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from the president

This summer has seen our chapter bustling with activity. Two events highlight the season, however. The first was our chapter's participation in the 13th Annual Christopher Street Liberation Day Parade, otherwise known as the New York Gay Pride March. Some 75 people left early - very early! - in two buses for a fun-filled day in the Big Apple. Although not all participated in the march, everyone was inspired by the sheer size and enthusiasm of those present. We look forward to next year.

The second event of note was actually a series of events: the Seventh Anniversary Celebration of Dignity/Central Pennsylvania. It began Sunday evening, July 11, with a dinner-dance at the Railroad House in Marietta. Thirty-seven people enjoyed a delicious banquet and an evening of good fellowship. On July 16 the Anniversary Mass was celebrated by Fr. Sawdy and two con-celebrants; it was followed by the traditional champagne reception. Concluding the week was the annual Pine Grove picnic, with over 60 persons attending. To all who had a part in planning these events and to the participants, I'd like to say "Thank You" for making our anniversary celebration so successful.

As has become customary at our Anniversary, an award for service to the chapter was presented. The recipient this year was John Barns, who has over the years served our community in capacities almost too numerous to mention. His dedication and loving presence has been and continues to be an inspiration to us all.

On a different note, I draw your attention to the notice of the annual general membership meeting and election of officers scheduled for October 10, 1982. We are in serious need of members who will offer themselves to serve on the Board, either as officers or committee chairs. Eight of the current 11 members of the Board are stepping down after long years of service. Others must come forward if this chapter is to continue its work. In particular, we need people to offer their skills in the

day-to-day running of the organization. Can you type? Are you good with figures? Can you do a half-decent job at balancing account books? Do you like to organize social activities? Does planning liturgical or educational activities appeal to you? If so, please step forward and volunteer yourself. We promise to avoid overlooking you, but we need your commitment and your help. If you're interested, contact me (234-8179) or any member of the Board.

Finally, don't forget the remaining summer activities, including Mass on August 20 (8:00 - Friend's Meeting House, Harrisburg) and the last big picnic of summer on August 29 at Pine Grove Furnace State Park.

May God's love and peace be with you all.

In Dignity,
Bob Sevensky

ELECTIONS

The annual general membership meeting and election of officers of Dignity/Central Pennsylvania, Inc., will be held on Sunday, October 10, 1982, at 6:30 PM at the Friend's Meeting House, 6th & Herr Streets, Harrisburg, PA. It will be preceded by a Mass in honor of the canonization of Blessed Maksymillian Kolbe at 4:00 PM and a potluck supper at 5:00 PM.

The current Board of Directors is serving as the Nominating Committee. Officers to be elected include: President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer and two (2) Members-at-Large. Nominations to these offices should be made to the Committee by Wednesday, September 29, 1982. Candidates for these offices must have been members of Dignity/Central PA for at least six (6) months. Provisions for write-in candidates will be made on the ballot. All members are eligible to vote.

Absentee ballots must be requested on or before October 3, 1982; they must be returned

by the time and date of the election. A judge of elections shall be appointed to oversee the election procedure.

Appointments as Committee Chairpersons will be made by the newly-elected President subject to the approval of the new Board of Directors. Standing Committees include: Communications; Education & Outreach; Liturgy; Membership & Finance; and Social. The chairs of these committees serve as full voting members of the Board of Directors.

conferences

Two conferences of interest to our readers are scheduled for the near future. The first is the Pennsylvania Lesbian/Gay Support Network's Annual Pride Conference, entitled "The Lesbian/Gay Community: The Challenge of the 80's". It is scheduled for August 27-29, 1982 and will be held at the Rainbow Mountain Resort, a gay resort in the Poconos. Registration fee is \$20; food and housing is additional. For more information, contact the Network at P.O. Box 822, Harrisburg, PA 17108 or the Harrisburg Gay Switchboard at 234-0328.

Of special interest is the Conference for Catholic Lesbians sponsored by Dignity/NY, Dignity/Region II, New Ways Ministry and SIGMA. The conference will be held at the Kirkridge Retreat Center in the Poconos the weekend of November 5-7, 1982. Many fine speakers are scheduled, including Sr. Theresa Kane, Virginia Mollenkott, Mary Mendola and Sr. Jeannine Grammick. Registration is limited to 80 women. Costs range from \$65-\$80. For more information/registration, contact: Ms. Kathleen Healy, 261 Central Avenue, Box 141, Jersey City, NJ 07307. Phone (201) 420-9482. Hurry!

reflections

In 1887 my grandfather lost his arm. He had been accidentally shot near his home in rural Warren County. There were no hospitals in northwestern Pennsylvania in those days and the nearest doctor was in Erie some sixty miles away. By the time the doctor arrived, gangrene had set in; so it was imperative that the arm be amputated immediately. The doctor laid my grandfather on the kitchen table and had my grandmother sit astride him to hold him down while the surgery was performed. A horrible experience, indeed! Yet, my grandfather lived another fifty-eight years and died at the ripe age of eighty-six. He was self-supporting and was able to do with one arm many things that I cannot do with two.

What I am trying to say is that we should not judge by appearances alone. Having an arm amputated under such primitive circumstances is a terrible ordeal, yet it was a life-saving event.

We are more familiar with the difference between appearance and reality when it comes to the sacraments. Although Christians of various denominations will differ in their explanation of just how Christ comes to us in Communion, all recognize that beneath the appearances of the bread and wine there is an invisible reality that is a special presence of Christ.

It is important for us to realize that Holy Communion is not the only place where we experience this contrast between appearance and reality, between fact and truth. The facts of life may be painful and devastating. But Scripture assures us that behind these very visible and painful facts there lies a hidden and invisible truth. Saint Paul expressed it in this way: "All things work together for good for those who love God." May the realization that there is this hidden truth sustain us as we face the very visible facts of life.

- Father Sawdy

short takes

Dignity/Central PA was the winner of the \$100 prize in a recent raffle sponsored by The Pennsmen of Harrisburg. The winning ticket was purchased by an anonymous benefactor. Many thanks to the Pennsmen and our anonymous friend!

A support group for the family and friends, of alcoholic individuals who are gay (Al-Anon) is being formed in the Harrisburg area. The group will meet Friday evenings beginning in late September at the Friend's Meeting House, 6th & Herr Streets. Gay AA will also meet at the same time and place. For more information, contact the Harrisburg Gay Switchboard at 234-0328.

MCC is sponsoring a Gay Skate on August 18 at 7:00 PM at the Olympic Skating Center in Enola.

Please remember the work of the West Branch Gay Support Group (WBGSG) which is very active in service to the gay community in North Central Pennsylvania. If you have friends in that area, tell them about it.

For more information and a calendar of events, write: WBGSG, c/o P.O. Box 5104, South Williamsport, PA 17701. Your financial support would also be welcome.

Dignity/Pittsburgh celebrates its anniversary on October 10.

Dignity/Baltimore observes its anniversary on October 23. Region III will meet in Baltimore that day and will say on for the anniversary Mass and dinner starting at 6:00 PM. All are invited.

Pray for the continued healing and recovery of our brother, Steve B. and our sister, Penny.

On the fly leaf of an old book the following was written: -

Who hailed the first appearance of pride,
And listened while the serpent lied,
Consented to be deified?

'T was woman!

Who by the tempter first betrayed,
Infringed the laws that God had made,
And all the world in ruin laid?

'T was woman!

'T was woman!

- From Charity and Children, 1891

REPLY

By N.B.C.

Who failed to tell his new made bride
How Satan basely, foully lied
About their being deified?

'T was Adam!

Who joined his wife in sinful pride,
Altho' he knew the serpent lied
About their being deified?

'T was Adam

Who tried to charge upon his wife
The blame of his own sinful life
When God and man were set at strife?

"Old Adam!"

Who ever since has laid the blame
Of his own follies, sin and shame
Upon the wife who bears his name?

"Old Adam!"

Who viler than the serpent's hiss
Betrayed his Savior with a kiss
And shipwrecked every hope of bliss?

Not woman!

Who vowed that he would sooner die
Than Lord and Master he'd deny
And on that eve did curse and lie?
Not woman!

Who urged the rabble to deride
The Son of God, and crucified
Their Lord with thieves on either side?
Not woman!

Who nailed his Savior to a tree
And mocked his dying agony
When He expired to set man free
Not woman!

Who used her place as ruler's wife
To intercede for Jesus' life,
When plots of enemies were rife?
'T was woman!

Who, when her plea could not avail,
Stood near the cross to weep and wail
While murderers drove the cruel nail?
'T was woman!

And when he bruised the serpent's head
And rose triumphant from the dead
What was the first word Jesus said?
'T was woman!

When John on Patmos saw the sights
And glories of celestial heights,
Whom was he 'mid the heavenly lights?
'T was woman!

Now, everybody say Amen!

- The End

- Dignity/New York
July, 1982

*we are all messy rooms sometimes,
out of order.
And we hide it.*

*Sometimes we can't hide it.
And that's because we need
faith,
love,
peace...*

each other.



Freedom

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."
—Galatians 5:1

The Newsletter of the Metropolitan Community Churches in Lancaster and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

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THE CLOSET AS KILLER

Elsewhere in this issue you will find an article by Al Johnson about a friend of ours who was victimized by other members of the gay community in the city where he lives. While it is regrettable that we have to admit that there are members of the gay community that lean toward the criminal, it is even more criminal that we so often allow them to get away with it.

Why? The main reason is that old bugaboo, the closet. So many of us have led ourselves to believe that we must protect the secrecy of our sex lives that we will put up with just about anything if the alternative forces us to come out of our closet.

This, my friends, is not freedom; it is bondage — and it flies in the face of the grace offered to us by God.

Am I saying, therefore, that it is sinful to stay in the closet? Well, that would be too simplistic and general to stand very close scrutiny, but basically I believe it is right. It is sinful to treat ourselves as trash when we are, indeed, children of the living God.

Perhaps you have seen the ad for one of the national gay political organizations that has a picture of a straight-looking man or woman (usually it's a man), and the caption reads, "But I can't 'come out.' How can I help?" That ad always makes me cringe. And then it makes me angry. I want to scream at the picture, "Why? Why can't you come out?" But since I have heard the litany of excuses before, I don't bother. Pictures seldom answer one, anyway.

In order to talk about coming out, we must first define our terms — not that I'm setting the standard for the nation, but just so that you'll know what I'm talking about.

Coming out is not an event. It is a process, and it takes a lifetime. In the first stage, one comes out to one's self. This means coming into full realization that you are a gay person. The second stage is often coming out to the gay community. This means going to the bars, baths, bookstores, and other gay haunts. For others, it means worming your way into a circle of friends (*see*: clique) who are gay. At the very least you find and develop a friendship with one or two gay people who can help you learn about what it means to belong (or not to belong) to the gay community.

The third stage quite often is sharing the secret of your homosexuality with a few close friends of the heterosexual persuasion. This is traumatic, because you never know how many of your old friends have been closet homophobes all these years. My experience has been that real friends seldom (if ever) dump you because you are gay. Fair-weather friends, on the other hand evaporate like alcohol on a hot day.

The next-to-last stage involves coming out to employers, landlords, next door neighbors, and the like. This group may also include a few relatives like your favorite aunt, uncle or cousin.

In many (if not most) cases the last step or stage is coming out to one's parents. For a lot of gay people this is the hardest step.

Coming out is a lifelong process because every time you meet someone, they will assume you are heterosexual until you inform them otherwise. This is called the heterosexual presumption, and it rules the sexual ethics and mores of every fabric of our society.

So what's the big deal? Why should we have to mouth off about our sexuality when straight folks don't? The answer to that question is that the question is a lie. Straight folks parade their sexual orientation in front of us at all times, shamelessly announcing to the world the identity of their sexual partners.

Do I care? Well, actually, no. But the truth of the matter is that sex partners are often life partners, and part of our identity is shaped by who we choose for a life partner. And even if that lifetime commitment has not been made, straight folks do not even show shame when they tell us about their boyfriends, girlfriends, fiancées, steady dates, and one-night-stands.

Why is this? This is because, barring illicit affairs, straight folks don't really care if we know who they are sleeping with. It is no big deal. The fact that Max is courting Ethel does not reveal all the intricate ways they express themselves sexually; it just proclaims that whatever they do, they are doing it with each other.

I look forward to the day when gay people can be as matter-of-fact. We don't have to give lurid accounts of how we do it, but we should have no qualms whatever about revealing who we do it with.

Continued on pg. 2

Closet — continued

But we do. And the excuses we dream up are classic. How many times have you heard (or used) one of the following rationalizations for not being honest about homosexual orientation?

- *Oh, I can't tell my parents, they just wouldn't understand.*
- *We can't come out in Lancaster. This town is just not ready for it.*
- *Where I work, one does not talk about such things.*
- *If my boss ever finds out I'm gay I'll be fired on the spot.*
- *They don't discuss their sex life, why should I discuss mine?*
- *What I do in the privacy of my bedroom is my business and nobody else's.*
- *She (or he) has enough problems already, why should I burden her (him) with this?*

There are hundreds of others, but these are the most popular. The main thing that is wrong with each of them is that they are basically dishonest.

They are dishonest for two major reasons: first, they usually don't hold water when examined closely, and second, because they put a higher value on some intangible (and sometimes invisible) entity than they do on the integrity of the humanity of the speaker. What makes them so popular is that there is a little bit of truth in each of them.

I once dated a man whose father was 70 years old and had a heart condition. He chose not to reveal his homosexuality to his father because he knew for a fact that his father

hated homosexuals and that knowing his son was one might easily kill him. Much as I hated to, I had to admit that he was right. However, I hear this same excuse from people whose parents are young and healthy.

Probably about 3-5% of the people who use this excuse are really in touch with the truth. I hate even to admit that because then everyone who uses it will claim that they are in that 3-5%. But it is just not so.

In like manner, there are some few (precious few) occasions when any of the other excuses might actually be true.

But the real reason most gay people don't come out has nothing whatever to do with parents, employers, friends, or society in general. It has to do with the individual making the excuse. Most gay people don't come out because they are ashamed of what they do. They have been told for so long that they are sick or perverted that they just buy into it, internalize it, and live it out.

This is not Good News. It is evil. And it is the reason we must persevere as a church until we succeed in getting our message across.

Scripture says that *all* who repent, confess, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved, will inherit the Kingdom of God, and have the potential to become children of God.

If there are exceptions to this promise, then scripture lies. And I

don't happen to believe that scripture lies.

Every time we deny our identity at the cost of our human dignity, we are saying to our oppressors, "You are right! We don't deserve to share this same planet with you. We'll just be silent and take your abuse because we really are inferior to you."

That's baloney. That is the lie that Satan wants us to believe so that we can be forever held in bondage. This paper is called FREEDOM for a reason.

Freedom is what God promises us. And with God's help we shall know the truth and the truth shall make us free.

Sisters and brothers, I submit to you that as long as we hide in our closets, we can never be free. We can't even breathe!

If you truly believe, beyond the shadow of any doubt, that you cannot afford to come out of your closet now, then you have your work cut out for you. Get yourself ready. Get those around you ready. Coming out is not easy, but with God's help it is not impossible.

True, there is some pain involved and there are some risks, but we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

With the end of the '70s came the end of the era for wearing political buttons. That's a pity, because I saw one once that I have never forgotten.

It said, quite simply, "The closet is a lonely place to die." And it is.

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