

# THE WITNESS

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## AIDS:

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T H E  
P L A G U E  
T H A T  
L A Y S  
W A S T E  
A T N O O N

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FORTUNATO

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# Letters

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## Police act warranted

I have just received your June issue and would like to commend you and your layout artists who make the magazine especially pleasant to read. The articles are timely and well written and are an invaluable tool in my efforts to develop well-informed opinions on the issues facing myself and my congregation. The writers may, by and large, be playing out in left field, but I think they're still in the ball park.

I would like to comment on Joan Howarth's police tank article. She referred to "unwarranted" suspicion that led the LAPD to batter their way into a suspected drug site. The use of the word "unwarranted" is misleading. The police entered the premises on the authority of a search warrant obtained from a judge. Warrants are not obtained on a police officer's whim, but are issued when the police produce sufficient evidence to convince the judge that a crime has been or is being committed by a specific person in a specific place. The warrant does not guarantee the police will find who or what they are looking for, but it does help guarantee that the search or arrest will not be frivolous.

What Howarth neglected in her report of the incident, when she focused on the five terrified occupants of the premises, was that the police were simply trying to put a dent in the drug trade that destroys thousands of lives and homes. To the untrained, the tactics of the LAPD may seem reckless and destructive, but they are designed specifically to save the lives of both police and suspects, as well as saving the evidence.

It is precisely the terror of crashing battering rams and exploding stun grenades that disorients heavily armed drug dealers (as well as women and children) long enough for the police to move in and control the situation. It may seem strange to the uninitiated for police to

point guns at small children, yet this too is necessary as the police try to freeze all activity in the smoky darkness and confusion so that they don't inadvertently shoot someone except when absolutely necessary. Ironically, there is a godly attitude behind all of that ungodly terror!

The ACLU, NAACP and religious leaders *do* have a point in protesting Police Chief Daryl Gates' media party. To invite the media to record a police action where guns and grenades are involved is nothing short of insane, especially where safety is the motive for the action. Reckless endangerment is not what the police did to the house or people, but what they did to the media representatives. The chief also risked an information leak that could have forewarned drug dealers who may have been in the house under investigation.

**The Rev. Keith F. Axberg**  
Colville, Wash.

## Howarth responds

The police do have a difficult and important job in keeping drug trafficking out of our neighborhoods. The goal of both the police and the community is to create an environment where children can grow up in safety without the threat of wanton violence. The "five terrified occupants" described in the article are the very people the LAPD are here to protect.

How strange that Keith Axberg can fear for the safety of the press — who were present at the incident voluntarily and outside the zone of attack — but not for the safety of the innocent women and children who were taken by surprise as the objects of the raid.

In that system of justice, once you are in a location where police suspect criminal activity, it is the "godly attitude" of the LAPD that leads to endangerment of your life; but if you are endangered because you work for a

newspaper, the police are just plain reckless.

Is it simply because Dolores Langford and her sons are "untrained" in the tactics of the police that they experienced terror during the ram incident? Or does terror follow when your house shakes, grenades explode, guns point at you and you can't breathe — no matter who you are?

Cocaine has surely made its way into middle class and wealthy neighborhoods, but the tank won't. When it's only "those people" who live "there" who are at risk, the risk seems acceptable. If the police mistakenly rammed through Rev. Axberg's living room wall where his children were playing, he might be as shocked and angered by their tactics as the uninitiated and the untrained. (All the police would need to justify the warrant is an unidentified informer accusing him of narcotics activity.)

The Fourth Amendment of the Constitution prohibits unreasonably dangerous searches and seizures. A search warrant is just that — a warrant to search — not permission to destroy a home and terrorize the occupants. The LAPD had no judicial authorization for the tank and grenades, and no knowledge of who was inside at the time of the attack. The use of a tank and a battering ram on the home of an unarmed and unwarned family is unreasonably dangerous, and we fervently believe that free citizens must never be trained to think otherwise.

**Joan Howarth, ACLU**  
Los Angeles, Cal.

## From awshucks school

It is sure good to see St. Paul's letters being edited and refined by Abbie Jane Wells of Alaska ("Witness author pens a book," June issue). John Wayne couldn't have done better. It looks to me like she's up to being the Artemus Ward of Contemporary Criticism: a champion

who can cut through the intellectual complexity of Paul's ideas — ideas which have led to Luther's mischief as well as John XXIII — and show it up for the crotchety chauvinistic superficiality it is. Not since Thomas Jefferson rewrote the Bible or since Ronald Reagan took on the abortionists, flayed opponents of school prayer and exposed the lazy poor, has the awshucks, shoe-shuffle school of open-eyed mawkery been used to such stimulating effect. It's just too bad St. Paul isn't around to take his medicine: Boy! would she make him look silly in a TV debate!

Of course, some might want to argue a couple of things — like when she says Jesus liked the way a child accepts faith, by which she interprets him to mean we should be childish. Confused old Paul, she says, wants us to put away childish things and be *mature* — a word Jesus also uses. Also, she suggests an interesting idea about who wrote the gospels and why: saying that they were penned by authors who were closer to the source than Paul who didn't always get things straight. "Getting the story straight and putting it down as we know it" sounds strangely like something Paul might have said, maybe while talking to James and Peter and making them a little more liberal by pointing out the internal inconsistencies in their Judaistic approach to gentiles and, for all we know, to women, to whom Paul seems to have accorded inordinate respect.

I only hope when I get to read her book I'll also find her poking a little fun at Jesus — like when He finds out Peter's mother-in-law is sick so He goes and cures her so she can get up and make Him dinner. It's about time we got the Gospel written out and applied by someone who doesn't have any axe to grind: who only wants to show us what we uncomplicated folk all know; namely, the Bible means simply what it says and

sometimes what it doesn't but would have if the right folks had been there to put it all down.

**The Rev. John A. Bright**  
San Francisco, Cal.

## Wells responds

If the Rev. John A. Bright can find that much to criticize in the one-column "Contradictions" excerpt from my book, he's going to have a field day when, or if, he reads the whole thing! As for his "like something Paul might have said while talking to James and Peter and making them a little more liberal," I can find no place in any of the four Gospels where Jesus said to James or Peter or anyone, "Now, listen here; there's gonna come along a man named Paul and he's gonna have the last word on everything. Y'all listen to *him*, you hear?" (By the same token, I can find no place where Jesus says, "There's gonna come along a woman named Abbie Jane Wells, ditto, ditto, ditto!") But I *can* find where Jesus said Peter was the rock upon which he would found his church. Could it be that, according to Jesus, it was Peter rather than Paul the early church should have listened to?

In Bright's "Jesus liked the way a child accepts faith, by which she interprets him to mean we should be childish," he assumes too much, for I interpret him to mean child-like, not childish. There *is* a difference. Bright reads Paul through a man's eyes and experience while I read him through a woman's and his "women, to whom Paul seems to have accorded inordinate respect," I see as inordinate oppression, if not downright disrespect.

There are as many ways to interpret

the Gospel — or Paul — as there are people to do it. Likewise, there are as many ways to "interpret" what I have written as there will be people to read it. The debate over human interpretations of Scripture will continue unabated as long as humanity lives — and long may it live. Which it won't if we don't rid the earth of nuclear weapons of indiscriminate and immeasurable destruction.

**Abbie Jane Wells**  
Juneau, Alaska

## Worship inspires poem

The occasion which "inspired" the following poem was a Sunday morning worship service which included the old standby, "Onward Christian Soldiers." As a member of a fairly progressive congregation, especially in matters of peace and nuclear freeze, I am constantly frustrated by our tolerance for music with bad theology. A recent lecture by Walter Bruggeman suggested the use of the psalm form to creatively grieve personal loss. This is my result:

### Upward not onward

The songs of my youth torment me  
My fathers' hymns chill my bones  
and kill my spirit.

The kindness of God and God's justice  
are hid from my eyes.  
A sword and breastplate blind me  
and hinder my access to my God.

Your battle cry drowns out  
the celebration of my hope.  
Why should I march  
when I've just learned to dance?

The beauty of God's adoration  
deserves more than an army review.  
I will not settle for drum rolls  
when I have knowledge of Angel songs.

**Elsie L. Dursi**  
Youngstown, Ohio

## Hungering for peace

**T**he 30-day fast for peace and an end to U.S. aggression completed recently by Miguel D'Escoto, foreign minister of Nicaragua, is remarkable in many ways. Not the least of these is that one hardly expects to find a government official in a cabinet post undertaking such a religious act — especially the chancellor of a country Ronald Reagan calls “communist.”

But this chancellor is unique. A Maryknoll priest, he takes the Bible and his Christian ministry seriously.

To some 10,000 Nicaraguan Christians assembled in the city of Leon to celebrate the sixth anniversary of the Sandinista revolution, he sent this message:

“I urge you to fast and pray together, in the churches, in your homes and other places. It will be a fast that goes hand-in-hand with community reflection, in which we think about prophetic ways of denouncing the crimes of imperialism. If we do not commit ourselves to using peaceful methods, we become accomplices to those crimes.”

The ecumenical delegation from the United States, including THE WITNESS editor, who participated briefly in the fast with D'Escoto, had a chance to meet some of the Christians who heard those words.

Eighty of them had come from the war zone, accompanied by Sister Dulcinia

Garcia and the Rev. Jim Feltz. Feltz, a diocesan priest, is originally from Michigan. Much of his time is spent retrieving bodies for burial. He has been detained by the contras 12 times. In a recent episode, he and Sister Dulcinia, while visiting their people on muleback, were robbed and held for a time. Upon release they were told by the contras that they should stop “spreading communism.”

By attending the Leon event, they were in effect, defying the contras, whom they would have to pass through on their return home — on roads that have been mined and where travelers have been ambushed. What is the nature of the faith of these missionaries, and the people they accompanied?

Here is a brief description of a few women in the group of 80, all of whom had fasted one day during the trip, uniting their intentions with the foreign minister:

Susanna Perez, whose husband, a noted lay leader in the area, was one of the first to be killed by the contras. She has 11 children, and was pregnant with the last when her husband was killed. Susanna took his place as a “delegate of the word.” She is an organizer of the women’s sewing co-op; most of its members are widows from contra attacks.

Maria Alarcon, whose two brothers were ambushed by the contras. She is a cultural organizer and a poet who lives in the mountains.

Genara Cerna, whose husband was killed in a contra attack. She is the organizer of a women’s baking cooperative.

Said Jim Feltz, when his people say that members of their family were “killed,” it is almost a euphemism for the mutilated, tortured bodies he brings back for burial. Such was the caliber of the people who joined the fast with their chancellor.

On a parallel fast with D'Escoto’s were nine women and one man who were fasting at International Red Cross headquarters for the return of their children who had been kidnapped by the contras.

The thought struck our fasting ecumenical delegation more than once: Christians who live in the United States who are well fed, well clothed, well housed have become numb to this kind of suffering produced by the Rambo mindset of the Reagan administration.

The period of prayer and fasting initiated by Nicaragua’s foreign minister is aptly prescribed that *we* not become further accomplices in these crimes which cause so much human misery.

What more can we do? Monitor Congressional legislation in the fall; support Witness for Peace and humanitarian aid efforts of the American Friends, the Quixote Center, Church Women United; become active in the Pledge of Resistance — anything to convince the President — no more “Guns of August.”



## THE WITNESS

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# AIDS: The plague that lays waste at noon

by John Fortunato

**R**ecently, a gay friend of mine named Michael attended a large reception in Chicago. He was standing, wine glass in hand, surrounded by festal din, talking with a gay friend. The conversation turned to AIDS — Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. A man standing nearby turned around. He was short, obese, and balding — a man in his 50's. Uninvited, and clearly having eavesdropped, he intruded with a tight-lipped,

sardonic grin and the words, "Do you know what the best thing about AIDS is?" Michael, caught off guard, gave him the straight line, "No, what?" The man's grin widened. "It's always fatal," he said icily, and walked off.

AIDS is a terrible disease for those who get it. But it is terrible as well for those of us who are gay who — at least so far — *haven't* gotten it. Not only because we now live dreading that today we too will wake up with night sweats or to discover the telltale enlarged lymph nodes in our necks, armpits or groins. And not only because our lovers and friends are dying all around us.

AIDS is terrible to live with also because it makes us painfully aware that

there are tens of thousands of people "out there" who hate us, who are overjoyed about AIDS, who are chuckling as we are dying; tens of thousands of fine, upstanding American citizens who are rooting for the virus that is killing us. Even worse, both in the United States and abroad, we are being blamed by many for every case of AIDS that develops in the "straight" community. One result of this scapegoating is that "fag-bashing" has increased at an alarming rate. Beyond that, gay people are being fired, evicted, and denied basic services all, ostensibly, in the name of AIDS fear. In the long run, the unleashing of such blatant homophobia may be the most damaging effect of this insidious disease.

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**John Fortunato**, a psychotherapist, is currently a divinity student at the University of Chicago. He is author of *Embracing the Exile: Healing Journeys of Gay Christians*; and past president of Integrity, the organization of gay and lesbian Episcopalians and their friends.

AIDS is a progressively degenerative disease caused by a virus known in the United States as HTLV-3. It attacks the body's immune system, the bio-chemical network that fights off those foreign agents which populate our environment and get into our bodies routinely. HTLV-3, over time, destroys thymic lymphocytes — the T4 cells — that control the immune system. This leaves the body defenseless. With no way to fight back, the body cannot prevent diseases from having a heyday. In 80% of the cases so far (which probably will be 100% eventually), these opportunistic diseases kill the victim.

### No cure to date

Some of these diseases produce grotesque suffering and degeneration before bringing on death: a secondary virus that attacks and erodes the brain, leading at first to personality deterioration, then a vegetative state, and finally death, as control of the internal organs is lost; a cancer that produces horribly disfiguring lesions all over and inside the body; a pneumonia-like disease that progressively suffocates its victim, causing prodigious pain and physical wasting in the process. These diseases can sometimes be fought off medically, but since the underlying lack of immunity continues, it is only a matter of time before the victim contracts something else, or the same thing again, or two or three diseases simultaneously. Eventually, the body and the medical establishment lose a critical battle and the victim dies.

To date, no cure has been found for the HTLV-3 virus, nothing that will kill the virus without killing the patient. There is no vaccine to prevent it, either. And there is no way to know how long it will be before a cure and vaccine are found.

The United States government dragged its feet predictably when the disease first surfaced. Since most of its victims were gay — a politically unpopular minority

group — the government wasn't much interested (as it has never been much concerned about sickle-cell anemia). As the disease has become a spectre for all, the Reagan administration has become more generous, although it is still spending a pittance in relation to the dimensions of the problem. (If the primary group of victims were comprised of upper middle-class, heterosexual Whites, is there any doubt that funding would be 10 times what it is at present?)

But in point of fact, even if all the money in the Pentagon's budget were made available for AIDS research, it alone could not produce a cure. Money cannot automatically unlock the secrets of a complex disease, or we already would have cancer licked, not to mention the common cold. Apparently, it is hard to beat a virus (especially one like HTLV-3 that apparently can mutate), so it may be three years or 10 years or never before a cure and a vaccine for AIDS are discovered — a terrifying but accurate statement of the prospects.

Nationally, about 73% of the victims of AIDS are gay or bi-sexual men, whose average age is 35. Non-prescription intravenous drug users (addicts) form the next largest group of victims, some 17%. Users of blood products, such as hemophiliacs, constitute 1%. And finally there is a large minority of others (mostly straight people, many of whom are Haitian) — 9%. Epidemiologists find that the "others" group is growing; that is, the disease is spreading more widely into the non-gay community. But for now, most victims of AIDS are gay, which leads most of the citizenry to label AIDS "a gay disease."

Since 1981, more than 10,000 people have gotten AIDS. Of those, more than 5,000 are now dead. Of those diagnosed in 1981, 80% are dead. And it is projected that by 1995, unless a cure and vaccine are found, 50,000 of the estimated 500,000 gay men in San Francisco alone will be afflicted and die.

That's one in 10.

We are virtually talking about a *plague*, a plague as virulent and ugly as the black death or smallpox ever were.

The AIDS virus is spread by the exchange of bodily fluids and it apparently has to get into the bloodstream to do its dirty work. Sexual intimacy is one way of getting it, and the primary way it has spread in the gay community. Exchange of blood, semen or mucous — even in minute quantities — can introduce the virus. It gets in, takes hold, and begins its deadly dance. Injecting drugs with needles and other paraphernalia that have not been sterilized properly is another way to spread the virus, as is transfusing contaminated blood. Nobody is sure yet about saliva and whether "French kissing," for instance, can spread the disease, but it is suspect, despite popular belief to the contrary.

AIDS has a long incubation period; that is, there is a substantial delay from when the virus gains entrance until it starts to destroy. The virus remains dormant for perhaps six months to as long as five years, maybe longer. Statisticians have only been accumulating relevant data for five years; the incubation period could be much longer. Which is to say, everybody who is going to get it six months from now in effect already has it. And it also means that, even if one has been celibate for four years, one could be carrying a biological time-bomb inside, picked up from intimacies (or needles or blood) shared five years ago or longer. So virtually the entire gay male community is walking around wondering if they have it.

### A personal saga

Almost all I know who are gay have gone through some period of thinking they had AIDS. About two months ago, I was convinced I had gotten it. I hadn't felt well for weeks. Not sick enough to be dysfunctional, but uncomfortable enough to feel drained constantly. Flu-like aches

and a feverish feeling, though I had no fever. While chronic malaise and flu-like symptoms are some of the pre-AIDS danger signs, there have to be others as well. In hindsight, it's clear I never had true AIDS symptoms. But we all know about hindsight.

Eventually — five doctors and a lot of tests later — I was persuaded that I didn't have AIDS. (At least, if I do, it hasn't produced the *real* pre-AIDS symptoms yet.) And the likelihood of my having gotten it was and is remote (I have always been a sexual conservative). But then, it would maybe only take *once*. And . . . statistics be damned . . . by fluke I *might* have it. So I was truly convinced. I lived 10 of the most miserable, panic-filled days of my life. I spent one full night lying beside my lover, wide-eyed, heart in throat, staring at the ceiling, dealing not only with the dreadful possibility that I might have infected *him*, but also with my own impending suffering and death.

I learned a lot about myself during those 10 days. I learned how attached I am to life. Heaven will be great fun, perhaps, but — at 38 and all spiritual maturity aside — I came to know how much I wanted to live, how much I loved this life, this world. I came to know how much I enjoy God's creation.

I also came to know how remarkably frail my faith is. The night I lay awake in terror, the only comfort I could find was in a mantra that came to me. I just kept repeating in my heart and silently on my lips: "I am safe in the palm of God's hand." All night long. It *did* give me solace, but not much.

I came to know the Kubler-Ross steps of grieving like the back of my hand in those 10 days, going through denial, bargaining, anger, depression and acceptance scores of times at many levels and at various velocities. I came to know in my guts the truth in the assertion that the dying need assurance mostly about four things: 1) that they will be as free as

possible of pain; 2) that they will die with dignity and not grotesquely; 3) that they will die with loving friends around them; and 4) that they will find some answer to the question, "What happens to me when I die?" I can tell you now, it's all true.

I came also to know in those 10 days how much I was loved. I suspect that none of my close friends actually believed I had AIDS. But they loved me enough to take my terror seriously. Seriously enough to hold me as I sobbed in anguish, to send me to physicians until my soul found rest. Seriously enough to talk with me as long as I needed, giving me all the facts they knew to try to quell

my fears. Seriously enough to reassure me that, if I were dying — they would be there for me to the end.

Well, I guess I don't have AIDS (although I'm still not well and nobody knows why). But my "brush" with AIDS, however imagined, has made an indelible mark on my soul . . . because 5,000 of my gay brothers *do* have AIDS. And they are actually going through all the torment and terror, anguish and despair, pain and disintegration that I dealt with as a prospect, and only for 10 days. Many of my brothers are dying without the comfort of family and friends; many linger for years, fighting off bout after bout of debilitating diseases with

## AIDS Supplication

*(For use in the Litany in place of the versicle and collect which follow the Lord's prayer, or at the end of Morning or Evening Prayer, or as a separate devotion. The intercessory prayer may be used separately.)*

O God, arise, help us;  
And deliver us for your Name's sake.

O God, we have heard with our ears, and our ancestors have told us of the works of healing you did in their days, and in ages past.  
O God, arise, help us, and deliver us for your Name's sake.

Glory to the Father, Son, and Mother Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

O God, arise, help us, and deliver us for your Name's sake.

From our enemies defend us, O Christ.  
Graciously look upon our afflictions.

With pity behold the sorrows of our hearts.  
Mercifully comfort your people.

Favorably and with mercy hear our prayers.  
O Compassionate Savior, have mercy on us.

Both now and ever hear us, O Christ.  
Graciously hear us, O Christ; graciously hear us,  
O merciful Christ.

### Intercession

We humbly beg of you, O God, mercifully to look upon your people as we suffer from this dread disease: protect the healthy, calm the frightened, give courage to those in pain, comfort the dying, grant to the dead everlasting life; console the bereaved, bless those who care for the sick, and hasten the discovery of a cure. At this time we remember especially \_\_\_\_\_. And finally, O Compassionate God, grant that in this and all our troubles we may put our whole trust and confidence in your steadfast love, through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.



absolutely no hope of being able to “win” and resume a normal life; many live in desperate and in all probability, futile hope that they will be able to hang on until a cure is found.

Never have I felt so much part of “a people.” Never have I experienced so strong a thirst for justice. Never have I had so little patience with those who would court the institution (church *or* state) or degrade themselves by begging for justice or settling for patronization. I have come to know in my guts that the *anawim* deserve justice. It is our God-given right. And the onus of moral responsibility concerning its provision is on everyone’s shoulders except the oppressed. This is something I always “knew;” I just never experienced it until now.

Listening to Jerry Falwell blithely pronounce that AIDS is being sent by God to us who are gay as retribution for our “perversion,” now evokes in me more rage than I ever knew I possessed. I can hardly fathom the heartlessness of people who are gleeful that human beings are dying miserable deaths.

What is the church doing in response? Basically nothing. And the Episcopal Church, regrettably, is no exception. The institutional indolence is a disgrace. One hand would suffice to count the number of programs that have been initiated in the Episcopal Church to provide for people with AIDS, their lovers, and their families.

In addition to this appalling neglect, insult is added to injury daily:

● In a recent pastoral letter, Bishop William Swing of California rationally — in a gentlemanly way — “took issue” with those who are claiming that AIDS is punishment from God. I say that is not nearly enough. The only acceptable Christian response to such perversion of Christ’s message of love is *outrage*. We are waiting. Not to mention the vigil we

keep for the scores of cringing bishops who remain discreetly silent about the whole “unpleasant” topic.

● A body of the Church of England has suggested that the Church should begin blessing gay relationships *because it would help contain AIDS*. (Read: help protect the “straight” community.) Gay people have been asking to have their unions lifted up by the church for 15 years or longer *because they have known Christ incarnate in them*. Are we now to have church sanction of gay relationships as a means of social planning? Liturgy as a method of disease control? The very notion is demeaning and unconscionable.

● A public figure in Chicago died recently of what apparently was AIDS. The man went off to the East Coast to die alone. The mayor’s office had nothing to say about the cause of his death. The press referred to it as “an AIDS-related disease.” His parish, a prominent Episcopal church, hosted his funeral, at which AIDS was neither mentioned nor alluded to. With good intentions, I am sure, a collusion among all concerned parties (beginning with the deceased) ensured that AIDS was politely smothered in brocade and incense. But at what cost? To my mind, that death-dealing lie robbed a man’s dying and a city’s grieving of any embodiment. It made a mockery of death, liturgy, the man, his family and his friends.

### The call

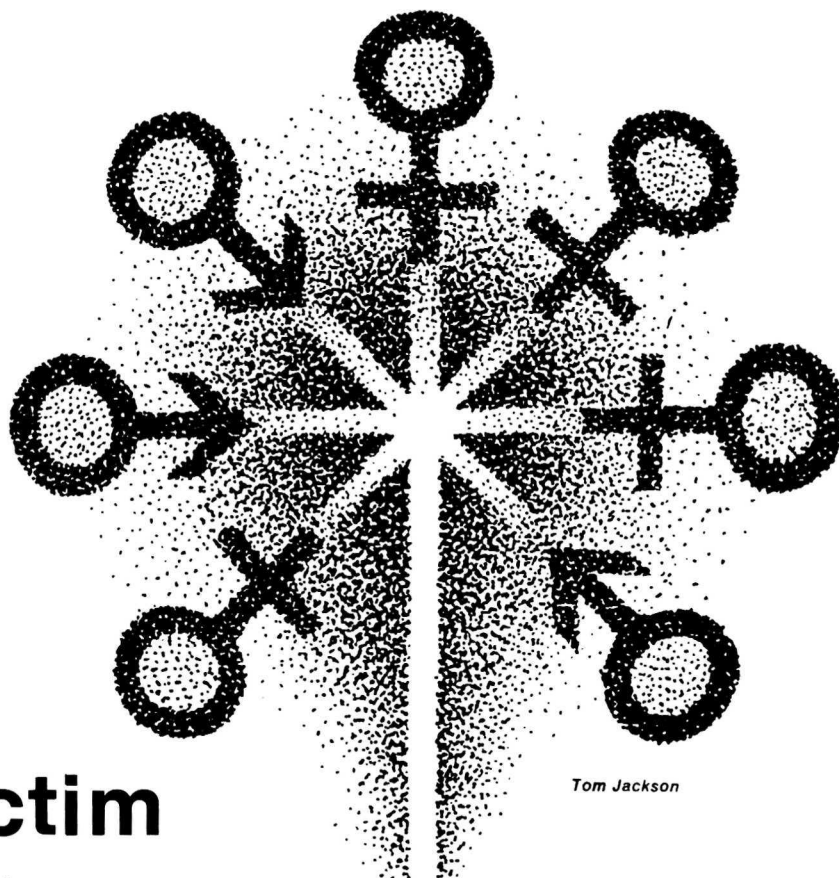
What is needed? Most gay victims of AIDS are dying with no spiritual nurture. Having been abandoned or excommunicated or alienated by the church by virtue of their gayness, few even consider asking for the church’s help in their dying. For the same reason, secular gay organizations that do provide support for AIDS victims are frequently hostile to clergy or religious groups.

For starters, then, the church might engage in some fence-mending with the gay community. Might the dreadful disease not serve as a catalyst to pull this self-righteous institution off its tartuffian high horse on the whole issue of sexuality? As evidence increasingly emerges that homosexuality is a natural biological variation in the human species, is it not time for the smug heterosexual majority to give up its self-image of monochromatic normality and acknowledge *God’s* right to a pluralistic creation? That’s just for starters.

Beyond that, in the face of this terrible crisis, everything needs to be done: gay people and others with AIDS need money (many become unemployable), shelter, clothing, food. They need friends and support groups and medical care and professional counseling and prayer groups and spiritual direction. They need friends to assure them, as mine did me. They need to know God’s love and redemption. They need to be surrounded by the mantra that saw me through my one dreadful night. There need to be healing services and vigils, the right kinds of funerals and memorials, generosity for research, and hospice care. And prayer. Lots and lots of prayer.

The bottom line is this: God favors the outcast. The *anawim* nestle especially close to God’s bosom. This assertion is scripturally unavoidable and true no matter how tightly some in Christ’s church hang onto their hypocrisy and comfortable pews.

But if the church — *our* church — truly intends to *be* the church, then it will reach out in this horrible situation. And I am persuaded that it *will*. Crusty Episcopalians may be a little slow on the uptake, but I have known much justice in this church. And a commendable intolerance for mean-heartedness. I am confident that justice and generosity and pastoral care and concern are forthcoming. Only . . . “How long, O Lord? How long?” ■



Tom Jackson

# Requiem for an AIDS victim

by Domenic K. Ciannella

**I**t is night and it is dark and I have returned from the Nassau County Medical Center, second floor, intensive care unit number four.

The patient was under heavy sedation, in guarded isolation. Mask-gloves-robe-AIDS-you know. The doctor came by. "He'll not respond, but talk to him. He can hear you." I entered a scene known to many. The difference here was Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. The patient is a homosexual, a prime but not sole target for this dread disease. So we communicated as best we could, by

word and touch, and I anointed him and presented the sacrament, which I consumed in his behalf.

Following the blessing and assurance of my return I left only to confront his parents. They came as they had come before, having wrestled (as love alone can wrestle with love) with the disease and the threat to their son's life, with all their future hopes and anticipations trapped in a vise and the awareness that their son is a homosexual.

It was love alone that could bear such pain as must be borne. So by love they were there. "Do something, O God, do something." I held their hands and helped them dress and waited until there was no more visiting. We left the hospital together as persons do in such instances. They spoke of "pneumonia." They

needed their cover even at night. This was their son. How do parents speak of sons or daughters as homosexuals . . . ?

In the fall of 1979 I was asked to consider a ministry to homosexuals in Long Island by offering a place for an Integrity chapter to meet, worship, provide a support system for its members and a healthy alternative to the bars and other gay "scenes" which can be counter-productive. I had never given much thought before to this special ministry, although I had previously ministered to many homosexuals. The group which had visited me had already been denied hospitality from another parish.

My own pastoral sensitivities and "the needs of others" prompted me to give serious thought to this request. From the start, I was inclined to positive action,

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but there were some questions I had to ask and answers I had to hear. Why a special ministry? Why a Eucharist to begin the meeting? How does a parish priest announce this? As rector, does he use the privilege of the keys? Does he ask the vestry? Does he seek the support of neighboring priests? How does he get started? Will the bishop provide his blessing? What about parishioners? Can the meetings be posted on the church's sign board along with services, A.A., Overeaters Anonymous, study groups?

Homosexuality is a volatile issue. The suburbs are not the city. Nassau and Suffolk residents are inclined to be conservative and protective. There are Bible quotations and the posture of fundamentalists. Besides, do I have the courage to go "public" with this ministry — or will it be foolhardy to do so and lose the confidence and support of parishioners on a single issue when they had leaped so far ahead in other areas of ministry and service? Was there a middle way? I thought there was; but, really, there is none.

Wednesdays were chosen, twice a month: Eucharist at 8:00, meeting following, discussions, some programs, some organization, some fellowship, sometimes wine and cheese, always coffee or tea and some sweets. No point was made to be secret, but no point was made to go public except for presentations made at two deanery meetings, announcements to the clergy, individually, in groups and at conferences.

The policy of the diocesan paper was not to accept such advertisements, and all hell broke loose at a vestry meeting when a discreet advertisement appeared in "Newsday" with the church's telephone number listed. In all fairness to the vestry, they felt overlooked; this was true and I was at fault. The very nature of the serious exchange which followed proved the extreme volatility of the issue, the high level of threat homosexuality presented, and the difficulty faced by

people in validating a special organization for homosexuals within the Episcopal Church and approving a special ministry to them. Finally, in unanimity, the vestry offered a resolution of confidence in their rector as parish priest, but this event proved something about church, priesthood and ministry — at least to me.

The church is the house of prayer for all people, but not yet. All are included, but not yet. All are welcome, but not yet. All are made worthy by Christ, but some must change. All are sinners, but some more than others. All are Christbearers — but some are unnatural.

We realize there are homosexuals in our parishes and in our communities, in professions and trades, providing goods and services. Many are, or appear to be, reconciled and compatible, but others feel estranged, uncomfortable, separated from church and society and thus isolated and disconnected.

Notwithstanding the actions of General Conventions (1976 and 1979) regarding the church's responsibility to study and understand the complexities of human sexuality and "express gratitude for the work of all those groups which are ministering pastorally among homosexuals in our society," developing and sponsoring such ministries is fraught with difficulties.

Specialized ministries are not unusual. Our Episcopal Church provides many. In some highly sophisticated and urban areas, ministries to persons whose needs raise volatile issues as homosexuality, abortion, and right-to-life are more readily provided, supported and accepted. In the more protected localities, such as the outer city and suburbia, this is not so. But the persons requiring such ministries are there, as is the church which states that such be provided. And if a ministry is valid it ought not to have to be clandestine. It requires authentication from the primary pastor to all pastors whose corporate utterances can lead and encourage the church community to exer-

cise ministry even where it appears to be murky.

Sometime ago we were all charged to change pews — from the comfortable to the uncomfortable — somewhat suggestive of the Eternal Word becoming humanly enfleshed. If mission is possible, as we all assume it to be, then it is possible to change an adverse homophobic climate to one that is understanding. At least it is possible to penetrate it. I believe mission is to change society, to move mountains, to make highways for God. I believe the tools for mission are the ministries exercised for change; changing whatever is contrary to the message of Jesus of Nazareth to an affirmation of it. I believe that homosexuals in our society are among the oppressed of all societies and claim the church's public ministry of liberation. I seek the blessing of the bishop, the venturesomeness of the press, the support of the clergy, the prayers of the church, the acceptance of believers.

The ministry to the homosexual at Holy Trinity has evaporated for the lack of these, and those in need still have need.

I must finish now. I'm on my way back to Nassau County Medical Center, second floor, intensive care unit number four.

*Postscript:* The phone rang. Answering, I heard the mellow tones of "his" friend. The caller was not his lover: he was his friend (as "no longer do I call you servants, but friends"). As only friends can, he wept — from the deep. He phoned to talk some, in lachrymal reflection on the death of his friend. Beneath it all was the quest for a measure of peace, reconciliation and resolution about this one death — another death, yes — like all other deaths, but unlike the others. Different — since this was his friend's.

Afterward I sat quietly in the darkness. I felt beyond thinking, but thought pressed hard upon me about myself, my caller, this dead one, the life, all that's hidden, "the deep."



Nicaragua's foreign minister Miguel D'Escoto, arms open to given an embrace, or *abrazo*, a pose familiar to visitors during his 30-day fast for peace.

## Fasting with the foreign minister

When Miguel D'Escoto, foreign minister of Nicaragua, asked for a leave of absence early in July to initiate a fast "for peace, in defense of life, and against terrorism," he raised the discussion of U.S.-Nicaraguan relations to a new theological level.

By participating in this ancient biblical act, he sparked a religious response worldwide before ending his fast Aug. 6. He had fasted 30 days when an attending physician warned that his already damaged heart would not take much further strain. D'Escoto had undergone an operation two months before the fast began, and also suffered from diabetes.

Was the fast effective? In many ways,

that is a non-question. Fasting is a religious act, valid in and of itself. For example, what might Jesus, Gandhi and Martin Luther King have responded?

Yet, a fast undertaken by a foreign minister of a country is news and has political and spiritual implications. Extensive commentaries appeared in the European and Latin American press, although there were few headlines here.

What follows are my impressions after joining the fast in Managua with an eight-member ecumenical delegation comprised of priests, nuns and laypersons, and sponsored by the Interreligious Task Force, National Council of Churches. Our participation was largely symbolic — most

of us fasted only four days, although one continued for two weeks. But we were one in supporting D'Escoto's intentions that "there be an end to aggression and the beginning of a new phase in the relationship between the United States and Nicaragua."

By way of background: Miguel D'Escoto, born in California, the son of a Nicaraguan diplomat, is a Maryknoll priest who chose to exercise his ministry in service to the government. For this, the Pope has suspended him from the priesthood, but Maryknoll still considers him a member. Four priests serve in cabinet-level posts in Nicaragua, a country the Reagan administration lab-



*An ecumenical delegation from the United States, including the editor of THE WITNESS, joined Nicaragua's foreign minister Miguel D'Escoto for a brief time during his 30-day fast for peace with justice. His effort added a theological dimension to U.S.-Nicaragua relations, they found.*

by Mary Lou Suhor

els "communist." They are witnesses that the Sandinista government can look upon the church with neither pain nor grimace.

Chancellor D'Escoto had worked toward reconciliation with the United States through the ordinary channels of protocol. He had tried diplomacy, compromise, personal visits to government and religious leaders, even the World Court to bring Nicaragua's beleaguered condition to light. The United States responded with "covert and overt efforts" to destabilize the revolution, voted millions to aid the Contras who are trying to topple the Sandinistas, and declared an economic blockade.

Because of such acts, many Latin Christians view the United States as a modern Pharaoh, challenging not only the right of Nicaragua's 3 million people to self-determination, but the sovereignty of other Central and Latin American nations as well. D'Escoto interpreted Reagan's demand that Nicaraguans give up and "say Uncle" as a "Satanic obsession of the U.S. government which is trying to force us to fall on our knees and worship it as the golden calf."

"Some demons," D'Escoto concluded, "can only be cast out by prayer and fasting."

Replaced temporarily by Victor Hugo Tinoco in his cabinet post, D'Escoto took residence in the parish hall of Sacred Heart Church in a working class barrio.

"I was offered a room in a rectory, but I was afraid that soon I would be tempted to sip a little soup, then move to a comfortable bed, then watch television," he said. "I thought, if I'm going to fast, I'm going to fast." He asked others of good will in North America, Latin America and Europe to join him by fasting for a period of time.

Thus was I invited to join the U.S. ecumenical delegation. Our group was met at the airport by Josefina Gurdian de Vijil, mother of six and coordinator of the fast for the Christian Base Communities in Managua, who was to oversee our needs. Her first assignment proved formidable. Four of our bags never arrived from Miami, and she sought the whole time we were there to track them down — to no avail.

Josefina took us to Sacred Heart parish hall and settled us in a long, dormitory-like room which accommodated some 20 fasters on cots and pallets. Then she told us that although it was late, Padre D'Escoto would like to see us.

We hastily gathered notepads and cameras and realized, for the first time, that he was but a few feet away, in an adjacent room. We shared the same facilities — a toilet in an adjoining patio

and an outdoor water spigot where some of us were to meet him in shorts the next morning, splashing water on his face.

Padre D'Escoto, 52, was unshaven and looked somewhat fatigued. After a week of fasting, he had lost 14 pounds.

"It was wonderful of you to come," he greeted us. We inquired about his health.

"I've never felt hunger in spite of the fact that I am a great eater. But what I am going to suffer is nothing compared to what our people have suffered in this war."

Speaking softly, he described how he sought the support of his religious superiors, priests and other Christians before deciding to fast. "Our collective non-violent effort must be proportionate to the sins we're trying to prevent," he said.

Nicaragua, he explained had confronted U.S. aggression in four arenas: the military, the diplomatic, the economic and the judicial. "And now it is time, without abandoning those four, to dig a fifth trench — in the theological arena."

Two experiences of faith were central to his fast, D'Escoto said. The first is related to the church's option for the poor, which more often than not incurs the disfavor of the rich. Therein lies the "mystery of the cross," he observed.

"When we proclaim that God wants us all to be brothers and sisters, we are persecuted and ultimately suffer the cross. We become the target of those who defend the unjust order where persons are not equal. Nicaragua's struggle to do something new has made her the target of aggression of those who do not tolerate change.

"The second faith experience is the realization that violence is not Christian. I do not abandon the military who have been forced to use violence to defend Nicaragua, nor have I abandoned avenues of diplomacy such as the Contadora process. But Christians must begin to introduce non-violent ideas and methods, to develop new and bold actions, like

Martin Luther King. I trust that little by little, the new order will overcome, and the old order will crumble.”

D’Escoto is also determined that religious symbols not be totally appropriated by the religious right and manipulated by President Reagan to set the climate for an invasion of Nicaragua. “He portrays the United States as good, and Nicaragua as representing evil and terrorism. The argument is tremendously simplistic but has been successful in convincing people. Religious allusions frequently appear in Reagan’s discourses. And although he is not a Catholic, he frequently refers to the Pope.”

As the visit ended, we each received an embrace and returned to the dormitory. In the interim, Josefina had come and gone and supplied those whose bags had not arrived with sheets, soap and towels from her own home.

Our next days were a whirlwind of prayer, press conferences, Masses and ecumenical services, and meetings with visiting delegations and ecumenical groups. We also drew up a statement about our fast and asked Sister Marjorie Tuite to read it during the weekly demonstration at the U.S. embassy by U.S. citizens working in Nicaragua. The demonstration was the 87th consecutive event since the invasion of Grenada. The message each time is a plea for peace, with a clear signal that the U.S. community in Nicaragua does not want to be “rescued” by Reagan, one of the pretexts given for the Grenada invasion. We led the “march” of some 200 demonstrators, from the embassy to Sacred Heart Church in two cars, sufficiently weak at that point as to be unable to walk the 20 minute distance in the hot sun. The U.S. citizens presented Padre D’Escoto with a collection of \$1400.

As our fast progressed, each day took its toll in different ways. Those used to copious cups of coffee throughout their normal days suffered caffeine withdrawal. Others experienced headaches, disori-

entation, muscle aches and constipation or diarrhea. Most disconcerting to me was a certain aphasia which set about the third day. And finding it hard to remember things, I had to take far more notes. That many were similarly affected became obvious when our group met to discuss names of religious leaders who might support a nationwide fast July 26-27 in the United States. Under ordinary circumstances we would have had no

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## **Ecumenical team in Nicaragua fast**

**Asia Bennett, Executive Secretary,  
American Friends Service  
Committee**

**Sister Mary Canavan, S.C.,  
Leadership Conference  
of Women Religious**

**The Rev. Daniel Driscoll, M.M.,  
Director, Maryknoll Justice  
& Peace Office**

**The Rev. Joseph Foley, C.M.,  
Social Justice Commission,  
Conference of Major Superiors  
of Men**

**The Rev. Joyce Myers, O.C.L.L.,  
Board for World Ministries,  
United Church of Christ**

**Dr. Benton Rhoades, Agricultural  
Missions, National Council  
of Churches**

**Sister Marjorie Tuite, O.P.,  
Director of Ecumenical Action,  
Church Women United**

**Mary Lou Suhor, Editor,  
THE WITNESS magazine**

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problem ticking off names, even addresses and phone numbers of possible candidates, but blanks had to be filled in when we got home.

Early on we were told that a nurse would check our blood pressure and temperature daily, and a doctor was also available. To my delight, the nurse who showed up was Dorothy Granada, the Episcopalian woman from California who gained notoriety for her 38-day Fast for Life some years ago. Granada, a

Witness for Peace volunteer, had been assigned temporarily to D’Escoto and the fasters.

Our “cafeteria” during the fast was set up at one end of the room on three chairs, upon which rested three large water jugs. We were urged to drink 16 glasses a day. Also available were a plate of limes, a container of coarse salt, and a small bottle of liquid potassium which fasters could use as they felt the need. Discreetly in a corner were Fleet enemas, and someone had contributed a few handwipes.

Dorothy Granada dispensed good cheer with her visits. “Drink more water. It gets boring, but it’s good for you. Be sure to get rest during the day. When you end your fast, allow one day to come out of it for every day you’ve spent fasting. Start with liquids, move into solids. And no alcohol the first day!”

Granada tended not only the fasters but visiting dignitaries as well. One could hear her remonstrating, “Drink more water. Get more rest,” with D’Escoto and visiting colleague Fernando Cardenal, minister of education, who had been released from the Jesuits as he continued to serve in his post.

The parish hall was the site of press conferences and interviews, and in between was used for quiet prayer or conversations with deputations who arrived practically every other hour and were curious about the fasters from the United States. One night, after most of us had gone to bed, we heard a buzz of voices, then shrieks and laughter, creating a din similar to that of fans meeting a celebrity. It was just that. The leading actress in Nicaragua’s most popular soap opera had come to visit Padre D’Escoto, and her fans had followed her. They waited until her visit was over and went into a frenzy again as she exited. Fortunately, the visit was brief and we dropped off into the vivid dreams which seemed to be another trait of our fast.

While we spent most of our time within the parish complex, either in the



Members of the U.S. ecumenical delegation, from left, the Revs. Dan Driscoll and Joe Foley, Sr. Mary Canavan and Asia Bennett listen intently as Nicaraguan Chancellor Miguel D'Escoto, far right, explains his fast.



Clockwise, from right: Dorothy Granada receives an *abrazo* from D'Escoto; Dan Driscoll, at Sacred Heart church, addresses U.S. citizens who live in Nicaragua; Education minister Fernando Cardenal chats with fasting WITNESS editor Mary Lou Suhor, left, and Nicaraguan poet Michele Najlis; Sr. Marjorie Tuite reads the ecumenical fasters' statement at a peace demonstration outside the U.S. embassy in Nicaragua. Over her shoulder, another U.S. faster, the Rev. Joyce Myers.





church, hall, or meeting rooms, many of the people we had hoped to contact came to the barrio. It was the Times Square of Nicaragua.

More than 1,000 signatures were in the visitor's book in the back of Sacred Heart church the day we arrived, and by the time we left, another thousand people had signed. From all parts of Nicaragua and from all sectors of society they came: Daniel Ortega and Sergio Ramirez, president and vice president of Nicaragua; Dom Sergio Mendez Arceo from Mexico; delegations from trade unions and the army; mothers of heroes and martyrs, poets, journalists, and religious.

It was as though *Exodus 17:11*, read at one of the Masses by the Rev. Joyce Myers of our delegation, had come to life. The people were flocking to support D'Escoto, their "Moses," to keep his arms uplifted in prayer, that their battle with the enemy not go against them.

Cables arrived daily from all parts of the world. Nobel prizewinner Adolfo Perez Esquivel of Argentina sent his support, as did Bishops Samuel Ruiz of Mexico and Pedro Casaldaliga of Brazil. Solidarity was expressed by Mexico's Christian Base Communities and many national political parties. The Rt. Rev. J. Antonio Ramos, associate director for the Caribbean and Latin America, NCC, cabled support for the fast from six other Episcopal Bishops: the Rt. Revs. Paul Moore of New York; John Spong of Newark; Lyman Ogilby of Pennsylvania; Coleman McGehee of Michigan; Robert Anderson of Minnesota; and Otis Charles of Utah.

While D'Escoto's fast did not receive much press coverage in the United States, it captured attention worldwide, and thousands fasted with him, some for one or two days, some for a week. Thousands more joined him in prayer.

The foreign minister's fast was perceived by some as further exacerbating the gulf between the hierarchy and the popular church. *La Prensa*, Nicaragua's

opposition newspaper, published a cartoon ridiculing the portly D'Escoto and depicting his neighbors, gleeful that his fast meant more food for them.

On the other hand, the portly, newly named Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo was extolled for being honored by the Pope. While *Barricada*, the Sandinista paper, featured D'Escoto's fast in banner headlines, other papers ran front page stories on Obando, describing how he celebrated his first Mass as Cardinal in Miami with Nicaragua's exile community. Obando's promotion by the Pope has profound political significance, since the new cardinal is ideologically identified with the counterrevolution in Nicaragua.

The failure of Nicaragua's hierarchy to speak out against U.S. aggression is deeply disturbing to Miguel D'Escoto, who said he was repenting in his fast for their "silence of complicity." "Our bishops should be the ones to denounce falsehood, but they have, with their silence and also with their words, provided Reagan with more arguments for his theological war against Nicaragua. In international forums, we listen to the phrases of Monsenor Obando and Monsenor Vega coming from North Americans who use them to justify their aggression. This causes me great suffering.

"The theological struggle is here and we must be in it. Not to make one, two, many documents of renunciation. The world is inundated with documents. We must do something. That is why I decided to fast."

As D'Escoto's health deteriorated, hundreds of demonstrators arrived at the church chanting and urging him to end the fast that he might resume his government post. Hundreds of parishes throughout Nicaragua volunteered to carry on the fast one day a week throughout August and into September as a U.S. invasion remained a possibility. Watching and praying, they sought the support of others to help them carry on the

"Gospel insurrection" inspired by D'Escoto.

In the United States, supporters are fasting on an individual and group basis, with many churches joining their Nicaraguan denominations in prayerful vigil for peace with justice. Said one U.S. participant, "If the contras can have a 'Jeane Kirkpatrick task force' taking up armed struggle, why can't we have Miguel D'Escoto prayer brigades committed to the sword of the spirit?" Those wishing to participate in the fast can contact the Interreligious Task Force, National Council of Churches, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, N.Y. 10115.

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## Water women

**We do not want  
to rock the boat,  
you say, mistaking  
our new poise  
for something safe.**

**We smile secretly  
at each other,  
sharing the reality  
that for some time  
we have not been  
in the boat.**

**We jumped  
or were pushed  
or fell  
and some leaped  
overboard.**

**Our bodies form  
a freedom fleet  
our dolphin grace  
is power.**

**We learn and teach  
and as we go  
each woman sings;  
each woman's hands  
are water wings.**

**Some of us have become  
mermaids or Amazon whales  
and are swimming for our lives.**

**Some of us do not know how to swim.  
We walk on water.**

**— Alla Bozarth-Campbell**

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# Short Takes

## ECM divests portfolio

The Boston Episcopal City Mission will divest holdings in its endowment portfolio by the end of this year in companies that do business in South Africa, it was announced by the Rev. Joseph A. Pelham, Director.

The action follows a two year review of the matter, and holdings involved represent an estimated market value of \$1,130,000 in bonds and stocks, approximately 50% of ECM's equity. Holdings affected include Pepsico Capital Reserve, IBM, General Motors Acceptance, Wang Laboratories, Johnson and Johnson, American Hospital Supply, Merck, Squibb, CPC International, MMM, General Electric and Exxon.

Eight states, 33 cities, and 47 universities have now divested or are in the process of divesting in South Africa in opposition to apartheid.

## Mark of God's image

Of language, novelist Doris Betts wrote: "I believed that language was the real mark of God's image within us, in a world where humans take all the time, but the other 2 million species say not a word."

— Quoted in *The Communicant*

## Gleaning encouraged

Citing the Judeo-Christian tradition of leaving part of the harvest in the field to provide food for the poor, Rep. Tony P. Hall (D-Ohio) introduced a resolution urging state and local governments to enact tax and other incentives to encourage gleaning. Gleaning is a custom which dates to Biblical times. Today, gleaning is largely practiced by church groups and other non-profit organizations that harvest and distribute fruits, vegetables, and other crops that have been left by mechanical harvesters.

In 1974 some 60 million tons of grain, fruit, and vegetables worth \$5 billion were left to rot unharvested. That amount of food could feed nearly 49 million people.

One of the largest gleaning groups is Senior Gleaners of California, which harvested over 2 million pounds of food in 1982 which it distributed to over 250 charities in northern California. Other major organizations are the Society of St. Andrew in Virginia, and Sparrow Outreach Ministries in Washington.

## Protocol of power

The whole society of Washington, D.C. is built on the protocol of power. At a well-run Georgetown dinner party, the most powerful person leaves at 11 o'clock — and no one else may leave before that person leaves. I remember one evening being at a small dinner where Mrs. John Foster Dulles was present. At 11 p.m. she said, "I don't know if it's me or the Suffragan Bishop, but I'm going home."

—The Rt. Rev. Paul Moore, Jr.  
Bishop of New York

## Media and the hostages

Americans are grateful for the recent release of the American hostages from TWA Flight 847. Their ordeal was news for 17 days. The news media has come under sharp criticism for its extensive coverage of these events.

Some of the criticism may be justified, but we must not lose sight of the positive role the news media played in the crisis. The media humanized the political struggle.

John Testrake, captain of the plane, spoke at a press conference in Damascus after the hostages' release. We heard his words via a free press. He said of the ordeal: "We've found out things about our fellow man on the other side of the world that we didn't know. And we found that they're human beings. They (the Shiites) have the same emotions, the same fears, the same expectations, the same dreams for their country that we all have. And in that sense," Testrake concluded, "we were able to empathize with them and we were led to have a deeper understanding of the problems that they're facing."

Most painfully, yet not without great benefit, the news coverage of the hostage crisis has brought before our eyes yet another oppressed group — the Shiites.

— The Rev. James Lewis  
Michigan Coalition for Human Rights  
on WDET-FM "Commentary," Detroit

## Quote of note

"What's the use of a house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on?"

— Henry David Thoreau

## Military's Mr. Coffee

The Pentagon's zeal for technological wizardry often results in "overdesigned" or "goldplated" weapons. By incorporating the very latest technologies into weapons they often become overly complex, unreliable, and expensive.

The \$7,400 "hot beverage unit" (coffee-pot) for the C-5 aircraft has over 2,000 custom made parts and is designed to work in gravitational forces greater than the crew or aircraft could survive.

The P3 Orion submarine-hunter plane comes equipped with a \$12,000 three-cubic-foot refrigerator to store the crew's lunches on long flights. It is designed to meet "rigid vibration standards," survive crashes, and operate in an unpressurized cabin. Such overdesign is unfortunately often the rule rather than the exception.

— Center for Defense Information  
*Defense Monitor*, Vol. XIV, No. 1

## Postage stamp politics

I visited with a fellow Episcopalian who advises George Bush on foreign policy recently. Having read a speech by Bush in Austin, Tex., I was upset over his use of the word "communist" to designate the elected government in Nicaragua.

I asked the adviser if he were a Democrat (expecting a chuckle). He said "no." I asked if he believed in democracy. He said "yes." I then asked if it would be a falsehood to label him a Democrat in spite of his belief, and he concurred. So I challenged Bush's remark denouncing the "communist rulers of Nicaragua, pointing out that not one member of the nine-person ruling directorate belongs to the Communist Party. Also, in the 1984 elections there were three parties to the right of and three parties, including the Communist Party, to the left of the Sandinistas. (That should earn them favorable consideration from Episcopalians who value the *via media*.)

He replied by pulling out an envelope with a Nicaraguan postage stamp depicting Karl Marx, as if that were evidence that they were communists. I pointed out that Babe Ruth was also on a Nicaraguan postage stamp and asked, "Does that mean the government leaders are all baseball players?"

— The Rev. Charles Demere  
Washington, D.C.

# A second look at the First Beatitude

by Nathan E. Williams

**T**he First Beatitude is given by Matthew as “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” Luke says, “*Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*” Some Christians prefer Matthew’s version to Luke’s, because if the realm is only for the destitute not many of us will qualify. “Poor in spirit” would seem to suggest that a little humility and self-deprecation can ease us in.

The primary meaning of “poor” in the texts is to be deficient to the point of destitution with respect to this world’s goods. However, Matthew’s expansion of “poor” with a qualifying phrase suggests that there are dimensions and references in the word which invite exploration.

An astonishing possibility for understanding the First Beatitude is suggested by I. Howard Marshall in an exegetical note on Luke 6:20 (*The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*). Examining the meaning of “poor” as it is used in the Septuagint he writes:

*The persons declared by Jesus to be fortunate are hoi ptochoi, “the poor.” The Gk. word means “one who is so poor as to have to beg,” i.e. one who is completely destitute. In the Septuagint it is used as the equivalent of various words. [I]t translates “a dependent,” . . . “lowly, weak;” and “poor man, beggar.” In Proverbs it also translates “needy, famished.” The antonym is not “rich,” but “violent.”*

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**The Rev. Nathan E. Williams, M. Div.,** is minister of the First Baptist Church of Pittsburgh.

The truly poor, in light of the First Beatitude, include all who renounce violence and trust God for their security.

The poor live with severely constricted political and economic options, and the frustration this creates is a severe temptation to violence. We forget that it was impoverished Galilean fishermen — exactly the type who became Jesus’ disciples — who ignited the war with Rome in 66 A.D. Rich and powerful people always have a variety of options through which they may act. When the system does not yield its usual fruit, some of them also resort to violence. The rich, however, hire surrogates to do their dirty work. The poor who renounce violence are totally vulnerable. They have little except God to protect them.

Poverty as complete vulnerability is a theme found in Flannery O’Conner’s story, “You Can’t Be Any Poorer Than Dead.” A 14-year-old backwoods boy living with his 84-year-old uncle is one day left alone to bury the old man. The uncle has given explicit burial instructions, even allowing for the possibility that the boy might not be able to lift him into the coffin and transport him to the grave. When death comes to the uncle the boy is strangely aware that he cannot be compelled to carry out the instructions. The dead uncle is powerless, and the boy can do what he wishes with the body.

As this awareness grows a voice within him says, “‘You can’t be any poorer than dead. He’ll have to take what he gets.’ Nobody to bother me, he thought. Ever. No hand uplifted to hinder me from anything.” As he continues the meditation on his own omnipotence and his

dead uncle’s powerlessness, the next thought that comes to mind is that he could kill the black game bantams that were his uncle’s special possession. Omnipotence, contrasted with complete vulnerability, leads immediately to the possibility of disrespecting all life. The boy can believe in his omnipotence because he is utterly alone and unaccountable to anyone for his conduct.

The poor to whom Jesus promises the blessing of the realm are the destitute of this world. However, included in the blessing is any person willing to renounce violence for the sake of the realm of God. Those who long for the realm do not passively accept poverty and exploitation. They expect an end to the complete vulnerability of the poor, praying and working eagerly for liberation without resort to violence. Those who seek the blessing of the First Beatitude know they are accountable to God for the gift of life, and they hold that gift in trust as members of a community of faith. Their confidence is that of the author of the Twelfth Psalm. “‘Because the poor are despoiled, because the needy groan, I will now arise,’ says the Lord; ‘I will place them in the safety for which they long.’” The psalm ends in confidence that this promise is trustworthy, and with the prayer that God will protect the believer from wickedness and vileness.

The First Beatitude does not ask us to feign humility or speak self-deprecatingly. We are asked to make a more difficult and dangerous choice. We are invited to find happiness in renouncing violence and trusting God for our security. The First Beatitude complements beautifully the blessing of the Peacemakers. ■

# A Luta Continua — the struggle continues

by Barbara C. Harris

## Marching to Pretoria — right on!

*"You walk with me,  
I'll walk with you  
And so we will walk together  
And so we will walk together  
As we march along.  
We're marching to Pretoria,  
Pretoria, Pretoria  
We're marching to Pretoria,  
Hurrah!"*

**S**o goes a verse and the refrain of a turn of the century soldier's marching song from the Boer War. It's the kind of song that's guaranteed to pluck up your courage when you're whistling through a graveyard. It was sung playfully around fires at summer camps and church conferences by scores of American youngsters during the 1940s and '50s with little thought or knowledge of its origin or meaning.

Its sentiments, if not its words, echo over South Africa today, but the "soldiers" and the context of the battle cry are beyond any 1890s Boer's wildest imaginings.

A new march to Pretoria is taking shape — one that may well strike a more telling blow to the jugular of apartheid than any tactic employed thus far. Orchestrated by the banned African National Congress, the new march is part of the people's war against apartheid and its muffled cadence is being piped into South Africa by ANC broadcasts over Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) "freedom radio."

Black workers in South African factories are being urged by the ANC to sabotage machinery by "removing vital parts or introducing foreign and danger-

ous elements." Office workers similarly are exhorted to destroy or confuse documents. "Wherever you are, in whatever department you work," the message goes, "make sure that production is disrupted regularly."

Sabotage and disruption of production by people's armies during a war is a time-honored tradition, particularly in the Western world. Freedom fighters struggling against the Nazi war machine were hailed as heroes and heroines. A current rash of TV movie re-runs chronicles their exploits and efforts to thwart the enemy's "march to the front." Even the early peat bog soldiers of Northern Ireland's bloody uprisings are immortalized in song. Small wonder that ANC president Oliver Tambo should resort to this approach.

Similarly, work stoppages, such as those threatened by South African miners, have won applause from Western governments when led by Solidarity in Poland and other Eastern bloc countries. Its application in South Africa, while downplayed by the Botha government, could seriously cripple an economy already in a state of severe recession. Government officials and the Chamber of Mines are quick to discount the National Union of Mineworkers' statement that a strike of gold and coal mines by over 400,000 workers would bring those industries to a standstill. Yet labor relations analysts outside the country agree that it would be the most serious challenge yet to the White-minority regime which could lose about \$250 million a week if the miners walk out.

Sabotage and strikes, coupled with un-



reported bombings — more than 70 so far this year — boycotts, arson and looting attacks on White-owned businesses, threaten to pierce the chinks in Botha's reportedly impregnable armor.

Demonstrations, riots in the townships and other sporadic violence, which the ANC admits are out of its control, may, indeed, be put down and/or "managed" by unchecked police power under a "state of emergency" — a measure tacitly endorsed by Washington. The South African government has warned, and few would deny, that its fearsome firepower has yet to be fully unleashed. Thousands more likely will be jailed and killed before what amounts to martial law is lifted.

Meanwhile, neither the quibbling of European Common Market member-nations over pseudoeconomic sanctions nor the recall of their ambassadors for "consultation" are likely to cause Botha much discomfort. And, indeed, the pious platitudes abhorring apartheid as "repugnant," that waft up from the banks of the Potomac, loom no larger than the petulant outbursts of a lover's spat.

But watch the quiet march to Pretoria — the one by "foot soldiers" in factories, offices, coal and gold mines. Like sugar in the gas tank of an automobile, it can bring even the sleekest driving machine to a screeching, grinding halt. ■

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# On being a gay priest

by Zalmon O. Sherwood

**“W**e are concerned about you,” a priest friend pulls me aside and whispers in my ear. Go ahead and be gay, but for God’s sake, be discreet.”

Four months have passed since I, a gay man was ordained a priest. Why do I qualify myself as a gay man at the beginning of this article? Many of my friends and colleagues discourage me from proclaiming my homosexuality. They consider it a private personal characteristic, one that, if publicly known, would interfere with my capacity to minister to people.

“I want you to be successful,” my friend continues. “I want you to attain a level of power that will make it possible for you to do great things for church and society.”

“Be patient,” advised my former spiritual director. “Wait a while longer before flaunting your homosexuality. In fact, why flaunt it at all? Jesus never dwelled on his sexual preference.”

Of course my friends, both gay and straight, are concerned, even afraid. I’m afraid myself at times. But their fear is massive and supported by the homophobic conviction that coming out is “not worth it,” which is to say, “I’m not worth it.”

I have come to accept and love this particular person who I am and the spiritual journey which is my own. In coming out, my life and ministry become a public witness of homosexual Christian maturity and a gift to the next generation. Such a witness is generative

because it provides a publicly observable model of how God can act in the life of a gay person.

Most of my gay friends were raised in a milieu of social intolerance so pervasive that at times, even today, it still seems natural. How is it possible for any of us to escape entirely the homophobia that was an inextinguishable presence throughout our formative years and whose scars we bear today? We learned in our homes, schools, and churches that homosexuality is a sin, an aberration, that our homosexual feelings are unnatural and shameful. And so our feelings were repressed, punished and closeted. If we dare to live openly gay lives, we are, more often than not, excluded, despised, slandered, robbed of human rights. Yes, our souls are scarred, and it is not surprising that so many gay persons see only the scars and mistake them for their whole selves, hating in themselves and thus in others that which can lead to a more meaningful life, if recognized and affirmed as a gift from God.

My “coming out” is a rejection of the images of heterosexuality that society expects from me. By being both honest with myself and others, I am being honest with God, and therefore more open to God’s grace. Being an avowed gay priest leads me to a deeper and more vulnerable, more compassionate sense of belonging with others who suffer unjustly. God calls me to be in solidarity with other oppressed minorities, and to demand with them and for them social justice and civil rights.

What God has fashioned within and around me; i.e., my homosexuality, is precisely that which calls me to the

ministry. My heart, my soul, my voice respond to God’s call, because I see all too clearly the pain and suffering, not only of my life, but in the lives of people who come to me for prayer and counsel. In order to grow spiritually, I have had to acknowledge, then let go of the pain, the betrayal, the guilt, so that I can proceed to follow Christ and be a channel of His healing and reconciling powers. As a minister, I am called to encounter all persons as human equals with understanding and sensitivity, and thus, free persons from stereotypes and cultural prejudices.

We all want to be open and authentic, to be freely ourselves and accepted as such. Yet gay persons know that much of what they legitimately want in life may elude them if they are open about their homosexuality. I often experience a sense of spiritual homelessness that results from trying to work gracefully in what is largely a hostile environment. It is a dangerous struggle in which I am engaged, that of disillusionment with the institutional church of which I choose to be a part.

I remain in the church, because I remember that Jesus’ disciples consisted of those persons outside of the traditional, established centers of social and economic power. The church today will thrive only to the degree that it embraces, in their full humanity, those persons on the margins of life.

My own experience of marginalization empowers me to reach out to others at the edges of society — battered women, abused children, prisoners, poor and hungry persons, the elderly, persons of color and different faiths. I shall

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**The Rev. Zalmon O. Sherwood** is an assistant priest at Emmanuel Episcopal Church, Southern Pines, N.C.



always live at the margins, at times closer, at other times farther from the centers of social, religious and political life.

As a gay priest, I do not attempt to disguise my homosexuality behind the disembodied prestige of the clerical

collar. I am committed to seeking ways to heal the division between body and soul, which means helping people to realize that God is deeply enmeshed in our most ordinary daily lives, instead of located in some other worldly, transcendent, never-never-land. By remain-

ing silent about my homosexuality, I am prevented from describing my intimate relationships, and hence come across as incapable of forming any. In our silence, in the secrets and lies we cling to, we are stripping our vocations of any passion and integrity. ■

## A distant light by Madeline Ligammare

He wasn't a stereotypical Christian. Some may argue that he wasn't a Christian at all. It's true, you wouldn't find him kneeling on velvet brocade. He didn't pray before a linen-draped altar bathed in the amber light of candles. Even I doubted that his earth-stained Nikes ever felt the give of the carpet lining the aisles of the faithful as they journey to the wheat fields and vineyards of their salvation. One thing, however, is certain. He introduced me to the God who not only desires us to walk in the truth of our salvation, but also in the truth of who we are in the heart of our beings.

Danny's sanctuary was an undersized room at the head of a hallway. The hallway was policed at one end by an army of nurses and mental health workers and at the far end by an ominous door with a formidable lock. His altar was a piano keyboard, and I feel certain that the prayers he intoned there rose heavenward, mingling with the silver notes of cathedral choirs and equally welcomed by God.

To and fro, up and down the hallway Danny paced, keeping step with each dropping rosary bead, one bead, one "Hail Mary" at a time. His shoulder-length hair rode the gentle breeze of passing patients on their way to group therapy.

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**Madeline Ligammare** is a poet and freelance writer based in Kennesaw, Ga.

I met Danny in the central solarium of that institutional greenhouse, where human minds like sun-beaten, wind-whipped plants are nurtured back to life. The window-lined wall soaked the solarium in sunlight, giving the room an illusion of freedom and a glimpse — a constant reminder — of the real world. Danny was seated at the piano, his nicotine-stained fingers teaching the keys to chant the messages of jazz. I was seated across the room from him, at the far end of my life — three couches, five chairs, and worlds away. Each seat held its own story of human anguish. I was one of those stories, devastated and depressed after my husband's death. Although my pain served as a wall between myself and reality, I was able to respond to the unpredictable patterns of life symbolized by the discordant sounds of Danny's jazz.

Danny's music was different. It didn't deny the existence of suffering. It didn't transport the listener to Elysian lands where consolation is promised by and by. The music, instead, intoned the sounds of suffering like a poet captures the sighs of his heart and translates them into verse. My pain, my grief now had an order, even a curious beauty; and in this new form, I was able to face the anguish in my heart and work my way through it.

As good friends do, Danny and I sat together midst the plants in the solarium,

tending our lives back to fullness. His faded jeans and shoddy T-shirt were in uncanny contrast to the light in his eyes. It was a light of acceptance, understanding, and caring that he had for himself as well as for others (although many persons would reject him at first glance). This light, like the star the Magi spotted in the dismal winter sky, gave me courage to travel through the winter season of my own soul.

I visited Danny only once after leaving the hospital. Soon he was discharged as well. I went back to my "straight," socially permissible life: four children, a mortgage, a college education, and the "proper" (although sometimes plastic) piety of my church. Danny returned to his life — to the drug-dealing streets of the city, to gay bars, and to those places where he is permitted to dress as a woman in his intense search for self-identity.

I'll never forget, however, those 10 desperate days when the paths of our unlikely lives converged and ran parallel for a season. Now as I kneel on velvet brocade and pray before the linen-bathed altar of my church, I am reminded that much of what we so quickly label "sin" is in reality the pain responses of our lives. Danny, a man shunned by the church as a "sinner" and labeled by society as a misfit, brought to me a life-saving, life-giving gift. It was a glimpse of mutual acceptance and of the power to love . . . to love fearlessly! ■

# Therefore choose life

by Anne Gilson

**S**ilence is not always golden. Silence can be life-denying. We who have kept silent about ourselves for far too long can testify to that. One clear morning it suddenly dawns on us that we can no longer bear the weight of our silence. We open the doors of our closets and come out to ourselves, one another, and to the world as lesbians or as gay men.

But this act is done neither thoughtlessly nor without dire presentiments of the dangers that lie ahead. Some of us lose our jobs, lose custody of our children, our worshiping communities, even our very lives. Each one of us must make excruciating decisions of what we can or cannot say. Some can never speak because the risks are too high. Those of us who *can*, must, for everyone's sake. Each one is called to choose the most life-affirming course of action.

In my last year of seminary, having come to the point where silence is no longer golden, I openly acknowledge I am a lesbian. "What a pity, they say. She had such a promising career . . . and she was such a *nice* person." In the last few months I have been the recipient of condolences and prayers for my "wholeness." People who have known me for years pour over my life with a fine tooth comb to find out why I am a lesbian.

Why did I choose now to come out? A friend anxiously asked me why I couldn't wait until *after* I was safely ordained to speak. My answer is that if I did wait, I would no longer be a whole person. There wouldn't be anything left to pay

the price of the pound of flesh for keeping silent. During these seminary years, I have grown to see my vocational commitment as a commitment to justice-making, to joining my sisters and brothers in Latin America, the United States, South Africa, and the Philippines in the struggle for liberation. I have probed to find the theological connections between my life and theirs. Through this search I have found I cannot ignore the ways I am oppressed as a woman and as a lesbian, and my struggle is connected with theirs because none of us can be free until all are free. Thus part of my commitment must be to confront the forces of homophobia, particularly in the church, which keep lesbians and gay men from breaking out of our silence to choose life.

Lesbians and gay men know all too well the dynamics of homophobia. The Moral Majority would have us quarantined. They say AIDS is God's punishment for gays. The Massachusetts Department of Social Services recently adopted a policy directed against lesbian and gay foster parents. Last summer a gay man drowned after being shoved off a bridge in Bangor, Me. Some of us are disowned by parents, sisters, brothers and other loved ones. Our integrity comes under attack. Because we love members of the same sex, we are charged with promiscuous, aggressive and confrontational behavior.

If we are lucky, our churches call us "children of God," but more often than not won't ordain us. If they do ordain us, they ask us not to "practice our homosexuality." (We don't need practice, we're experienced, a friend once pointed out.) The National Council of Churches turned down the request for membership of the Metropolitan Community Church

— a church which ministers to lesbian and gay people. We are asked to choose between our faith and our sexuality. Those of us who are lesbian and gay often find that homophobia is so pervasive that it has crept into our own psyches. Our own homophobia keeps us from valuing ourselves.

Fear is the active ingredient in this schema of horror. Homophobia literally means fear of the same. Those who would prefer our silence and invisibility fear what we can become as self-affirming lesbians and gay men. In fearing us and our consequent challenges to the status quo, they also fear themselves. Homophobia fosters a fear of being intimate and ultimately a fear of loving. We learn to fear our neighbors as ourselves.

The underpinnings of homophobia rely on the assumption that lesbians and gay men are less than whole and that relating heterosexually, sanctioned by centuries of theological dictates, is the best and only way of relating. Such assumptions only pervert our relationships with each other and with God. Fearing our neighbors as ourselves causes us to become disembodied. We shun any mutuality, any sharing of what we hold in common, and become disconnected from one another.

The church as a faith community needs to open itself to lesbian and gay people. The church must recognize that there are families other than nuclear families, partnerships other than male/female marriages. Saying such things are in the "private sphere" is a euphemism for disconnection from the rest of the world and God. How we live and how we love affects others in the world besides ourselves.

Our love of neighbor as self moves us

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**Anne Gilson** is a seminarian at Episcopal Divinity School and a political activist involved in peace and Central American issues.

## AIDS resolution to GC

Following is the conclusion of a General Convention resolution concerning AIDS:

Be it resolved that the 68th General Convention of the Episcopal Church meeting in Anaheim:

1) Recognizes with love and compassion the tragic human suffering and loss of life involved in the AIDS epidemic;

2) Urges that a spirit of reconciliation and love infuse the dialogue surrounding the AIDS crisis in the spirit of the living Christ who died that all might have life and have it more abundantly;

3) Urges the dioceses, parishes and missions of this church to offer intercessory prayer regularly with special intentions for the AIDS crisis; to implement programs of education concerning AIDS; to identify and implement programs for ministry to all persons affected by AIDS, and to develop programs of AIDS prevention education;

4) Instructs the staff of the Executive Council to develop programs of AIDS awareness and education for implementation no later than March, 1986;

5) Gives high priority for funding to AIDS-related programs;

6) Calls upon the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church to establish and lead a national day of prayer and healing with special intentions for the AIDS crisis;

7) Calls upon the President of the United States and Congress, state, and local governments to increase funding for research and treatment for AIDS and AIDS prevention education.



## Gearing up for convention

**T**he Consultation, an Episcopal-based coalition for social justice, has named a 20 member steering committee to oversee that its "platform for exercising prophetic ministry" is carried out at the church's General Convention in Anaheim Sept. 6-13.

The group has been meeting over the past two years "to do some hard planning to propel forward a so-called liberal church that now floats between vacillation and equivocation on issues of justice and peace." The coalition invites those who are interested in participating in its strategies around elections and legislation to attend an open meeting on Saturday, Sept. 7 at 3:15 p.m. in the Hilton Hotel. Groups supporting the coalition will be situated in booths united under one banner at the exhibit hall.

The Consultation's vision statement, *Odyssey in Faith*, calling for a Christian commitment to justice and empowerment, has been running serially in past issues of THE WITNESS. The coalition's platform takes a stance vis a vis the reports and resolutions of the committees, commissions, boards and agencies of the General Convention as contained in the *Blue Book*.

The platform will be mailed to all members of the House of Bishops and House of Deputies. Others interested in obtaining a copy can write to the Episcopal Church Publishing Company, Box 359, Ambler, PA 19002.

Members of The Consultation steering committee are: Byron Rushing, the Rev. Edward Rodman, and Diane Pollard representing the Episcopal Urban Caucus; the Rev. R. Baldwin Lloyd and Edward C. Chapman, Appalachian People's Service Organization; Juli Beatty and the Rev. Domenic K. Ciannella, Integrity; Mary Miller and the Rev. F. Sanford Cutler, Episcopal Peace Fellowship; Carol Cole Flanagan and Marge Christie, Episcopal Women's Caucus; the Rev. Floyd Naters-Gamarra, Hispanic concerns group; the Revs. S. Michael Yasutake and Richard S. O. Chang, Asian-American concerns group; Dr. Deborah Harmon Hines and the Rev. Jesse F. Anderson, Union of Black Episcopalians; the Revs. Barbara C. Harris and Kwasi A. Thornell, the Episcopal Church Publishing Company; the Rev. Everett W. Francis, Church and City Conference; and the Rt. Rev. John H. Burt, Urban Bishops' Coalition. ■

beyond the superficial split between public and private life. If lesbians and gay men want to participate in mainstream churches, we have to leave pieces of ourselves on the doorstep of the church each time we enter and lose ourselves in the process. Questions go half answered. Truths are only half told.

Lesbians and gay men should no longer

forfeit bodies and souls to the church's double standard. If we are indeed "children of God," then the church is wrong to refuse to ordain gay men and lesbians.

I reject the notion that same sex relationships are incompatible with Christian faith, and also that in order to be a person of faith and an effective priest, I

should not be sexually active. I believe that my sexuality is holy and my relationships wholesome. Many of my sisters and brothers have left the church, but for the time being, I remain. I will not be defined out of the church. Nor will I remain content to leave those pieces of myself on the doorstep. I must, against the odds, choose life. ■

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