

# the rest of our world

## Muzzling Prevention

New York – In a letter sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Civil Liberties Union has denounced revisions to the agency's content guidelines for HIV/AIDS materials. The guidelines would require organizations to present HIV prevention materials for review by state and local health officials, who could be partisan, elected officials with no expertise in HIV issues and prevention.

James Esseks, Litigation Director of the ACLU's AIDS Project said, "These changes are nothing more than dirty politics that put lives at risk."

Organizations receiving federal funds for HIV prevention are currently required to run materials past a Program Review Panel (PRP), a group of individuals knowledgeable about disease prevention. In addition to the PRPs, under the new guidelines HIV prevention materials would also have to be approved by state and local health officials.

"At a time when HIV prevention efforts are more important than ever, there's a very real fear that partisan politics will begin dictating prevention messages," added Esseks. "Let's face it, abstinence until marriage isn't going to go over very well with gay teens who can't marry."

## Trans Danger in Nepal

New York – Amnesty International is mobilizing its members to write Nepalese authorities following the arrest of 39 metis (male transgenders) in Kathmandu on the night of August 9. The metis were arrested in public and are being held in Hanuman Dhoka police station in Kathmandu.

"We are extremely concerned that all 39 could be in grave danger of torture or ill treatment in detention," stated Michael Heflin, Director of Amnesty International USA's OUTfront program for LGBT human rights. "Members and concerned human rights activists should write the Prime Minister of Nepal, the Nepalese Ambassador to the US and other authorities, demanding guarantees of humane treatment in custody and requesting their unconditional release – absent their being charged with some recognizable criminal offense."

All are members of the Blue Diamond Society, a local organization that provides sexual health, HIV/AIDS and advocacy services to sexual minorities, and campaigns for their rights. The August 9 arrests could be in retaliation for a complaint to police made by the Blue Diamond Society about an earlier

attack, when police officers in Kathmandu are alleged to have raped four metis.

## Church Tit for Tat

West Hollywood, CA – The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches is urging its pastors to exercise political restraint. According to a letter emailed to MCC member congregations, a fundamentalist Christian organization, the Religious Freedom Action Coalition, has launched a website – [www.RatOutaChurch.org](http://www.RatOutaChurch.org) – in an effort to intimidate liberal and progressive churches.

The organization's website proclaims its mission as "Ending Radical Left-Wing Politics In The Pulpit." Quoting from the website: "We are actively recruiting volunteers to attend services of churches known to have liberal leanings and report to us anything said from the pulpit that may be construed as 'endorsement' of a candidate. We intend to file complaints with the IRS against these churches that overtly endorse candidates or who use 'code words' to tell congregations to vote for a specific party."

The MCC notice suggested that the RatOutaChurch.com campaign, a project of Big Brother Church Watch, was in retaliation for a complaint filed by Americans United for Separation of Church and State against Jerry Falwell for his endorsement of George Bush's election campaign on his ministry's website. The complaint seeks the revocation of tax-exempt status for Falwell's ministries because of the alleged violation of IRS laws.

The MCC notice says that "known liberal churches" include its own gay-friendly congregations, along with Unitarian Universalist, and predominantly African-American AME congregations.

To fight the campaign, MCC clergy were urged to become familiar with IRS guidelines related to political activities, which they have compiled into a brief list of "Dos" and "Don'ts." There's also IRS Publication 1828, "Tax Guide For Churches and Religious Organizations," on-line at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1828.pdf>.

MCC finds a potential silver lining to the situation: the conservative spies get exposed to the spirituality of gay folks.

## Brain Scans for ALL

Las Vegas – In a press release issued via email last month, the Raelians have called for regulations to require all elected officials to undergo mental

competency tests, including brain scans. They cited "a growing number of reports (Teresa Hampton - Capitol Hill Blue, filmmaker Michael Moore, and a growing number of PhDs) and the irrational way George Bush and many other politicians react to situations."

The Raelians believe that humans were made by alien beings who will return to Earth in Jerusalem. They had announced a successful human cloning project a few years ago, but never supplied proof.

Speaking on behalf of His Holiness Rael, a neurobiologist specializing in MRI scans said, "Mental and emotional balance is the least we should expect from the people running for public office."

All who run for a public office should be required to prove they are mentally and emotionally competent, said the statement. "After all, these are the people we trust with billions in taxpayers' money and even more importantly, they are in the position to use weapons of mass destruction."

## NGLTF Goes With MO

Washington, DC – Despite Missouri's passage of an anti-gay amendment barring same-sex couples from marrying, the national Gay and Lesbian Task Force will be holding its annual Creating Change conference in St. Louis in November.

According to a statement issued by NGLTF Executive Director Matt Foreman, the organization received letters regarding a boycott, but is keeping the conference in the state in support of the LGBT communities there.

"Our friends and colleagues in Missouri were the first in the nation to face a statewide campaign to enact an anti-gay constitutional amendment since the historic Massachusetts *Goodridge* decision late last fall. With scant resources, they fought valiantly and with great heart in an uphill battle against deeply held prejudice and antipathy towards our people.

"We think there is no better place for 2000-plus community leaders and organizers to be from November 10-14 than St. Louis, Missouri. Let's show them solidarity and collegial support for in the challenge they faced and that we are all facing."

## Social Workers Back Limon

Topeka, KS – In a friend-of-the-court brief, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and its Kansas chapter are joining the American Civil Liberties Union in asking the Kansas Supreme Court to reverse the conviction

of a teenager who is serving a prison sentence 13 times longer than he would have received if he were heterosexual.

"The state claims that the much harsher sentence Matthew Limon received is justified for reasons that we as social workers know aren't valid," said Dorothy Stucky Halley, president of the Kansas chapter of the NASW. She added, "One's sexual orientation could never justify 16 additional years in jail."

In its brief, the 153,000-member organization of professional social workers debunks the state's claims that the length of Limon's sentence is justified because young people who engage in same-sex intimacy are so impressionable that they may be swayed into becoming gay.

The ACLU had taken Limon's case back to the lower court after the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the court to reconsider the matter in light of the it's decision last summer in *Lawrence v. Texas*, which struck down all same-sex-only sodomy laws. After the Kansas Court of Appeals upheld the conviction in January, the Kansas Supreme Court agreed to hear the case on August 31.

## ENDA Incomplete

Washington, DC – In a move that could spell the end of the pending Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), both the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) have separately decided to terminate their support for the bill in its present form. The primary motivation for the move is the legislation's lack of protections for transgender Americans.

The HRC board of directors voted in August to adopt a resolution declaring that it "will only support ENDA if it is inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression." It had faced demonstrations from the National Transgender Advocacy Coalition (NTAC), Pride at Work (PAW) and Parents, Friends & Families of Lesbians & Gays (PFLAG) protesting its lack of action on gender inclusion in ENDA.

The NGLTF position was articulated in a statement from Director Matt Foreman: "For many years, our community has debated the place of transgender people in the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). The time for debate is over. The question must be called. ENDA must be amended to protect transgender people. If it is not, we all must walk away from it."

It is hypocritical to allow

some members of our communities to continue to be marginalized in order to buy political and legal equality for the "good gays," Foreman suggested, and the LG and B communities must learn "why or how trans issues are 'gay' issues – and how 'gay' issues are trans issues."

## MCC Opposes Inquisition

Los Angeles – In the wake of the Vatican's latest attack on feminism, the predominantly gay Metropolitan Community Church has reaffirmed its commitment to feminism and to the full equality of women and men in the church and society.

"We are saddened that the Vatican leadership once again finds itself in opposition to those universal spiritual principles that value and celebrate the giftedness of women," said The Reverend Elder Troy D. Perry, Moderator of the 43,000 member Metropolitan Community Churches. More than 50 percent of MCC clergy are women, a higher percentage than any other Christian denomination.

"Feminism is not over," said Perry. "Religious leaders who attack social and spiritual equality for women also use their religion to legitimize the denigration of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender persons. Metropolitan Community Churches is opposed to all forms of discrimination, because we recognize that homophobia is a manifestation of sexism."

The Vatican statement against feminism, 'On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World,' was released July 31. It was authored by Josef Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, known more famously as the Inquisition. In the new Vatican statement, Ratzinger writes that feminism "call[s] into question the family, in its natural two-parent structure of mother and father, and make[s] homosexuality and heterosexuality virtually equivalent ..."

Ratzinger is well known for his homophobic rhetoric, calling homosexuality an "intrinsic moral disorder" and justifying violent reactions to legal protections and social acceptance of gays and lesbians.

In response, MCC has established prizes in Feminist Preaching at three liberal seminaries: Pacific School of Religion (California), Iliff School of Theology (Colorado), and Union Theological Seminary (New York). ▼

Compiled this month by Euan Bear.