



Nancy Ellen Judd, MA
Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor
COUNSELING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

802.863.2084
2 CHURCH STREET, BURLINGTON VT 05401

TEENS | ADULTS | INDIVIDUALS | COUPLES

Good legal advice
can make all the difference.



Langrock Sperry & Wool takes
PRIDE in contributing to the
advance in civil rights for gay
and lesbian citizens, and to
making our state a better place
for all Vermonters.

Langrock Sperry & Wool offers the services
of 24 lawyers with over 300 years combined experience
in all areas of the law — including two lesbian attorneys
with special expertise serving the legal needs
of the g/l/b/t/q community.

SUSAN MURRAY & BETH ROBINSON

With offices in Middlebury and Burlington
Middlebury (802) 388-6356
Burlington (802) 864-0217
smurray@langrock.com brobinson@langrock.com

Langrock Sperry & Wool, LLP

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

SPIRIT IN COMMUNITY

Bennington Group Discusses Spirituality

BY ELVIS LACOSTE

On Saturday, July 22, through the Bennington Pride Coalition, individuals with a loving curiosity about spirituality met and held a discussion. The topic: As lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and queer folk, when did we ask ourselves, "What role does spirit play in my life?"

The group was composed of individuals from various backgrounds: from Catholicism and Judaism to Protestant and Quaker. Our guest speaker was Robert Patton, a practicing Shaman affiliated with Spirit Hollow in Shaftsbury. Patton helped facilitate July's discussion with opening remarks and by presenting the group with four questions to consider: "Who am I really?", "Who is God; what is my personal definition of my Creator and the Divine?", "How do I relate to that Being and how does It relate to me?" and "How does my relationship with my God affect, inform or dictate my relationship to my fellow beings on this Earth?"

We spoke about the differences between religion and spirituality, growing up in a religious family and the heartache it takes to find one's self. We spoke about our individual fears, experiences and thoughts that we had not shared with others before. We also talked about the moment we realized the true meaning of the divine in our personal life, as well as the journey we have undertaken to try to find fulfillment with and within the divine. The session was

held in a storytelling format, people openly putting out their unspoken thoughts to this group of strangers who, in turn, held a safe and loving space in which each could do so.

What is the difference between religion and spirituality?

We are built for spirituality - just like we are built for love, fear, and empathy - and our sexuality cannot be divorced from spirituality because both are part of the "hardwiring" of our being.

Religion could be interpreted as a teaching from or of a spiritual leader who has divine inspiration; and spirituality could be seen as devotion based on the metaphysical thoughts that arise from personal experience. Every civilization in the known world has built community near or around sacred spaces to allow one to commune with the divine either collectively in the form of religion or individually in the form of personal and private spiritual practice. The one thing a lot of people are not aware of is that, as humans, we are built for spirituality - just like we are built for love, fear, and em-

pathy - and that our sexuality cannot be divorced from spirituality because both are part of the "hardwiring" of our being.

Within any healthy community, we have to talk about those things we feel are not big issues; those things that have been pushed in to the closet. The more we talk about those things we do not understand, the less fear we put in them and give no room for feelings of abhorrence. We all are on our personal journeys, and at times we need respite to make sure the path we are on is truly ours.

These discussions are not meant to change the world, but to help us have a better understanding of our place in it. They are geared to look at religion, spirituality, reincarnation, the true meaning of gay marriage and the role of the presence or lack of God in one's life.

Hopefully this one discussion will be the beginning of future discussions which will look at the meaning of Spirit and spirituality for individuals, at the role of the presence or lack of God in one's life, at religion; the true meaning of gay marriage within a spiritual context, and at reincarnation, and a variety of other metaphysical questions that arise in the daily lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer folk with no venue for expression. We hope you will join us. ▼

Robert Patton facilitated the first Queer Spiritual Discussion Group in Bennington, and Elvis LaCoste is scheduled to lead the next one, to be held this fall.

VERMONT NEWS

Vermont's First Civil Union Ends

BRATTLEBORO - Carolyn Conrad and Kathleen Peterson - the nation's first same-sex couple to be joined by civil union - dissolved their union in Windham Family Court late last month, the *Brattleboro Reformer* reported.

Conrad and Peterson, both of Brattleboro, formalized their five-year relationship in a civil union ceremony just after midnight on July 1, 2000, when civil unions first became legal in Vermont, the *Reformer* said. They filed to

dissolve their union nearly a year ago, in October, 2005. The report said that more than 7,500 couples had joined in civil unions by the end of 2004, and there have been a total of 78 dissolutions. ▼

YOUR VOTE MATTERS!
register to vote: mountainpridemedia.org