

# WORLD news BRIEFS

## BELGIUM

Sexual minority persons between the ages of 15 and 25 in Belgium's Flanders region are two to five times more likely to attempt suicide than straight youth, according to researchers at Ghent University.

Sociologist John Vincke and psychologist Kees van Heeringen studied 404 young people—half of whom identified as sexual minorities, the other half as heterosexual.

Their report was presented at the *Seventh European Symposium: The Suicidal Process: Challenges for Treatment and Prevention*, held Sept. 9 to 12 in Belgium.

According to the findings, 25 percent of young lesbian and bisexual women had attempted suicide at least once, compared with 5.4 percent of straight female youths. About 13 percent of gay male youths had tried to kill themselves, compared with 5.9 percent of straight male youths.

The report found that 45 percent of young lesbians and one-third of young gay men had considered suicide, compared with 24 percent of straight females and 16 percent of straight males.

## CANADA

Two Montreal men who have been a couple for 25 years filed suit Sept. 14 demanding the right to marry legally.

Gay activist Michael Hendricks, 57, and his partner, Rene Leboeuf, 43, submitted their case after Quebec Superior Court Assistant Clerk Louise Lebrun rejected their application for a marriage license.

"In concrete terms, it'll give us recognition," Hendricks says. "We'll be able to share our pensions and of course the inheritance. If I pass on, he'll be left with nothing. If we're married then we'll be covered and assured."



The case will likely advance to the federal Supreme Court—a process that could take several years.

"We're young enough for that," Hendricks told the Canadian Press wire service.

The Superior Court case will be heard beginning Dec. 15. The lawsuit claims Quebec's marriage law violates the province's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which has banned discrimination based on sexual orientation since 1967. The couple's lawyer will also argue Quebec has no right to decide who can marry whom because marriage falls under federal jurisdiction.

Brad Woodside, mayor of Fredericton, New Brunswick, was ordered to proclaim gay pride weekend by a provincial Board of Inquiry Sept. 17.



The board said Woodside violated the provincial Human Rights Act's ban on discrimination based on sexual orientation when he refused to declare pride weekend in 1995.

"[Gay men and lesbians] are simply seeking to exercise their right to be equal members of the community as they are entitled to do by law," wrote Brian Bruce, a board commissioner.

Fredericton gay activist James Whitehead said of the mayor's inaction: "It's very frustrating when someone can turn something that seems so simple to begin with into something so divisive. There's been a lot of damage done."

Similar cases in London and Hamilton, Ontario, saw the same outcome, except the mayors of those cities were also fined—\$5,000 in Hamilton and \$10,000 in London. Woodside was not fined.

## COLOMBIA

A 1979 law that allowed firing openly gay and lesbian teachers was struck down by Colombia's Constitutional Court Sept. 10.



In a 5-4 ruling, the nation's highest court said the law was discriminatory. It affects about 250,000 public school teachers from grade school through college.

"Homosexuality is not contagious," said German Humberto Rincon, the lawyer who brought the suit before the court.

No one was ever actually fired under the statute.

## FRANCE

The 14,644 mayors who signed a petition against the country's proposed registered-partnership law were led to believe they would be forced to conduct same-sex weddings, French newspapers reported in mid-September.

In fact, the legislation, which will be debated in the National Assembly Oct. 9, proposes that cohabiting couples—same- or opposite-sex, romantic or not—be allowed to register with a court clerk and obtain most of the social and fiscal rights of matrimony. Access to adoption and state-funded alternative conception technology will likely be excluded.

A recent poll found that 50 percent of French people surveyed approve of government registration of same-sex partnerships, and 28 percent say same-sex couples should be permitted to adopt children. However, only 19 percent of those surveyed would call a same-sex partnership "marriage."

## INTERNATIONAL

The International Lesbian and Gay Association will stage its 1999 world conference in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September.

ILGA is a federation of more than 350 gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans organizations from six continents.

The conference organizing committee consists of Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe, South Africa's Gay and Lesbian Organization of Witwatersrand and National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality, and Namibia's Rainbow Project.

## JORDAN

Health Ministry officials say the nation deported 26 HIV-positive foreigners this summer.



The serostatus of the foreigners was detected during mandatory medical examinations required to obtain work and residency permits.

Officials say slightly more than 190 Jordanians have been diagnosed with HIV, but representatives of the World Health Organization say they know of about 600 AIDS cases in the nation.

According to Agence France-Presse, the government of Jordan quarantines people with HIV and does not discuss the disease because its main modes of transmission—gay sex and prostitution—are taboo topics.

## PORTUGAL

Joao Soares, the mayor of Lisbon, attended the unveiling of the new headquarters of the Portuguese gay group Opus Gay on Sept. 12, and the kickoff of Lisbon's second gay and lesbian film festival two days later. The festival screened more than 100 films.

Soares said he was "very proud that Lisbon is a city of freedom, tolerance and openness."

Opus Gay President Antonio Serzedelo, 53, told Spain's *El Pais* newspaper, "After the blacks and the Gypsies, it's our turn [for freedom]."

Opus Gay's name is a takeoff on the extremely conservative worldwide Catholic organization Opus Dei, which is Latin for the "work of god."

## THAILAND

Thai AIDS activists picketed the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok Sept. 4 to protest what they view as U.S. governmental pressure on companies that produce generic anti-HIV drugs.



U.S. officials claim the cheaper Thai antivirals illegally violate the patents of First World drug companies. The protesters said if local AIDS patients are forced to buy name-brand drugs, many will have to go without because they can't afford them.

Thailand's Pharmaceutical Organization sells generic AZT for about 35 cents a pill, compared to Glaxo Wellcome's price of approximately \$1.

## ZAMBIA

The government of Zambia will not register the newly-formed group LEGATRA.

Legal Affairs Minister Vincent Malambo says the group cannot be officially recognized because homosexuality is illegal and "un-African."

Group spokesman Gershom Musonda recently told reporters there are a half-million gay men and lesbians in Zambia, which has a population of 9 million.

Compiled by REX WOCKNER

## THE BIBLE DOESN'T HURT PEOPLE

Well-Meaning Christians Do

People calling themselves Christians claim the Bible as the authoritative basis for their faith. Of course there is enormous variation in how people interpret the Biblical material, some maintaining it God inspired while others claim it to be literally true in every respect. In fact the Bible is a compilation of many smaller books written over many centuries, often edited and later selected to become the canon now accepted as scriptural authority. The Second Testament is comprised of the Gospel Accounts of the work and teachings of Jesus as well as various letters written by Paul and other early witnesses telling a story of the unfolding of God's saving grace on behalf of humankind. Jesus taught, and his life demonstrated, God's unfaltering love for us at any price, no matter who we are or what we do.

As gay men we are uncomfortably aware that the Bible has been used as a weapon against us. Many Christians, convinced of Biblical condemnation of homosexuality, have closed their minds to any reconsideration of the subject. Their attitude is similar to that of the Pharisees who, certain of their interpretation of First Testament scripture, were incensed at Jesus healing on the Sabbath. Then as now, there was a tendency to be blinded by a legalistic, black and white view of Biblical writings rather than to be liberated by them from the tyranny of judgment and fear.

In explaining the significance of the **Good News**, Paul wrote "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Were he writing today with current knowledge about human sexuality, he might add "straight or gay" to the above declaration. Certainly he would find himself vehemently opposed by modern day Pharisees dwelling on a tiny number of scriptures taken out of context to support their own agenda. We ought not to cast the Bible aside because some have used it to abuse us. Understood correctly, the Bible is a rich and profound source for discovering and entering into the mystery of God.

A message from  
the Anawim Community