

World Briefs continued from page three

called gay in San Francisco, he suggested might not be seen as terrible as in other places.

Episcopal schism

ROSEMONT, Pa.—Conservative Episcopalians are going their own way in opposition to the church's stand on gay issues.

Anglican archbishops from overseas who oppose the Episcopal Church USA's liberal views on homosexuality challenged the American denomination's leadership by staging their own confirmation service.

"The day of reckoning has begun," said the Rev. David Moyer, the rector at the Church of the Good Shepherd, where the confirmation of more than 70 youths and adults took place.

The presiding bishops of Kenya, Uganda, Congo, and Sydney, Australia, attended or sent delegates to the confirmation by Archbishop Maurice Sinclair of Argentina. They oppose the practice by the Episcopal Church, the U.S. branch of Anglicanism, of ordaining gay men and lesbians and allowing clergy to bless same-sex unions.

Bishop Charles Bennison of the Diocese of Pennsylvania called the move a "canonical crisis." Foreign intervention into the affairs of a national church runs counter to Anglican tradition.

"It's a breach of custom and canon and courtesy," he said. "I'm disappointed they would do this."

Love me, says Ricky

NEW YORK—For all you gay boys out there who think music star Ricky Martin's hot, it's OK by him.

He says the persistent rumors about his sexuality don't bother Martin.

"I can't get hung up on people whose lives are that empty," he said in the Dec. 4 issue of *People* magazine. "I'm an artist and you can fantasize about me however you want."

Martin, whose "Sound Loaded" album was released this month, won't confirm or deny rumors that he's gay. He simply says he's happily single.

Shepard play

LARAMIE, Wyo.—An emotional play dealing with the death of University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepard finally has made it to his school.

The audience—some of whom appear in the drama as characters—cheered and gave a two-minute standing ovation

after the inaugural performance of *The Laramie Project*.

"Certain wounds attack so deep they can never fully heal but this certainly helps the healing a lot," said Matt Galloway, one of the last people to see Shepard alive.

The play, produced by New York's Tectonic Theater Co., offers a vast array of characters based on interviews cast members and production staff conducted with residents after the University of Wyoming student's beating two years ago. It opened Feb. 26 in Denver and had its off-Broadway opening May 18 in New York.

"For such a difficult topic and subject it was so well done," said Susan Stoddard, a Laramie counselor. "I'm just so glad I was here."

AIDS infections

ATLANTA—There's still a lot of ignorance about how AIDS is transmitted.

A survey of what people know about AIDS found that four out of 10 mistakenly believe it is possible to get the disease by sharing a drinking glass or being coughed or sneezed on by an infected person.

"It's scary that so many people are still so ignorant of what causes HIV-AIDS," said Marty Algaze, a spokesman for the gay Men's Health Crisis.

"Almost 20 years into this epidemic, it's disturbing that people think you could still get it from casual contact."

About 40 percent of more than 5,600 participants in the nationwide survey, conducted for the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said it was very likely, somewhat likely or somewhat unlikely that HIV could be transmitted by sharing a glass.

Researchers included the "somewhat unlikely" response in the 40 percent because that choice includes the possibility of transmission. "Very unlikely" and "impossible" were the other choices.

Forty-one percent said transmission is possible by being coughed or sneezed on by someone with the virus.

Nearly 19 percent of those surveyed said they agreed with the statement, "People who got AIDS through sex or drug use have gotten what they deserve."

The survey found that those with more knowledge about how the virus is spread were less inclined to agree with the statement.

Gay sex in Britain

LONDON—British law now treats gays and straights the same way when it comes to

the legal age of consent to have sex.

But it took a Herculean effort by Prime Minister Tony Blair's government to force the law through Parliament.

The House of Lords three times blocked the law lowering the age of consent for gay sex from 18 to 16.

So House of Commons speaker Michael Martin invoked the Parliament Act to force through a Sexual Offenses Bill that makes the age of consent the same for both homosexuals and heterosexuals. It became law after being given Royal Assent by Queen Elizabeth II.

Lawmakers in the House of Commons overwhelmingly approved the bill earlier this year, but the House of Lords this month rejected it for the third time.

The Lords' powers, however, are limited to delaying legislation by blocking it and bouncing it back to the House of Commons. The Parliament Act was created to ensure that the will of the country's elected lawmakers prevails.

The bill brings Britain in line with most other European Union nations.

"It is a reform which, in my personal view, is long overdue and is only right for a country that has a history of reform and challenging prejudice," said Home Secretary Jack Straw, Britain's top law enforcement officer.

Duke ceremonies

DURHAM, N.C.—Gay and lesbian couples will be permitted to conduct commitment ceremonies the famous gothic chapel at Duke University, despite opposition.

Duke President Nan Keohane and the Rev. William Willimon, dean of Duke Chapel, announced that they agree with the change recommended by a committee of faculty, staff, students, and trustees.

"We ought to allow these unions to be celebrated by those clergy who are allowed, by their religious communities, to officiate at such ceremonies," wrote Keohane and Willimon.

Duke currently allows same-sex unions on other areas of the campus, including in the Sarah P. Duke Gardens and at the Freeman Center for Jewish Life.

Duke is affiliated with the United Methodist Church, which prohibits same-sex ceremonies. But the school said the chapel is a "university facility" not tied to any particular denomination.

Like marriages, same-sex unions will be limited to students, staff, alumni and faculty.

Bishop Marion Edwards of the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church said Tuesday that the chapel has never been bound by church policies. But he said the decision conflicts with the church's official stance on homosexuality.

Leaders in the Duke Conservative Union student group opposed the move, saying the school is undermining the family and violating the rights of religious students.

Unrepentant minister

CHICAGO—A Methodist minister who got into hot water last year for presiding over same-sex unions has found a way around the problem: Just hold the ceremonies themselves outside the church and then go inside and celebrate what just happened.

In a twist on the traditional wedding ceremony, couples at the Broadway United Methodist Church in Chicago exchange vows at a ceremony with friends and family outside of church and then return to the church to celebrate their unions, the Rev. Gregory Dell said.

All weddings at the church now are conducted in the same manner in ceremonies for both heterosexual and homosexual ceremonies under a policy adopted Sept. 12. Several ceremonies have been held since then, and more are planned, Dell said.

Bishop C. Joseph Sprague said the ceremony and service appear to satisfy church law.

Dell was suspended last year after a church trial found that he had violated United Methodist law by presiding over the "holy union" of two Chicago men in 1998. He returned to the pulpit in July.

Gay priests

ROME—An Italian who cowrote a biography of Pope John Paul II has broken a taboo with the publication of a non-fiction book about homosexuality in the ranks of Italy's Roman Catholic clergy.

Marco Politi's newly published book *La Confessione* presents the testimony of a priest struggling to balance his homosexuality with his com-

mitment to a church that considers homosexual acts a sin.

The priest, who is never identified, discloses that a network of homosexual priests is active in the Italian church. It is described as an informal "self-help group" that lives in the "catacombs" of the church—the underground.

"There are always those who fear being discovered by superiors and listed as partners in a homosexual corporation. It's incredible how the fear is so widespread," the priest says through the author in the non-fiction account, written in the first person.

Mexican unions?

MEXICO CITY—It may soon be legal for gay and lesbian couples to register their unions and adopt children in the largest city in the Western Hemisphere.

Lawmakers from the leftist Democratic Revolution Party, the party of Mexico City's mayor, are working with gay and lesbian rights groups to put finishing touches on the legislation. Mexico City is a federal district with its own legislature.

"It is very significant from our point of view to advance the human and civil rights of these people that are supposedly born free and equal under the constitution," Armando Quintero, Democratic Revolution leader in the legislature, was quoted by the *Reforma* newspaper as saying.

It was not immediately clear what chances the bill had of passing, but it could face resistance from the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, and the socially conservative National Action Party, or PAN, of President Vicente Fox.

No party has a majority in the 66-seat assembly for the independent federal district: Democratic Revolution holds 19 seats, the PAN has 17 and the PRI, 16. ▼

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