

NATIONAL news

than white gay men were diagnosed with the disease.

According to the CDC, minorities accounted for 52 percent of the gay and bisexual men who were diagnosed with AIDS in 1998. In 1989, 31 percent of the diagnosed cases were among minorities.

One reason CDC researchers are suggesting for the increase is that blacks and Hispanics are less likely than whites to identify themselves as gay or to use AIDS prevention and treatment services.



"Clearly, we know that homosexuality is stigmatized across all cultures, but it may even be greater in African American and Latino communities," says Dr. Helene Gayle, CDC's director of HIV prevention.

Of the roughly 18,000 cases diagnosed in 1998, one-third were blacks, 18 percent were Hispanics and 1 percent were Asians or Pacific Islanders. Minorities constitute approximately one-quarter of the total U.S. population.

Data from the CDC study also indicate that black and Hispanic gay men are becoming HIV-positive at a younger age than white gay men.

In January, 850 clergy members and church officials issued a declaration on morality that calls upon all faiths to bless same-sex unions and allow gay and lesbian ministers.

The declaration also advocates access to abortion and sex education at all age levels. The declaration opposes "unsustainable population growth," the "commercial exploitation of sexuality" and all forms of "sexual oppression."

"For too long, the only voices in the public square on religion and sexuality have been the anti-sexuality pronouncements of the religious right," said Debra Haffner, president of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, the group that sponsored the one-page declaration.

According to media reports, members of 25 denominations endorsed the text of the statement. Nearly half are officials and clergy from Thomas's United Church, the Unitarian Universalist Association, and Judaism's Reform and Reconstructionist branches.

The declaration received little backing from the Catholic Church and none from major evangelical, black Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, Mormon, Buddhist, Hindu or Muslim organizations.

The list of endorsers does include members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Epis-

copal Church and the United Methodist Church.

NEW YORK

Speaking at a January news conference, U.S. Senate hopeful Hillary Rodham Clinton stated that she supports full benefits for partners in same-sex relationships but believes marriage should be between a man and a woman.

"Marriage has got historic, religious and moral content that goes back to the beginning of time, and I think a marriage is as a marriage has always been, between a man and a woman," Clinton told reporters.

Clinton also said she would have voted for the Defense of Marriage Act of 1996, a law that denies federal recognition of same-sex marriage and allows states to ignore same-sex marriages licensed in other states.

Clinton added that she believes there is no need for a similar provision in state law.

VERMONT

More than 1,000 people converged upon the Statehouse to offer their comments on the debate over same-sex marriage.

Two legislative committees held the first hearings on the subject since the state Supreme Court's December ruling that same-sex couples must be given the benefits of marriage, reports a Jan. 25 Associated Press story.




Suggestions ranged from granting gay men and lesbians the right to marry or creating a domestic partnership system, to adopting a state constitutional amendment that would define marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

The court ruled that gay and lesbian couples are being unconstitutionally denied the benefits of marriage. The court left it to the Legislature to decide whether to legalize same-sex marriage or adopt some sort of domestic partnership arrangement.

Rep. Thomas Little, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, hopes to begin drafting a bill in February that could be voted on by the House of Representatives in early March. The Senate would then have about a month to act before the Legislature adjourns in mid-April.

Compiled by KRISTINE CHATWOOD, a Portland-based writer and longtime Just Out contributor.



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