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The purpose of Out In The Mountains [OITM] is to serve as a voice for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people, and our supporters in Vermont. We wish the newspaper to be a source of information, insight, and affirmation. We also see OITM as a vehicle for the celebration of the culture and diversity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities here in Vermont and elsewhere.

### Editorial Policy

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## editorial

# Blessings of the Times

Last month was a busy one in the cultural wars— and as I write, the month is only two-thirds done.

▼ A New York judge ruled that the City of New York could not deny marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Supposedly gay-friendly Mayor Michael Bloomberg immediately directed the city's attorneys to appeal the decision.

▼ The Tennessee legislature approved the wording of a 2006 ballot question that would amend the state's constitution to ban gays from marriage. Fortunately, a separate bill barring gays from adoption died in a State House committee.

▼ Same-sex partners of Michigan public employees lost access to health, death and pension benefits through their spouses if an opinion from the state Attorney General's Office about the voter-passed Proposal 2 holds sway. The proposal defines marriage as between one man and one woman.

▼ A California court ruled that just because it is a tradition of long-standing to do so, there is "no rational basis" for banning same-sex marriage.

▼ And another bill to write anti-gay discrimination into the U.S. Constitution by banning same-sex marriage and civil unions was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives.

▼ But despite holy invective from the Vatican, Canada and Spain are preparing to recognize same-sex marriages.

▼ Burlington became the first school district in Vermont to add "gender identity and expression" to its student anti-harassment policy.

▼ And after being brave and compassionate two years ago in ordaining its first openly gay bishop, Gene Robinson, the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church USA did a fancy two-step with the Anglican Communion around their outrage and demonization of queers.

At first glance, it looked like one of our mainstream Christian allies had sold us out. And maybe it will turn out that they will. Right now the discussion seems to be a lot about semantics, when it should be about lgbt lives — and for these Christians, about lgbt souls.

The Worldwide Anglican Communion demanded an apology from the American church earlier this year for causing such a ruckus, and ordered that it no longer

ordain gay or lesbian bishops or bless same-sex unions.

Last month, the Episcopal House of Bishops met in Texas and agreed to apologize to the rest of the Anglican world for the "breach of affections" that the American Episcopalians had caused by ordaining an openly gay bishop. The group also agreed not to authorize liturgies for same-sex unions or bless any such unions — until June of 2006. More on that later.

Sounds like they caved to the pressure of the most conservative and reactionary elements of their church.

But wait, there's one other thing the bishops did: rather than single out potential gay and lesbian candidates for bishop to refuse ordination to, the bishops decided that no candidates for bishop of any gender or sexual identity will be ordained for the next

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year. That's an action akin to straight allies donning the pink triangle.

So, the fine print, as elucidated by Vermont Episcopal Bishop Thomas Ely, is that the statement agreed to by the bishops is binding only on the bishops, and only so far as the bishops individually and collectively have authority over the issues in question.

"This is an agreement as to how we bishops will behave," Ely said. Then he explained that he doesn't normally officiate at weddings or civil unions, unless a member of the clergy is one of the partners. Current practice in the Episcopal Church is that any priest wishing to bless a same-sex union must first get permission from his or her bishop. That hasn't changed.

When the section of the Texas document banning the bishops from blessing same-sex unions came up for a vote Ely

voted against. In the end, he said, when the entire statement came up for a vote, the presiding bishop asked whether "we could live with the document," and after prayer and reflection, Ely voted yes.

The Worldwide Anglican Communion may read the bishops' statement saying "we" as representing the whole of the American church. But the House of Bishops represents only part of the church.

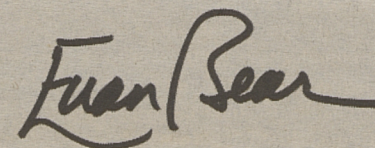
That's where the importance of June 2006 comes in. It's the date of the next Episcopal General Convention, made up of the bishops — and lay people and clergy (the House of Deputies) deciding together where the church is going and how it is going to get there.

Maybe a cooling off period is useful for both sides here. Maybe during that period those in the U.S. and elsewhere who believe that their god made some people — lesbians and gay men — inferior, automatically damned, without salvation, maybe they will find a new revelation about faith and what it means to be human and made in the image of the god they worship, the image of love, not hate.

And maybe the Episcopal General

Convention will stand up — again — for lgbt Christians, holding out a light to their benighted co-religionists enduring a dark night of the soul.

I have not believed in a patriarchal god in decades. But I recognize the power of churches to shape belief and reality in ways that continue to affect the world we live in as gay men and lesbians of whatever faith or none. I send out my energy to the universe that the Episcopalians will have the strength of their convictions, and that their convictions will bless all of us eventually. ▼



Euan Bear, Editor