

OH WOOLY NIGHT

In St. Luke's account of the nativity, angels announce the birth of the Christ child to shepherds. Generations of boys dressed in bathrobes have portrayed these humble ones. Few such boys, whether destined to be gay or straight, have understood the significance that it was shepherds who were the first to learn that a new epoch was dawning.

It's not just that shepherds were poor and of little consequence. More importantly they were considered defiled by the very nature of their work—beyond the pale of redemption. No self-respecting member of society would have imagined them worthy of God's attention. Yet, they were chosen over the powerful, the religious and the self-proclaimed righteous to receive the message that God's love extends to all.

As gay men we are also considered by some to be defiled and unworthy. The story of the shepherds reminds us that God's ways are not man's ways. Those rejected by society are dearly loved by God and uniquely capable of receiving and responding to that love.

Some of us spend our energy trying to fit into a world that refuses to receive us as we are. Others try to escape the pain of rejection by pursuing money, sex and pleasure. How much better if we would listen with our hearts for the angelic message telling us the good tidings of God's love.

*A message from
the Anawim Community*

LOCAL news

SELLING SOCIAL SERVICES

Steering a major AIDS organization in new directions, Cascade AIDS Project's Thomas Bruner gets down to business by Holly Pruett

"We have great products to sell."

If it doesn't sound like a typical nonprofit executive director talking, it's because Thomas Bruner is on a mission to bring more business savvy to Cascade AIDS Project, an organization founded in the mid-1980s that provides nonmedical services to people affected by HIV and AIDS in Oregon and Southwest Washington.

Bruner, installed as CAP's executive director in July, asserts: "We need to think of ourselves as a business, not a grass-roots entity."

That belief, however, doesn't mean Bruner, 37, shows up to work in a pin-stripe suit each day. Clad in a cozy wool sweater to ward off Pacific Northwest dampness, the Texas native is quick to point out that sound business practices aren't necessarily "cold, uncaring, profit-driven and impersonal." Instead, Bruner hopes CAP will come to be recognized as an efficient and effective organization.

Given that CAP has had its share of fiscal and organizational crises over the years, Bruner realizes his vision represents "a significant turning point for CAP, a cultural shift." It is a shift he believes is not only necessary, but welcome.

When *Just Out* first spoke with Bruner back in June as he prepared to take over the reins at CAP, he said: "My first order of business is to go and listen."

Since moving to town with his partner, Kevin Hendrick, and their two dogs, Bruner has heard an earful, meeting with each of CAP's 40 employees and 11 board members individually.

In addition to getting acquainted with all of CAP's program areas, Bruner has visited every HIV service provider in the area.

The questions he asked were often tough, the answers he received often frank.

That process—along with a recent strategic planning session with the board of directors, and the first all-staff retreat in the organization's history—honed Bruner's analysis of what CAP does well and what needs to change.

Surrounded by Monet prints, family photographs, awards and memorabilia from his 10 years of leadership at the AIDS Outreach Center in Fort Worth, Texas, Bruner exudes enthusiasm for CAP's greatest assets: its "innovative, timely, cutting-edge programs and services."

Last year, the \$3 million operation served 1,981 people with HIV and AIDS, and reached an estimated 32,000 people through community awareness and education programs.

Contradicting the perception that CAP serves only middle-class gay men, CAP is now the leading provider of low-income housing for people with HIV and AIDS throughout Oregon.

In addition to offering emergency and transitional housing, CAP worked with the Housing Authority of Portland to build two new permanent housing facilities from the ground up: the 15-unit Project Open Door, and 4-unit Nathaniel's Way for families with children.

With offices in Portland, Hillsboro and Vancouver, Wash., CAP's services range from traditional emergency assistance, counseling and case management to creative outreach efforts that train people with HIV to serve as peer advocates and educators.

What's more, CAP provides an outlet for hundreds of people who want to assist in the battle against the disease.

Last year, 780 volunteers contributed 42,000 hours of service, the equivalent of 22 full-time staff members, or \$500,000 cash.

CAP's list of accomplishments reflects tremendous "passion, zeal and ideology," Bruner says, but therein lies the rub. As Bruner sees it, the degree of passion had outpaced the strength of CAP's organizational foundation, and the combination led to crisis management and financial tumult.

In a technologically more complex world, and what he describes as a "more competitive marketplace," Bruner believes nonprofits need to get smarter about how they operate.

CAP's board of directors agrees and, according to Bruner, has given him "a mandate to beef up the business infrastructure of the company."

Changes are already taking effect. CAP's

cially important as the profile of those affected by HIV and AIDS continues to shift.

According to data Bruner attributes to the Oregon Health Division, the numbers of HIV-positive people of color, women and heterosexual intravenous drug users have grown markedly since the 1980s.

CAP's clients match up with these demographic trends. Of the roughly 1,000 people Bruner describes as CAP's "most active core client base" served in 1998, 15 percent were women, 22 percent were people of color, 31 percent were heterosexual, and 28 percent lived outside of Multnomah County. Less than half of those served last year were identified as men who have sex with men.

Still, Bruner thinks there is room for improvement.



CAP's executive director, Thomas Bruner

multiple facilities and large staff and volunteer pool are now supported by recently created office manager and volunteer coordinator positions, which have consolidated responsibilities that were previously everybody's job and nobody's job.

Soon the organization will get its message out with a unified voice, as the 13 different agency brochures, plethora of logos, letterheads and company colors are tied together into a consolidated corporate image.

When it comes to communications, it's not just style Bruner is worried about; substance needs to improve, too.

"People on our mailing list only get solicitations, and they get a zillion of them. But we never report back to them about what we did with their money," he says, adding that poor communication has also ruffled CAP's relationships with other community groups.

"CAP has functioned in relative isolation for a long time," he says. "At times, we've invested a fair amount of energy fighting both internally and externally. We have a lot of work to do to become a better partner and collaborator."

Bruner is working to build bridges, in part by recognizing the expertise of others in the field—like the Multicultural AIDS Alliance of Oregon and the Women's Intercommunity AIDS Resource. Such partnerships are espe-

"We know overall that people of color, women and straight people are being served by CAP, but that doesn't mean that, program by program, we're being as inclusive and sensitive as we should," he says, adding that CAP is contracting with the Multicultural AIDS Alliance of Oregon to provide consultation and training to improve accessibility for people of color, and has turned to Women's Intercommunity AIDS Resource for advice on making its buildings more child-friendly and addressing other concerns of female clients.

Bruner knows that CAP's emerging identity will be cause for consternation in some quarters. He thinks the gay community should feel proud of the leadership role it continues to play in responding to AIDS, but he asserts: "CAP is not a gay organization. It is an organization that happens to come out of the gay community, and happens to serve gay men—not because they are gay, but because they have HIV."

Bruner says he also hopes to help the agency's transition from "death mode to life mode" by working compassionately with those who are dying, but also supporting the self-sufficiency of those who are living longer with HIV, so that they can live as fully as possible.

"It's time to live," Bruner says—a message embodied in his vigorous approach to the business of leadership and his passionate embrace of his new hometown, Portland.