

Progress Among Episcopalians

The Reverend Jane Garrett
Deputy from Vermont

Join The Fight!

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The Vermont Coalition of Lesbians and Gay Men

in their work to pass legislation guaranteeing equal rights to Lesbians and Gay men in Vermont and insuring protection for People With AIDS and HIV+ persons. Contribute to our cause and add your name to our mailing list. We need your help.

Yes, I want to be a part of making Vermont safer for Gays and Lesbians. Add my name to your mailing list.

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PO Box 1125
Montpelier VT 05602

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THANK YOU!

"Gay Cause Wins Three" trumpeted the headline of the July 18 issue of *United Voice*, the newsletter of Episcopalians United, an evangelical and conservative group. From the perspective of the many gays and lesbians at the Episcopal Church's triannual General Convention in Phoenix, July 11-20, it was progress not a win. Though most of the same battles will have to be refought in 1994, hopefully more gays and lesbians will have made themselves known in the Church and thus be harder to dismiss.

The Church has been openly struggling over the theological acceptability and role of homosexual persons since 1976. Liberals have come to have no difficulty accepting homosexuality as just another God-given aspect of human sexuality, but conservatives see it as a terrible sin that should be purged from both individuals and the whole Church. Before each General Convention the battle between the extreme groups becomes intense. This year the conservatives poured more energy and money than ever before into a campaign that grew increasingly angry, and even hate-filled. Many, including this correspondent, feared that the Church was being torn apart.

Until the voting began, no one knew how much strength the conservatives had. In the House of Bishops debate became so heated that onlookers were asked to leave, and the Bishops went into executive session. Many Bishops were particularly upset that a lesbian and a gay man, both in committed relationships, had been ordained recently. In the House of Deputies, where each Diocese is represented by four lay people and four clergy, the debate was less vituperative than in previous years, and for the first time a lesbian woman and a gay man spoke openly about their committed relationships. When the votes began to be tallied it was clear that the liberals and moderates would not only stem the feared conservative tide but would be able to begin to speak and act prophetically.

Legislation that would have canonically dictated celibacy for all unmarried clergy (which would include all gays and les-

bians since the Church does not recognize same-sex union) was rejected. The Bishops put forward a compromise plan affirming the Church's traditional teachings about marriage (exclusively heterosexual) but acknowledging "the discontinuity between this teaching and the experience of many members." Dialogue on these matters will continue for another three years.

Amendments in the House of Deputies added that the Bishops, with the help of some deputies, are to prepare a Pastoral Teaching prior to the next Convention, using learning from Diocesan dialogues and insights from "theologians, ethicists, social scientists, and gay and lesbian persons." This is the first time that such input has been officially sanctioned. Another resolution called for the appointment to the Church's Standing Commission on Human Affairs of representatives "from the groups and communities most affected by the agenda for the triennium." In short, in the future gay men and lesbian women will not be "studied" by the Church without voice and vote in the resulting recommendations. This is indeed progress!

The House of Deputies also voted that "all members shall have equal access to the selection process for ordination." The Bishops did not concur. Several amendments to specifically prohibit the ordination of sexually active lesbians and gays in the coming three years failed in both Houses. An effort by some bishops to reprimand the two bishops who recently ordained a gay man and a lesbian to the priesthood also failed.

We may yet live long enough to see the Episcopal Church put into practice a resolution from 1988: that "stable, loving and committed relationships between homosexual persons... whether lay or ordained, provide a wholesome example for the Church." Amen. ▼