

MAJOR SYNAGOGUE GROUP APPROVES SAME-GENDER UNIONS

In April, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, a unit of the Reform movement, voted at its annual meeting to give rabbis the option of officiating at same-gender commitment ceremonies. This makes it the most influential Jewish group to take this step. Reform Judaism is the largest and most liberal of the three major branches of Judaism. Over a decade ago it approved openly gay rabbis, as has the small Reconstructionist branch, which also endorsed such unions.

It has been an open secret for some time that many Reform rabbis perform these ceremonies. This resolution simply makes them officially permitted, but does not encourage or require rabbis to officiate at them, nor does it title them "marriages". The Conservative and Orthodox branches of Judaism oppose same-gender unions. The Orthodox say "another tragic assault on ... the sanctity of our people" has been made, and will expel any rabbi who officiates at one. One Reform rabbi in Boston said that the Conservative and Orthodox reactions are to be expected: "They are entitled to their opinions. They don't have any more authority or authenticity than any other movement has."

"It will be to the advantage of Orthodox families," he went on, "not to treat their children as pariahs. They should be grateful that there is a place in the Jewish community that will welcome them."

Perhaps because of their long history of marginalization, Jews have a tradition of helping the downtrodden and oppressed. They were among the first to join the Black civil rights movement in the 1960's, motivated by the Holocaust. "There are many Jews who know full well that the yellow star and the pink triangle were the same symbols," one Reform observer said, adding, "This has much wider implications ... of affirmation not only to gay and lesbian Jews but to those who have been shut out by other religious groups."

Individual clergy or regions in the Congregational and Episcopal churches have endorsed same-sex unions. Presbyterian and Episcopal national bodies are expected to take up same-sex unions this year. The United Methodist national body just reaffirmed its disapproval of homosexuality.

Purloined from other PFLAG Newsletters . . .
THE WORDS OF A PFLAG MOM
(wife of a minister)

Now that my son is out, I realize that homosexuality is not primarily a political or civil rights issue, as important as those are. It is fundamentally a theological issue. We say we believe that God created the world and rejoices in all creation, including every human being. We don't say God tolerates us in spite of who we are. Why some people are gay is God's mystery and God's business. Personally, I think it's one more example of her unfathomable creativity. How boring the world would be if we were all alike! All I know is that my son is perfectly normal, absolutely healthy, and a gift to our family and our community.

Churches with young families have a special ministry to their children. The suffering of gay children is unnecessary and wrong. We can prevent it by teaching all our children, gay and straight, from the time they are infants, that God made each of us and loves us as we are.

THE WORDS OF A PFLAG DAD

I have come out to several close friends -how liberating that felt! For me, the process was first to be able to accept my gay son; then learning to feel

comfortable with the knowledge; and finally, being ready and feeling good about sharing it with friends and family. PFLAG certainly helped!

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MAKING SCHOOLS SAFE: A PFLAG PRIORITY

SPOKEN IN LOVE WITH COURAGE

By Marian Weage, Founder of Greater Cincinnati Chapter of PFLAG

I speak at high schools in Cincinnati whenever invited. I spoke at St. Xavier H.S. five years running. Each year it took all day to speak to about 200 Juniors. In the fourth year, three mothers sat in on my presentation. Later they asked the head of the religion department if they could have a speaker tell the "other side" -- that it's a sin to be gay, and how to accept Christ and discontinue in this sinful life. He refused, saying it was not a debate but a lesson on love and acceptance.

One of the mothers kept it up, going to the Mothers Club, the Board of Trustees, and even the Archbishop! Then I was asked to meet with the new principal (who had not yet heard me) and the head of the religion department. The principal laid out rules for me, which were fine except that he wanted me to refuse to answer certain questions. I refused this request, because I tell the boys that I'll answer anything asked honestly. He backed down. I spoke, the principal sat in, as did the President of the Board of Trustees. All were complimentary and asked me back for a sixth year.

This precipitated a picket of the school and a press campaign. My name was in the papers and on TV, and bantered about on a late-night talk show. The host and his two guests -- both from out of town -- trashed me and the school. For the first time I was a little apprehensive about going. Those are the nuts who shoot people!

The school sent a letter to the parents of Juniors, saying, in part: "A number of parents have expressed concerns about an upcoming class in the Social Justice/Morality course. On April 8 Mrs. Marian Weage will return for the sixth year to tell Juniors first-hand stories about how her children and other young people have suffered discrimination because of their homosexuality. ... The class seeks to help students form the conviction that discrimination is never justified. If all people are created in the image of God, then all people have dignity and deserve respect...."

On April 8 the kids faced down the pickets, who numbered only ten at the most, including the two from out of town. All day, Seniors came up to me, said they had heard me the year before, thanked me and hugged me. The boys hearing me for the first time were amazed at the hoopla. They said they didn't find the talk controversial.

It's interesting that in the six years I spoke there, in two different years there was one boy who was very confrontative, obscene and rude. Their classmates apologized for them. Both boys were the sons of the mother who caused the most trouble. I have offered to speak to the parents who object, but nothing has been acknowledged. Their biggest criticism of me is that I am not Catholic. To my delight, in the fall of 1998 one of the Catholic parents agreed to do the speaking. She did a good job and was well-accepted. I am pleased she has evolved to the place where she could do this.

We are grateful to Pat, Gwen, Roy and Jane for the recent Newsletter of United Church of Christ Parents of Lesbians and Gays, from which the above was excerpted.

A PROVIDENCE PRESENCE IN MASS.

My attendance at a Safe Schools Speaker Training Workshop held in March in Fall River, MA, led to an invitation to be a part of a safe schools program as a PFLAG representative in April. The two-hour program, called The Second Annual Sharon High School Health Fair, was organized by the peer leaders under the direction of advisor Rachel Franks.

As PFLAG representatives, we answered questions and manned a booth in which we displayed books and pamphlets. Our booth was buzzing with activity. Students were offered a chance to answer a questionnaire about gay and lesbian issues, which also qualified them to enter a raffle for a gift certificate to Strawberries Music store.

The program offered me the opportunity to represent the mission of PFLAG as a loving, supportive, and accepting ÒmomÓ, as well as an educator.

member, Barbara Metz,
Greater Providence PFLAG

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