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NATIONAL news

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY NIXES GINGRICH SPEECH

Officials at Catholic University of America refused to allow Candace Gingrich, sister of House Speaker Newt Gingrich, to speak on campus April 22, despite the fact that she had been invited by the Rev. Robert M. Friday, vice president for student life, and the university's Organization for Lesbian and Gay Student Rights.

"Religious disagreements do not justify suppression of free speech," says Elizabeth Birch, the Human Rights Campaign's executive director. "Apparently, administrators at Catholic University do not have enough faith in their students to allow them to hear different points of view. The students at the university are the big losers today."

Gingrich, who is HRC's associate manager of the National Coming Out Day Project, said she was disappointed.

"I'm surprised that this happened in our nation's capital, where major issues are freely debated every day," she said. "Catholic University has sent the message that they choose to be an island of ignorance in a sea of free speech."

In a one-paragraph statement, Catholic University President Brother Patrick Ellis wrote, "I have concluded that the presentation could not be compatible with the Catholic identity of the Catholic University of America."

Ellis' statement contradicts the university's history of occasionally inviting speakers whose views are in opposition to those of the Roman Catholic Church. These guests have included speakers who favored abortion rights and supporters of the death penalty.

The decision sparked disagreement from some students and faculty members.

"My understanding was that Gingrich was going to speak about what life was like as a gay person in America," Friday told HRC. "I do not think what she was going to say was incompatible with the Catholic identity of the university. This is a place where diverse points of view should be heard and the students can make up their own minds."

The school's decision followed a letter written earlier that week by representatives of Graduates for Life, an anti-abortion student group, which asked the university president to rescind Gingrich's invitation. The letter said Gingrich's message "directly contradicts the truth of Catholic moral doctrine."

QUEER CHRISTIAN HAVEN

The evolution of homosexuality in Christianity continues with the Rancho Amanecer Retreat Center. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, the 22-acre ranch in Southern California's Leona Valley is the only ecumenical spiritual retreat in the country specifically for gay men and lesbians.

Aside from offering a retreat site for queer Christians, Rancho Amanecer's mission is to counter the antagonism toward religion often



Candace Gingrich

seen in the sexual minorities community, said one of the retreat's founders, James L. Colburn, who is Catholic.

That sentiment was echoed by Episcopalian priest Malcolm Boyd at the center's April 18 opening conference.

"Our profession of faith within the gay movement has too often led to our being treated as second-class citizens and falsely stereotyped as hypocrites and accomplices in social oppression," Boyd said.

Colburn said he tried to be inconspicuous about his orientation when he first arrived in the valley, but several residents knew he was gay even before he purchased the site.

"One time the postmistress, an older lady, took my hand and said, 'It's so nice to have you boys in the valley,'" he said.

FRANK DOWN ON MARCH

Openly gay Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., thinks the time and money going into planning a year 2000 march in Washington, D.C., in support of queer civil rights could be better spent, reports the *Washington Blade*.

In an interview with syndicated gay columnist Hastings Wyman published in early April, Frank said he thinks the march "is not a good idea. It's a diversion of resources."

He also told Wyman he wants to see sexual minorities rushing to participate in one of the two main political parties rather than marching in Washington.



Barney Frank

"I'd like to see [gay people] spending all their time trying to be delegates to the Democratic convention—and the Republican convention, though that's not going to be as successful," he said.

Plans for the Millennium March on Washington were announced in February by the Human Rights Campaign and the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.

The march has stirred controversy, with a number of queer organizations charging they were not consulted on key decisions in the march's planning, including discussions about the political platform that will be presented. Several have reserved their endorsement of the march pending further discussion of these issues.

A TAXING SITUATION

When Kathys' Group, a nonprofit support group for lesbians with cancer, applied for tax-exempt status, an Internal Revenue Service agent ordered the group to alter its mission statement to read "all women" instead of focusing on lesbians.

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund sent a letter to the IRS April 14 insisting the agency treated the Rhode Island group improperly. Lambda also said Kathys' Group meets all tax-exempt criteria, which should be the IRS's only concern.

"Dealing with the IRS is a scary thing, so we thought we might have to give up our mission," says Lorry Gavin, president of Kathys' Group.

