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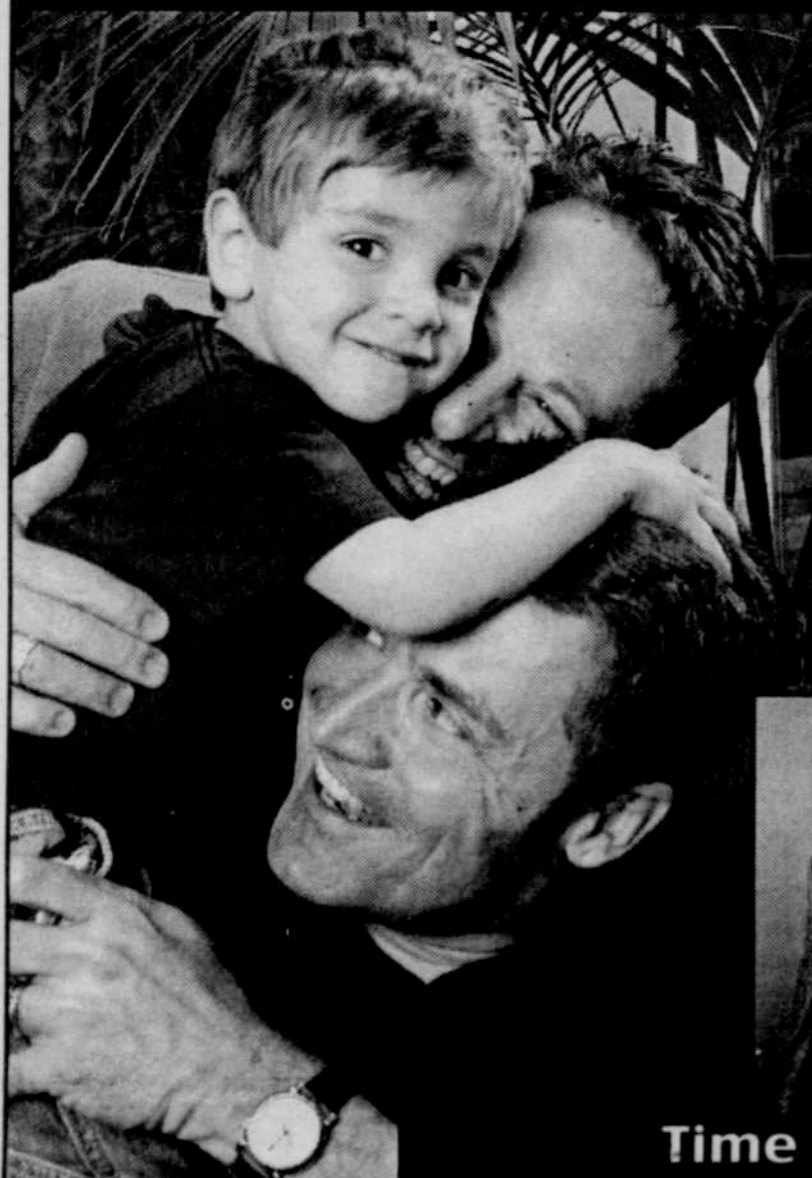
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NATIONAL news



Dignity/USA president Mary Louise Cervone addresses the media after the St. Patrick's Cathedral demonstration April 28 in New York City

NEW YORK
More than 150 people gathered April 28 in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City to respond to the Roman Catholic Church's recent attacks on gay priests.

Several leaders have publicly blamed homosexuality for the current child sex abuse scandal. Monsignor Eugene Clark, substituting in the pulpit for Cardinal Edward Egan at St. Patrick's, said, "It is a disorder and, as a disorder, should prevent a person from being ordained a priest."

During a press conference after the demonstration, speakers denounced Catholic Church leaders and expressed outrage that they have scapegoated gay priests.

"Threatening to purge the priesthood of gay men is a way for church leaders to deflect attention from the real moral crisis in the church—that is, a culture of secrecy, conspiracy and lies by priests, bishops and cardinals that has disgraced the very institution of Catholicism," said Mary Louise Cervone, president of Dignity/USA, the largest national gay and lesbian Catholic organization. "We demand that Cardinal Egan, Cardinal [Anthony] Bevilacqua [archbishop of Philadelphia] and all of their brother bishops stop, once and for all, the spiritual violence against GLBT people."

Without debate, the New York Legislature unanimously passed a joint program bill May 6 to help ensure surviving family members, including same-sex partners, of Sept. 11 victims receive the benefits they are owed.

The act does a number of technical things, including making federal fund awards exempt from state taxes and clarifying the relationship of federal fund awards and workers' compensation payments. Significantly for same-sex partners, it includes language specifying the Legislature's desire that they be eligible for federal fund awards.

The language is the result of extensive negotiations between the attorney general's and governor's offices and the Empire State Pride Agenda. The civil rights advocacy organization hopes this provision will help give Special Master Kenneth Feinberg an additional basis in law to distribute federal fund awards to surviving same-sex partners.

"We commend our elected officials for trying to make New York a model for how victims of Sept. 11 and their surviving families, including same-sex partners, should be treated in the eyes of the law," said Joe Grabarz, Empire State Pride Agenda executive director. "From the very beginning, they have tried to be supportive of all victim family survivors, regardless of any defining characteristic including sexual orientation."

After a long campaign by gay rights organizations for language explicitly recognizing the

eligibility of same-sex partners for the federal compensation fund, the U.S. Justice Department did not do so when it issued its final regulations March 7. Instead, it let state law where gay survivors live make the determination.



Gina Smith and Heidi Norton

MASSACHUSETTS
The Massachusetts trial court ruled May 8 against seven same-sex couples who challenged state laws denying them the fundamental right to marry.

The case was filed in April 2001 by Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders and was argued March 12 before Suffolk Superior Court Judge Thomas E. Connolly. The couples plan to appeal.

"This is just the beginning," attorney Jennifer Levi remarked. "We have always known that there will be no final resolution in this case until it is heard by the Supreme Judicial Court. Our objective in this round was primarily to begin the process of making our case for equal treatment of all families in the commonwealth."

Reaction from the couples was immediate. "We are deeply disappointed that the court did not recognize that we seek simply the same legal protections for our family that other committed couples throughout the commonwealth enjoy," said Hillary Goodridge, who has been in a relationship of 14 years with Julie Goodridge.

The court based its denial of marriage licenses on a legal conclusion that having and raising children is central to the purpose of marriage, despite acknowledging that four of the seven couples in the case have kids and that state law allows same-sex couples to adopt jointly.

Gina Smith, who sought to marry her partner, Heidi Norton, partially to ensure their sons would grow up in a world where their parents' relationship is legally and communally respected, commented: "The decision is particularly troubling because Heidi and I, like many of our gay and lesbian neighbors, have children. We feel strongly that our sons deserve the same level of protection that other children in the state enjoy."