

Volunteer facilitator Samuel Lurie keeps discussion on track.

Queer Summit: Planning for Action & Support

BY EUAN BEAR

It's one of those meetings where nothing dramatic happens, and the process is worth as much as the "product." The meeting was the Third Queer Community Summit

meeting for GLBTQ organizations, and it brought representatives of at least 16 GLBTQ organizations – a significant segment of our communities – solidly together at the Vermont Law School in January.

Its purpose was "To bring together queer and ally community

activists/organizations for networking to familiarize ourselves with each other's work, to create understanding of common issues and strategies, and to build an effective queer movement in Vermont."

Organizations represented ran the gamut from R.U.1.2? (sponsor of the summits), Outright, and Faerie Camp Destiny to The Barony of All Vermont, Christ Church Presbyterian, and Safe Space. The Vermont Anti-Racism Action Team was represented by Paj Wadley Bailey, Equality Vermont (formerly Vermonters for Lesbian and Gay Rights) by Keith Goslant and Virginia Renfrew.

Volunteer facilitator Samuel Lurie began the morning session with stories from the organization people seated at the table, personal recollections of a particularly "queer" moment. The stories were funny, heartbreakingly sad, or shining with pride. Outright's Lluvia Mulvaney-Stanak recalled that when she was a Castleton State student, she went out to her car after a snowfall, only to find "God Hates You" written in the snow on her car. After talking with other students about it, she went out to the car the next day and found "God Loves You" written in the car's dusting of snow. Ken Wolvington of Christ Church Presbyterian remember marching in his first gay pride parade.

Keith Goslant and Virginia Renfrew presented an early-days overview of the new legislature and issues that might come up, along with news of their meeting with the incoming governor (see related story on p. 3). They suggested that (despite civil union opponent Rep. Peg Flory's chairmanship of the House Judiciary Committee) it was unlikely the House would spend time attempting to repeal or amend the civil union law passed in the 2000 legislature.

They offered tips on getting and staying involved with legislative politics and issues: contact your legislators, identify the issues you are concerned about, let them know you expect to hear from them, stay in contact, and, if you go to the Statehouse for any reason, call ahead and make an appointment to meet with your senators and representatives.

Renfrew said she did not yet have a feel for whether a bill to add gender identity to the state's anti-discrimination law would be introduced or had a chance of passing. Goslant said the community should be concerned about healthcare funding and should be organizing now against potential cuts, initially by identifying a legislator who will adopt the issue and make it a priority.

The summit participants broke into four focus groups just before lunch. The four topics had been previously identified (top priority-vote getters from among six on a list) for discussion: Rural organizing, anti-oppression/anti-racism work; transgender issues; and fundraising. Some of the issues had come up at previous summit gatherings.

Each group was given seven minutes to list the "obstacles and barriers" or "needs" regarding each topic and to identify "first steps" to be taken to address those needs. Facilitator Lurie reminded participants that the process was "brainstorming," meaning that it didn't matter whether the ideas were practical and that no time or energy should be spent critiquing any idea presented.

After a brief cheese-cold-cut-hummus sandwich lunch, participants chose a topic they wanted to work more intensively on, presenting the whole process at the end of the day.

First steps and action items

on trans issues included: building support to expand the anti-discrimination law; updating the Diversity Health Project's guidebook to include trans concerns; enlist the Department of Health in a needs assessment project for this under-served population; building a coalition of agencies to sign up for training on how to support transgender clients; and each participant making a commitment to gender-free bathrooms in our workplaces.

The anti-oppression/anti-racism first steps included: intentionally creating popular education classes to create programs on different cultures; building opportunities for people of color and white people to interact and socialize; creating forums to highlight the interconnectedness of different cultures and oppressions; creating programming that includes and highlights black BLBTQ activists. Two other items on the list were reminders to participate in Martin Luther King, Jr. commemorations and actions against racism in Burlington and Montpelier last month.

The other two groups' first steps revolved around identifying and using existing resources to share information and exert the widest possible influence, including organizations sharing mailing lists and donor lists and doing mailings on behalf of an organization with a particular need.

The next summit is tentatively scheduled for April or May and may evolve into a day-long session on one particular topic ▼

For more information on the Third Queer Community Summit and access to the online Queer Summit listserve, contact Christopher Kaufman (Christopher@ru12.org, 802-860-7812).

Gay & Lesbian Marriage Actions Urged for Valentine's Day

When the Los Angeles courthouse opens at 9 AM on Friday, February 14th – Valentine's Day – veteran civil rights activist and Metropolitan Community Church founder Rev. Troy D. Perry and his partner of 18 years, Philip Ray DeBlicke, will be standing in line.

They plan to apply for a license to marry.

"And I'm encouraging thousands of gay and lesbian couples across the US to do the same," said Perry, whose churches perform more than 6,000 same-sex weddings each

year. "It's time to move the debate on gay marriage forward. It's time for equality. It's time for the US to catch up with Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, France and other countries that are providing marriage rights for gay couples."

According to a press release, Rev. Troy D. Perry, a U.S. citizen and founder of the predominantly-gay MCC with more than 46,000 members and adherents in 22 countries, is encouraging GLBT couples to go to court houses and municipal offices on February 14, Valentine's Day, to apply for marriage licenses.

"For me it's not a religious issue, it's a legal issue. It's a matter of equality and simple justice. If my country is to live out its promise of equality, all laws must be applied equally, and that includes our marriage laws.

"Imagine the power that will be unleashed if thousands or tens of thousands of gay and lesbian couples apply for marriage licenses on the same day," said Perry.

Perry, never shy when it comes to advocating for GLBT rights, plans to invite the media to cover the event. "I want to be sure our state legislators hear our voices."

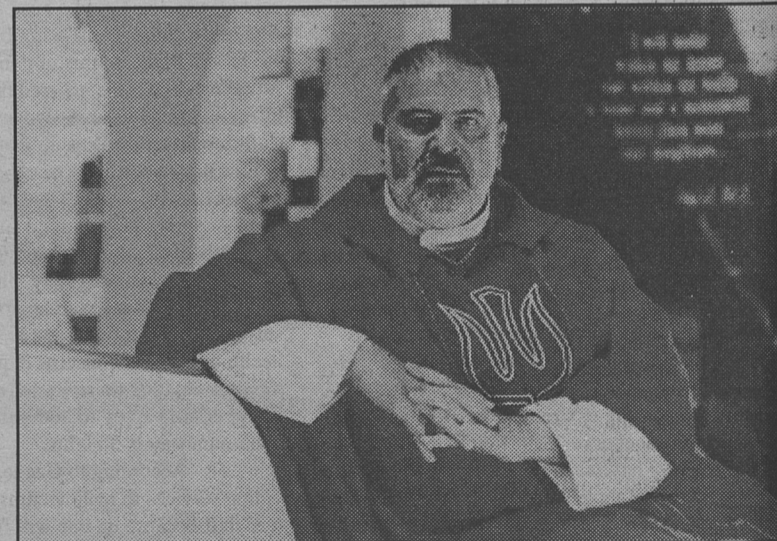
Why now?

"I've seen so many important advances for gay and lesbian people in my 34 years of activism. But before my life is over, I want to share in the same right afforded to most Americans; a basic right that is still denied to gays and lesbians. Before my life is over, I want to legally marry my wonderful partner Phillip."

And if his application for a marriage license is turned down? Perry is undaunted. "Well, realistically, the odds are that it will be turned down. And if so, I'll tell them, 'Thank you and we'll be back next Valentine's Day to apply again.' Then I'll step outside and talk to the press about equality and fairness for God's gay and lesbian children. And I will be back next year."

Perry believes the action can increase attention to the gay civil rights movement and he is not hesitant to help lead the way.

"We have a great legacy of public actions that helped to move forward the cause of justice. A century ago, women took their demands for equality under the law to voting booths and polling places. Half a century ago, African-Americans took their demands for legal equality to segregated lunch counters and places of oppression. It's time for gay, les-



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bian, bisexual and transgender persons to advance our own quest for equality by taking our demands to courthouses and municipal offices with actions that demonstrate both the depth of our love and the unfairness of the restrictive marriage laws."

In recent years, gay and lesbian groups have used Valentine's

Day to call attention to the lack of equality in marriage laws. By encouraging thousands of gay and lesbian couples to actually apply for marriage licenses, Perry hopes to increase the focus on marriage rights. ▼