

## Testing Diversity: G/L pro-life group speaks at Dartmouth

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**HANOVER, NH** — Does a gay man asking for directions to a campus pro-life meeting sound unusual? "Head down Fraternity Row to the Rockefeller Center ...," came the directions. Super.

Skepticism undoubtedly filled the minds of many of the approximately twenty students who turned out for the November 28th meeting sponsored by the Dartmouth Coalition for Life. The presentation, given by Philip Arcidi, president of the Washington D.C.-based Pro-Life Alliance of Gays and Lesbians (PLAGAL), illuminated on what it means to be gay and also pro-life, a contradictory concept to most people in the gay and lesbian community.

Arcidi admitted that in some instances, "it has been easier to be out as a gay man than it has been to say I'm a pro-lifer." But others apparently have had the same courage to come forth with their feelings on the abortion issue — the group has approximately five hundred members nationwide. PLAGAL also claims to be as ethnically, politically, and age diverse as the gay and lesbian community itself. Offices are located in Boston, Cleveland, Minneapolis, and Philadelphia, among other cities.

Somewhat disheartening were the stories Arcidi told about reactions to PLAGAL — especially those reactions that came from gays and lesbians. Having participated in many parades and marches, Arcidi has had verbal insults as well as garbage thrown at him. This past June while watching over a table for PLAGAL at the Boston Pride Parade, a group of fellow women marchers accosted the PLAGAL display, knocking down the group's flag and stealing material from the table. Arcidi was forced to sit on the top of the table to prevent further theft and fend off the crowd of fifty-plus angry marchers who had closed in around him. The police told Arcidi that they couldn't ensure his safety from the mob and suggested he leave the parade to avoid injury. The parade manager agreed and even though PLAGAL had paid to participate in the Pride festivities, suggested they leave the function. Arcidi disappointedly left.

That the gay and lesbian community would be so hostile to a counter-viewpoint when it advocates diversity in the first place is not the least of the paradoxes Arcidi claimed concerning gay and lesbian reaction to the pro-life movement. One of these paradoxes dealt with the right to privacy. "Gays and lesbians assume that they have a right to privacy somehow based on the Roe vs. Wade case ... that we have the same right to privacy as a woman has to an abortion, when this clearly is not the case ... The Hardwick case gave no privacy rights to gay people in states with sodomy laws."

By Arcidi's account, genetics will soon be manipulating the lives of the unborn. Of particular interest is new research indicating that homosexuality may be a part of our genetic coding. If abortion can

be defined as a window of opportunity to appraise a life, then there is need to worry. "If there's a trait that makes someone want to abort you before birth, it indicates there's something about that person that you wouldn't like about them in life ... you wouldn't want them to be alive as an adult." By Arcidi's reasoning this should make gays and lesbians not only scared but angry. "Just because some people don't like me, doesn't mean I shouldn't exist ... It is entirely impossible for me to will away my existence."

Arcidi must put aside issues of his sexual orientation at times to focus on his pro-life beliefs. Indeed, in most all of Arcidi's stories, it is poignantly apparent that PLAGAL continuously finds itself allied with Republicans, right-wingers, and the religious who would otherwise find the group's members offensive. In an "Open Letter to the Pro-Life Movement," the tone is an appeal for a meeting ground for a common cause. "The only mission of the pro-life movement is to save the lives of the unborn and rescue their mothers from brutal victimization without veering into 'non-life' issues. Any enmity against homosexuals is beneath the dignity of a movement founded on the self-evident truth of the intrinsic worth of each individual ... Abortion is, after all, not a homosexual atrocity."

Other issues PLAGAL is concerned about include funding dispersal at various AIDS functions. For instance, it was discovered that part of the monies garnered from the sponsored event "For All Walks of Life," a walk-a-thon which supports HIV research and HIV support organizations, was being distributed to Planned Parenthood and other abortion advocating organizations. PLAGAL felt that the funding of Planned Parenthood gave the wrong impression, that it condoned "doing away" with HIV+ people, even if unborn. PLAGAL's sponsorship of such events was therefore removed. The group has also taken leads in exposing the link between abortion and breast cancer, as well as in championing the effective treatment of HIV+ expectant mothers.

Kevin Walsh, treasurer of the Dartmouth Coalition for Life and organizer of the Tuesday evening presentation, indicated disappointment at the fact that he had attempted, by both phone and e-mail, to contact the Dartmouth Rainbow Alliance to arrange co-sponsorship of the PLAGAL presentation, but had received no response from the group. Attempts to contact the group for a statement proved equally unfruitful.

Walsh, however, seemed undaunted by any contradiction between his group and the objectives of his gay and lesbian counterparts. "I think [the issue of abortion] should break across political and social issues. I think there's a definite definition out there of a 'pro-lifer' ... that they're Christian, and straight, and whatever. But Mr. Arcidi's presentation shows a need to break across stereotypes. The more dialogue, the more viewpoints, the better off we are." ▼



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