

Common Circle for Human Rights

Volume I, Number 2

March 1997

February Meeting Focused On Timely Topic Of Writing Effective Letters to Legislators

Our thanks to Joe Mooney for his excellent presentation on effective letter writing as a means of communicating ideas and opinions concerning legislative issues. Joe provided the attendees at the February meeting with a great handout of tips for communicating with legislators and other government officials. We are including a copy of his tip sheet in case you were unable to attend the meeting!

Joe's presentation was particularly timely in light of the call we received from the Maine Lesbian and Gay Political Alliance last week. MLGPA is urging people to call and/or write their legislators concerning LD #1017 (An Act To Protect Traditional Marriage and Prohibit Same Sex Marriage) and LD # 1116 (an Act To Prevent Discrimination).

MLGPA is attempting to gather 100 or more people for the hearing on LD 1017 on March 12. The hearing is scheduled for 1:30pm at the Augusta Civic Center. Please try to attend if you can!

On Tuesday, April 8, the public hearing for LD #1116 will be held at the Augusta Civic Center at 1:30pm. MLGPA has set a goal of generating 5000 calls and/or letters before this hearing. In addition, the group is calling for 500 people or more to attend the April 8 hearing. Mark your calendar now; and plan to be a part of this very important event! Be there, be counted!!!

Common Circle Finalizes Statement of Purpose

Those present at the February Common Circle meeting worked to finalize a "Statement of Purpose" for the group. After some thoughtful discussion, the group decided on the following statement:

"The Common Circle for Human Rights is a group of individuals whose mission is to educate ourselves and the larger community on issues of equal rights and social justice. We will hold social, political and cultural gatherings in order to 1) facilitate respectful discussion and exchange of ideas, 2) create a more informed citizenry, and 3) increase the bonds of friendship and understanding among diverse people." -- Adopted February 24, 1997

Maine Equity Fund Grant Deadline April 1

The Maine Equity Fund was created in 1996 to provide grants for projects that address issues of diversity, inclusiveness and acceptance of differences while promoting greater understanding of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) community. Our Common Circle for Human Rights has an opportunity to apply for a grant up to \$8000 under this program.

This is a rare opportunity to obtain funds to help support our identified important work of educating and creating bonds of understanding in our community. We need a core group of people to help identify one or more projects that we can pursue in our local community. Please join us on Wednesday, March 19 at 7:00pm at Debbie Hockensmith's house (12 Pearl Street in Belfast) to develop our ideas and delegate responsibilities in order to submit a successful grant application. For more information about the project, contact Mitzi at 338-5889 or Debbie at 338-1704. If you are unable to attend this meeting but want to have input, and have energy for bringing to fruition an idea for a project, please call Mitzi or Debbie. Please help us!

Coffee, Tea, Desserts, and Discussion Slated for March

The next meeting of the Common Circle will be Monday, March 24 at the St. Margaret's Parish House, 49 Court Street (corner of Court and Elm St.) in Belfast. We have been working hard for the last several months, focusing on legislative and educational issues. Now it's time just to relax and enjoy an evening of good food and light conversation. We extended invitations to our area legislators to meet and mingle with us. As of this time, it is not clear if any can/will accept our invitation.

We will share updates on our group's activities and (as always) welcome any suggestions for future meeting topics and/or community projects/activities. Desserts, coffee, tea, and soft drinks will be provided.

Community Calendar

March 15

Women's Coffeehouse
Abbott Room, Belfast Free Library
7:00pm - 10:00pm
Diva, Brasilia, Ellie Daniels, Nan Stone, and others will be performing
A women-only event to benefit the Women's Center in Belfast

- March 16 **Speak Out Discussion**
A discussion on how to generate local speaking opportunities regarding homophobia, same-gender marriage, and related issues
Rockland Unitarian Universalist Church
Corner of Broadway and Gay Street
2:00 - 4:00pm
For more information, call Lucy at 236-4734
- March 23 **Benefit Diversity Supper for Larry Godfrey**
Pot luck dinner to help a local gay activist recover from a devastating fire.
Bring foods of all kinds to share
Echo Hill Hall
Route 131, South Thomaston
6:30pm
For info on other ways to support Larry, call Beth or Nancy at 273-3989
For cash donations, make checks payable to Larry Godfrey, Send to Virginia Slawson, 1022 Back Cove Road, Waldoboro 04572
- April 4 **Gay Men's Conference on Strengthening Our Community**
A series of three 2-hour roundtable discussions, followed by cocktails and buffet
A chance to vent and learn!
To attend or help facilitate, contact Michael Rosetti at (207) 879-7323 or e-mail rosetti@Biddeford.com
- June 13-15 **Symposium XXIII: Community -- Come In Unity!!!**
Workshops, recreation, entertainment designed for the GLBT community.
Southern Maine Technical College, South Portland Campus
Please pre-register ASAP, organizers need a commitment of attendance.
To register or volunteer, call 625-8499
- June 18-22 **Southern Maine Pride Week**
Events include dance and parade!!!
For more information, contact Southern Maine Pride
P.O. Box 11502
Portland, ME 04104
Laurie Fortman, Executive Director 878-0546 or
Michael Rosetti, Operations Director 879-7323 (e-mail: smepride@gwi.net)

"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."

--Eleanor Roosevelt

Contacting Your Federal, State and Civic Representatives

There are several ways to contact a representative of your district. This applies to any type of rep (e.g., State, Federal, City Council member, school board member, presidents and CEOs of companies, etc.).

- Meet them in person. Attend meetings, etc.
 - Call them on the phone.
 - Fax them.
 - E-mail them.
 - Write them a letter.
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- This discussion will be about writing effective letters to your representatives. Letter writing is very effective and relatively inexpensive; to write a good letter, however, will require some time and effort. According to former state representative Susan Farnsworth, Maine State Representatives do not get that many letters, so the ones that they do get have greater impact.
 - Here are some important points to remember:
 - Be brief and to the points. Address only one issue per letter. If you are writing to a representative about an upcoming bill, identify it by its title and/or L.D. number if possible.
 - Write as an individual, not as a member of a group or organization.
 - The letter may be hand written or typed. If you hand-write the letter, printing is better than cursive. However, unless you have exceptional penmanship, it is always better to type.
 - Share your knowledge of an issue and the reasons why you do or do not support it. Personal experience relating to the issue is also important to include in your letter. Make sure you have the facts straight and be concise.
 - Be polite. Opening your letter with a few words of praise is a nice way to start. Most legislators get more criticism than praise.
 - Do not become a chronic letter writer. A well timed letter will have more impact than one that is received on a monthly or weekly basis.
 - Send your legislator a thank you note or postcard when he or she supports a bill which you approve.
 - Make sure your name and address are on both the envelope and the letter.
 - Proofread your letter. It is better still to have someone else proofread it; you'll be surprised what you might miss!