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NATIONAL news

NATIONAL

UCC VOTES TO SUPPORT GAY MARRIAGE

The United Church of Christ has become the first mainstream U.S. denomination to endorse marriage equality for queers. Support for the endorsement came at the denomination's 25th biennial synod July 4 in Atlanta.

It supports marriage equality "regardless of gender" within both the religious community and civil society. It built upon a long-standing call for "full civil liberties and equal protection under the law" regardless of sexual orientation.

"On this July Fourth the General Synod of the United Church of Christ has acted courageously to declare freedom, affirming marriage equality, affirming the civil rights of same-gender couples to have their relationships recognized as marriages by the state and encouraging our local churches to celebrate and bless those marriages," said the Rev. John H. Thomas, who was re-elected president of the UCC.

The UCC has 1.3 million members, and its roots stretch back to the Pilgrims of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. A leader in social justice causes, the UCC has supported gay rights, women's suffrage and the abolition of slavery.

"In making this bold statement for the full inclusion of all its members in the life and ministry of the church and in the fabric of society, the denomination continues its historic place of leadership in the cause for equality," the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's National Religious Leadership Roundtable said in a statement.

NGLTF FORMS HOST COMMITTEE FOR 2005 CONFERENCE

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force announced July 5 the formation of the host committee for its 18th annual Creating Change conference, the country's pre-eminent queer organizing conference, to be held Nov. 9 to 13 in Oakland, Calif. Bay Area activists can get involved by e-mailing creatingchange@thetaskforce.org.

Portland-area activists will find that Creating Change offers programming to educate, challenge and support the queer social justice movement and to encourage organizations to address racial justice issues in the sexual minori-

ties community.

For more information, go to www.creatingchange.org.

STONEWALL DEMOCRATS LAUNCH SUPREME COURT RESOURCE CENTER

Calling all Democrats! National Stonewall Democrats launched a Web resource center July 7 to equip queers with the tools needed to actively engage in the Supreme Court confirmation process. "Don't Rock the Court" can be found at www.stonewalldemocrats.org.

"Don't Rock the Court" is centered on a "Supremes" theme where users are guided by online hosts Ross and Diana, who help them understand how a new Supreme Court justice is chosen. The Web site includes briefings, sample letters to senators, key congressional contacts, links to judicial experts and the latest headlines regarding the nomination process.

Eric Stern, executive director of National



Vandals hit a UCC church in Middlebrook, Va., with graffiti and arson; the case is being investigated as a hate crime.

Stonewall Democrats said: "We understand that White House spin and an unfamiliar process may cause some to overlook this potentially life-changing event. That is why we have created a fun campaign...to guide LGBT Americans through this."

"Our goal is to equip our community so that we will be ready to respond to any radical nominee, or support the president if he chooses to nominate a consensus candidate who will uphold our Constitution," said Stern. "We're not here to play politics, but to ensure that the Supreme Court gets a justice that Americans deserve."

VIRGINIA

UCC CHURCH TORCHED IN HATE CRIME

The St. John's Reformed United Church of Christ Church in Middlebrook, Va., was the tar-



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—Sasha

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Mikhael Rawls sits in his music room at his home in Bedford, Texas.