

R.U.1.2? Targeted By Flier

Burlington – On Sunday, May 15, a flier was found on the postage-stamp-sized “lawn” of the R.U.1.2? Queer Community Center. Headlined “R U Confused 2?,” the flier purports to refute any non-condemnatory interpretation of the Christian Bible’s few verses related to homosexuality.

The flier is signed by “Rev. John Hamel,” identified as the pastor of the “City Streets Church,” which meets at the Fletcher Free Library in Burlington.

Among the claims on the “R U Confused 2?” flier are that “The Curse of Death is not only upon individuals who accept homosexuality and lesbianism as ‘normal.’ It’s also upon all Nations who do so.” Further, the writer of the flier says that when homosexuality is accepted – “When all the men go off with the men and all the women with the women” – no more children will be born.

The flier also carries the typical characterization of homosexuality and lesbianism as an “abomination,” carrying “the same death penalty” as bestiality. It refers to “liberal politicians and ignorant religious leaders” who might try to convince the reader that the Bible (as the author of the flier interprets it) is wrong.

In an email response to questions about the flier and about his church and pastoral training, Rev. John Hamel denied that he had called for the death penalty for homosexuals and lesbians, an idea he called “ridiculous.” He added, “What I said was that the Bible says that there is a curse of death that comes upon people for committing homosexual acts. ... You should apologize for falsely accusing me.”

Hamel wrote in his email, “God loves homosexuals but He despises homosexuality. I love all people including homosexuals because God dwells within me.” In response to an emailed question, he denied placing or asking anyone else to place the tract on R.U.1.2? property. “Although, I am not sorry that it was placed on your property. ... I hope it will help you. You will indeed answer to the Almighty for your behavior one day.”

The self-styled pastor refused to answer any questions about his church and its affiliation or his own ordination and training, writing that such questions were “very rude and demanding.”

Library Co-director Amber Collins

said in a phone interview that she had spoken with the Burlington City Attorney regarding the group. Collins, a 38-year veteran of the library, said her concern was the posting of fliers “implying that Fletcher Free Library is their church.”

“Apparently this was set up before we could get them a copy of the rules” for community organizations to use the library for meetings, Collins said. “I’ve been trying to contact [John Hamel] for two weeks to get him a copy and get him to sign off.” Among the policies is one that limits nonprofit groups’ use of the facility’s meeting rooms to once a month. Collins said the “City Streets Church” has been meeting there every Sunday for at least a month.

Collins added that the Burlington City Attorney told her the library could not

deny the use of the space to a church group. City Attorney Gene Bergman said, “The policy allows use by civic organizations and does not discriminate.”

Asked whether a group engaging in hate speech could use city facilities, Bergman said, “There are rules related to activities conducted within the room, but not anything a group might do beyond the room. The important point is that we are not choosing on the basis of content.” Bergman cited the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in 2001 in *Good News Club v. Milford Central School*, in which the Court found that if the school allowed some organizations to use facilities, it must allow the private Christian Good News Club to do so under the same terms.

SafeSpace Program Director Hannah Hauser said the flier is likely not a

specific enough threat for its placement on R.U.1.2? property to be prosecuted as a hate crime. She was familiar with the flier, having found one while returning from the Youth Pride celebration on Church St. on May 14. SafeSpace would document the incident, she said, if it is reported.

R.U.1.2? Queer Community Center Executive Director Christopher Kaufman said the flier “proves we still have a lot of work to do.” He said he would raise the issue with the library “to try to get them to understand that it’s not okay to house a hate group. Just because they call themselves a church doesn’t mean they’re not a hate group.”

Kaufman filed a complaint about the flier with the Burlington Police Department on May 17, and has been in conversation with Robert Appel, director of the state’s Human Rights Commission. ▼



Rainbow Graduation

On May 5, 27 graduating UVM lgbtqa students received rainbow stoles as part of their academic regalia at a ceremony in Billings North Lounge. The ceremony was hosted by LGBTQA Services. In addition, several students and faculty earned service awards: **Unsung Advocate Award** to Meghan Bannan & Jac Callanan; **Emerging Leadership Award** to Rhian Waters, Ashley Gallo, and Lindsey Carfagna; **Ally Award** to Sandra Solomon, Assistant Professor, Psychology; **Bridge-building Award** to Khristian Kemp-DeLisser; **Faculty Leadership Award** to Jackie Weinstock, Associate Professor, Integrated Professional Studies and to Annie Stevens, Assistant VP for Student & Campus Life; **Student Leadership Award** to Kim Little; and the **Jackie Weinstock Service Award to the Translating Identity Conference Committee** (pictured above). **Ethan Fechter-Leggett** won the **Student Life Activism and Commitment to Social Justice Award**. There was also a special award to departing professor and campus lesbian academic icon **Esther Rothblum**. ▼

Stroud Wins Step 1 Appeal

Germantown, PA – According to an update issued by the former Reverend Beth Stroud’s partner Chris Paige, Stroud has won her appeal of a church court’s decision to “defrock” her for being an avowed lesbian.

At 10:30 am on Friday, April 29, the Northeast Jurisdictional Committee on Appeals

announced that it had set aside the decision and penalty from Stroud’s December 2, 2004 trial due to concerns about due process. The vote of the Committee on Appeals was 8-1 for the reversal.

The content of the decision focuses on procedural questions relating to the specific charge leveled against Stroud. The decision is

a lengthy document containing a detailed analysis of specific points of church law raised in the appeal.

“The evidence in support of the charge was overwhelming and would be sustained in the absence of legal error,” the Appeals Committee decision reads. The decision hinged on the lack of definition in church documents for the words “status”

and “practicing homosexual.”

Stroud’s bishop, Marcus Matthews, announced a few days later that he would appeal the decision reinstating Stroud as a minister, even though he offered to reappoint her to her former position as associate pastor of the First United Methodist Church of Germantown.

Stroud declined and

announced that she would not resume wearing her ministerial regalia or performing sacramental tasks until all appeals are exhausted. Her church, known as a liberal congregation, has kept Stroud on as a lay minister.

The Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church is expected to consider the Bishop’s appeal at its October meeting, according to a report in the *Washington Blade*. ▼