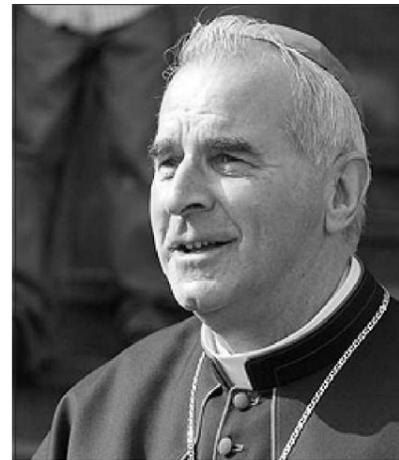
One senior Church source added: "This is probably the first time the Scottish hierarchy has contradicted a bishop. His fellow bishops are

concerned about the spate of press releases coming from the Diocese. We are dealing with a rogue bishop and a rogue press officer."

The row leaves the Church facing a split at its highest ranks and the potential for a damaging stand-off. As a bishop, Devine is entitled to act as he sees fit within his Diocese, with his fellow bishops entirely powerless to depose him.

Last year he declared that being openly gay would not be "compatible" with being a teacher in a Catholic school.

Gerry O'Brien, spokesman for 69-year-old Devine who has been Bishop of Motherwell for 26 years, last night refused to comment on whether he had changed his view on the matter. Deighan also declined to comment on the row. ❧



Cardinal Keith O'Brien

Mexico City Recognizing Gay Civil Unions

Associated Press
November 17, 2006

Legislation recognizing gay civil unions in the Mexican capital was published in the official gazette on Thursday, making it the first such law in the history of the conservative, predominantly Roman Catholic country.

The law does not legalize gay marriage but allows same-sex couples living in Mexico City to register civil unions with authorities, granting them inheritance rights and other benefits typically given to spouses.

City legislature passed the law last week and it was signed on Monday by Mexico City Mayor Alejandro Encinas. However it will not take effect for 120 days.

At least one conservative non-governmental group said it was considering seeking a court injunction against the measure.

The measure has been severely criticized by the Catholic Church and conservative groups in the country, which is 90 percent Catholic. The Mexican Council of Bishops has said the law is the first step toward legalizing gay marriage and adoption by gays. The conservative National Parents Union called it "aberrant."

While homosexuality is still taboo in many rural parts of Latin America, the region's urban areas are becoming more tolerant. Mexico City joins the Argentine capital of Buenos Aires and the southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul in legalizing same-sex civil unions.

At the national level, lawmakers in Costa Rica and Colombia have debated, but not passed, similar measures.

The Mexico City assembly passed the measure by a vote of 43-17, with all the no-votes coming from the conservative National Action Party of President Vicente Fox and President-elect Felipe Calderon. The party is known for its opposition to abortion and support for traditional families. ❧

Gay couples allowed to register

Reuters
December 7, 2006

Padua became the first Italian city to allow unmarried heterosexual couples and homosexual couples to register formally as families, provoking the wrath of the Vatican and the political right. While the decision did not authorize legal marriage for the couples, the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* condemned the move and branded its supporters "hypocrites." ❧

Gay rights activists protest pope's visit to Germany

Washington Blade
September 15, 2006

Gay activists quietly protested against Bavarian-born Pope Benedict XVI's anti-gay policies on Sept. 8, the day before his arrival in Germany for a six-day visit. A dozen gay rights activists held signs that read "For tolerance," "Against discrimination" and "We want acceptance, not empathy," the *Deutsche-Welle* news agency reported. Before becoming pope, then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger called gay marriage the "legalization of evil," a statement that especially outraged many of the protesters. "I think it's irresponsible that he adds fuel

to the fire," said Ulrike Gehrig, pointing to the violence many gays still face in many countries around the world, including eastern Europe, the German news agency reported. On the same day, Benedict repeated from the Vatican his opposition to gay marriage and abortion in a toughly worded address to visiting bishops from Canada. "In the name of 'tolerance' your country has had to endure the folly of the redefinition of spouse, and in the name of 'freedom of choice' it is confronted with the daily destruction of unborn children," the pope said. ❧

continued from page 1

Bishops approve guidelines on gays

According to the guidelines, gay Catholics who are living celibate lives are free to take active roles in their faith communities so long as their behavior does not violate church teaching. Those who minister to gays may not advocate positions or belong to groups that conflict with church teaching. The document also reaffirms the church's rejection of gay adoptions, civil unions and same-sex marriages. The one concession is that children of same-sex couples are not to be refused baptism in the hope they will be raised Catholic.

Stephen McDonnell is a gay Catholic and president of the board of directors for Dignity/Washington, the local chapter of the national organization for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Catholics. He was raised Catholic, entered the seminary when he was 14 and ordained a diocesan priest in 1989.

He said he left the priesthood because he was not able to integrate his sexual orientation with his vocation. He became a social worker and specializes in addiction and trauma counseling and lives with his partner of three years.

McDonnell still considers himself a priest and celebrates Mass for Dignity groups in Washington and Virginia.

He said despite the negative reception the guidelines have received, there is a glimmer of hope because after years of silence the church is reaching out to gays and lesbians.

"From the late 1980s onward there has been this shunning and silencing of gay and lesbian people," he said. "Dignity chapters were shut down by order of the bishops starting with New York and continuing throughout the country. In the last 15 years we've been treated to silence."

McDonnell added that the guidelines are indicative of the bishops' refusal to engage with gays and lesbians in the pews.

"This document comes out of philosophical precepts that do not match our experience," he said. "It is medieval theology that is not based on people's experience or what we know to be true in the mental health profession."

DeBernardo said the guidelines are not the final word on the issue. He said although there was discussion at the meeting about whether or not sexually active gay Catholics should receive Communion, it was informal discussion and was not put to any kind of vote. He encouraged gay and lesbian Catholics to "keep showing up and sharing the faith journey." ❖



Stephen McDonnell

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
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
Hawthorne: St. Joseph (Spanish)
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
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

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)
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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
Boulder: St. Thomas Aquinas
Colorado Springs: Our Lady of Guadalupe
Denver: Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, St. Dominic

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
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, Cathedral of the Assumption, St. William

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: Jesuit Urban Center, Paulist Center, St. Anthony's Shrine

Newton: Our Lady Help of Christians
Sharon: Our Lady of Sorrows
Worcester: Holy Cross College

Michigan

Detroit: St. Leo
Kalamazoo: Lambda Catholics
St. Ignace: St. Ignatius Loyola

Minnesota

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

Missouri

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

Nebraska

Omaha: Holy Family, Sacred Heart

Nevada

Las Vegas: Christ the King, Guardian Angel Cathedral

New Hampshire

Merrimack: St. John Neumann
Pelham: St. Patrick

New Jersey

Clifton: St. Brendan
Lawrenceville: St. Ann
Trenton Falls: St. Anselm

New Mexico

Albuquerque: Holy Family
Española: Sacred Heart of Jesus

New York

Baldwinsville: St. Augustine
Bellmore: St. Barnabas the Apostle
Brooklyn: St. Andrew the Apostle, St. Boniface
Deer Park: Ss. Cyril and Methodius
East Islip: St. Mary
Elmira: St. Mary
Fairport: Church of the Assumption
Henrietta: Good Shepherd
Long Island: Sacred Heart
Manhattan: Holy Name of Jesus, St. Francis Xavier, St. Paul the Apostle
Melville: St. Elizabeth
Merrick: Sacred Heart
Rochester: Blessed Sacrament, St. John the Evangelist (Humboldt St.), St. Mary, St. Monica
Syracuse: St. Andrew the Apostle
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
Cleveland: Ascension of Our Lord, St. Malachi, St. Martha
Mentor: St. John Vianney
University Heights: Church of the Gesu
Westlake: St. Ladislav
Wooster: St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception

Oregon

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

Seattle: St. Benedict
Tacoma: St. Leo

West Virginia

Shepherdstown: St. Agnes

Wisconsin

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

Canada

Toronto: Our Lady of Lourdes

School dips into delicate dogma

Students at Jesuit High are spearheading a campaign on tolerance that stretches to gays

By Amy Hsuan

The Oregonian

November 26, 2006

Gentle reminders of faith and religion touch students across Jesuit High School's campus. Each classroom holds a palm-sized crucifix. A cross towers high from the school's auditorium.

Yet, amid the Catholic traditions at this private Beaverton high school, a new openness spurs discussion about a once-quiet matter.

Students this year are on a mission to spread a message of tolerance, a mantra of Jesuit educators. They're launching "Crusade for Respect," a campuswide initiative they hope will open doors for students of different backgrounds.

And, by bringing gays into the conversation, school leaders are taking a bold step in stretching long-held Catholic beliefs. As part of the yearlong program, school leaders plan to stage "The Laramie Project" next spring, a controversial play about the murder of a gay college student.

"We've been guilty of stifling conversations in the past," school President John Gladstone said. "But we want students to say, 'It's OK to talk about it. It's OK to be different, no matter what your sexual identity or socioeconomic background is. You don't have to hide who you are.'"

The push for greater dialogue comes as the nation's Roman Catholic leaders reaffirm policies on gay outreach, discouraging homosexuals from making "general public self-disclosures" within their churches. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops recently adopted new guidelines, attempting to support gay members while upholding bans on same-sex marriage.

Across the country, Catholic schools and universities have struggled to balance religious values with educational ones. Education increasingly trumps tradition in a changing society, said the Rev. John Whitney, provincial superior of Jesuits of the Northwest.

"It's the difference between teaching and preaching," Whitney said. "They're not opposed to each other; it's just a different context. There's a whole need for diversity in our population and to face these issues without fear, and that's what Jesuit High is trying to do."

At Jesuit, school and student leaders welcome a discourse some public schools have shied from. School leaders say their support for "The Laramie Project" reflects Catholic teachings of love and tolerance. The play, they say, is less about homosexuality than about understanding differences.

"We want kids to be familiar with the world they're going into," Gladstone said. "We really expect kids to be risk takers while staying within the Catholic Church. We are not saying kids who are homosexual or heterosexual should act on it. But kids should accept what different people bring to society."

Over the past year, Jesuit High School students and administrators have flexed the mold of a tradition-bound Catholic school.

"There's a public perception out there that Catholic schools are all knee-high socks and blaz-

ers," said senior Maddy Bennett, student body president. "We're not in line with those rigid stereotypes."

This year, a wide range of personal and professional backgrounds drew nine new Board of Trustees members to the helm. For the first time in the school's 50 years, the diversity director went full time. Jesuit High's minority student count climbed to an all-time high along with its number of non-Catholic students and staff.

The shifts are an effort to mirror the outside community, Gladstone said, though there's room for improvement.

"We're not a perfect place," he said. "(The Crusade for Respect) is a milestone for us in teaching how important it is to embrace racial and ethnic differences, gender identities, even different learning styles."

Not everyone is on the same page when it comes to the topic of homosexuality, Gladstone said. But, students and staff overwhelmingly agree the school should be a haven as young people form their identities.

"In some ways, it's safer here than other places," said Beth Fagan, a senior drama club leader. "We're not afraid to look at things differently."

School leaders hope the Crusade for Respect will foster understanding of a changing world. The program is the brainchild of a handful of students who wanted to replicate intense classroom debates on a campuswide level.

"We've all heard racial and homophobic remarks in the hallways," said senior Salam Tessema, who leads the school's Unity Council and teamed up with Fagan, Bennett and other student leaders to propose the campaign. "Intolerance comes from people not talking to each other."

Two weeks ago, Jesuit's 1,150 students broadened their horizons to Africa with a visit from Peter Kimeu, a Catholic Relief Services director from Kenya. Kimeu brought a face to the AIDS epidemic on the continent, where 6,300 people die each day.

"Try to think of each of those millions of numbers with a name," he said. "Think about Africa as a country of people with names."

After the presentation, students formed groups of 16 with representatives in each grade. Their assignment throughout the discussion: form an action plan to reach out to those in Africa.

The drama department also has grabbed the opportunity to seize teachable moments. In the fall, the department staged "Bat Boy" and plans "Beauty and the Beast" for March. Both feature characters who feel ostracized because of their physical appearances.

But drama teachers Jeff Hall and Elaine Kloser chose a decidedly more contentious script with their third play. "The Laramie Project" tells the true story of the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyo.

The play, staged at Beaverton's Southridge High School last year, has been banned at some schools for its harsh language and sensitive con-

tent. At Southridge, administrators canceled and later revived the play's production, drawing a volatile visit from a Kansas group known for their opposition to the play.

"We kind of knew what we were getting into," Kloser said. "But we realized how much it would serve the community and the school."

Jesuit administrators have invited Matthew Shepard's mother to speak to students when

the show is staged in April. Since her son's death, Judy Shepard has become an outspoken activist for hate-crime legislation.

"As educators, we can't let opportunities slip by," Hall said. "If we're going to do 'The Laramie Project,' we're going to do 'The Laramie Project.' We're going to open up that discussion." ❖

Catholic school fires gay guard

Church teaching cited; petition seeks an apology

By Lori Higgins

Detroit Free Press

October 19, 2006

A gay-rights advocacy organization is denouncing the firing of a campus safety officer at Marian High School, saying she was dismissed because she publicized that she's a lesbian.

"It's a horrible lesson to the young women at that school," said Jeffrey Montgomery, executive director of the Triangle Foundation in Detroit.

The officer, Charlene Genter, 55, was in her sixth year at the Catholic, college-preparatory school for girls. A former Detroit police officer, she has a daughter who graduated from the

which addresses the relationship, she was fired.

Genter said Sister Lenore Pochelski, the school's president, gave her the news Friday, two hours after a local newspaper reporter interviewed her about the book. She said Pochelski said she wouldn't have gotten fired if she hadn't gone public with the book.

"She was very clear," Genter said. "She said it was because my lifestyle does not coincide with the teachings of the Catholic Church. I personally felt she was having a hard time firing me."

"But she was firm that she had to go along with the teachings of the Catholic Church."

Pochelski confirmed that Genter was terminated, but said she would not comment on her termination out of respect for personnel and confidentiality issues.

"She was a great employee," Pochelski said. "We're grateful for her generous service."

The Rev. Harry Cook, pastor of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Clawson, said Genter, a friend and a parishioner, was an asset to the school.

"People are in an uproar," Cook said.

And Genter is devastated. She said she left the school in tears Friday.

"My heart was breaking. That school has been my life for the six years I've been there. To be around these positive, energetic young women who are going to make a difference in that world."

"I never needed an alarm clock to wake up. I didn't call it work."

Montgomery said Genter's firing illustrates the lack of protections against discrimination that gays have in Michigan.

"In Michigan it is not against the law to discriminate against gay people. You can be fired if you're gay. You can be refused public accommodations. There is no protection against discrimination."

Genter said she doesn't expect to get her job back, but the firing saddens her.

"I wish the Catholic Church would follow the doctrine of Jesus Christ, who said there are no outcasts in the kingdom of heaven." ❖



Charlene Genter

Bloomfield Township school in 2001.

Her firing has prompted Marian alumnae to action. A petition at www.petitionspot.com/petitions/genter that seeks an apology for Genter and the gay and lesbian community had gathered 136 signatures by Wednesday.

Genter said Wednesday that she has been in a committed relationship for 28 years and that it was no surprise to anyone at the school that she is a lesbian. She and her partner often attended school events, chaperoned dances and went to parent-teacher conferences.

But last week, when she began publicizing her autobiography, "Badge 3483: A True Story,"