

Solstice Celebrated

by Walter Zeichner

A few months ago I met with a group of men to share and discuss our thoughts and feelings about spirituality in our lives. One of the things we decided to do was to meet together on the solstice and build a bonfire in the forest. Each of us had a different picture of what that would be, from pagan ritual to roasting hot dogs.

On Dec. 20 at around 3 p.m. we started to gather at the home of one man in Hinesburg. The place we planned to build the fire was about 1/2 mile behind the house, up a hill and in the woods. I went to the gathering with a man who is in my men's group, but I didn't know most of the other men well. At a certain point we decided to go into the woods, knowing that the others would follow as they arrived.

The walk was a great indicator to me that I was not used to walking up hills anymore. The time, dusk, and the grey sky; the horse yard we had to go through on our way to the meadow; the icy hill; the crisp cold; all made for an invigorating walk.

Three of us went up initially to start the fire. People started to arrive just as we got the fire going (with more than a few paper-cup-and-gasoline helpers. Many people

brought food, one man going so far as to make a casserole and leave it in the oven at the house for later consumption. There were 8 men total.

Everyone fed the fire with wood gathered from the surrounding forest. The heat was wonderful. I enjoyed the informality and at the same time the acknowledgement of the Solstice, which can have mystical connotations. In terms of the yearly cycle of fertility this is the lowest point, and the point at which the cycle turns and begins to come back towards fruitfulness. This being the shortest day of the year, and the longest night, the passing of the solstice is cause for celebration. The sun is coming back! Winter will not last forever (even though it's really just begun).

The time we spent around the fire together was comfortable and fairly low-key. There was much roasting of hot dogs and eating of chocolate. The visions I had of dancing around the flames dissolved into a more friendly, less ritualistic atmosphere. This was a comfortable gathering without a lot of drama. It was nice for me to be with a group of gay men and yet not be focused on "gay issues" per se and to be together without the tension or energy of the bar scene.

At some point, after a few hours, a general consensus formed to go down to the house. We trooped down the hill, through the horse yard and into the house. Most people stayed a while to watch TV and eat,

and just generally hang out.

After Christmas someone mentioned doing another bonfire for New Year's Eve, which sounded like a great idea to me, but that's another story.

The group that met originally around spiritual issues has not set a date or time to meet again, but I think that we will. I invite others to come and participate. Help us create more.

Editors' note: We understand the New Year's event was a happy time, too.

Exploring Lesbian/Gay Spirituality

Unitarian/Universalists Plan

Sunday, February 8th at 11:00 a.m., the Unitarian/Universalist Church will hold a gay/lesbian service, planned and conducted by a group of its members. It is part of a monthly series of lay services organized to give members a chance to present issues of special interest.

In addition to traditional Unitarian readings and songs, the service will include piano music performed by Gilles Bonneau and a solo guitar performance of "For The Ones Who Aren't Here" by Philip Roberts.

The readings include selections from works by Rita Mae Brown and from Gay American History.

In place of a sermon, the central piece of the service will be a series of anecdotes presented by gay and straight members titled "Sharing Some of Our Experiences That Brought Us Here Today." The individual stories will highlight turning points, tragedies and joys in the tellers' lives, to create a collage effect of the gay spiritual journey.

A Catholic Response

During late October the Vatican reinforced its condemnation of homosexuality in a document that harshly rebuked the homosexual rights movement for trying to change church teachings and civil legislation.

In a letter to Roman Catholic bishops, the Vatican for the first time explicitly condemned the mere inclination towards homosexuality as an "objective disorder."

Previous Vatican statements centered primarily on the sinfulness of homosexual acts.

Over the next few months we will be hearing some responses from the local community regarding the Vatican document which we will be printing in Out in the Mountains. Your responses are welcomed.

-A Catholic Responds-

I have been asked to write a response to the October 1986 statement on homosexuality that was issued by the Roman Catholic Church. The reason I was asked is because I am gay and involved in the ministry in the church, a tenuous position to say the least!

Briefly, the position of the church on all sexual activity is that the only time that it is permissible is within marriage, that within marriage it has to be open to producing

children and that such sexual activity should also strengthen the bond of love and intimacy between marriage partners. That's it.

Because no children can be produced in a same sex genital relationship the church says that it is not a valid expression and therefore wrong. It is also said to be wrong because it does not conform to the natural law, and it is condemned in scripture. A neat little package, isn't it?

Well, in the past twenty years or so all the arguments listed above have been questioned by some of the best moral theologians and found inadequate in light of modern behavioral science as well as modern scriptural analysis and understanding of biblical societies. Add to this a rethinking of what revelation is and a lessening of dependence on natural law theory and there are a raft of reasons to question some basic stances on homosexual orientations.

What brought on all this new inquiry and insights was the Second Vatican Council that opened the doors of the church to the twentieth century. This new openness has made theologians in the church very uncomfortable. What we see in this latest statement is part of a continuing attempt to close the doors that Vatican II opened. In the long run those doors will not be closed nor should they.