

Bishops Address AIDS Ignore Rights

"U.S. Roman Catholic bishops have taken a small step toward confronting AIDS, but have yet to address the fact that lesbians and gay men have legitimate civil rights," according to Frances Kissling, president of Catholics for a Free Choice upon the release of the latest issue of *Conscience*, the bimonthly newsjournal of the organization.

The special issue on AIDS and the U.S. bishops examines the U.S. Catholic Conference administrative board's recent 7,700-word document on AIDS policy, and reactions from the U.S. media, theologians, bishops and Dignity, the national organization for lesbian and gay Catholics and their supporters.

The newsjournal also looks at the so-called "Trojan Wars," the bishops' debate on the issue of condoms. The debate was sparked by the USCC document's qualified approval of mentioning the use of condoms among the various AIDS preventative methods in sex education classes. The document spurred the first public rift among the bishops on sexuality in two

decades—since the controversy about the 1968 encyclical on use of "artificial birth control," some observers say.

The policy paper's recommendations include a call for Catholic institutions, such as schools and hospitals, to keep persons with AIDS employed or in school as long as possible.

Cardinal John O'Connor of New York led the conservative bishops' attack in a public criticism of the policy paper in the *New York Times*. O'Connor, whose remarks are included in *Conscience*, has called the policy paper "a grave mistake" and declared that he would not follow the guidelines. He is a member of President Ronald Reagan's AIDS commission.

In a possible victory for O'Connor and other conservatives, last week the USCC announced that all 300 bishops will review the AIDS policy at their June meeting in Collegeville, Minn. Observers believe the meeting may produce an even more conservative AIDS policy statement.

Over the past year, lesbians, gay men and their supporters have gathered monthly at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City to protest the anti-homosexual church policy of the Vatican and the New York archdiocese.

Catholics for a Free Choice is a national educational organization that supports the right to legal reproductive health care especially to family planning and abortion. It also works to reduce the incidence of abortion and to increase women's choices in childbearing and child-rearing through advocacy of social and economic programs for women, families and children.

For more information, or copies of the issue, call Janice Hughes at Catholics for a Free Choice at 202/638-1706.

Come Out ,Come Out in October!

by Heather Wishik

Beginning this October 11 a National Coming Out Day will be held annually. The theme of this year's day will be "Take the Next Step." This means if you are out to no one but yourself, come out to someone safe; if you are out to friends but not to family, perhaps that is your next step; if you are out and an activist, perhaps civil disobedience is what's next. Whatever it is, each individual will be encouraged to take her or his personal next step. The date was picked to commemorate the 1987 March on Washington. As with the "Great American Smokeout" sponsored annually by lung associations, National Coming Out Day is expected to be an annual event, with each year having a slightly differing theme or slogan.

The idea for the National Coming Out Day emerged from many people who attended the March on Washington. At a brainstorming meeting of activists from all over the country held recently outside Washington, D.C. and called "The War Conference (because they are making war against us)", the decision was made to begin having a coming out event that could be individualized and organized locally, but that would have national impact and share a common date and theme.

Coming out is viewed as essential if lesbians and gay men are to achieve full civil rights and if homophobia is to end. So long as most lesbians and gay men are invisible to the majority of society it will remain difficult to have an effective political voice and to make social values change. An analogy between a person of color "passing" as white and a lesbian or gay man

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