

NOT FALLING IN LINE

Critics are dragging their feet at the prospect of another march on Washington, D.C., that's been called for 2000 by Bob Roehr



PHOTO BY JAY BROWN

1993's march on Washington

The Millennium March for Equal Rights was announced in early February via a press release from the Human Rights Campaign and the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. They had bought into a proposal made by promoter Robin Tyler for a Washington, D.C., rally in the spring of 2000.

Dissenting voices arose even while fax machines were still spitting out the news. Within a week, HRC head Elizabeth Birch announced a "pause" to try and calm protests.

Some critics argued there had not been adequate consultation and discussion within the queer community, others opposed the principle of a national march, while a third faction questioned the timing of this particular event.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force has been working for more than a year with a network of state and local groups to organize rallies in state capitals in 1999. Each will be tied to local issues such as repeal of sodomy statutes, same-sex marriage and civil rights legislation.

Five organizations joined together to raise questions about the march: the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center, the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, and the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum.

They crafted a letter outlining their concerns. It grew out of a Feb. 17 memo prepared by Victory Fund executive director Brian Bond, that was circulated to the others in advance of a conference call later that day. The missive reflected conversations he had had with his board and "key political leaders and donors on this issue." In the memo, Bond cited the recent repeal of anti-discrimination protections for gay men and lesbians in Maine.

"I think it is very clear to all of us that more needs to be done in the states to bolster our statewide organizations," he wrote. "I think the general feeling out in the 'real world' is that enough money already flows to Washington, leaving in many cases scraps for our state and local organizations."

Longtime California activist Jerry Sloan has noted, in addition to the time and money needed to stage the event, that "what always seems to be overlooked is the cost incurred by the people who go to D.C. for [a march]." Transportation, food and lodging for as many as 1 million people is a spendy proposition, and some feel that the time, energy and expense could be better used.

The controversy continued on March 5, when the Human Rights Campaign sent out a letter to newspaper editors.

"In the year 2000, the entire nation will be looking for new trends and fresh messages. We have an opportunity, if not an obligation, to use this wave to effectively shift the paradigm of perception about gay people," wrote Birch.

She maintained the event could in part lead to better organizing around the fall 2000 elections.

The spring of 2000, from February to June, is when presidential candidates will duke it out in wide-open fights in both parties. It is the first nonincumbent race since 1988. Many states will also decide congressional nominees. The religious right wing will have its hard-core supporters working the pulpits and bake sales, exhorting its people on how to vote.

HRC, the largest gay and lesbian political organization, is proposing to counteract this by bringing the gay and lesbian community's most open and visible members to Washington, D.C., at the very height of this crucial primary season. Some feel this doesn't make political sense.

The day after HRC sent out its letter, Robin Tyler sent out her own, under the title of "executive producer" of the march.

Tyler said she had a financial plan she believed would "raise enough money not only to cover the march, but to possibly raise money" for other organizations across the nation.

The track record on this point is not good: Most marches have lost money. Stonewall 25, held in New York in 1994, was a financial disaster. The Million Man March generated losses. The Promise Keepers, which held a massive rally in October, is in the midst of a financial crisis.

At the same time, those marches garnered major attention, says Nicole Ramirez-Murray, national co-chair of the National Latino/a Lesbian and Gay Organization.

In a March 6 public statement, Ramirez-Murray wrote, "The Millennium March on Washington once again gives us a great opportunity to show America the determination of our movement and our allies in our struggle for equality. The facts are that the Million Man March and the Promise Keepers march brought the world's attention to Washington, D.C., and we will do so again for our march in 2000."

Still, critics argue that skepticism is in order, and say greater public discussion must occur—and questions must be answered—before the community commits to moving forward on anything as large as a Millennium March.

ME? A BEGGAR?!

None of us can imagine a fate much worse than begging for our lives. It may surprise you then that the word to pray originally meant to beg. All who pray are beggars. When we truly pray from our hearts, we are begging God to give us what we cannot supply for ourselves—the very essence of life.

Often we are tempted to believe that in prayer we are asking God to grant us things or to change the course of events as if God were some type of cosmic bellhop. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proclaimed

*Ask and it will be give to you;
Seek and you will find;
Knock and the door will be opened to you.
For everyone who asks receives;
He who seeks finds;
And to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

Based on his example, it is unlikely Jesus was suggesting we ask for "the good life." Rather he was teaching that all who truly seek God can be assured of God's loving response.

So what should a gay man pray for? A hot new partner? A tight body? Youthful looks? More stuff? The list of our wants is endless and we deceive ourselves into believing that their fulfillment brings deep happiness or inner peace. The promised satisfaction is short lived and soon we discover something else we "need" to make life complete.

God wants us to seek nothing more than God's own self. When we pray we should assume that being in God's presence is our blessing. Only losing ourselves in the unfathomable love of God brings true happiness. We are *beggars* because we are helpless to secure the deepest desire of our hearts except as the gift of God's grace.

A message from the Anawim Community—gay men seeking to follow Jesus through lives of prayer and service to our gay brothers.

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