

NH/VT Unitarian Universalist Ministers Sanction Same-Gender Marriage

by Reverend Brendan Hadash

At their annual retreat on January 14-16, the Unitarian Universalist ministers of New Hampshire and Vermont chose as their topic same gender marriage. Guest speakers included Keith Kron, the denomination's Director of the Office of Lesbian, Bisexual and Gay Concerns in Boston; Rev. Brendan Hadash, an openly gay UU minister in St. Johnsbury, Vermont; and Beth Robinson from the Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force.

Unitarian Universalist ministers have been performing same-gender marriages since 1984, so this was a topic quite familiar to the group. Several brought sermons to share on the topic. At the end of the three days the ministers decided to propose the following resolution at the annual district meeting on April 26:

"BECAUSE the first principle of Unitarian Universalism is to affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person; and "BECAUSE marriage is held in honor among the blessings of life; and

"WHEREAS many states, the Congress and the President of the United States are attempting to void the recognition of same gender marriages and to deny 'full faith and credit' to such marriages formalized in Hawaii and any other states that sanctions them; and

"WHEREAS the debate about extending legally recognized marriage to same-gender couples has focused on the objections of certain religious communities; and

"WHEREAS the Unitarian Universalist Association has adopted numerous resolutions over the last twenty-seven years supporting equal rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons, including support for Ceremonies of Union between members of the same gender; and

"WHEREAS the UUA Board of Trustees and the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association have voted their support for the right to marry for same gender couples; and

"WHEREAS the 1996 General Assembly of the UUA passed a resolution of support of legal recognition for marriage between members of the same gender;

"THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the New Hampshire Vermont District of the Unitarian Universalist Societies adopts a position of support of legal recognition for marriage between members of the same gender; and

"BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the New Hampshire Vermont District of the Unitarian Universalist Societies make its position supporting legal marriage between persons of the same gender known by means of press and other public media; and

"BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the New Hampshire Vermont District of Unitarian Universalist Societies urges its member congregations to take an affirmative position in support of the value of marriage between any two committed persons whether of the same or of the opposite genders, and to make those positions known in their own communities." ▼

New Hampshire Anti-Marriage Bill Dies

CONCORD—New Hampshire's House of Representatives voted 261-85 last month and effectively killed legislation which would have limited the definition of marriage to the union of one man and one woman. Those who voted against the proposed ban on same-sex marriages considered the bill to be unnecessary and worried about the confusion it might create in other areas.

Supporters of the ban relied heavily on arguments favored by the radical religious right, claiming that the legislation was intended to "serve the interests of children by providing a positive environment for the propagation and rearing of children." Researchers around the country have testified in a number of courts, including Hawaii's, that such arguments have no foundation in statistical fact. The narrow focus on procreation would also seemingly work against heterosexual couples wherein either one partner was impotent or both partners had decided against having children.

A number of states around the country have also considered legislation which would either limit marriage to one man and one woman or prohibit recognition of same-sex marriages performed in another state such as Hawaii. Though a large number of such bills have failed, a number of states have passed the bills, which are often worded to meet the approval of religious right wing conservatives. ▼

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Whether each of us in the glbtq communities chooses to seek civil marriage and its many benefits for ourselves or our loved ones or not, same-gender marriage will be one of the main spaces in which gay and lesbian rights will be debated and negotiated by legislators who are not experienced in dealing with us on such a central level. Although Vermont is considered one of the friendliest states in terms of gay and lesbian rights, there is also now a growing initiative amongst religious political extremist organizations around the U.S. to bar any affirmation of same-gender marriage in Vermont. For this reason, the VCLGR will continue to work to secure this freedom in the coming years and to highlight the fact that no opposition to same-gender marriage can ever claim a non-homophobic, pro-family logic.

Within earshot of Visibility Day is a second VCLGR event, cosponsored with Outright Vermont and the Vermont College Gay Lesbian Bisexual Network. On Friday afternoon, April 18th at 4:00 p.m., a Queer College Coffeehouse will take place at the Blue Couch Cafe on North Street in Burlington. It will follow the Vermont Student Affairs Personnel Association's spring conference at St. Michael's College. The VSAPA which will focus on improving cultural and social advocacy for glbtq students around the state. Everyone is invited to stop in at the Blue Couch for some coffee and phat beats on the 18th. Call 388-0750 with questions about the conference or the coffeehouse.

The VCLGR annual conference is shimmering on the other side of the summer months. Plans for a site in Rutland County are now on the Coalition's workbench. The board is working in collaboration with a newly formed community group, Proud in Rutland County (PIRCy), to find a home for the unashful bash.

Other goals for the Coalition for this year are 1) to establish and finance home and work space for the VCLGR's political advocacy, education, and cultural inreach work; 2) to support and encourage the cultural strength of Vermont's glbtq communities and their organizations; 3) to extend our outreach work beyond our speakers' bureau and annual conference; and 4) to increase membership and participation within the Coalition.

As Sarah Schulman wrote in 1992 about anti-homophobic and People With AIDS advocacy, "Only large numbers of people working in loose agreement and democratic process can make broad social change." When you make gay and lesbian operative terms in your town, home, and workplace, please count on the VCLGR's support. As always, we hope to hear the goings-on and news from gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, and queer people (as well as their allies) so that we can more clearly understand and respond to them, and from there continue to integrate them into the Coalition's programming, committee and advocacy work.

We will be setting up a new 800 phone connection within the month, but for now, please continue writing to us at VCLGR, PO Box 1125, Montpelier, VT 05601-1125. ▼

Health Resources

All phone numbers are 802 area code unless noted.

HIV/AIDS HOTLINES

Vermont: (800) 882-2437
New Hampshire: (800) 752-2437
New York State: (800) 541-2437
Massachusetts: (617) 522-4090
Maine: (800) 851-2437
National: (800) 342-2437
National TTY: (800) 243-7889
Teen Hotline: (800) 234-TEEN

Addison County AIDS Network (ACAN)

352-6679 or 388-4193

AIDS Community Awareness Project (ACAP)

PO Box 608 • St. Johnsbury VT 05819 • 748-1149

AIDS Community Resource Network (ACoRN)

PO Box 2057 • Lebanon NH 03766 • (603) 448-2220
or (800) 816-2220 • E-mail: acorn@valley.net

ALANA Health Care Organization

PO Box 357 • 179 S. Winooski Street • Burlington
VT 05402 • 864-2631 or 864-2632

Bennington Area AIDS Project

PO Box 1066 • Bennington VT 05201 • 442-4481 or
(800) 845-2437

Brattleboro Area AIDS Project

PO Box 1486 • Brattleboro VT 05302 • 254-8263 or
254-4444 (Helpline) • E-mail: sbell@sover.net

Comprehensive Care Clinics (for HIV/AIDS)

Hotline: (800) 763-2460

Brattleboro: 257-8860

Burlington: 656-4594

Rutland: 747-1831

St. Johnsbury: 748-7361

Dawnland Center (Native American)

PO Box 1358 • 121 Barre St. • Montpelier VT 05601
229-0601 • E-mail: Nadrumin@aol.com

Gay/Lesbian Alcoholics Anonymous

PO Box 5653 • Burlington VT 05402 • 658-4221

Lesbian Cancer Support Group

660-8386

Men's Health Project (see Vermont CARES listing)

National Association for People With AIDS

(202) 898-0414

NH/VT HIV Information Network on the Web

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~hivnet/>

North Star Holistic Health Care

RR2 Box 3255 • Morrisville VT 05661 • 888-2858

Tribal Remedies (ALANA Community Organization)

8 Williston St. • Brattleboro VT 05301 • 254-2972

Twin State Women's Network

PO Box 3 • Cavendish VT 05142-0003 • 226-7807

E-mail: margoc@mail.tds.net

Web Site: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~hivnet/orgs/TWSN1.html>

Vermont AIDS Council

PO Box 275 • Montpelier VT 05601 • 229-2557

E-mail: vt aids@plainfield.bypass.com

Vermont CARES

PO Box 5248 • Burlington VT 05401 • 863-2437 or

(800) 649-2437

PO Box 6033 • Rutland VT 05702 • 775-5884

Vermont Deaf AIDS Project

PO Box 172 • Brattleboro VT 05302 • (800) 257-1123

(TTY); (800) 253-0195 (Voice Relay);

(802) 257-2013 (Fax)

Vermont Department of Health

108 Cherry St. • PO Box 70 • Burlington VT 05402

AIDS Program Office: 863-7245

AIDS Hotline: (800) 882-2437

Vermont HIV/AIDS Care Consortium

PO Box 9 • Hinesburg VT 05461 • 482-5100

Vermont HIV/AIDS Education Network

PO Box 1784 • Burlington VT 05402-1784 • 862-1668

Vermont Office of Minority Health

c/o VT Dept. of Health (see above) • 863-7273

Vermont People With AIDS Coalition

PO Box 1055 • Brattleboro VT 05302 • 229-5754 or

(800) 69-VT-PWA • E-mail: vtpwac@sover.net

Web Site: <http://www.sover.net/~vtpwac/>

Vermont Women's Health Center

336 North Ave. • Burlington VT 05401 • 863-1386