

A ministry to the gay community: The Ecumenical Catholic Church in the Champlain Valley

Rev. Miki Thomas

PLATTSBURGH, NY -- The Very Reverend Michael Frost was raised Roman Catholic and despite a conversion experience in college that led to an involvement with an evangelical campus group, he felt that the liturgy was still important to him. He then decided to enter Roman Seminary, but in 1984 he started the coming out process. He dropped out but returned to seminary in 1991, thinking he can "lie low" about his sexuality. After a year, he realized it was not going to work. Besides, he had just met the man he would eventually marry. One day, while reading *The Advocate*, he came across an ad asking "Are you interested in the priesthood?". Intrigued, he began an ongoing dialogue with the bishop of the church that placed the ad, the Ecumenical Catholic Church (ECC). In July of 1993, he was ordained into the ECC and St. Mary's Ecumenical Catholic Church of Plattsburgh, NY was born.

ECC was started in 1987 by Bishop Mark Shirilau and his partner Jeffrey Shirilau because according to Bishop Shirilau in an interview in *Second Stone*, "we saw the need for Catholic-oriented ministry to the gay community." The ECC is a liturgical church, similar in structure to the Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches. Its doctrine and theology are based on the creeds

developed at the Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon during the Early Church period. It also observes the seven sacraments including baptism, the eucharist, and marriage, the latter open to both gay and nongay couples. The eucharist is open to all baptized Christians regardless of what church one may belong to. It currently has twelve churches in ten states.

St. Mary's ECC began in the summer of 1993 at the home of Rev. Frost and his spouse Ken where they initially held masses. Since this past spring, the church has been meeting every Sunday at 6pm at REBOS ("sober" spelled backward) in Plattsburgh. The church is still relatively small and thus its ministry is limited to weekly masses. Despite this, Rev. Frost has in the past made hospital visits to prisoners with AIDS and is currently planning a food drive for the local food shelf.

Another current concern of Rev. Frost is the Holy Apostles Seminary, formed in 1991 as the Theological Institute for Catholic Studies to train those interested in the ministry of ECC. It became Holy Apostles Seminary in 1994 under the auspices of Rev. Frost. Prior to the formation of a seminary, most of the clergy coming into ECC

were already priests and as such, a training program was not viewed as necessary. Later, as more and more non-priests were showing an interest in the ministry, a training program was developed. Presently, the seminary is a correspondence course, but plans are underway for a permanent building for it, possibly in Burlington, because of its active gay and lesbian community.

Rev. Frost is excited about the fast growth of the Ecumenical Catholic Church, which started with only seven clergy and is now blessed with many, including its first woman priest, ordained this past September in Connecticut. There have been several inquiries into ECC, with some as far away as Kenya and the Netherlands. Rev. Frost himself has always felt a call to the ministry; the Ecumenical Catholic Church has given him the chance to heed that call.

For more information about St. Mary's ECC, write to St. Mary's Ecumenical Catholic Church; P.O. Box 159; Chazy, NY 12921 or call (518)493-3272. For more information about ECC itself, write to Ecumenical Catholic Church; P.O. Box 32; Villa Grande, CA 95486 or call (707)865-0119. ▼

Where to Find OITM

Barre

Pen Dragon

Bennington

Bennington Free Library

Bennington College

Bennington Library

Record Rack

Southern Vermont College

Brattleboro

Brattleboro Food Coop

Common Ground

Everyone's Books

Burlington

Burlington College

Chassman & Bem

Fletcher Free Library

Onion River Co-op

Partners in Recovery & Growth

Peace & Justice Center

Pearls

Planned Parenthood

Castleton

STEP Learning Center

Chester

Misty Valley Books Chester

Craftsbury

Craftsbury Public Library

Center Rutland

Rutland Area Gay/Lesbian Connection

East Hardwick

Greenhope Farm

Fair Haven

Fair Haven Free Library

Hardwick

Buffalo Mountain Coop

Galaxy Books

Lyndonville

Jon's Automotive

Project EXCEL, Lyndon State College

Manchester Center

Northshire Bookstore

Middlebury

Addison County Women in Crisis

Ilsley Public Library

Middlebury Natural Food Coop

Storm Cafe

Montpelier

Bear Pond Books

Horn of the Moon Cafe

Rivendell Books

Woman Centered

Morrisville

Morrisstown Centennial Library

Newfane

Moore Free Library

Northfield

Brown Public Library

Norwich

Social Alternatives for Gay Men

Plainfield

Woman's Study Program

Putney

Putney Library

Randolph

Kimball Public Library

Rutland

PFLAG

Rutland Free Library

United Methodist Church

Grace Cong. United Church of Christ

St. Johnsbury

LUNA/NEVGALR c/o Umbrella

Natural Provisions

Regional Library

St. Johnsbury Athenaeum

Stowe

Food for Thought

Waterbury

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