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SCHOOL REFUSES TO ENROLL LESBIAN COUPLE'S DAUGHTER

In complaints filed with the Eugene Human Rights Commission and the state Child Care Division, a lesbian couple have alleged that because of their sexual orientation, their 4-year-old daughter was denied admission last month to O'Hara Catholic School.

Lee Inkmann, one of the girl's mothers, said O'Hara principal Dianne Bert told her that a family with two moms would confuse other children at the school and that same-sex couples were in conflict with Vatican rulings.

Neither Bert nor representatives from St. Mary's Catholic Church, which oversees the school, offered comments on the complaints. O'Hara, however, issued a statement that said the school does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national and ethnic origin in admissions but "cannot comment on decisions of academic placement for any specific student."

Bud Bunce, spokesman for the Archdiocese of Portland, said the decision was based on multiple factors but would not discuss specifics. "The school did not make the nontraditional lifestyle of the parents the issue, the parent did," he said.

Inkmann, 43, has been a member of St. Mary's since January. She told *The Register-Guard*, "I want my daughter to receive a Catholic education that will be in keeping with her teachings at home, and I want to become part of a Catholic community again like I was when I was a child."

Neil Van Steenberg, an advocate assigned by the city's Human Rights Commission, hoped to offer mediation that would avoid a full hearing, but Inkmann said school officials refused to meet with him. Since his role is only one of intercessor, however, neither Van Steenberg nor the commission can advise on potential legal remedies.

Eugene's city ordinance prohibits discrimination in housing, employment, city contracting and public accommodation based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. Whether a Catholic school is considered a "public accommodation," however, has yet to be tested.

Dave Fidanque, executive director of the Oregon American Civil Liberties Union believes the ordinance should apply because the Catholic school "is essentially a business that provides service to the public at large."

The school, he said, also might be subject to an Oregon nondiscrimination law that applies to state-certified, extended-day preschools. A complaint by Inkmann to the Oregon Department of Employment's Child Care Division is on hold until the state attorney general's office makes a ruling.

QUEER-FRIENDLY PRESCHOOL OPENS

The community is invited to check out Rainbow Preschool—a queer-friendly learning environment for 3- to 5-year-olds—during an open house from 3 to 4:30 p.m. Sept. 28 at 1244 N.E. 39th Ave. It is located in but not affiliated with Bethlehem Lutheran Church, which is a welcoming congregation.

School will run from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Thursday starting Oct. 1. It will have two teachers and 15 to 18 children.

Nicki Eybel says she became motivated to launch the school after seeing a large number of children at

Portland Pride 2004 in June. Her goal is to create an empowering and welcoming learning environment for kids like these.

"I want Rainbow Preschool to reflect the real world with all its diversity," Eybel told *Just Out*. "Rainbow will be a place where parents will find support, and children will find encouragement.... I am inspired by young children's easy acceptance of most everything. I also want straight parents to be comfortable with other kinds of parenting."

Eybel holds a master's degree in early childhood education from Bank Street College, the largest independent college of progressive education in the country. Her co-teacher is also a Bank Street graduate.

"We believe that children are curious about the natural and social world and work to make sense of their world," Eybel says. "Children go out into the world and return to the classroom and re-create what they experience. Children are active learners and want to participate in the world."

Eybel works as volunteer coordinator for the Hambleton Project, a nonprofit organization offering networking and direct services to lesbians with cancer and other life-threatening conditions. In her spare time she also is involved with the Lesbian Garden Club.

For more information call 503-284-1739.

GRIEF GROUP REACHES OUT TO LESBIANS

A "Living with Grief Group" will meet from 6 to 7:30 p.m. for six consecutive Thursdays starting Oct. 16. It is sponsored by the Hambleton Project, a nonprofit organization offering networking and direct services to lesbians with cancer and other life-threatening conditions.

This professionally led educational/support group is aimed at lesbians and women who partner with women who have experienced a significant loss through death. This loss does not have to be recent.

The group is free and confidential. Organizers request a commitment for the full six weeks.

For more information call 503-335-6591.

RECOVERY ROUNDUP

"Bridges in Recovery"—a roundup for all gay, lesbian, bi and trans people in 12-step recovery programs—will be held from



PHOTO BY MARY DAVIS
Rainbow Preschool teacher Nicki Eybel wants to create an empowering and welcoming learning environment for the children of queer parents