

Every Person Affirmed: New England-wide conference draws over 250 to Keene, NH

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other people. ... My steadfast as an ally is stronger because of this process."

Leslie:

"Marriage can be a positive, constructive relationship for individuals to be in. It can build community, support, and friendship. I think that should be available to everyone, and the rights that people view as coming with that should be available to everyone."

Schultz:

"I think it has to do with the Quaker tradition of looking at issues of civil rights and discrimination, involvement in everything from the anti-slavery movement to women's rights. Quakers have a tradition of being concerned about that of God in everyone, and we are all supposed to be equal in God's sight, so we need to treat each other accordingly."

"We're going to struggle. We're going to be in there with mud up to our waists struggling with state legislatures and churches in the area. We've gotten some positive

on the time spectrum of history and it's like we've made such incredible strides in the last 26 years. I'm optimistic."



Michael Gigante, PhD, who facilitated two **Coming Out** workshops, credits both his professional experience as a psychotherapist as well as his own coming out as a gay man in influencing his work with gay men, lesbians, and bisexual individuals around their process of coming out. His private practice is in Brattleboro.

"My belief is that (coming out) is absolutely crucial. Staying in closets not only keeps us separated from the rest of the world, but keeps us separated from ourselves, and ultimately our own spirituality. When we either deny to ourselves or to other people who we really are, we set up a block. We set up a hindrance to our deeper selves. When we do that, we

can never really fully be free. Free and empowered."

"By listening to people who are further along in the (coming out) process, (others) get a sense of what lies ahead, the freedom and the power that lies ahead for them as they continue this process. I think some people may have felt courage to keep it going."

"I think that having a conference like this for gay, lesbian, bisexual people is really wonderful, and the fact that it can happen in New Hampshire is even better. I think the whole idea of 'affirming every person' is a gift. It is a gift that we can give each other. It is a gift that we can give ourselves. And ultimately, the gift is freedom and empowerment." ▼

"One of the things that people have said that have taken (the course), and this has been almost universal, is that everybody should take this course. And the majority of the people who have taken it have been straight people. ... Almost everyone says to me, '... My brother's gay, my aunt is gay, my friends down the hall are gay. I want to find out more about this because of them.' So almost everyone has people in their lives that they want to understand better."



Members of the **Putney Friends Meeting**, Marion Cushman, Tom Hoskins, Nancy Storrow, Leslie Hill, and Schultz (pictured l-r), presented **A Quaker Community Looks at Gay Marriage**, a panel discussion that highlighted the five-year process that led to the acceptance of same-sex marriages within the Putney Friends Meeting in Putney.

Nancy:

"I think the point of (looking at the issue of gay marriage) is affirming people in their own spirituality, their own identity, and their own beings as people. I think for the community, our community as a whole, it has also been an incredibly enlivening, spiritually profound time for us to look into ourselves as to how we feel about

and some not so positive responses from local churches. We're going to be struggling with churches around things like biblical literalism, when we take the bible and it's your interpretation of the bible versus my interpretation of the bible. How do we come to see each other as equal in God's sight?"

"If we can build a groundswell of people who are concerned about this issue and simply be able to show how discriminatory it is, to get people to put aside their fears and their hatreds, I am optimistic that we might make some progress. I'm not sure it's going to happen this legislative session. I don't think so, but I think it's a slow process. ... Stonewall was 1969, it's been 26 years since then. You look at that

MICHAEL GIGANTE, PH.D.

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(802) 254-8032

15 Myrtle St., Brattleboro, VT 05301

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Lauren J. Thiem

*Psychotherapist
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Attorneys

100 Main Street
P.O. Box 1124
Burlington, VT 05402-1124

802-864-4531
802-864-6400
FAX: 802-860-1565