

BON VOYAGE

Metropolitan Community Church pastor sets sail on another adventure

by Jim Radosta

The Rev. Roy A. Cole, who has served as Metropolitan Community Church of Portland pastor since the fall of 1994, announced his resignation during his morning sermon Aug. 12. He plans to pursue a second doctorate and leadership roles as a teacher, writer and consultant.

Cole, 45, was born in San Diego and grew up along the West Coast. He graduated from Portland's Warner Pacific College in 1983.

He has been a pastor for 17 years, 11 of those with the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. He returned to Portland in 1994 after a stint in Reno, Nev.

Cole started a doctorate of ministry program two years ago and conducted his residency this summer at San Francisco Theological Seminary. His employment contract with the church was expiring at the end of 2001, so he had to make a crucial decision about whether he was prepared to renew it for the next three to five years.

Cole says he made the decision to resign after professors encouraged him to devote his full-time energy to future career goals. In January he will head to General Theological Seminary in New York to complete his dissertation.

"I greatly love pastoring, and pastoring the MCC here in Portland has been a joy and a phenomenal experience for me," he says. "But I've always had an attraction for academics."

In the fall of 2002 Cole plans to apply for a Ph.D. in theology at University of Oxford. He eventually hopes to teach at the university or seminary level and get published in the fields of theology and ethics.

Cole leaves with a great deal of accomplishments under his belt. He is given much of the credit for increasing the congregation from 55 members to almost 300 and making it the leading gay and lesbian church in the Pacific Northwest.

About a year ago MCC took the reins of Esther's Pantry, which provides food and personal sundries for people living with AIDS. In addition, the church facilities have been renovated and serve as a venue for community meetings.

Last year MCC was accepted into Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, an association of 17

Christian denominations across the state that work together for unity and justice. Executive director David Leslie says Cole's leadership brought a lot of more conservative churches around.

"Many of our member denominations have changed their understanding about how they can be a catalyst for community building," he says. "People came to respect Roy because he was willing to listen to both the positives and the negatives and to foster dialogue."

But Cole is most proud of seeing the church attain greater acceptance during his seven-year tenure. "The thing that I leave with the greatest sense of accomplishment is that the congregation has been able to grow in its ministries and its role within the gay and lesbian community in a way



PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

After the Rev. Roy A. Cole completes his doctorate of ministry program, he plans to pursue a Ph.D. in theology

that's relevant to the greater community," he says.

However, Cole remains humble in discussing his achievements. He says most of it couldn't have been possible if Portland wasn't such a progressive place.

"It wasn't so much that I brought any great skills to the ministry," he says. "One of the great gifts to the ministry was the very positive support from...city leaders."

The board will conduct a national search during the next six to 18 months to find a suitable replacement for Cole. Portland is one of the denomination's top 20 churches in size and resources, so he is certain many talented people will be interested in the position.

"Losing Pastor Cole will be a sad time for us," says Anna Brouns, board of directors vice moderator. "It will also be a time of excitement and challenge and allow our church family to see how we want our ministry to work and face the future as a vital part of the Portland community."

Former vice moderator Dave Dishman has been with MCC Portland for 21 1/2 of its

25 years. He has nothing but good things to say about Cole.

"We've been blessed with seven years of his leadership, and we will be sad to see him go and wish him the very best with his future plans," Dishman says. "He's been a wonderful pastor to us."

Cole will deliver his final sermon Oct. 14, the Sunday after Out on Broadway, a fund-raiser celebrating National Coming Out Day. The event also will include a special farewell tribute to the outgoing pastor. **JN**

OUT ON BROADWAY will be held 7 p.m. Oct. 11 at the World Trade Center Theater, 121 S.W. Salmon St. For more information visit the Internet site www.outonbroadway.com.



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