

Communiqué

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BULLETIN: THE QUILT WILL
BE AT UM PRESQUE ISLE
APRIL 7 & 8

COMMENTARY - by Dick Harrison

UNITARIAN CHURCH LIVES UP TO CARIBOU'S HOMOPHOBIC REPUTATION

SHAME! SHAME! SHAME! The Board of Trustees of the Caribou Unitarian Universalist Church has said "No," again, to a request by Northern Lambda Nord for use of church space to hold our monthly meetings. This is the second time NLN has requested use of the church; a request for space to house the Gay-Lesbian Phoneline was denied several years ago.

Since its founding in 1980, all of Lambda's gatherings - monthly meetings, pot luck meals, discussions, parties - have been held in rotating locations in private homes throughout the region (NLN covers an area equal in size to Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts - without the Cape - combined). In an attempt to centralize at least one of our regular events, our monthly Sunday meetings, we requested use of space in the Caribou UU Church building on South Main Street. Since the Unitarians are known for their outspoken support of gays & lesbians (the first denomination with a national "Office of Lesbian and Gay Concerns", openly-gay ministers, gay & lesbian commitment ceremonies or "marriages") the NLN steering committee felt that despite the church's previous lack of support, it had been several years since the local UU church was approached. They now have a gay-supportive minister who has lead an NLN discussion group. Maybe they've changed. Maybe they've matured enough since our last request to have become more supportive of gay people and to be more in line with the values of the Unitarian Universalist precepts they profess to support.

Our optimism was misplaced. In a February 29th letter to Lambda co-signed by The Reverend Sydney K. Wilde, Minister of the Caribou congregation, and Philip Ring, church president, they noted that due to the "church's history of conflict over this issue, the Board chose to informally poll the congregation... [with] very strong opinions expressed both in favor

and in opposition to providing space for your meetings. However, the predominant view was stated as:

"Any member of Lambda Nord is welcome, as an individual, to visit the church, to fully participate in all church activities and to become a member of the church, however "we" fear that if we allow the group to meet in the church, "we" will suffer community backlash, harassment and vandalism; for that reason we do not want the group to meet in our church."

Do the Caribou Unitarians affirm and support the inherent worth and dignity of every person, or do they contribute to the inherent ignorance and intolerance which seems so prevalent in this area?

The board's vote was 6 to 3 to (1) deny NLN's request "to meet in the church at this time, and to (2) undertake an education program in an attempt to dispel the fears, misinformation and stereotyping which lead to homophobia."

The "predominant view" expressed by the congregation reminds me of Anita Bryant. She said she loved the sinner (homosexuals) but not the sin (homosexuality). In Caribou it's OK if we stand alone and afraid, but we're a threat if we stand as a group and strong.

It's admirable that the Caribou UU Church is undertaking an education program. Hopefully they will call on some "experts" for advice and information (i.e. gay people). They didn't speak with any Lambda members about their irrational and unfounded fears of "community backlash, harassment and vandalism". Through education the changes that should and must be made in the attitude of the vast majority of the Unitarians in Caribou may even rub off on members of other congregations and institutions, specifically the Caribou Chamber of Commerce, which has a long-standing anti-gay record. And there are several UU members who are also Chamber members. It's time

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DID YOU KNOW

☛ MORE DETAILS about the BANGOR GAY-LESBIAN PRIDE celebration Saturday, June 20: parade at 10am downtown, heads up Main Street to Paul Bunyan Park. Info booths and craft tables in the park. Details: G/L Freedom, POB 462, Hampden 04444.

☛ BOSTON GAY MEN'S CHORUS concert Sunday, April 26, 3pm, First Parish UU Church, 425 Congress Street, Portland. Tickets: \$10. Info: 773-6366

☛ W.O.M.Y.N.'S DANCE, Saturday, April 25, 9pm-1am, St. Charbel's Hall, corner Westmorland & Argyle, Fredericton. Cover: \$5 (waged), \$3 (unwaged). Info: WOMYN, POB 20082, Fredericton E3B 6Y8.

☛ The pastor of an Ottawa Baptist church was fired after telling his congregation that homosexuality is a sin. Church deacons insist he was fired for refusing their advice, not because of the content of his talk.

☛ The Rochester, NY school board voted 5-2 to bar organizations

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CP/POB 990 Caribou, Maine 04736-0990 USA Gay-Lesbian Phoneline/Télégai 207.498-2088 (TDD/Voice-Voix)

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for them to practice what they (profess to) preach and speak out against discrimination when they witness it.

It's ironic that those who should be our most adamant supporters are not. Some may say it's because this is Aroostook County. Though the calendar says "1992", we're not quite there yet. Why, it's been less than two years since we've had touchtone phone service, the closest shopping mall is still a 3-hour drive from Caribou, and except for the end of the Interstate in the southern part of The County, all our roads are two lanes. Things seem to arrive here from the south - from southern Maine to The County. And I guess it's the same with the Unitarians. Portland's First Parish UU Church is hosting the Boston Gay Men's Chorus concert April 26th and gives meeting space to local gay groups. The Augusta UU Church was the first in Maine to have an openly-gay minister (Douglas Morgan Strong), and for six years has been the regular meeting place of the monthly Maine Lesbian-Gay Political Alliance. The Bangor UU Church co-sponsors the annual memorial to Charlie Howard, killed almost a decade ago because he was gay, and has provided meeting space to local gay-lesbian groups. And the Fredericton Unitarian Hall is the meeting location of the newly-revived FLAG, Fredericton Lesbians & Gays, and is the meeting/pot luck space for the gay civil rights group, the New Brunswick Coalition for Human Rights Reform. Do any of these events which are so common in other parts of Maine and New Brunswick seem out-of-place at the Caribou UU Church? Unfortunately, yes.

Unitarians should rightfully be ashamed of and embarrassed by the continuing hostility of the Caribou congregation towards the organized gay-lesbian community in northern Maine. It's a shameful and unique situation. Until the Caribou UU congregants can warmly and honestly open their hearts and their church to NLN and our community, the Unitarian Universalist Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Fellowship of Maine is merely a "Fellowship of Maine - from Bangor to Portland, only." ▼

Communiqué

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from city high schools if they have discriminatory policies, becoming the first in the US to bar military recruiters because of the US Defense Department's ban on gays & lesbians.

Archconservative Republican Member of Congress Newt Gingrich said, "I don't see any necessary reason to expell someone from the military for purely private sexual behavior."

Levi Strauss is the first Fortune 500 company to extend employee benefits to same-sex partners of its workers, the same benefits offered to legally married couples, including health and life insurance.

BUILDINGFUND



The NLN Building Fund is designed to raise money for a community center for this region. The center would house the phonline, library, office, meeting space, and party space. Since NLN is a 501(c)3 group, all donations are tax-deductible on federal U.S. income tax; merely ask for a receipt. Donations of any amount - U.S. or Canadian funds - are appreciated. ▼

NEW BRUNSWICK REPORT

THE FLAG FLIES AGAIN

Fredericton Lesbians and Gays, the group many thought had disbanded, has risen from the ashes. Since Dance Trax, the gay-lesbian bar in Fredericton opened in 1987, FLAG has been operating the New Brunswick FLAG-line, a telephone support line similar to NLN's Gay Lesbian Phonline. Until the bar opened, FLAG provided regular social activities for the region's community. The bar replaced the bi-weekly FLAG dances and, ultimately, their revenue. Now that the bar has closed, there is a social vacuum in the provincial capital.

BUT THE FLAG FLIES AGAIN! A steering committee formed at their December 1991 meeting to begin the groundwork for bringing the organization back to life. Their second meeting in February attracted over 30 people. Memberships cost \$15 per year, or \$10 for unemployed or students. Interested persons are urged to contact FLAG at POB 1556, Station A, Fredericton E3B 5G2. Please Note: FLAG provided financial support in 1982 to establish NLN's Gay-Lesbian Phonline, which remains the only service of its kind in Maine. Thanks, FLAG! NLN wishes you well in your reincarnation! ▼

Do more
than belong.
Participate.