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Religion and civil rights: Acts of love?

Metropolitan Community Church offers a far greater message than prayer and praise. We are called to act on our beliefs, and we are called to go one step further — to live what we say is true.

B Y K A T E Z O N

And one of them, a lawyer, asked Jesus a question, as a test. "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" And Jesus answered, "You shall love the Sovereign your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:35-40)

Lesbian and Gay Pride celebrations — are they sacred or secular? Are civil rights and worship compatible? Do religious groups properly minister only to the soul or do they help us address all aspects of our living?

The answers we give for any of these questions directly reflect our own views of who God is and who we are. A need to make separations or divisions between worship and politics, between secular and sacred, between soul and physical/emotional/intellectual indicate what separation we perceive between God and self.

Many of us struggle with questions of this sort when we come to Metropolitan

Community Church (MCC). After having felt unwelcome in our churches of origin, many of us declared ourselves to be non-spiritual beings, done with that God stuff which seemingly only caused us pain. We were the persons who were disenfranchised and separated not only from society-at-large, but also from God. We were told that society didn't like us because God didn't, and frequently we believed that false message. When we did become willing to again recognize the spiritual aspects of ourselves and to overcome our suspicion of institutions enough to associate ourselves with churches and corporate worship, we were in desperate need of spiritual healing.

For example, I had few doubts left about my ability to deal with an often-hostile and indifferent world. I came to MCC as a front-line Roseburg politico, and stayed because of the miracle of hearing my sisters and brothers singing hymns to and about God. My spirit was thirsty, and I drank in the words and the music and the realization that I had a God who loved me. I had banished my Spirit behind locked doors deep inside me, lest I feel the pain of separating myself from a God with whom I had wanted to share my life. At MCC I opened those doors and my Spirit began to

breathe again.

MCC is a most unusual church. To quote a pamphlet from UFMCC (Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches):

"A church which proclaims liberation for all, a church which extends its ministry to persons of all races and backgrounds, to young and old alike, to rich and poor, a church which welcomes Gays, Lesbians and heterosexuals, to worship together, to witness and serve together — such a church is, indeed, a rare church in modern times. From the earliest days of MCC, involvement in Christian Social Action has been central to all of us, including our founder, Reverend Troy Perry.

In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s Troy Perry led marches, promoted demonstrations, staged sit-ins and fasted in public to advance the cause of Gay rights. As times changed, Reverend Perry and MCC members became active in additional approaches to gaining freedom from the oppression they felt had long been perpetrated on Gay people.

At our General Conference in 1983, UFMCC passed a resolution outlining our response to the AIDS crisis. It calls for active pastoral care and leadership in educational, political activism and social responsibility to the local congregational and denominational levels.

At that same conference, two other resolutions were passed in support of a freeze on nuclear weapons — world peace and justice are urgent concerns of our world-wide Fellowship.

In this day of theological debate and sociological struggle with the status of women in a number of Christian denomina-

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