



Amarillo Lesbian Gay Alliance

Update

Volume 2, Number 7

ALGA Information Line: 373-5725

October 1995

Events Calendar

Queer Dinner Club
Thursday, October 5
Washington Square
7:30 p.m.
Everyone Invited

P-FLAG
(Parents Family & Friends Of
Lesbians and Gays)
Meeting
Tuesday, October 10
7:30 p.m.
Call 358-4810 or 373-5885
for details

National Coming Out Day
Wednesday, October 11

Queer Dinner Club
Thursday, October 19
Italian Delights
7:30 p.m.
Everyone Invited

Amarillo Lesbian Gay Alliance
Presents
A fundraiser for the
Lesbian Gay Rights Lobby of Texas
with special guest,
Dianne Hardy-Garcia,
Executive Director of LGRL
Saturday, October 28
4409 Baltus, 7:30 p.m.
Tickets \$25 (\$30 at the door)

Dianne Hardy-Garcia will speak on
Texas Hate at the Amarillo Unitarian
Universalist Fellowship
Sunday, October 29
11 a.m.
4901 Cornell

Supreme Court to Hold Hearings on Colorado's Amendment 2

(Washington, October 10) - On October 10, 1995, the United States Supreme Court will hear argument in *Romer v. Evans*, the challenge to Colorado's 1992 anti-gay ballot initiative. The case is brought by Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, along with the American Civil Liberties Union and several Colorado attorneys, and it marks the first time in nine years that the high court will hear a case that directly presents questions concerning the application of constitutional protections to lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. Former Colorado Supreme Court Justice Jean Dubofsky will argue for the plaintiffs.

"Amendment 2 is an outrageous violation of the Constitution," said Suzanne B. Goldberg, staff attorney at Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund. "By banning laws that would prohibit discrimination against lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, it changes the political playing field, but only for people who are gay," Goldberg added.

Beatrice Dohrn, Lambda's legal director, added: "In erecting its special barrier for lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals, Amendment 2 violates a most basic tenet of our constitution. Voters in a majority group cannot change the rules of participation for members of a minority because they are unpopular. It is the most fundamental principle of our constitution that you can't do that and still have a democracy."

Under Amendment 2, most Coloradans retain their ability to seek redress from their elected representatives. However, under the amendment, lesbians and gay men cannot seek redress for discrimination or even anti-gay violence legislatively. Lesbians and gay men would be forced to seek amendment of the state constitution before government can provide to us what it remains free to provide to anyone else. Amendment 2 imposes upon gay people a much more burdensome set of rules than those which apply to all other citizens who have full access to the ordinary political process.

By doing so, Amendment 2 violates the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause, which guarantees all citizens the fundamental right to participate in the political process on an equal footing with others. "Although Amendment 2 does not literally bar gay people from the voting booth, the right to cast a vote is a hollow right if government cannot act on the voter's behalf because of who that voter is," said Goldberg.

Although this case represents the first time such a measure will be examined by the high court, Amendment 2 and similar ballot initiatives have been invalidated repeatedly by courts around the country.

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MUGABE HIT WITH PROTEST

by Rex Wockner

Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe was met by hundreds of protesting gays and lesbians as he arrived in Johannesburg, South Africa, Aug. 26 to attend a summit of the Southern African Development Community.

They were responding to the strong insults he has hurled at homosexuals on four occasions since Aug. 1.

"We are gathered here to be a voice against a fallen hero of African liberation," said Kevan Botha of the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality. "Mugabe needs to be reminded of the lesson of Africa that he has forgotten, and that is that the struggle for liberation has been a struggle for equality for all."

The protesters kissed and chanted, "Two, four, six, eight, is Mugabe really straight?" reported the Reuter news service.

Mugabe left the airport through a back door and took a back road into town, Reuter said.

Mugabe's tirades since Aug. 1 have included:

* "What we are being persuaded to accept is sub-animal behavior and we will never ever allow it here. If you see people in your areas parading themselves as lesbians and gays, arrest them and hand them over to the police."

* "I find it extremely outrageous and repugnant to my human conscience that such immoral and repulsive organizations, like those of homosexuals who offend both against the law of nature and the morals and religious beliefs espoused by our society, should have any advocates in our midst and even elsewhere in the world."

* "I don't believe (homosexuals) have any rights at all."

DUTCH GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIZES GAY GAMES

by Rex Wockner

The Dutch government has provided Amsterdam's 1998 Gay Games with a \$62,000 subsidy, reported De Gay Krant.

The money came from a fund for organizers of large sporting events.

A spokesman for Secretary of State Eric Terpstra said he hoped that "more

News Briefs

than before, attention will be given to sport for homosexuals, which in turn will promote sporting participation in general."

Meanwhile, organizers of the 1998 Games have hired the professional lobbying group AEF European Affairs to seek money from the European Community.

"We're counting on ... \$625,000," said Gay Games spokesman Marc Janssens. "To achieve that we have to submit a lot of applications."

ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO MEETS WITH GAY GROUPS TO DISCUSS CIVIL RIGHTS ISSUES

Washington, DC -- September 13, 1995 -- The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) coordinated a meeting today at the Department of Justice between gay organizations and Attorney General Janet Reno. NGLTF Executive Director Melinda Paras and Public Policy Director Helen Gonzales were part of a contingent of organizations working on gay-related civil rights issues who met with top Justice officials.

The discussion focused on hate crimes, anti-gay ballot measures, and pending and potential legislative attacks on gay, lesbian and bisexual people. NGLTF requested that the Department seek ways to use the office of Attorney General and the Department as a whole to advance fair and equal treatment of all citizens, regardless of sexual orientation. Today's meeting was held in response to a request by NGLTF and other groups to meet directly with the Attorney General. That request followed the decision by the Attorney General against filing an amicus brief in the pending U.S. Supreme Court case involving Colorado's anti-gay initiative, Amendment 2.

"We wanted to express our disappointment with the Department's decision in the Colorado case, and explore opportunities for the Justice Department to weigh in on future civil rights issues related to gay citizens," said Helen Gonzales, NGLTF Public Policy Director. "By meeting directly with the Attorney General, we can elevate the Department's awareness of critical civil rights issues facing the gay community. The Attorney General seemed genuinely moved when we discussed the issue of hate crimes, and interested in using her office as a bully pulpit in condemning hate violence."

"As we enter the Presidential primary season, we can expect that anti-gay rhetoric and legislative attacks will only get worse before they get better," said Melinda Paras, NGLTF Executive Director. "We need allies who support justice and fairness to be vigilant in defending basic civil rights principles. The Justice Department should be one of those allies. Our allies must not miss a single opportunity to speak out on behalf of fair and equal treatment for gay men, lesbians and bisexuals."

NGLTF has been meeting with the Justice Department on various issues, and worked regularly with the Department in 1993 and 1994 while NGLTF was advocating federal mediation in the crisis involving Camp Sister Spirit in Ovett, Mississippi. Early in 1993, NGLTF met with then Attorney General-designate Janet Reno about hate violence and victim advocacy issues, and discussed other civil rights issues in a separate meeting that spring.

Other Justice Department officials at the meeting were Deputy Attorney General Jamie Gorelick, Assistant

Continued on next page

The ALGA UPDATE is published monthly by the Amarillo Lesbian/Gay Alliance, P.O. Box 9361, Amarillo, TX 79105-9361. Anyone wishing to contribute, please call 374-2907 and leave the information on the machine, or mail information to the Editor. Deadlines will be the 15th of the month for the next month's issue.

of the Office of Policy Development. Marsha Scott, Deputy Assistant to the President for Political Affairs, also participated in the meeting.

In addition to NGLTF, other organizations participating in the meeting included the Human Rights Campaign Fund; Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund; the American Civil Liberties Union; the National Advocacy Coalition on Youth and Sexual Orientation; LLEGO -- the National Latino/a Lesbian and Gay Organization; Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund; Servicemembers Legal Defense Network; Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays; and People for the American Way.

Congress to hold anti-gay hearings

On October 13, Congress will be holding testimony on "the homosexual agenda in our public schools". These hearings are the result of lobbying by Lou Sheldon and the Traditional Values Coalition and seek to have congress deny federal funding to any public school system that promotes any type of lesbian/gay/bi supportive kind of program. The LA Unified School District and its Gay and Lesbian Education Commission are Sheldon's #1 target.

Currently the testimony that will be presented to Congress is incredibly one-sided. Provided below is a direct quote from a Sheldon mailing that should provide a good idea of what we can expect:

The Congressional Subcommittee hearing is so important. Previously we had the "high moral ground" in explaining how they are promoting homosexuality. This shows they are "after our kids." Now, they are using the idea of "safety" for gay and lesbian

students, particularly, stopping them from committing suicide. That is not true and we must expose the lie in it.

The foremost authority on homosexuality, Dr. Charles Socarides, says, "Kids are not committing suicide because of actions against homosexuality but because they know within themselves that is it not normal."

Important Phone Numbers

Senator Phil Gramm (R)
202-224-2934
(FAX) 202-228-2856

Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R)
202-224-5922
(FAX) 202-224-0776

Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-13th)
202-225-3706
(FAX) 202-225-3486

Rep. Larry Combest (R-19th)
202-225-4005
(FAX) 202-225-9615

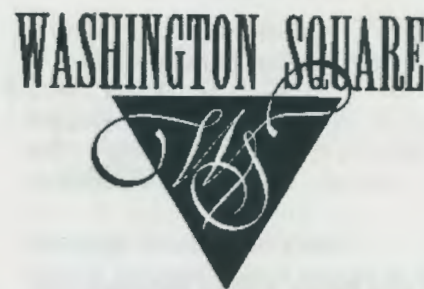
We can not allow this type of testimony to go unchallenged or for "our side" to not be represented. The mental health, the very lives, of a future generation of queer people is at stake.

Congress must be deluged with messages indicating that America does not

have the view that kids should be allowed to kill themselves because programs that would provide them positive support are contrary to American Family Values.

ACTION:

Call Subcommittee Chair Rep. Hoekstra (R-MI), 202-225-4401 and ranking Democrat Rep. Thomas Sawyer (D-OH) 202-225-5231. Let them know that you are concerned for the safety and education of all youth, and that the programs targeted by the Radical Right are necessary to save all of America's youth. Demand that these hearings be unbiased and not used as a pulpit for Lou Sheldon's dangerous hate propaganda.



1607 S. Washington, 373-5885

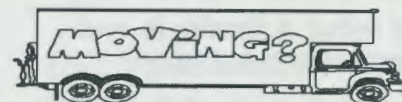
**October 13 & 14
Washington Square 1
Year Anniversary Party!**

Friday, October 13
Stew Moss

Saturday, October 14
Larry Lemmons

Saturday, October 21
Tevor Kroger

Friday, October 27
Mike Fuller



**Don't forget to give us
your new address!**

Overheard

by Rex Wockner

"I did have some interesting responses from people who thought that Rebecca, Randy's aunt, was a stereotype because she's a butch dyke, and they ask me why I had a butch dyke in my film, and I said, 'Because I think butches are hot--and that's actually the only reason. I think she's hot. And I think butch women are hot. So too bad.'"

--Filmmaker Maria Maggenti of "The Incredibly True Adventures Of 2 Girls In Love."

"I don't hate homosexuals. I don't even know any homosexuals."

--Sen. Jesse Helms on the floor of the U.S. Senate. We rest our case.

"When Jesse Helms talks about movies that embrace family values, he most definitely is not speaking of 'Priscilla, Queen of the Desert' (although one would need to look hard to find a movie that does more to address the very issue of what a family is and what real values are)."

--King Features Syndicate columnist Linda Ellerbee.

"An engineering professor is treating her husband, a loan officer, to dinner for finally giving in to her pleas to shave off the scraggly beard he grew on vacation. His favorite restaurant is a casual place where they both feel comfortable in slacks and cotton/polyester-blend golf shirts. But, as always, she wears the gold and pearl pendant he gave her the day her divorce decree was final. They're laughing over their menus because they know he always ends up diving into a giant plate of ribs but she won't be talked into anything more fattening than shrimp. Quiz: How many biblical prohibitions are they violating? Well, wives are supposed to be 'submissive' to their husbands (I Peter 3:1). And all women are forbidden to teach men (I Timothy 2:12), wear gold or pearls (I Timothy 2:9) or dress in clothing that 'pertains to a man' (Deuteronomy 22:5). Shellfish and pork are definitely out (Leviticus 11:7, 10) as are usury (Deuteronomy 23:19), shaving (Leviticus 19:27) and clothes of more than one fabric (Leviticus 19:19). And since the Bible rarely recognizes divorce, they're committing adultery, which carries the rather harsh penalty of death by stoning (Deuteronomy 22:22). So why are they having such a good time? Probably because they wouldn't think of worrying about rules that seem absurd, anachronistic or--at best--unrealistic. Yet this same modern-day couple could easily be among the millions of Americans who never hesitate to lean on the Bible to justify their own anti-gay attitudes."

--From lesbian columnist Deb Price's new book, "And Say Hi To Joyce."

SOLIDARITY SUNDAY

by Rev. Dr. Alex Nagy
Religious Spokesperson for Beyond The Closet, Bend, OR

"Let us stop the emotional, religious and physical bashing of these, God's children!"

In an attempt to counteract the violent rhetoric and actions of some, Dignity/USA has named Sunday October 8, 1995, as Solidarity Sunday. This is the day when Catholics, other Christians, Jews and all religious people who seek justice and fairness across the United States are invited to show support for God's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered children.

Participation in this important event is easy! That sign of solidarity is simply the wearing of a small piece of ribbon in the colors of the rainbow throughout the day.

This is a nationwide outreach to invite bishops, priests, ministers and lay people - the whole church - to counteract the words and actions of those who would harm any of God's children. Emotional, religious and physical bashing must end.

The Radical Right targets people on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity for passage of state laws denying them their basic civil rights. Radio and television preachers continuously use gays, lesbians and others to raise money for their "ministries." As a result many are emotionally scarred, some are physically injured. Some have been killed.

It is time to say, "Enough is enough." Let us end the hatred and violence. Let us stand together as God's people.

It may be very difficult for you to consider wearing the Rainbow Ribbon. But consider, too, how important it might be for someone in your family, your neighborhood, your parish, your community to see that you are willing to be public about the fact that you believe gay people should be treated with the same respect as everyone else, that they should not be subject to violence because of who they are, and that they should be able to worship God as full members of their Church.

Student Organizations

Lambdas of West Texas A&M
 Box WT 335, Canyon, TX 79016
 Saul Reyes, Co-Chair, 374-3054
 Becky Cavitt, Co-Chair 655-5769

Pink Triangles Student Group
 Amarillo College
 Contact Rob Mills, 371-5300

Religious Organizations

Metropolitan Community Church
 2123 S Polk, Rev. Bob Finch
 Office hours M-F 9 AM 1 PM 372-4557
 Sunday Services 10:30 AM & 6 PM
Children's Sunday school during service
 Monday 12 Noon, Brown Bag Prayer
 Wednesday 7 PM, Discussion Group

St Andrews Episcopal Church
 1601 S. Georgia, Father Bill Nix
 376-6316

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
 4901 Cornell
 Sundays, 11 am (Summers, 10 am)
 355-9351

Services

Family Support Services
 Domestic violence, rape crisis, counseling
 services. Fees charged on a sliding scale.
 900 S. Lincoln
 372-3202
 1-800-749-9026 hotline/helpline

National Gay & Lesbian Task Force
 1734 14th St. NW
 Washington, D.C., 20009
 (202) 332-6483

National Gay & Lesbian Teen Hotline
 1-800-347-8336
 Open 6 PM to 11 PM Central Time

Northwest Texas Public Services
 HIV Counselor
 Terry Arnold, 371-1106

**Panhandle AIDS Support Organization
 (PASO)**
 604 W. 8th, 372-1050
 1-800-388-4879 Hotline/Crisis number

**Parents & Friends of Lesbians/Gays
 (P-FLAG), Amarillo Chapter**
 Parents and friends, you have a support
 group, too! Call Washington Square for
 times and dates.

The Pavilion
**Northwest Texas Healthcare
 System**
 Intensive Outpatient Program/
 Addictive Disorders
 354-1835

Shepherd House (call PASO)
 MWF 11:30 - 1:30
 Home cooked meal services for
 HIV/AIDS individuals

**Sisters (Women's Discussion
 Group)**
 MCC 2123 S Polk
 Every Sunday 7 PM

**Speak Out! Human Rights
 Campaign Fund Information**
 1-800-777-HRCF

Lesbian/Gay Rights Lobby of Texas
 P.O. Box 2579
 Austin, TX 78768
 (512) 474-LGRL

People For The American Way
 2000 M Street, NW, Suite 400
 Washington, D.C. 20036

**Parents, Family & Friends of
 Lesbians & Gays (P-FLAG)**
 Travis McBride 358-4810 or
 Wash. Square 373-5885

Bars

Alexander's Lounge
 1219 W 10th Ave
 372-7414

Maggie's Disco
 1515 S Harrison
 371-9312

The O.P.
 500 W 16th Ave
 379-9613

The Ritz
 322 W 10th Ave
 372-9382

Sassy's
 309 W 6th Ave
 374-3029

The Classifieds
 519 E. 10th St.
 374-2435

**Gay Friendly
 Businesses/Organizations**

Amarillo Bowl
 4100 Wolflin
 352-5681

Hastings Books and Video
 2001 S Georgia - Gay/Lesbian book
 section & magazines
 4301 W 45th - Lambda book section

Kinko's Copies
 3801 Olsen Blvd
 Open 24 hours

Italian Delights, Inc.
 2710 W 10th Ave
Queer Dinner Club (QDC) meets
 7:30 PM on the third Thursday of
 the month. Everyone is welcome!

**Valley Lodge Family Motel &
 The Hole Thing Donut Shop**
 PO Box 304 - Main Street
 Red River NM 87558
 Reservations: 1-800-951-2262
 Information: (505) 754 2218

Via Veneto
 1108 N Pierce
 Same owners as Italian Delights,
 open for lunch only.

Gay Owned Businesses

**Washington Square Cafe &
 Bookstore**
 1607 S. Washington
 373-5885
 Teas, coffees, light dining, books,
 magazines, entertainment and art.
 Closed Sunday.

French & Co. Realtors
 Paul D. French, Owner
 4200 Ridgecrest, Suite A-5
 356-9086

This listing is a service of the
 Amarillo Lesbian/Gay Alliance.
 Please send corrections/additions
 to ALGA Update, P.O. Box 9361,
 Amarillo, TX 79105-9361.

Think you have a problem with Alcohol?

Try Lambda AA.

Wednesdays & Saturdays at 8 p.m. in the MCC Educational Annex.

Call 351-1574 or 376-5190 for more information.

Don't forget about the Costumed Gay-La on Saturday, October 29!

\$25/person or \$30/person at the door.

Mail reservations to:

ALGA

P.O. Box 9361

Amarillo, TX 79105

(make checks payable to LGRL - donations are not tax deductible)

The Amarillo Gay/Lesbian Alliance (ALGA) Membership Application

ALGA seeks to provide an organization that will encourage healthy acceptance of our lifestyle both within our community and the population at large. Our annual budget is funded solely by your membership fees. Membership guarantees reduced rates for future ALGA-sponsored events. Those same fees pay for printing and mailing of this newsletter, sponsors the annual ALGA Gay Pride Picnic, camping trips, future workshops and our hotline costs. All mailings are discrete, and our mailing list will never be provided to any other agency.

We are happy to provide the *ALGA UPDATE* to people who cannot afford to purchase a subscription; however, we ask that anyone who can afford to subscribe, do so to keep the exchange of information flowing, our community informed, and allow for more activities in the future.

- \$50 Silver membership (3 year membership, and 36 issues)
- \$35 Household annual membership for 2 adults (with 12 issues)
- \$25 Individual annual membership (with 12 issues)
- \$10 Student/PWA/Low Income membership (with 12 issues)

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ ()

Date: _____

Please make all checks payable to ALGA
PO Box 9361, Amarillo, TX 79105-9361

Open Letter to Christian Coalition Members

The following letter was read by the Human Rights Campaign Fund Executive Director Elizabeth Birch at the hotel where Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition was having its annual "Road To Victory" conference. Over 300 people cam to listen to Elizabeth Birch during a lunch break on September 8.

Dear Members of the Christian Coalition:

An Open Letter was not my first choice as a way of reaching you. I would have preferred speaking to all of you directly, and in a setting where you would be most comfortable.

That was my motivation, some weeks ago, when I asked your executive director, Ralph Reed, for the opportunity to address the Christian Coalition's "Road to Victory" Conference. It is still my motivation today. And it is supported by a single, strong belief that the time has come for us to speak to each other rather than past each other.

It took Mr. Reed very little time to reject my request. Perhaps he misunderstood my motivation. But I can assure you that what has driven my request is this: I believe in the power of the word and the value of honest communication. During my years of work as a litigator at a major corporation, I was often amazed at what simple, fresh and truthful conversation could accomplish. And what is true in the corporate setting is also true, I'm convinced, in our communities. If we could learn to speak and listen to each other with integrity, the consequences might shock us.

Although your podium was not available to me, I am grateful for those who have come today and will give me "the benefit of the doubt" and be willing to consider what I have to say. I will be pleased if you are able to hear me without prejudging either the message or the messenger. And I will be hopeful, most of all, if you respond by joining me in finding new ways to speak with honesty not only about one another, but also to one another.

If I am confident in anything at all, it is this: our communities have more in common than we care to imagine. This is not to deny the many differences. But out of our sheer humanity comes some common ground.

Although the stereotype would have us believe otherwise, there are many conservative Americans within the

nation's gay and lesbian communities.

What's more, there are hundreds of thousands of Christians among us -- Christians of all traditions, including those represented in the Christian Coalition.

And, like it or not, we are part of your family. And you are part of our community. We are neighbors and colleagues, business associates and friends. More intimately still, you are fathers of sons who are gay and mothers of daughters who are lesbians. I know many of your children very, very well. I work with them. I worry with them. And I rejoice that they are part of our community.

Part of what I want you to know is that many of your children who are gay and lesbian are gifted and strong. Some are famous; most of them are not. But many are heroic in the way they have conquered barriers to their own self-respect and the courage with which they've set out to serve a higher good. All were created by God. And you have every right to be proud of each of them.

I begin by noting the worthiness of the gays and lesbians in your family and our community for a reason: it's hard to communicate with people we do not respect. And the character of prejudice, of stereotype, of demagoguery, is to tear down the respect others might otherwise enjoy in public, even the respect they would hold for themselves in private. By taking away respectability, rhetorically as well as legally, we justify the belief that they are not quite human, not quite worthy, not quite deserving of our time, or our attention, or our concern.

And that is, sadly, what many of your children and colleagues and neighbors who are gay and lesbian have feared is the intent of the Christian Coalition. If it were true, of course, it would be not only regrettable, but terribly hypocritical; it would not be worthy of the true ideals and values based in love at the core of what we call "Christian."

The reason I have launched this conversation is to ask that you join me in a common demonstration that this is not true. I make my appeal as an individual, as Elizabeth Birch, and also as the executive director of the Human Rights Campaign Fund, America's largest policy organization for gay men and lesbian women.

This is such a basic appeal -- to human communication and common decency -- that I do not even know how

to distinguish between what is personal and what is professional. But my appeal is sincere. I am convinced that if we cannot find ways to respect one another as human beings, and therefore to respect one another's rights, we will do great damage not only to each other, but also to those we say we represent.

I recognize that it is not easy for us to speak charitably to each other. I have read fundraising letters in which people like me are assigned labels which summon up the ugliest of dehumanizing stereotypes. Anonymous writers have hidden under the title of "Concerned Christian" to condemn me with the fires of God and to call on all of you to deny me an equal opportunity to participate in the whole range of American life. I have heard of political agendas calling not merely for the defeat of those I represent, but for our eradication.

Such expressions of hatred do not, can not, beget a spirit of trust. Nor do they pass the test of either truthfulness or courage. They bear false witness in boldface type. And I believe that they must embarrass those who, like me, heard of another gospel -- even the simple gospel taught me as a child in Sunday School.

I would not ask that you, as members of a Christian group, or as supporters of a conservative political cause, set aside either your basic beliefs or your historic commitments. The churches which many of you represent -- Baptist, for example, and Pentecostal -- were also the churches I attended as a young woman. In those days, I heard sermons about justice and sang songs about forgiveness. My greatest hope is not that you will give up your faith, but that it will work among all of us.

Neither of us should forsake our fundamental convictions. But we could hold those convictions with a humility that allows room for the lives of others; neither of us may be the sole possessors of truth on every given issue. And we could express our convictions in words that are, if not affectionate, and if not even kind, then at least decent, civil, humane. We need not demonize each other simply because we disagree.

I came to my task in the campaign for human rights with this conviction: if we, in the name of civil rights, slander you, we have failed our own ideals, as surely as any Christian who slanders us in the name of God has failed the ideals of

Scripture.

Some of those who asked me to serve at HRCF may believe that I am naive, that it is foolish to appeal to "the enemy" for common decency, let alone to ask for trusting conversations. But those who wonder about my ideals may not know my childhood.

I am an American, born on American soil, but raised in Canada throughout my formative years. Even from a distance -- perhaps especially from a distance -- the American ideal and the centuries-old American dream captured my imagination and my spirit. When I saw America, I saw responsible freedom being exercised everywhere from the picket line to the voting booth. When I learned of the values rooted at the heart of the American Spirit, I felt undying hope. That hope is also rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition of this nation. From my vantage point on the Canadian prairies, the promise of America tugged at my soul. I could fight it, but I could not win, and America quite literally won my heart.

More remarkable still, all this happened during my adolescence, when we are most subject to peer pressure, and in the 1960's during the height of Canadian nationalism. It was, in those days, as daring to publicly acknowledge your love for America as it was to come out of the closet as a lesbian.

But I could not hide my affection for my homeland, even though I saw its obvious failings and shortcomings. I believed then, and I believe no less staunchly today, that no other nation in the world offers all its citizens such promises of fairness and equality, principles that are equally reflected in the Christian tradition and the American Constitution.

What surprised me when I first became active in America's gay and lesbian communities was that, in this idealism about America, I was not alone. Gay men were beaten with baseball bats, and they went off to find justice, confident that the American ideal would protect them. Lesbians were fired from their jobs, and they said to one another, "We'll be protected by the law." So keen was confidence in the American hope that it took the gay and lesbian communities decades to conclude, regretfully, that civil rights are as likely to be withheld as granted, despite the Constitution; and that true believers are as likely to engage

in cruel discrimination as in compassion, even in the name of Christ.

Many of us in this community have a long history with the church.

Gay men I have loved deeply and lesbians I've known well have talked long into the night about their love for God and for God's church. For some of them, the church had provided the one message of hope they knew as children. The promise of good news was seized gladly by adolescents who did not understand why they were different, or what that difference would mean.

For some, the deepest agony of life is not that they risk physical abuse or that they will never gain their civil rights, but that they have felt the judgment of an institution on which they staked their lives: the church. What they long for most is what they once believed was theirs as a birthright: the knowledge that they are God's children, and that they can come home.

And it is not only those of us who are gay or lesbian who have suffered on the doorstep of some congregations. Parents, fearing what others at church might whisper, choose to deny the reality that their son is gay or their daughter is a lesbian. Brothers and sisters suffer an unhealthy, and unwarranted, and un-Christian shame. They bear a burden that cripples their faith, based on a fear that cripples us all.

This means, I think, that we are still a long way from realizing the ideal of America as a land of hope and promise, from achieving the goal of religion as a healing force that unites us, from discovering that human beings are, simply by virtue of being human beings, deserving of respect and common decency.

And so, I have come today -- in person, bearing this letter, and in writing to those who will only receive it -- to make three simple, sincere appeals to those of you who are members of the Christian Coalition.

The first appeal is this: please make integrity a watchword for the campaigns you launch. We all struggle to be people of integrity, especially when we campaign for funds. But the fact that we are tempted by money is no excuse. We need to commit ourselves to a higher moral ground.

I do not know when the first direct-mail letter was issued in your name that defamed gay men and abused gay women, that described us as less than

human and certainly unworthy of trust. Neither do I know when people discovered that the richest financial return came from letters that depicted gays and lesbians with intentionally dishonest images. But I do know -- and I must believe that you know too -- that this is dishonest, this is wrong.

I can hardly imagine that a money machine is being operated in your name, spinning out exaggerations as if they were truths, and that you do not see it. But perhaps you do not. In which case, I ask that you hear my second appeal: I ask that, as individuals, you talk to those of us who are gay or lesbian, rather than succumb to the temptation to either avoid us at all cost, as if we are not a part of your community, or to rant at us, as if we are not worthy of quiet conversation.

We are, all of us and those we represent, human beings. As Americans, you will have your political candidates; we will have ours. But we could, both of us, ask that our candidates speak the truth to establish their right to leadership, rather than abuse the truth in the interest of one evening's headline. We may work for different outcomes in the elections, but we can engage in an ethic of basic respect and decency.

Finally, I appeal to you as people who passionately uphold the value of the family. You have brothers and sons who have not heard a word of family affection since the day they summoned the courage to tell the simple truth. You have sisters and daughters who have given up believing that you mean it when you say, "The family is the basic unit of society," or even, "God loves you, and so do I."

Above all the other hopes with which I've come to you hovers this one: that some member of the Christian Coalition will call some member of the Human Rights Campaign Fund and say, "It's been a long time, son" -- or, "I'm missing you, my daughter" -- and before the conversation ends, someone will hear the heartfelt words, "Come home. Let's talk to each other."

In that hope, I appeal to each of you.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Birch,
executive director
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