

*DignityUSA works for respect and justice for all gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons in the Catholic Church and the world through education, advocacy and support.*

## Write the Bishops? Why Bother???

By Joe Gentilini, Dignity/Columbus (OH)

At the DignityUSA Convention 2005 in Philadelphia, Father John McNeill told us not to concern ourselves about what the Bishops are saying regarding us and our morality. At the DignityUSA Convention 2007, in Austin, Texas last summer, Mark Matson, our then president-elect, said, “I personally do not intend to invest any more energy in trying to secure the approval of the Bishops.” I agree with them and yet....



I began to write some of the United States Bishops in the mid-1970s after I became a member of DignityUSA. In 1974 I attended a Gay Christian Conference in Dayton, Ohio after unsuccessfully attempting painful conversion therapy for the previous six years. At that conference, I listened to religious men and women tell me that God loved me as I was and I participated in the Eucharist hearing God’s love proclaimed for me as a gay man. It was an overwhelmingly emotional and spiritual experience and I decided to stop conversion therapy and learn to love myself as I was.

Naively, I thought that others would also see the goodness of gay love and embrace me and this reality. In a conversation with a priest I came out to, he told me that while he wanted me to attend the Mass that he was going to celebrate in a few minutes, he would not give me Communion because he could “see” that I was on my way to hell. I refused to go to his Mass and got in touch with my anger at the Church and society. Shortly thereafter, Brian McNaught was fired from his job with the Detroit diocesan newspaper because he had written an article on the goodness of love, gay or straight. There was a march from the church, where Dignity/Detroit met, to the Cardinal’s office to proclaim this as injustice and to affirm our goodness. I participated, affirmed myself, and decided that no one deserved this “spiritual abuse.” I decided to contact the Bishop of my diocese about it.

The Bishop did see me in his chancery office and told me that he disagreed with my moral decision and was sorry the conversion therapy had been unsuccessful, but admitted that he would not have refused me Communion. When I spoke of God’s mercy, the Bishop spoke of God’s justice. I also believed

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in God’s justice and added that God knew every cell and gene in my body — God had created me gay and certainly would not reject me because of it. With that meeting, I began a relationship with this Bishop until he retired many years later.

Over the years, I expanded the number of Bishops I wrote to about the need for the Church’s support of gay rights. Unfortunately, my letters were filled with anger and self-righteousness and their responses reflected this.

In 1995, a Cistercian-Trappist Priest told my partner and me that the pain of living our lives in an unaccepting Church and society was like the blood of the early martyrs and would bring about change in the Church, even though we may not live to see it. I listened and took heart. Sometime later, I heard Bishop Thomas Gumbleton urge us to “write your stories to the Bishops.” He said that it would make a difference in their lives even if we did not actually “see” any immediate change in their proclamations. I realized that I had never actually “told my story” to these members of the hierarchy; I had just been angry and accusatory.

I began to write various Bishops telling them my story. I did not demand anything. I simply told the story of my life as a gay man and the pain I felt at the Church’s discrimination. With

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some I began a dialogue where I was able to suggest how they could more meaningfully support us in the civil and religious arenas.

Surprisingly, their responses to me indicated that they recognized the pain I went through to become integrated as a gay Catholic and some even admitted that they knew that the teachings of the official Church seemed harsh, even while they wanted to be pastoral. At least one even asked if he could share my letter with a task force he was developing to better minister to GLBT Catholics in his diocese. In order to keep these lines of communication open, some did request that I not publish our letters. I agreed to this and therefore will not reveal who they are. Their names are not important.

I truly believe that the contemplative witness to the truth of our lives will change the Church, although this may not happen anytime soon. I believe that living my life as an openly gay Catholic in a 26-year relationship with my partner, Leo, means that this gay vocation is already deposited in the Church and will one day be accepted. So, I agree with Father John McNeill and Mark Matson. I am not looking for the Bishops' approval and my goal is neither to embarrass them or the Church, nor to militantly disagree with Church teaching. My goal is to share my story and let God take care of the results.

This has become my "ministry" and follows from the grace of my baptism. It is not only my right to write the Bishops, but also my duty. Even a few Canon Laws support my efforts and I'll list them below:

- Canon 208:

In virtue of their baptism there exists among all the faithful a true equality with regard to dignity and the activity whereby all cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ.

- Canon 211:

All Christian faithful have the duty and the right to work so that the divine message of salvation may increasingly reach the whole of humankind in every age and in every land.

- Canon 212 - #2:

The Christian faithful are free to make known their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires to the pastors of the Church.

- Canon 212 - #3:

In accord with the knowledge, competence and preeminence which they possess, they [the Christian faithful] have the right and even at times a duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinions on matters which pertain to the good of the Church, and they have a right to make their opinion known to the other Christian faithful, with due regard for the integrity of faith and morals and reverence toward their pastors, and with consideration for the common good and dignity of persons.

The Spirit of God is bringing about important changes in the Church and is using our GLBT community's prophetic witness to assist in this work. I encourage others who feel so

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Begun in 1969 in San Diego, CA under the leadership of Fr. Patrick Nidorf, OSA, first as a counseling group and then a support group in Los Angeles, DignityUSA has been a national organization since 1973 uniting GLBT Catholics, their families and friends.

DignityUSA is an independent non-profit religious corporation organized under U.S. Internal Revenue Service Code 501(c)(3). Our national office is located in the Greater Boston area, with chapters located throughout the United States.

Members gather at local chapters, periodic regional meetings and biennial national conventions.

The **QV** encourages the exchange of opinions, book reviews, reflections, background information, resource materials and essays and articles by established speakers and professionals touching on spirituality, human sexuality and its expression, and the mission of DignityUSA. Of special interest are personal experiences and what has worked well in areas of pastoral ministry, human and social justice issues, leadership, chapter and faith community building.

Opinions expressed in reflections, reviews, letters, etc., are those of their authors and not necessarily those of DignityUSA.

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moved to consider this "ministry." I offer the following 14-point guide and hope you find it helpful.

**Building the Relationship**

- The goal is to develop a relationship with the Bishop, not to send a quick letter and then be done with it. Realize that this will be a long-term communication process. If you can, try to arrange a meeting with your Bishop. If not, then write him.
  - Know your purpose in writing. Is it to influence or is it to vent and blame?
  - Use "I" statements, not "you" statements. "You" statements usually come across as blaming. This is not what you want to do.

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- Do not use words that convey intense anger. You may be angry, but try to take out the “blaming” or “accusatory” language. This only puts the other person on the defensive and makes it more difficult to hear your words and messages.
- Be vulnerable — you have to share yourself — your thoughts, feelings, and spirituality. Be humble and not arrogant.
- Speak for yourself. Do not judge or assign motives or intent. Talk about how Church teachings have hurt you.
- Whenever you have the opportunity to see the Bishop, make sure you introduce yourself again.
- Be respectful, if only for the office the Bishop holds in the Church or, if you can’t respect the office, respect his person.

**Other Important Thoughts on Content and Prayer**

- Tell your story about being a gay or lesbian Catholic — the pain and the joys. If you are in a relationship, make sure he knows this and what it means in your life.
- Use the Bishop’s own language and symbolism if you can. For example, cite the Canon Laws mentioned above as the reason for your letter or suggest that they make sure copies of *Always Our Children* are sent to all the parishes and Catholic social service agencies in the diocese. (A copy of the document is available at <http://www.dignityusa.org/ourchildren.html>.)
- Deal with one issue in your letter, taking them as they surface instead of trying to deal with all of your issues in one letter.
- Even if you find it offensive, try to read the diocesan paper. If there is an article on homosexuality or related issues, see if there is a letter you can write to give your point of view. This is another way to communicate.
- Allow God to act — we do not need to be concerned with how the Bishops respond or with the results. Let the Spirit use you — this takes an act of faith.
- Finally and maybe most importantly, pray for the Bishop and the Church and let them know that you are keeping them in prayer. You might also ask for their prayers. ▼

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## Toward a Theology of Fallibility

By John J. McNeill

When Pope Benedict visits “Ground Zero” in New York City, he will be greeted by a giant banner with a painting of Michael Judge, the gay Franciscan priest, whose life is recorded in the documentary, *Saint of 9/11*. That banner signifies the ambiguous state of many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Catholics toward the Pope. We share the respect and love of the Catholic community for the Vicar of Christ and wish him well. At the same time, we are profoundly aware of how wrong he is in his understanding and judgment on gayness as an “intrinsic disorder.” We are deeply conscious that we cannot accept and live out his teaching on homosexuality without destroying our mental and spiritual health. What is bad psychology has to be bad theology. We find ourselves in the same position as children of a homophobic parent, who, while still loving their parent, must separate off and take distance from that parent’s homophobia, if they are to live happy and healthy lives.



We gays have found it necessary to undergo the same maturing process in our spiritual lives that Jesus asked his disciples to undergo at the last supper. “I shall ask the Father and he will send you another Paraclete to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth.” (John 14: 16-17) Jesus stressed the point that it was necessary that he should go away in order for the Spirit to come. “Yet you are sad at heart because I have told you this. Still, I am telling you the truth; it is for your own good that I am going, because unless I go, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you....However, when the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you to the complete truth.” (John 16: 6-13)

Why could the Spirit of Truth only come after Jesus’ death? Because as long as Jesus remained alive and present, his disciples had their center of authority outside themselves and were not totally responsible for their actions. They were striving to meet the expectations of a provident leader. They had not yet become fully creative and responsible adults. But after Jesus’ death, his Spirit became what Paul saw as the source of the “Glorious Freedom of the Children of God.” (Rom. 8:20-21) — The proof that you are sons and daughters is that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts: the Spirit that cries, “Abba!” (“Father”); and it is this that makes you a son or daughter, you are not a slave anymore. — Pagans were not free but slaves in relation to their gods because they related to their gods in a spirit of fear. John tells us “Perfect love casts out all fear.” It is equally true that perfect fear casts out all love. Christians are free because their God is a God of love who had adopted them into the family. “All who are guided by the Spirit of God are sons or daughters of God, for what you have received was not the spirit of slavery, to bring you back into fear, you have received the Spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry out Abba, Father.” (Rom. 8:14-17)

With the death of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit, the apostles received a challenge as well as an opportunity to mature. As Paul expressed it, “...until we all reach unity in faith and knowledge of the Son of God and form the perfect human, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself.” (Eph. 4:13). The apostles had to give up the security of a provident leader; they had to begin to find out what God wanted from them from within themselves and their own experience.

In like manner, in our spiritual life, we gay people must pass from a passive, dependent role to an active, creative one. For our survival we have a special need to become mature, self-motivated, autonomous people, no longer dependent on outside homophobic sources for a sense of our identity and well-being. We must not let our enemies outside ourselves define us; we must let the Spirit of love that dwells within our hearts define us. As the Catholic philosopher Maurice Blondel expressed it: “Our God dwells within us and the only way we can become one with that God is to become one with our authentic self.”

It is this understanding of the role of the indwelling Holy Spirit that gives me great consolation during these times when the Catholic Church reacts to its gay members in ignorance and even downright hostility. We gays should be grateful to God for creating a humanly fallible Church. We are intensely aware that if our parents had been infallible we could never have matured and become autonomous and responsible adults. God blessed us with finite and fallible parents. It was precisely when and where our parents proved fallible that we were challenged to take distance from their authority, make our own choices and be fully responsible for them.

In a similar way, we are dependent on the human fallibility of religious authorities in order to develop an adult freedom of conscience. I believe we are witnessing the coming into being of what I call the Church of the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit. After forty years of ministry with lesbian and gay persons, as both priest and psychotherapist, I am convinced that a unique spirituality, special and vibrant, is springing up in the gay community. It is a spirituality totally compatible with a life of gay sexual love and intimacy. As scripture says “...the stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. (Mark 12:18) Gays are leading the way to form a spiritual community based on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit’s special presence in the gay community and the unique graces which are enabling lesbians and gays to build a mature, autonomous spiritual life are not just gifts meant for the gay community alone. When God pours out special blessings on one segment of the community, those blessings are meant to flow out and be shared by the human community at large

The Church of the Holy Spirit will be a Church in which all are equal, no hierarchy, no clergy as a separate caste, no domination of men over women. Leadership in the Church of the Holy Spirit will be based on careful listening to what the Holy

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Spirit is saying through the people of God. A recent event makes me believe that God is working overtime to bring about the transformation of the Catholic Church into the Church of the Holy Spirit. President Lech Kaczynski of Poland, in a March 17, 2008, televised speech to the nation — echoing the Vatican position — warned that the adoption of the European Lisbon Treaty would compel Poland to recognize same-sex marriages, which he linked to the end of “moral order.” To make his point, the president used footage of the 2003 wedding of Brendan Fay and Tom Moulton in Canada. As a result of that speech, a media frenzy moved Brendan and Tom out of obscurity and they became world famous. Brendan and Tom are devout gay Roman Catholics who see their marriage as a sacred bond blessed by God. The Holy Spirit is ultimately in charge of the Church and will transform it so that it becomes one with the realm of God. We who are gay pray daily that the hierarchy will hear what the Spirit is saying through the people of God and cooperate with the Spirit’s transformation of the Church.

For more information about and from John McNeill, please visit [www.johnjmcneill.com](http://www.johnjmcneill.com). ▼

## Why I will wear the Rainbow Sash this Pentecost

By Brian McNeill, President, Dignity/Twin Cities

Is it worthwhile to spend time and energy to try to reform Catholic teaching on homosexuality? With the immense problems of global warming, wars in the Middle East, poverty, hunger, the AIDS pandemic, and financial collapse increasing the sum of human suffering in our day, why would anyone spend what little free time he or she has have trying to change the minds of the Roman Catholic curia on the issue of homosexuality? Isn’t this, at best, frivolous?



There are many who think so. Many, who might be inclined to care about the issue because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT), and were baptized Catholic as infants, have simply left the Roman Catholic Church as the hierarchy has repeated its bigoted statements about homosexuality as an “objective disorder” in multiple official documents issued on an almost annual basis. In its November 2006 statement, *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) state that LGBT Catholics are discouraged from coming out in their parishes, may not be officially involved with parish ministry, and should not adopt children. The bishops then have the gall to say discrimination against LGBT people should not be allowed. They conclude with a call to dialogue with LGBT people even though the document was created without any consultation of

LGBT Catholics, and there has been no official dialogue with gay Catholic groups since the document was issued.

In the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, the new coadjutor, Archbishop John Nienstedt, who will soon take over for the retiring Archbishop Harry Flynn, has done the USCCB one better by condemning the family and friends of lgbt Catholics who are living with a same-sex partner. Perhaps in the interest of getting a red hat, he has written: “Those who actively encourage or promote homosexual acts or such activity within a homosexual lifestyle formally cooperate in a grave evil and, if they do so knowingly and willingly, are guilty of mortal sin. They have broken communion with the church and are prohibited from receiving holy Communion until they have had a conversion of heart, expressed sorrow for their action and received sacramental absolution from a priest.” *The Catholic Spirit*, November 15, 2007.

The official response to letters of complaint and efforts to discuss disagreement with church officials over these teachings is met by the particularly unchristian tactic of stonewalling. They simply do not reply. This, in my mind, is a tacit admission that they cannot justify their position. A church that relies heavily on the behavioral sciences as part of its preparation of candidates for the sacraments of holy orders and matrimony, has backed itself into the corner of having to ignore or dismiss all that those sciences are saying about LGBT people in order to maintain its current policy. Its pointing to scripture to back up its teachings is undertaken in the same spirit of misusing the scriptures to back up its teaching that the sun revolves around the earth, and the permissibility of human slavery.

Having said all that, is it still worth anyone’s time to put on a Rainbow Sash this Pentecost Sunday, May 11? Yes. Not doing so will be interpreted by the USCCB, and the conservatives who support them, as silent consent for their position. Wearing the Rainbow Sash is a peaceful, prayerful, and respectful way of clearly stating that the Church is wrong on this issue and needs to change.

A correct interpretation of scripture tells us that there are two fundamental gospel values: Love and justice. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, their family and friends, respond to the first by coming out, and to the second by working to change the structures of oppression. Like it or not, the Roman Catholic Church is one of the largest and most powerful oppressors of our community, and it will not change unless people work to make it change. Walking away allows bigotry and discrimination to thrive.

Join us in wearing the Rainbow Sash on Pentecost Sunday!

For more information about the history of the Rainbow Sash, please go to [www.rainbowsashallianceusa.org](http://www.rainbowsashallianceusa.org). If you are inclined to join this effort, please contact Brian McNeill, President, Dignity/Twin Cities, [dignitytwincities@hotmail.com](mailto:dignitytwincities@hotmail.com) for information about obtaining sashes, as well as writing to your local bishop and your local media before the event. ▼

BOOK REVIEWS

**Sex and The Sacred: Gay Identity and Spiritual Growth**

by Daniel A. Helminiak (Binghamton: Harrington Park Press, 2006), 235pp.

Reviewed by Scott D. Pomfret, Author of *Since My Last Confession: A Gay Catholic Memoir*

[www.sincemylastconfession.com](http://www.sincemylastconfession.com)

Daniel Helminiak’s project in his 2006 collection of previously published essays, *Sex and the Sacred: Gay Identity and Spiritual Growth*, is a naked act of reclamation. Helminiak, a Catholic priest, professor of psychology and longtime member of the gay Catholic group DignityUSA, sets his sights on terms like “spirituality,” “Christianity,” and “natural law,” and wrests them from those who would use them to oppress gay people. He provides a cogent re-description of these and related terms in an effort to draw gays and lesbians back to the Eucharistic table. Helminiak’s manner is gentle and affirming: He knows that he is preaching to a GLBT audience of the wounded, who regard religious concepts with wariness at best and an understandable outright hostility in many cases. Heroically, he barely acknowledge Sisyphusian nature of his project; he says one thing that brings GLBT spiritual beings close; religious authorities say something new and hurtful that drives them away all over again.

Because he starts from “Ground Zero” (literally: Many of these essays invoke 9/11), some of Helminiak’s statements and conclusions are so obvious as to be banal. But patience with these initial assertions pays off: They are building blocks to more ambitious arguments.

Helminiak begins by describing a concept of spirituality that is independent of religious institutions. He describes it as “a dimension to human experience...that pulls us out of ourselves and lets us know that we, our very selves, are caught up in something that is vast and marvelous.” He posits that the homosexual experience is necessarily spiritual, because the coming out process is one of growth, integration, and self-transcendence. Authenticity is the highest God/good of his conception of spirituality; indeed, for him, authenticity precedes genuine religious experience. Helminiak then reclaims sexuality for spiritual beings, arguing that sexuality—GLBT or otherwise—is a necessary component of spirituality and not its enemy, as many contemporary institutional religions—including the Catholic Church—seem to believe. For Helminiak, sexuality is also a means of expressing spirituality.

Having reclaimed the term “spirituality” for the non-religious or those with antipathy toward organized religion, Helminiak shifts gears: He argues that while spirituality does not require God or organized religion, there is nothing about spirituality that precludes organized religion—and, specifically,

Christianity. Helminiak then introduces us to Jesus as a model of coming out: Drawing especially from the Gospel of Mark, Helminiak shows us a Jesus who did not know that he was God and did not have all the answers, yet spoke from authority—an authority rooted in faith. His take on this Jesus is not one-sided, however. He also acknowledges the difficulty some — particularly oppressed or abused women — may have with the historical fact of Jesus’ maleness.

Helminiak also introduces us to the mystery of the Trinity, but he reclaims that word “mystery” in a way that is liberating.

Most take “mystery” in a negative sense: Something that cannot be understood — and they leave it at that. However, there is a more positive understanding of religious mystery: Something so rich in meaning that its meaning can never be exhausted.

From here, Helminiak goes to his roots: Catholicism. He first notes that Catholic teaching, in theory, is relatively good for gays and lesbians. The Church does not regard homosexuality as a choice, nor is merely being homosexual considered sinful. Moreover, the Church condemns violence against GLBT people. But Helminiak rightly points out that this teaching has been largely perverted from a pastoral perspective that lives in the real world and recognizes the primacy of conscience to a rigid perspective that makes a fetish out of rules — especially rules involving sexual matters — claimed to be so eternal they are divorced from history. Eloquent chapters dispatching rule-bound Catholic teaching and defending gay marriage follow. The format is perhaps too short for the full exposition the topics require, but I have never before read a clearer, or more concise, demolition of the position of the Catholic hierarchy as expounded by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI and their progeny bishops.

In his final chapters, Helminiak takes on Fundamentalists who call themselves Christian. It’s not a well-written chapter. Repetitive assertion clouds logical argument and white-knuckle fury blurs Helminiak’s more measured prose. But the conclusion is clear: Fundamentalism is incompatible with Christianity. This conclusion leads Helminiak to some of his finest observations. He writes, “It is not the what, but the how of the Bible that turns out to be most important — not what the Bible says, but how it arrives at what it says.” Scriptures are relevant for an ethics built on virtue, excellence, and character formation: “The scriptures teach us to be honest, loving and kind, and this unchanging lesson applies everywhere and always. However, if our intent is the modern preoccupation with ...ethics built on rules that would spell out in legal fashion every act that is to be performed or avoided ...the scriptural teaching becomes moot, for it is debated.” What matters to Helminiak is a Biblical attitude: Ffilled with wonder, questioning, dedication, honesty, personal integrity and a commitment to truth. This is why even Fundamentalists ought to admire the hard work of coming out, because it reflects these qualities, whether or not you think homosexuality is a bad thing.

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### **Sex and The Sacred: Gay Identity and Spiritual Growth** Continued from page 6

Not everything in *Sex and the Sacred* works. Some statements consist of maddening assertions that do not follow from the logic of the preceding sentences and left me scratching my head: “Christian belief affirms perfect human integration as the heavenly destination of every human being.” “Human integration” was certainly never a topic in any Sunday school class I attended. Moreover, there is considerable repetition here, which no doubt results from the fact that this book is a collection of previously printed material addressing a variety of audiences. Finally, I craved more stories and case studies. In the opening essay, Helminiak introduces Richard, the teen rent-boy—a boy with keen interest in religion as well as an internalized sense of damnation, but we never hear from Richard again in the ensuing two hundred pages.

Nevertheless, this book’s strengths far outweigh any weaknesses. In the closing essay, Helminiak asserts what is singular—and worth defending—about (reclaimed) Christianity as opposed to other world religions: The inherent coincidence of the divine and the human. God became man in the person of Christ, but equally we Christians believe we can touch and merge with the divine through self-transcendent spirituality — prayer, work, and even more mundane occurrences. Invoking sexual imagery that has a (suppressed) tradition within the Christian church, Helminiak says “Heaven is a never-ending orgasm” — in the sense that orgasm brings us outside of ourselves, is transformative, and is the stuff of spiritual communion. ▼

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## **Justice Denied: What America Must do to Protect its Children**

by Marci Hamilton (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008), 200pp.

Reviewed by Linda Pieczynski, Attorney, DignityUSA Board Member

In his recent visit to the United States, Pope Benedict XVI repeatedly expressed sorrow and regret over the sexual abuse of children by Roman Catholic priests. While these words are welcome, they do not deal with what the bishops have been doing behind the scenes to thwart new legislation to protect children from sexual predators or to hold offenders accountable.

In her new book, *Justice Denied: What America Must do to Protect its Children*, Professor Marci Hamilton, an internationally recognized constitutional expert on church/state relations and legal advisor to survivors of sexual abuse by clergy, makes a strong case that the statute of limitations should be abolished in sexual abuse cases. A statute of limitations is an arbitrary time restraint created by the legislature during which a criminal or civil action may be filed. Once the time has run out on the statute, no action may be brought no matter how heinous the offense. The running of the statute of limitations is the

reason why most of the priests in the sexual abuse crisis were never prosecuted for their crimes and most of their victims were never compensated. While some crimes do not have a statute of limitations at all, such as murder or treason, most states have them for sex offenses. The statute of limitations in sex abuse cases has been too short to give victims a chance to come forward to the proper authorities when they are psychologically ready. Some of these statutes have required that the victim come forward within two years from reaching the age of majority. Sexual abuse is unlike other crimes in that victims often believe they are to blame. They suffer enormous shame about the crime and some don’t even realize the emotional distress they are suffering from is due to the sexual abuse until they seek psychological help for other ills such as alcoholism or drug use.

Hamilton explains that reforming the statute of limitations is not just about victims of the clergy or the Catholic Church. Most victims are abused by someone they know, especially family members. By the time these victims become emotionally able to reveal what happened to them, the statute of limitations has run out. Therefore, perpetrators never end up on sex offender registration lists, thereby putting all children at risk. Because we are only prosecuting a small percentage of actual offenders, sexual predator laws are not being fully used.

Instead of fighting to protect children by doing away with the statute of limitations or at least extending it, the church has lobbied legislatures around the country against this legislation. Victims have been fighting for a “window” law that would allow victims to file civil lawsuits against their offenders during a short period of time no matter how old the offense was. The California legislature passed a one year window for these lawsuits which resulted in hundreds of lawsuits being filed. Hamilton points out that a number of lawsuits were brought by sex abuse survivors against perpetrators who had nothing to do with the Catholic Church scandal. Therefore, these laws are not meant to persecute the Catholic Church but to protect children.

Once a lawsuit is filed, plaintiffs are entitled to discovery which enables them to issue subpoenas for documents held by the defendant. This legal procedure has been the source of the majority of information about the child abuse scandal but can only be used if the lawsuit survives the statute of limitations challenge.

Hamilton points out that the church’s allies in this fight have been insurance companies (who don’t want to have to pay settlements), teacher’s unions (who fear lawsuits and prosecutions against teachers) and defense attorneys (who are protecting their clients’ interests). Children have had no voice in the legislatures while the interests of offenders have been preserved.

Professor Hamilton’s easy to read book is a must read for anyone who cares about protecting children. ▼

## Life in Paradox: The Story of a Gay Catholic Priest

by Paul Edward Murray (Hampshire, U.K.: O Books, 2008), 240pp.  
In stock July 25, 2008

### CONTENT:

No issue divides the Christian community more than homosexuality. Father Paul Murray's story provides an intimate look at life on both sides of the liberal/conservative divide that crosses through church and society alike. Ordained a priest by Pope Paul VI in 1975, Murray was first drawn to Roman Catholicism as a young man through association with prominent, traditionalist Catholic writers. His personal odyssey and eventual self-acceptance of his homosexuality chart a radical transformation in his understandings of God, church, and society. Murray's coming out engages and challenges several presumed dualities: between spirituality and sexuality, Catholicism and homosexuality, priesthood and freedom. His quest, as much interior journey as worldly exploration, finds its point of resolution where seeming opposites meet. The more deeply he accepts his gayness, Murray finds, the more does he realize the truth of life in Christ. This parable of freedom challenges deeply held assumptions about the boundaries between the sacred and the secular.

### AUTHOR:

Paul Edward Murray is a Catholic priest and cultural anthropologist. During the 1990s he became Washington, DC's first openly gay priest and worked extensively there in ministry in the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer community. In 1998 he relocated to Bard College, where he teaches religion and ministers as Catholic Chaplain. He lives in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

### ENDORSEMENT AND REVIEWS:

*This memoir is the compelling story of an honest, sensitive priest, and the tragic tale of a hierarchy that has lost its way in its desire to control the Church rather than nurture it. No book sets out more clearly and urgently the tragedy and the prospects of the current crisis of Catholicism.* **Bruce Chilton**, Bernard Iddings Bell Professor of Religion. Bard College.

*A searingly honest spiritual autobiography, with rare insights into the inner workings of the Roman Catholic Church's decision making processes. Paul Murray, a gay priest, invites his readers into his journey, his paradoxes and his tensions. This book defiantly asserts that the problem facing the Catholic Church today is not the presence of homosexual clergy in its ranks; it is the reality of a threatened, repressed and compromised ecclesiastical hierarchy. Anyone reading this book will come to the same conclusion.* **John Shelby Spong**, author of *Jesus for the Non-Religious*.

*This is an absorbing story of one man's struggle of clashing with the current political, religious, and sexual mainstreams as he journeys toward self-identity and personal freedom as a gay*

*priest. We glimpse a clerical world, at successive ecclesiastical junctures, redolent of opposition to individual autonomy. Told in eloquent prose, this memoir is a bold indictment of proclaiming any "truth" that is unknown by the heart.* **Sister Jeannine Gramick, SL**, National Coalition of American Nuns, Executive Co-Director.

*Paul Murray, a priest of the Washington DC Archdiocese, has written a very personal and moving account of his life from early adolescence to his current position as a member of the faculty of Bard College. Paul's story is about the struggle between growing awareness of his homosexuality and his strong sense of religious faith which he seeks to bring to fruition via the priesthood, early on through the Episcopal Church and then as he converts to Roman Catholicism. The book is both a confession of faith and another chapter in our growing awareness of homosexuality in the priesthood. Paul makes clear the distinction between being a homosexual and being a gay priest. In regard to the latter, Paul reveals a bit about the active gay life of priests; in the process, the reader comes to understand that as with heterosexuals life is very much about the search for social interaction and friendship, as it is about sexual attraction and love.*

*This book is an important addition to the growing body of literature about homosexuality and being gay in the Roman Catholic priesthood. It reveals the often untenable situation faced by priests like Paul, as they struggle to survive in a hierarchic system that professes no tolerance for homosexuals. In Paul's case, his is the story of a personal manifesto of faith, spiritual resilience, and a lifetime commitment to the priesthood in the face of the personal and institutional costs brought on by the Catholic hierarchy's inability and/or unwillingness to address the experience of human sexuality whether in or outside of the priesthood.* **William V. D'Antonio**, Sociologist and co-author, *American Catholics Today: New Realities of their Faith and their Church* 2007.

*On the day Pope Benedict arrived in Washington, DC, I heard from a friend that Fr. Paul Murray's memoir had arrived in Newman Book Store, ahead of its publication date. Paul had sent me the galleys of his book a few weeks ago, and once I began to read it I couldn't put it down. Paul is a priest who was ordained by Pope Paul VI for the Archdiocese of Washington, and is now the Catholic Chaplain at Bard College, NY. Paul serves us in Dignity/Washington as a presider whenever he comes home on vacations.*

*Paul's book is an intimate and honest account of his journey, as a gay priest, from his conservative and Episcopal youth, to being accused by an auxiliary bishop of being a heretic. Paul's journey resonated with mine as a gay man and a priest, and I assume that it will for all of us as LGBT Catholics—through our own paradox. It is an antidote for all that we have just heard yet again from the Pope about what the Church is. Paul articulates another model of Church for us. I hope you'll*

***Life in Paradox: The Story of a Gay Catholic Priest***  
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consider reading his book. Perhaps Paul can offer a conference with us for the next DignityUSA convention. **Stephen McDonnell**, former President of Dignity/Washington, current priest-president for Dignity, and psychotherapist in private practice. ▼

## Sequels, Updates and Feedback

By Bill Welch, Editor

Our *QV: Quarterly Voice* Family Edition for 1st Quarter 2008 carried the extremely interesting stories of four Dignity families — the Gold Family (Denver, CO), the Dolan-Hills Family (Auburn, WA), the Vader-Huskinson Family (Gillette, WY) and the Nagle-Pinkerton Family (San Antonio, TX). See [www.dignityusa.org/pdf/qv/2008/QV\\_DUSA\\_1stQtr2008.pdf](http://www.dignityusa.org/pdf/qv/2008/QV_DUSA_1stQtr2008.pdf)

In the article, “Homos on the Range: The Vader-Huskinson Family, Gillette, Wyoming,” we learned that Leah Vader and Lynne Huskinson were banned from receiving the Eucharist by order of Bishop David Ricken of Cheyene, Wyoming in March 2007, after they spoke out against a proposed Wyoming State Senate File banning same-gender marriage.

In this article, we are pleased to convey great news in sequels, updates and feedback to two of those family stories.

### Vader-Huskinson Family Sequel and Update

In a February 2008 message, Leah Vader relates how “good old Sr. Therese” came to her place of employment to reinvite and remind her of Bishop Ricken’s upcoming pastoral visit to the parish, and gently reminding her that it was “kind of important” that Leah and her partner Lynne be present. As added incentive, Sr. Therese mentioned that coffee time would feature homemade cinnamon rolls!

Leah wasn’t sure she was ready to face Bishop Ricken. She wrote, “Lynne was scheduled on day-shift, but at the last minute decided to call in and accompany me to Mass. She’s so cool, a real sit up front kind of gal. We liked his homily. Lynne kept whispering to me, ‘He reminds me of your dad!’”

At Communion time, Leah and Lynne presented themselves for a blessing, which the Bishop gave. They were a bit disappointed when, unlike Fr. Cliff’s customary placing his hands on them, the Bishop restrained any physical touch. However, since it was the Feast of St. Blaise, during the blessing of throats, Leah writes, “...the Bishop was very hands on, even taking my hand.”

At the social coffee klatch following Mass, Leah and Lynne were enjoying coffee and rolls with a “fiery old lady—mom of a friend and member of our peace group, when Bishop Ricken

came right up to us. Oooh, I was beside myself, nervous but prepared. In our brief time together I let him know about my Catholic school history and also told him I was writing for DignityUSA. He actually apologized for what had happened to us and said he had told Father Cliff to get a hold of us.”

Anxious for Reconciliation, Leah and Lynne awaited the next step.

On the Thursday before Holy Week, Leah and Lynne met with Fr. Cliff and Sr. Therese. “After a brief discussion acknowledging that we were understanding of, not necessarily in agreement with, ‘where the church was at regarding homosexuality,’ and with direction to focus on ‘primacy of conscience,’ we were welcomed back to full community and Eucharist. We received the sacrament at Holy Thursday Mass and it was so beautiful! Fr. Cliff is truly our friend and soon to be our dinner guest (after he recovers from Holy Week!)”

### Feedback

Shortly after the distribution of the 1st Quarter 2008 edition of this publication, DignityUSA’s national office received a communication from Theresa Miller of Gillette, Wyoming.

“I just finished reading the interview about my dear friends, Leah Vader and Lynne Huskinson. Thank you so much for providing us with a glimpse into the personal lives of these two very private and courageous women.

“I live in Gillette, Wyoming, about 2 blocks from Leah and Lynne. Lynne and I actually went to high school together. I met Leah when she moved to Gillette and enrolled her children in the religious education program at St. Matthew’s. I was the grade school religious education coordinator at the time. I invited Leah to help with our 1st grade CCD program. The kids absolutely adored her. A few years later, she and I taught 9th grade together. It was one of the best teaching experiences I ever had. Her knowledge about the Church was invaluable and she had such an easy way of presenting the material. The kids really liked her because she always treated them with the utmost respect. Turns out that our class was the one everyone wanted to be in and we’d usually have one or two kids showing up from other classrooms because they wanted to get in on the fun. Sadly, we both quit teaching after that year. I don’t know the details surrounding her departure, but I didn’t want to teach without her and I can tell you that her leaving was a huge loss to the program and a lot of kids were disappointed.

“I have nothing but the utmost love and respect for Leah and Lynne. I am blessed to call them my friends. They have taught me and many of our friends and family how to endure suffering and loss with kindness, grace and yes, dignity. I marvel at how they continue to walk into St. Matthew’s on Sunday morning with their heads held high, ready to greet their oppressors with a smile and a handshake (or hug, if permitted).

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"They are much more forgiving than I would be or have been. In solidarity with them, I have abstained from receiving the Eucharist since this tragic event occurred [the denial of Eucharist to Leah and Lynne]. I knew in my heart that if the Church considered my devoted, faith-filled friends unworthy because of their public declaration of love for each other and their support for GLBT rights, then I too was "unworthy" to receive because my husband and I were unrepentant about our decision to use artificial birth control (vasectomy) and I fully and publicly supported their relationship. So I made my own public declaration to that effect and left the table. I miss receiving the Eucharist but can't bring myself to partake until we are all welcome to share the Body of Christ.

"Thank you for being here for Leah and Lynne. You have provided much needed support for them and given them a safe place to use their voices for change."

### Nagle-Pinkham Family Update

Ruth Pinkham, of the Nagle-Pinkham Family featured in the 1st Quarter 2008 QV, recently reported that her partner Della, the kids and she are involved in the new SoulForce American Family Outing. "We, and other families around the country, are participating in meetings with family representatives of six megachurches around the country to open dialog about the place needed for GLBT people in places of worship. It might be nice for other GLBT folks who live in these areas to join in the meetings so that the churches can put a more 'local' face on the cause.

"Between Mother's Day Weekend and Father's Day Weekend, 2008, diverse families from around the country will create meaningful conversations about faith, family, and LGBT people. We visit these churches because we recognize the enormous influence each has within Christianity and the larger culture...[and] have the potential to be a positive force in ending the physical and spiritual violence perpetuated by some religious voices against LGBT people and their families. Some of these churches have exercised inspirational leadership on social issues such as poverty and AIDS, and we believe they can exercise comparable, courageous leadership in ending spiritual and physical violence against LGBT people."

More info at <http://www.soulforce.org/>



## "Boston Marriages" (Romantic Friendships) and How I feel they can Provide us with Spiritual Inspiration

By Denise Arceneaux, Dignity/Seattle

While aware of their actual existence among several women I know—generally not self-described lesbians—I was unaware, until recently, of the actual terminology which could be applied to their current relationships aside from the term "roommate," namely, that of "Boston Marriage."

According to an online GLBT encyclopedia ([http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/boston\\_marriages.html](http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/boston_marriages.html)), there existed "romantic unions between women that were usually monogamous but not necessarily sexual [which] flourished in the late nineteenth century. The term [Boston Marriage] was coined in New England, around the time that numerous women's colleges such as Vassar, Smith, and Wellesley emerged" and "the women involved in them tended to be college-educated, feminist, financially independent, and career-minded." The women in the past, as do the women in the present, typically shared (and share) their lives in much the same way as people do in traditional marriages today with the possible exception of any form of "genital sexuality."

On one level, you could interpret the development of this phenomenon in past centuries as a direct consequence of repressive, unenlightened social policies toward GLBT people, i.e., only non-sexual relationships (non-threatening to the patriarchy) were tolerated. On another level, in these more liberated times, "Boston Marriages" exist in their own right, depending upon personal circumstances and personal needs.

The purpose of this article is not to cast a value judgment upon such relationships either in the past or present, but to further enlighten members of my community about their existence and, more importantly, to address the positive and beautiful expressions of love, which could possibly be unrequited on some level, coming out of these relationships. After reading the book *Boston Marriages: Romantic But Asexual Relationships Among Contemporary Lesbians* by Esther Rothblum and Kathleen Brehony (University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1993), I found accounts of frustration, but also accounts of joy in the expression of their love.

Continuing my research on Boston Marriages and unrequited love, I found a web site entitled "romantic friendships" ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romantic\\_friendships](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romantic_friendships)) and encountered Emily Dickinson's relationship with her friend and future sister-in-law, Susan Gilbert. Though Emily Dickinson (born in 1830) predated the usage of the term "Boston Marriage," she was known to have written some very passionate letters to Susan Gilbert. These letters were later edited due to the fact that they were considered too intimate for public consumption.

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**“Boston Marriages” (Romantic Friendships)**  
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The following excerpts show the edited and unedited versions of Emily Dickinson’s letters to Susan quoted from “Wikipedia” :

The edited version reads:

“Susie, forgive me darling, for every word I say, my heart is full of you, yet when I seek to say something to you not for the world, words fail me. I try to bring you nearer...”

Whereas, the original letter read as follows:

“Susie, forgive me darling, for every word I say, my heart is full of you, none other than you in my thoughts, yet when I seek to say something to you not for the world, words fail me. If you were here – and Oh that you were, my Susie, we need not talk at all, our eyes would whisper for us, and your hand fast in mine we would not ask for language [underline added]... I try to bring you nearer...”

According to Wikipedia, Emily Dickinson sent over 300 letters to Susan Gilbert “over the course of their friendship. Her missives typically dealt with demands for Sue’s affection and the fear of unrequited admiration...” Also from the same source, Emily was known for her reluctance to “even leave her room.” Therefore, it was quite possible that this passionate relationship was non-sexual, as well as unrequited in the end.

Fortunately, in this case, we were able to recover the original unedited version of someone involved in a same-sex romantic friendship. However, it is my fear that the remaining 299-plus letters from Emily to Sue, as well as the rest of the volumes and volumes of same-sex romantic letters, poems and novels of the past have not only been severely edited but also destroyed, leaving only small excerpts for us to peruse and meditate upon.

I hope this is not the case. How spiritually rich are the previously edited words “we need not talk at all, our eyes would whisper for us, and your hand fast in mine, we would not ask for language” from the reclusive, poetic genius of Dickinson who did not attend Church regularly throughout her life! (She wrote a poem which began with the lines “Some keep the Sabbath going to Church/ I keep it staying at Home.” She also wrote, to a male friend “While others go to Church, I go to mine, for are you not my Church, and have we not a Hymn that no one knows but us?”)

The book *Boston Marriages: Romantic But Asexual Relationships Among Contemporary Lesbians* also cites the romantic friendship of the late eighteenth-century French writer Mme. de Stael (also predating usage of the term “Boston Marriages”) and Juliette Recamier in which “Mme. de Stael wrote to Mme. Recamier at various times:”

“I love you with a love surpassing that of friendship. I go down on my knees to embrace you with all my heart.”

“You are in the forefront of my life...It seemed to me when I saw you that to be loved by you would satisfy destiny. It would be enough, in fact, if I were to see you...”

There is also the recent case of unrequited love turned dangerously against the individual who expresses this love (or crush) in the person of Lawrence King from Oxnard, California. According to an article from the Los Angeles Times (<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-oxnard17feb17.1.1523425.story>), “King, an eighth-grader at E.O. Green Junior High School in south Oxnard, had revealed he was gay...” “He had [also] begun accessorizing his school uniform with feminine items” and “was often teased by other students.” Unfortunately, as “Jeremiah, another student and friend of the victim” related, “Lawrence King had recently told the 14-year-old boy who is alleged to have shot him, ‘that he had a crush on him.’”

Quoting from DignityUSA’s Breath of the Spirit of February 24, 2008, “The ‘biblical trick’ is not to pray that God enter our lives, but to pray that we discover how, when, and where God’s already in our lives.” If you believe, as I do, in a loving, non-capricious God, you must also believe God especially exists in the lives and actions of those like Emily Dickinson, Mme. de Stael and the 15-year old boy, Lawrence King — all people who kept steadfast in their outward expressions of love for others in the midst of ridicule, rejection and danger.

While I think that most of us in the GLBTQ community have experienced unrequited love on some level throughout our lives, whether in “Boston Marriages” or not, it is comforting to me to know that these expressions of love can contribute to a greater and more diverse expression of beauty and passion in our lives than just the requited expressions, although these can be beautiful as well. ▼

