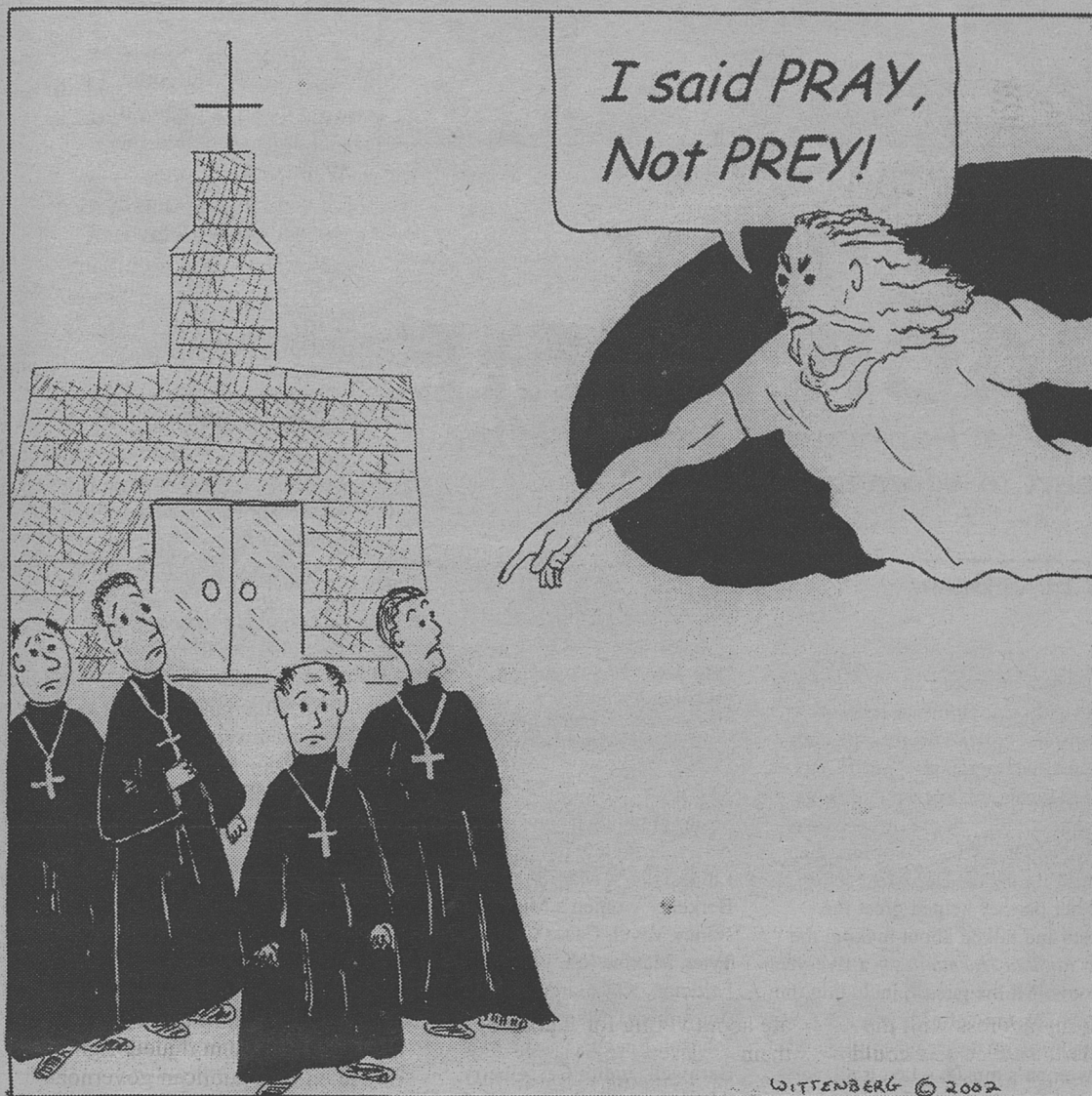


# Spiritual Essence



## squibs squibs squibs

### Mass Civil Union During Dyke Doc Conference

There was a dramatic upswing in civil unions in Burlington during a certain week of July – the week that the Women in Medicine (also known affectionately as Dyke Docs) Conference was held at the Radisson Hotel. Gloria Gil, a long time feminist and political activist, officiated at nearly 20 CUs that week, with 13 in one day in Battery Park.

“I told them I wasn’t going to do this like Rev. Sun Myung Moon, everyone at once. Each couple came up separately,” said the veteran Justice of the Peace. “I have quite a nice little service that I do, with a bit of political background about Vermont being the first and so far only state to legally recognize same-sex relationships.”

“Each couple had some thing they wanted to say to each other,” Gil related, “and they were there with their kids, and as each couple’s service finished there was this big cheering squad! It was wonderful! The first couple had been together 42 years!”

Gil said that the 13 couples she united in civil union that day had been together a collective 293 years, or an average of over 22 years per couple. Going through the 13 couples took a mere two hours – how’s that for compassionate efficiency!

### Abuse-Free and Semi-Visible

On August 12, the National Public Radio program *Marketplace* ran a segment on the only church denomination that has never had an insurance claim related to sexual abuse: Metropolitan Community Church. While that is remarkable enough on its face, the segment went on for several minutes without once mentioning that it was founded 34 years ago as a gay church by gay pastor Rev. Troy Perry, and that a significant percentage of its ministers (not to mention parishioners) are gay or lesbian.

Apparently the most successful sexual abuse prevention strategy is the church’s policy of requiring two adults to be present whenever a minor is meeting with a church official. In addition, all 300 MCC congregations (with 46,000 members) are required to purchase sexual abuse liability insurance, which costs, on average \$4,000 a year. New church buildings are constructed with interior windows between offices and common areas.

We weren’t entirely invisible, however. About halfway through the segment, there was a brief reference by a church official to the fact that the churches understand that “repressed systems never lead to healthy sexuality” and that is especially true for “people with gay and lesbian sexuality.”

On the other hand, in *Marketplace*’s “calendar announcement” segment for upcoming events in the economic sphere, the Human Rights Campaign’s Corporate Equality Index was mentioned, with the explanation that it was a report card on how well companies treat their gay and lesbian employees.

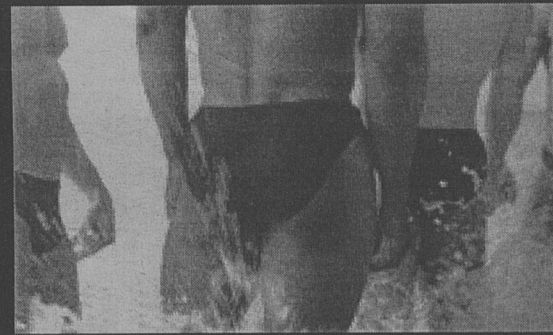
### First Civil Union Lights Up Retired Minister

It wasn’t exactly the way they’d planned it, but it turned out okay anyway. Vannilu Harrison (a featured gardener in our April 2002 issue) and her partner Sherry Underwood had planned for months for pastor Rev. Murdale Leysath to celebrate their civil union last month. But a fall resulting in a serious back injury the day before the ceremony sent the would-be celebrant and friend to the hospital instead of to the ceremony.

She called her friend Rev. David Dean, a retired minister from Rutland’s Grace Congregational Church (United Church of Christ), to step in, with the women’s permission.

As he opened the ceremony, he announced that, since he had retired before the civil union law was passed, this would be his very first civil union ceremony. And it was there in the way he said it, the way he looked all around at the assembled company, the special oomph in his voice, that he was absolutely delighted at the prospect. And that specialness made all the difference for the women who missed their chosen pastor.

Congratulations, Sherry and Vannilu – nice to have a legal relationship after 25 years. ▼



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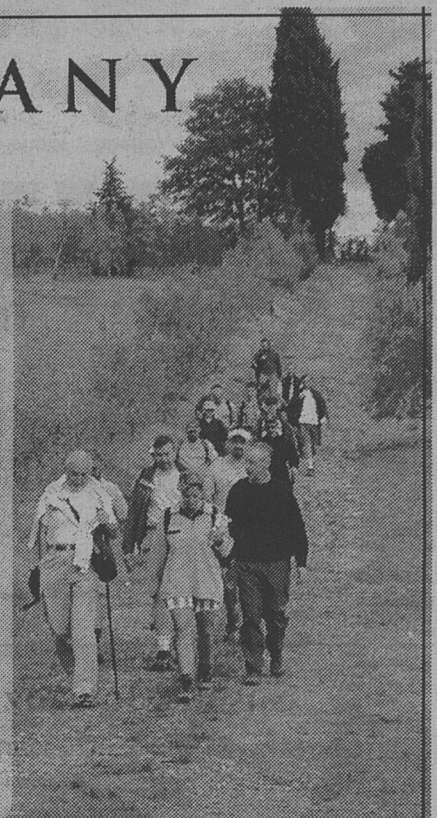
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