

WORLD news

lation to legalize same-sex marriage in the other provinces and territories until the Supreme Court answers the questions. In the meantime, same-sex couples from anywhere in the world can still go to Ontario or British Columbia, buy a marriage license and get married the same day.

IRELAND

About 10 percent of Irish university students are gay and 18 percent have had gay sex, a survey by the Union of Students in Ireland has found. The organization quizzed 500 students in 15 colleges across the island.

Other findings included: 70 percent of those questioned said Irish society is homophobic, 28 percent said they had experienced homophobic taunts, and 21 percent do not wish to see gay couples engage in public displays of affection. About 79 percent would react positively if their best friend came out of the closet, but only 40 percent would have a positive response if their brother or sister came out.

MEXICO

Several thousand gay, lesbian and transsexual couples descended on a downtown Mexico City plaza Feb. 14 to demand recognition of same-sex unions, Reuters reported. They hugged, kissed and received symbolic marriage licenses, the wire service said.

ITALY

Thousands of gay people staged a kiss-in at Rome's Piazza Farnese on Valentine's Day, the British Broadcasting Corp. reported.



Sergio lo Giudice

"Italy is one of the very few European Union countries that doesn't recognize same-sex couples, and this has to change," said organizer Sergio lo Giudice of the gay lobby group Arcigay. "Political parties...are too afraid of the Vatican."

The Vatican declared war on same-sex marriage and civil union and domestic partnership laws last July.

The church's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith asserted: "There are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family. Marriage is holy, while homosexual acts go against the natural moral law. Homosexual acts close the sexual act to the gift of life [pregnancy]. Under no circumstances can they be approved."

"When legislation in favor of the recognition of homosexual unions is proposed for the first time in a legislative assembly, the Catholic lawmaker has a moral duty to express his opposition clearly and publicly and to vote against it. To vote in favor of a law so harmful to the common good is gravely immoral."

UNITED KINGDOM

Britain's House of Lords, the upper chamber of Parliament, voted 155-57 Feb. 10 to let pre- and post-operative transsexuals obtain a new birth certificate and get married as a member of their new gender. The bill now moves to the House of Commons.

The European Court of Justice ruled Jan. 7 that transsexuals must have equal access to marriage and pension rights. The decision applies in the 15 nations that comprise the European Union, including the United King-

dom, and in the 10 countries that will join the union in May.

In 2002, the European Court of Human Rights—the court of final appeal for citizens of the 45 nations that make up the Council of Europe—also ruled in favor of transsexuals' right to marry.

A drag queen had a heart attack and died during his grand finale Feb. 10 at the gay Jack Homer Pub in Worthing, England, ThisIsBrightonAndHove.co.uk reported. Al Warwick, 52, who performed as Alice Harlequeen, was singing "So Long Dearie" when he collapsed.

Warwick had a history of heart problems and recently had taken time off from work because of ill health. Worthing sits on the English Channel just west of Brighton.

New HIV infections in the United Kingdom climbed 20 percent in 2003, the Health Protection Agency said Feb. 13.

Last year saw 5,047 new cases compared with 4,204 in 2002—and the count is not yet complete. The final number for 2003 is expected to top 7,000.

At least 2,000 of the new cases are believed to be among gay men, which would be the largest yearly total since HIV testing became available. "Increases in unsafe sex are undoubtedly the main driving force," government epidemiologist Barry Evans told *The Guardian*.

The United Kingdom has close to 50,000 HIV-positive people, a third of whom don't know they are infected, the agency told the newspaper.

MALTA

A survey has found that 10 percent of gays and lesbians have faced violence because of their sexual orientation, *The Malta Independent* newspaper reported Feb. 15.

In addition, half of the island's queers reported they had experienced harassment. The attacks were perpetrated by strangers, employers, family members, religious leaders and police officers, the survey found.

In releasing its report, the Malta Gay Rights Movement called for enactment of anti-discrimination, hate crimes and domestic partnership laws; a ban on negative depictions of homosexuality by schools; anti-homophobia training for police officers; and ratification of European Convention on Human Rights Protocol #12, which provides for a general ban on all discrimination by public authorities. The group also urged the government to launch efforts to help gays and lesbians come out of the closet and feel less isolated.

Members of the Malta Gay Rights Movement's steering committee presented the data Feb. 19 to Maltese President Guido de Marco, the *Independent* reported. The delegation included coordinator Sandro Mangion, international secretary Christian Attard and administrator Ruth Baldacchino.



President Guido de Marco

CHINA

The owner of a gay bar in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, was sent to prison for eight years Feb. 18 for running a gay prostitution ring, the Xinhua news agency reported. Li Ning, 33, was also fined \$7,300 by the People's Court of Qinhuai District. □

Compiled by REX WOCKNER, who has reported for the gay press since 1985. He has a bachelor's degree in journalism from Drake University and started his career as a radio reporter.

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