

Homosexuals gather for 'Integrity'

Religion

'Men are filed under headings of heterosexual (good) or homosexual (bad) and the church has taught each group to hate the other one'

By CHARLENE WARREN
Post Religion Writer

A group of homosexuals, which presently numbers more than 200 members, has been meeting at a Roman Catholic church in central Houston for the past three years.

"The priests have been very kind to us," said Francis Thompson, a spokesman for "Integrity," which is an outgrowth of a national Catholic organization of homosexuals entitled "Dignity."

"Our group began as 'Dignity,' but we felt we should expand and open the meetings to all faiths," Thompson explained.

A baptized Catholic who left the church, Thompson said most of the leaders of Integrity are Catholics. But the group, which meets once a week, is not religion oriented like the Metropolitan Community Church gay Bible study group which has met at the Montrose Gaze Community Center.

"We don't want the name of the church where we meet publicized because the priests would be harassed," Thompson said. "People in the parish would get upset if they thought we were meeting there."

Members of Integrity, most of whom are middle aged, have mixed feelings about any church, he admitted.

"The church has failed not only gays, but all people regarding sex," he said. "Nowhere in the words of Christ do you find any condemnation of homosexuality. But by following the words of Paul, the church has condemned all sex."

"The Catholic church even excommunicates gays, although many priests are gay."

The church has divided men into two categories, Thompson charged.

"Men are filed under the headings of heterosexual, 'good,' or homosexual, 'bad.'" Through this tactic, the church has taught each group to hate the other. Straights hate gays because the church says homosexuality is bad. Gays hate straights because of their oppression."

'People in the parish would get upset if they knew...'

The church's ideal is the family man, said Thompson, who himself once fitted that ideal.

"I was married for seven years," he recalled. "My wife was a Catholic, so I was baptized when we got married. We were very happy for five years. We had two daughters, but the last one was jaundiced because of the RH factor. We didn't want any more children, but the priest told us we couldn't practice birth control. I wasn't going to confess what I didn't believe was a sin, so I left the church."

Thompson also left his wife and daughters — and became an active homosexual, which he had been before his marriage.

"My wife won't allow me to see the girls," he said pensively. "She threatens to tell them about me, but when they

are older I hope to tell them myself. Maybe they will understand..."

Thompson believes that gays should be accepted by the church as part of the regular congregation, but he is realistic enough to realize that this may never happen.

"The gay church is growing fast," he said. "But the mother church in Los Angeles has been burned twice. There has been a tremendous amount of damage done by the church's attitude and persecution. I don't see why gays should be treated any differently. God is for all people if they obey Christ's command to love."

The church very slowly is changing its attitudes toward gays, added Thompson, who is working with Montrose Gaze to establish a gay church in Houston within the next three months.

"One Protestant denomination has accepted a gay as an ordained minister and an Office of Gay Affairs has been created by the Unitarians," he pointed out.

'I don't see why gays should be treated differently'

"A number of ministers are accepting us, but their congregations are something else. If they know you are homosexual, they shun you. I feel God loves homosexuals as much as heterosexuals — maybe more."

The Houston area has a population of at least 300,000 active homosexuals, according to Thompson.

"Approximately 10 to 20 per cent of the country's population is actively homosexual," he claimed. "Ninety per cent of the gays I know have had heterosexual relations — and a good number of them are married."

'By following the words of Paul the church has condemned all sex'

Thompson described himself as a "very deeply religious person."

"Since I came to accept myself, thanks to Gay Lib, I have accepted God and my fellow man. My main interest now is in helping Gay Lib — and I think faith in God is a very necessary part of it."

"If anyone thinks that being a homosexual makes you any less of a man, he hasn't met Troy Perry," he added.

Perry is the founder of the Metropolitan Community Church, which opened its doors in Los Angeles six years ago. He also is the author of the book "The Lord is my Shepherd and He Knows I Am Gay."

Thompson knows he is gay — but he doesn't pretend to know the reasons why. He doesn't accept what he calls the "usual myths" about why gays are gay.

"All the old myths are being dispelled," he said. "It used to be said that gays had a dominant mother and a passive father. Well, my father is no mouse and my mother is not domineering. They have a very good relationship."

"I am one of five children — and am the only one who is homosexual. I don't hate women, although I know some gays who do. But I know some heterosexuals who do too," he laughed.

"I think it was born in me," he mused. "If anything, gays are overly sensitive. I always loved art and classical music. But Eisenhower and Churchill liked art — and they weren't gay."

Thompson has admitted his homosexuality to his family and has been accepted by them, he reported.

"I am very open," he said. "My father is not gay, but he is involved with Gay Liberation. I am his son and he says 'Your fight is my fight too.'"

Thompson does not believe homosexuality is a mental illness.

"Back in the '50s, gays all thought they were sick and were freaks. We have been called 'sinners' by the church and 'sick' by psychiatrists, but we are neither sinners nor sick. We are just people who love differently."

"Men are the last minority group, but I think all people need to be liberated sexually — and need to accept each other. Bigots wear their bigotry as a symbol of pride, but I don't understand how anyone can be proud of hating. We are not made to hate."

"Jesus said to love your neighbor," Thompson concluded. "That doesn't mean you have to do what he does, but it means you recognize his right to do it."

'Church has failed,' says priest who meets with gays

The assistant pastor of the Houston Catholic church that allows 200 homosexuals to meet there each week calls himself the chaplain of the group.

"I sit in on all the meetings," he explained. "I maintain an interest in them — and I think it does count. It gives them moral support."

The church has failed to minister to homosexuals in the past, the priest said.

"The church has adopted a kind of ostrich head-in-the-sand attitude, hoping they will go away, but they don't. The individual parish has some sort of obligation to the community,

so the pastor here has given them the use of the hall."

The bishop of the Galveston-Houston diocese, John L. Morkovsky, is aware that the group meets at the church, the assistant pastor said.

"He walked in on one of our meetings one time — and several of the Catholic members recognized him. He wasn't attending the meeting, but came in by mistake. He knows that we are there."

The priest said he knows "several priests who are homosexuals."

"I am sure many of us priests have homosexual tendencies, but we seem to be scared of anyone finding out, especially since we work with altar boys."

"The impression is that every last homosexual is a child molester, but this is not true. We have had no problems with the people who have met here."

The priest said the church group "seems to be the only organized gay group here in Houston."

"The Gay Lib at the University of Houston

folded — and now Montrose Gaze no longer has a place to meet. These people need something there to maintain them. I thought they might want to meet only once a month, but they come week after week. It serves a purpose."

The number of homosexuals in the Houston area has greatly increased since the opening of NASA, the priest maintained.

"Not that NASA has a lot of them, but it has brought tremendous growth to the city," he explained.

The homosexuals who meet at the church do not have religious services there — and are ministered to only by the presence of the priest who attends their meetings.

"They must concentrate upon themselves — and develop their own personalities," the priest said.

"Gays shouldn't undersell themselves, as they so often do. There is a lot of talk about Gay Lib, but it has to be the person himself who liberates himself. It is this that I find greatly lacking among gays: A sense of personal responsibility."

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Counseling homosexuals individually rather than through groups urged

Roman Catholic priests here have been advised by their bishop that counseling of individual homosexuals is preferable to group ministry.

In response to a Houston Post story about homosexuals who meet at a Catholic church here, Bishop John L. Morkovsky sent a letter to all priests ministering in the diocese of Galveston-Houston.

"I have serious doubts about the pastoral usefulness of meetings of large groups of homosexuals," the bishop wrote.

Morkovsky acknowledged that "alcoholics are helped in their efforts to overcome their impulse to drink by meetings and mutual support," but added "An apostolate

late to these people (homosexuals) might best be exercised by way of counseling of individuals."

The assistant pastor of the church where the homosexuals meet each week said he has not been notified to stop the meetings. The gay group calls itself "Integrity."

The assistant pastor sits in on all the meetings of the homosexuals to "give them moral support." He said he is doubtful the bishop will remove him from his post because of this.

"I question whether that can be done in this day and age," he said. "It would make a martyr of me."

The priest claimed the bishop

has received a lot of comment from people who are in favor of a ministry to homosexuals."

"I think maybe in the final analysis it was good that it came out in the paper," the priest said. "The gay community of Houston is quite different from those in other cities. It is terribly fragmented and closeted."

In his letter to the priests, the bishop commented:

"Some of you and some of the people entrusted to your care surely read the recent article in the Houston Post about an apostolate to homosexuals. My name was mentioned in it. I do not recall the incident mentioned, but that is beside the point."

"The point is that our apostolate is to all the people, including those who need help the most, the 'sinners,' those with immoral inclinations, to help them to overcome these, or to bring them repentance and forgiveness if they have failed to overcome them."

"This is the thrust of our apostolate to the alcoholic, to the drug addict, to those inclined to greed, to hatred, to injustice, to pride, to fornication and adultery."

"Let there be no doubt in anyone's mind — and unfortunately, some people even in responsible positions have left the opposite impression in the minds of some — drunkenness and greed and hatred and homosexuality and adultery and fornication are evil inclinations, and to follow them is immoral, sinful."

"We do not condemn people for their evil impulses," the bishop wrote.

"We know that some of these are involuntary. Some may be so strong that they negate free will. We do condemn sin in order to save the sinner."

There has been much progress in the study of human behavior in recent years, the bishop admitted in his letter.

"Our apostolate is to those who are not by nature inclined that way. Jesus said, 'I have come to call sinners, not the just.' It is these who need help to overcome their sinfulness."

You are cordially invited

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on Sunday, the twenty-seventh of May

in the year of our Lord

nineteen hundred and seventy-three

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