

Reclaiming our gay and lesbian history

Catholic priests were friends to early gay lib activists, helped found first homosexual organization in Oregon

by Tom Cook

Did you know that a Roman Catholic priest helped organize what later became the first gay and lesbian civil rights organization in Oregon? It may be hard to believe, but it's true. Surviving copies of the first gay newspaper in Portland, *The Fountain*, recently researched at the Oregon Historical Society, indicate that Fr. Kieran Healy, O.P., chaplain of Portland State University during the early '70s, helped to organize the first meeting of the Second Foundation, which was incorporated in the state of Oregon in August, 1971.

The Fountain states, "In October, 1970 a group of individuals headed by

Neil Hutchins and Dennis Kennedy met for the first time to discuss the need for a homosexual counseling service. The first meeting was held at Koinonia House, chaired by Fr. Healy and attended by Julia Saslow of PSU Counseling Service. A committee was appointed by Fr. Healy, and the wheels were set in motion. On Feb. 9, 1971 a constitution was adopted and the name of the organization, Second Foundation, was suggested by Terry Tunnell."

The organization derived its name from the title of a science fiction novel by Isaac Asimov. In Asimov's story, a great sociologist and psychohistorian named Hari Sheldon, using his knowledge of human nature, plans two organizations of people who are supplied with the knowledge and dedication to serve as foundations to the rebuilding of society: the "first foundation," to help rebuild the physical world, and the "second foundation," composed of people who understand human emotions, needs and potentials. The novel deals with a fantastical setting, but there is an underlying thesis which deals with a serious study of human society.

The Second Foundation started out as a social service agency and counseling service for homosexuals in Portland, and through its political committee soon become involved in the "gay liberation" movement. The organization was described as "... composed of ex-drag queens; straight, up-

tight, conservatives; liberal closet cases and scattered remnants of the defunct Portland Gay Liberation Front."

There is evidence that this organization maintained its ties with supportive Catholic clergy, for *The Fountain* reported that on May 16, 1971, it sponsored a "Day of Reflection" under the direction of a priest identified only as "Fr. Henry, a Mt. Angel Seminary theologian." The informal discussion group of twenty people "... talked freely and openly about such topics as the basis for gay commitment (marriage), problems that can arise, ethics, social acceptance, the gay's relationship to the church and to God, and the need for each homosexual to develop a sincere love for his gay brother and the need to advance the feeling of community [among homosexuals]."

Local Dominican priests who were supportive of the homosexual community during the "gay lib" days also provided one of the first homes for the nascent Metropolitan Community Church of Portland, which was at first refused space in the United Church of Christ, but later given sanctuary in the First United Methodist Church on Jefferson Street, while members searched for a permanent location to hold services. As *The Fountain* reported in July, 1973:

"... According to MCC Pastor Ken Adams, the Catholic Archdiocese put pressure on the Dominican provincial governor to oust the fledgling homosexual congregation. Adams said they were not forced to leave, but finally left to prevent Holy Rosary from being troubled further. Another factor in the departure involved MCC members of Catholic background who did not like Protestant services being held in a Catholic church."

The story of the Second Foundation is important to the history of gays and lesbians in Portland because it was this organization that published the first gay newspaper in Oregon in March, 1971 with 200 subscribers. The earliest copies were mimeographed six-page issues, assembled in the basement of editor Neil Hutchins' home. Within six months, the paper had grown to 3,000 subscribers, and the Second Foundation counted 150 paid members.

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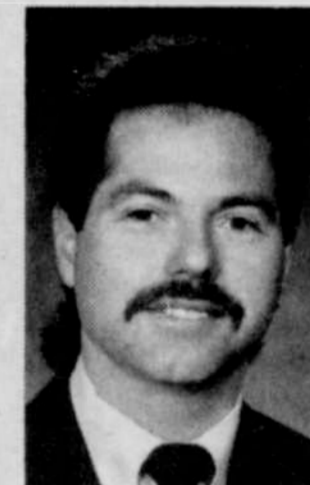
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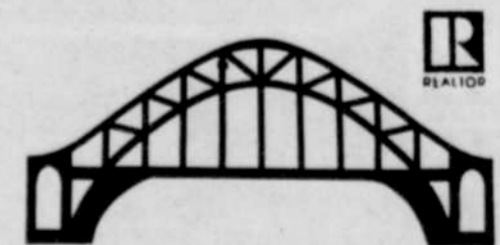
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