

P/FLAG program supported by Episcopalians

Right-wing religious and political leaders who wave the banner of "traditional family values" are a major impediment to overcoming the teen suicide problem according to a parent-church-educator coalition that announced a suicide prevention program focused on gay and lesbian youth.

The project, "Respect All Youth," is being undertaken by the Federation of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, with financial assistance from the United Thank Offering Fund of the Episcopal Church.

RELIGION

THE REV. MATTHEW NELSON

Its principal function will be to develop and furnish training materials to those who work with youth, according to Paulette Goodman, President of P/FLAG. The organization's anti-discrimination aims were recently endorsed by First Lady Barbara Bush.

Government studies show that lesbian and gay teenagers are up to three times as likely to attempt suicide as other young people, because of the stigma society places on them. Nevertheless, Congressman William Dannemeyer (R-Calif.) recently prevailed upon Louis Sullivan, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to disavow the studies in the interest of "traditional family values."

Speaking strongly in support of the P/FLAG announcement were the Right Reverent Oliver Bailey Garver, Jr., Suffragan Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles; and Jackie Goldberg, president of the Los Angeles City School Board. Goldberg's district undertook the first program in the nation to initiate counseling for gay and lesbian high school students.

Also endorsing the program were Virginia Uribe, director of Project 10; and Mary Griffith, a mother whose son died because of her earlier misguided religious beliefs and lack of information. Griffith, a mother of four, said that her gay son, at her urging, resorted to prayer and "reparative" therapy with religious counselors in the vain attempt to become heterosexual. At the age of 20, convinced that he was evil in the eyes of God, he threw himself off an overpass and into the path of an 18-wheel semi-trailer. It would not have happened, she is now convinced, if there had been programs at school and elsewhere that "could have offset what he was told by me at home and by others in our church." Griffith is now president of the Mount Diablo, California, chapter of P/FLAG. Her object, she said, is to help other parents avoid the tragedy that befell her family.

Tutu defends gays and lesbians

Christians have no option but to defend all the oppressed, including gays and lesbians, Archbishop Desmond Tutu said on Aug. 16, 1990, in London, Ontario. Tutu was in Canada on a ten-day trip, which included addressing the United Church of Canada's General Council meeting in London. The Archbishop told reports that lesbians and gay men are "marginalized," treated in a special discriminatory way. "Our faith cannot allow this to happen," he said on the steps of St. Paul's Anglican Cathedral in London.

Southern Baptists bash Bush

President Bush has betrayed the trust of millions of Southern Baptists by inviting homosexuals to the White House for a second time, a high Baptist official charges. The White House invited gay representatives to witness Bush's July 26 signing of the American Disabilities Act. Richard Land, head of the Southern Baptists' Christian Life Commission, sent a letter to President Bush on Aug. 1, asking to meet with him to "discuss how your policies coincide with the agenda of the homosexual lobby." Large numbers of Southern Baptists want to know why you are giving such official recognition to a homosexual-lesbian lifestyle they find abhorrent," Land wrote. This is the second time this year that Land has registered consternation over a White House invitation to gay and lesbian representatives. In April, members of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force were there to see Bush sign anti-hate crime legislation. At that time Land wrote, "For the White House to give this kind of acceptance to homosexuals is inconsistent with its attempts to appear pro-family. The White House can't walk both sides of the street," he said. "They can't be seen as both pro-family and pro-homosexual. Evangelicals did not vote for George Bush with the prospect of his doing this."

The fallout over Bush's April invitation to NLGTF cost him an appearance at the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in June. Having originally sought an invitation to address the convention, Bush decided not to go after several Southern Baptist leaders suggested that he would receive a cool welcome.

"This second invitation to the homosexual lobby has grievously damaged your administration's standing among many of my constituents and has led many of us to ask, 'Does the White House no longer care about our concerns?'" Land said in his August letter.

As a result of the furor, President Bush's key link to the religious right and other conservative constituencies was fired from his White House job after he declined to support the White House invitations.

-Excerpted from Integrity News and Notes

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