



GFC NEWS

October 1998

GFC-Richmond • P.O. Box 8501 • Richmond • VA • 23226

President's Message:

Do You Love Yourself?

You may think the question strange. But in light of my last column and our discussion lead by pastoral counselor, Mur Nease, at our last meeting, and the feature article in this past week's edition of *Style Weekly* ("Does God Love Gays?"); I think it is quite pertinent.

The radically conservative Christian leadership seems to be implying that "God" only loves gays if they stop being gay – if they give up their "homosexual lifestyle" and return to their lord and master. (Do you detect undertones of slavery there?)

In *Style Weekly's* exploration of the issue, they merely presented five viewpoints; that of several devotees to "Set Free" (the "ex-gay" movement), that of the pastor of the local Metropolitan Community Church (often called "the gay church"), that of a lesbian who has embraced religion and celibacy as a means of "leaving" homosexuality, that of a gay man who found love and acceptance within his Episcopalian community, and that of the gay-supportive Roman Catholic bishop of Richmond. Our discussion seemed to bog down around the same issues that really prevent this issue from being settled: not only does nobody know the answer and nobody can know the answer, but it really doesn't matter.

This issue is purely academic. It is moot.

Now, I'm not suggesting that religious beliefs are meaningless and don't matter. What I am suggesting is that the external doesn't matter. What matters is what's inside us. What matters is what kind of men we are. Are we ethical and moral in our treatment of others and the world in which we live?

When I was in high school, I began to question how murder, masturbation, entertaining "impure thoughts," missing mass on Sunday, and eating fish on Friday could all be equally offensive to God and immediate grounds for eternal damnation to the fires of hell. That's what my Roman Catholic church taught me. It didn't matter if I was otherwise a good person. One episode of "impure thoughts" – even without "abusing myself" behind the locked bathroom door – would doom me forever if I didn't get absolution from a priest before I died. Eventually I realized that this was all a lot of foolishness. (Although most of my Roman Catholic brethren did not.)

Today, I honor myself as a gay man. I seek the spirit of good inside myself and in community with others. It is my love for myself that makes me thrive as a person, that gives rise to the good I do in life. I endeavor to live ethically and morally, driven by my inner voice – not by

external dogma and scripture. I believe that as rational beings we have the capacity to discern right from wrong without external preachings from clergy. We know it intuitively, instinctively.

What I suggest is that everyone look inward and assess what kind of person you are. If what you see is good – except for the fact that you "lust after men" and engage in "homosexuality" – then respect yourself for the good you see. The other issue doesn't matter, regardless of what any clergy person might say to the contrary. They are not you. They are not the spirit in you. The "God" they say loathes homosexual activity is the creation of a bunch of men who lived a long time ago who had a particular agenda they wanted to achieve. Your guidepost for your life is your own rational inner voice and it alone gives rise to your sense of right and wrong.

The question is not whether or not "God" hates homosexuality – the sexual part. It is whether or not you treat your sexual partners with respect as human beings. Do you strive to give them as much pleasure as you receive from them? Or do you just use them for your own gratification and ignore their own desires? Is your sexual activity uplifting or denigrating?

This isn't just rationalizing my way around the issue, guys. This is about sitting down and asking;

"What's really the issue here?" And it's about implicitly trusting your own good intuition. Don't let the radical religious rabble grind you down. Don't let them influence your self esteem. Don't wrestle with their question. Wrestle, instead, with the thorny ethical issues of everyday life.

Nobody has really found ultimate spiritual enlightenment by adhering to an arbitrary set of external rules articulated by others. Spiritual nirvana is internal and intuitive and is experienced only when one lets go of the external and lets their inner intuitive rational voice guide them.

And when others say that "God" hates gays, look them directly in the eyes and say that perhaps their own god hates gays, but your inner spirit – the spirit that connects you with all others and with the universe – embraces all men completely: physically, romantically and spiritually. Say that the god in you is gay and you must follow his lead. And don't for a moment doubt that you are right.

This is what "gay pride" means: being proud of who you are, of the kind of man you are and of living your life according to the guidance of that gay spirit – that gay god—within you. And when asked whether or not you love yourself, you can respond with a resounding "YES!"

September Minutes

The 18th meeting of GFC/Richmond began at 7:45 p.m. at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, 520 N. Boulevard, Richmond.

Thirteen members/visitors were in attendance, including all five Board members.

The meeting began with a brief social time, and then proceeded with the evening's program. Bob Greene introduced the speaker, Mur Nease, a local pastoral counselor.

Program: Mur facilitated an open discussion on maintaining our self esteem and believing in ourselves despite the currently changing religious/political climate. She provided information to help better understand the fears that motivate those individuals and religious groups who are currently denouncing gays and lesbians. A lively discussion followed as members shared their own experiences and viewpoints.

General Business:

Old: None

New: GFC/Richmond will have an information table at several Pride Festival events on Sunday, September 27.

Bob Greene's photographic exhibit, *The Mysterious Male*, will open with a reception at the Shockoe Bottom Arts Center, Friday, October 16, 1998 at 7:00 p.m.

Treasurer's Report:

We currently have \$534 on account.

Following a social time, the meeting was concluded at approximately 10:00 p.m.

Calendar of Events

Date: Thursday, Oct. 1

Time: 7:30 p.m.

Place: St. Mark's Episcopal Church, 520 N. Boulevard

This month's meeting will feature a presentation by Dr. Michel LeRoux, DC. Dr. LeRoux is new to the

Richmond area having previously practiced in the Chicago Suburb of Naperville, IL. He has established a chiropractic practice here. He is a national board certified physician. Dr. LeRoux served his residency at AIDS Alternative Health Program in Chicago. AAHP is the largest clinic of its kind, orchestrating allopathic and holistic treatments by a staff of physicians, chiropractic physicians, acupuncturists, nutritionists, massage therapists, and physiologists.

In addition to his practice here, he volunteers his services to clients of the Fan Free Clinic. Dr. LeRoux regularly lectures on stress reduction, nutrition, office ergonomics, injury prevention and sports training. He is a marathon runner, competitive Olympic style weightlifter/Trainer and an avid mountain biker.

Michael will present a discussion to our group on stress reduction and will be available for your questions concerning any of his many professional credits.

Join Us For Dinner Before The Meeting

Prior to this month's meeting on October 1, you are welcome to meet for dinner at the Lighthouse Restaurant. The Board members have set aside this time to take a few minutes from our hectic schedules and "break bread" together. The time is at 5:45 p.m.; the restaurant is at 1627 W. Main Street. Hope to see you there!