

Religious coalition formed to oppose OCA agenda

People of Faith against Bigotry announced its formation to stop the Oregon Citizens Alliance in its attempt to endanger civil rights. PFAB is an interfaith coalition of Christians, Jews and other people of faith who are concerned about the gathering cloud of hate, discrimination and fear focused by the OCA.

PFAB believes that no minority group will be safe if the OCA is successful in its initiative. The OCA is doing just what the Nazis did, targeting one minority at a time. Their next target could be Jews, Catholics, racial minorities, immigrants or women [of all colors and faiths]. All of these groups have been the target of hate groups here in Oregon.

PFAB is pleased that the bishops and executives of the 17 denominations of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon have unanimously spoken out against the OCA initiative. PFAB is a grassroots organization working within congregations, parishes and synagogues to give voice to the call against bigotry and in supporting diversity and mutual acceptance in our society. The grassroots networking among the religious community is an essential component of this work for human rights and justice. PFAB plans many

activities, including workshops, speakers, prayer services and candlelight vigils throughout Oregon. A media campaign entitled "No Bigotry in My Name" is being planned. The idea is to get hundreds of names of people from every denomination and religion throughout Oregon to state publicly that the OCA does not speak for them.

PFAB is a grassroots organization designed to help people organize events in their local community. PFAB can be reached at 2249 E Burnside St., Portland, OR 97214, or by calling Dan Stutesman at 230-9427.

Episcopalians extend benefits

The Episcopal Diocese of Newark, N.Y., acted last month to extend dental insurance coverage to partners of its gay and lesbian priests and lay employees, making it the first body within any mainstream Protestant denomination nationwide to extend such benefits to same-sex partners. Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, which provided legal support to the efforts to change the policy, lauded the extension of benefits as a significant step in achieving meaningful recognition for lesbian and gay partnerships.

Fifth year of Catholic AIDS ministry

In December of 1987, at the request of Archbishop Levada, a group of volunteers gathered to begin discussions on the church's response to the

growing epidemic of a relatively new virus called HIV. This group of volunteers quickly recognized the need to mobilize and to begin to take action. The AIDS Ministry of the Archdiocese of Portland came into being. In August of 1989, the Pastoral Letter on AIDS of the Most Reverend William J. Levada, Archbishop of Portland, was published. Entitled "With Compassionate Love and Reconciliation," the letter states the Catholic Church's position: "...we should assist in efforts to educate persons about this disease and ensure that persons with AIDS and their families receive the pastoral care they need from their Church." Using this sentiment as a springboard, Catholic Charities has continued to provide education and care for those affected by AIDS.

While many persons within the Catholic community have been involved with the AIDS ministry, the ministry took on a more formal position in July of 1991, when Father Bruce Cwiekowski was appointed by Catholic Charities as AIDS Ministry Coordinator. It is Cwiekowski's task to educate, raise consciousness and bring about a true sense of pastoral care within the church for persons living with AIDS.

Methodist church in Estacada opens arms to walkers

The United Methodist Church of Estacada sent its church vans to Canby, 25 miles away, to pick up over 30 lesbian and gay walkers to offer them warmth and hospitality. The walkers were

part of the For Love and Justice Walk that took place in June.

That evening, the church hosted a program which attracted over 200 people from the area who joined in solidarity to hear lesbian and gay rights activists blast the Oregon Citizens Alliance and its attempt to limit civil rights. Suzanne Pharr gave the keynote address.

The Methodist Church teaches that homosexuality is not compatible with Christian scripture. Although the church does not ordain gay people, it affirms the civil rights of gays.

Two years ago the United Methodist Church of Estacada welcomed lesbian and gay people to its congregation. Displaying the height of homophobia, the Estacada Ministerial Association disbanded and launched a new association without them.

Compiled by Matthew Nelson, an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ.

What I'm doing to fight the OCA

Within the United Church of Christ, I chair the Task Force on Lesbian and Gay Concerns. The task force has created a six-week educational program on heterosexism that has been presented to one third of the UCC churches in Oregon and southern Idaho; another third have had brief presentations, and three UCC churches have declared themselves "open and affirming" of lesbians and gay men. I've presented this program and spoken to churches from Klamath Falls to Lone, and I will continue to challenge the religious community to stand up and be counted in support of the lesbian, gay and bisexual community.

Matthew Nelson

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