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Published Every Two Weeks On Recycled Paper • Volume 13, Number 16 • December 12, 1998 • FREE

Phelps targets the Carolinas

by Dan Van Mourik
Q-Notes Staff

GREENVILLE, SC—Anti-gay activist Rev. Fred Phelps, Sr., 69, and about a dozen supporters protested outside Bob Jones University (BJU) on Friday, November 27, saying it was too lenient with gays because it allows them into its art museum. BJU recently sent letters to gay alumni warning it will charge them with trespassing if they set foot on campus. They later decided to allow gays to visit the museum to retain the gallery's tax-exempt status.

Apparently, banning gays from campus wasn't good enough for Phelps, a BJU alumnus.

Phelps' group was met by a small group of counterprotesters. Both groups were peaceful, but three police cars stood by.

On Saturday, the group headed to Charlotte to protest the NC State-Carolina football game at Ericsson Stadium because of what they describe as the universities' tolerance and promotion of homosexuality. "The two universities have embraced the homosexual agenda," Phelps said.

A leaflet handed out by protesters said the schools' newspapers criticized Westboro Baptist (Phelps' church) for picketing at the funeral of Matthew Shepard. The leaflet also criticized the schools' recognition of gay and lesbian organizations.

Concerning the demonstration at the Shepard funeral, Jonathan Phelps, a civil rights attorney, said, "We made sure it wasn't a one-



A young member of the Phelps clan

sided news event. There was nothing holy or righteous about that kid."

"I blame the preachers," said the senior Phelps, who wore a white cowboy hat and sunglasses. "They're preaching it's OK to be gay. It will doom this nation."

Thirteen protesters toted signs, including "AIDS Cures Fags" and "Thank God for AIDS," as they marched along the sidewalk across from the stadium.

"We're just preaching what the Bible says about this," said Margie Phelps. "We're just telling the people about it. It's not OK to be gay."

Fred Phelps said they will be on an upcoming episode of the TV show *Jerry Springer*.

Later Saturday, the activists headed to Wake Forest University to protest a Maya Angelou speech. They say Angelou supports gays.

Phelps is minister at Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, KS and Kansas Gov. Bill Graves has called Phelps "a source of embarrassment to our state." ▼

Judge Warren takes the stand

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

For gays and lesbians, life at the brink of the millennium is changing faster than ever before: gay characters populate must-see-TV, Matthew Shepard's death has made homophobic violence a dinner-table topic and an out lesbian (Wisconsin's Tammy Baldwin) has been elected to Congress.

Because many of us have lived openly throughout these events, and the prodigious changes they have heralded, we forget that the closet is still a reality for some folks. The fact is that someone somewhere is always taking those first tentative steps toward self-liberation, striving to live more fully and with greater honesty.

Judge Raymond (Ray) Warren, 41, has presided in Superior Court for four years. A moderate Republican with a reputation for respecting individual rights, he narrowly lost a November race for the NC Court of Appeals.

He first contacted *Q-Notes* in connection with his campaign, expressing his desire for GLBT voter support. It was on a subsequent visit that he confided his wish to be interviewed. We, of course, welcomed the opportunity.

Q-Notes: What is the primary reason that you wanted to do this interview?

Ray Warren: Actually, there are three primary reasons. The first is personal, the second involves my family and the third is a matter of conscience.

I would have preferred to work through this process as most of my gay friends have done. Most have been free to come out to those with whom they felt comfortable while remaining rather innocuous in the larger world. They certainly did not feel the need to make a public announcement.

Unfortunately, the reality of being a public official is very different. I really don't think I can be partially "out." At some point between now and the time my current term ends in four years, some politician or interest group is likely to make an issue of my life. Basically, I have two choices: I can hide in a deep closet and confide in nobody in the straight world or I can openly acknowledge the situation and move on. To try and be honest with my friends and

co-workers without expecting that news to spread is not realistic. The nature of politics and political gossip make it impossible to limit the knowledge in a way that most other gay professionals take for granted. For me, this is the only realistic way to get on with my life.

[My wife] Leigh and I also feel that any public outing is a time bomb hanging over our heads. We feel it would be better for us, and for our children [an eight-year-old daughter and a six-year-old son], to pull this trigger ourselves when we are prepared for the publicity and are prepared to answer our children's questions. We don't want to live with the prospect of some sort of political or journalistic ambush that might occur at a time when we are not ready to deal with the situation.

Finally, I've thought a lot about the concept of collaboration. When the Nazis occupied Europe, they depended as much, if not more, on willing collaborators as on committed fascists. As I have come out to and met gay people,

I am struck by the number who still live in deep fear. The closet is like that. It isolates us and makes us feel lonely and vulnerable. I won't live like that. But more importantly, I hope that seeing me as a gay man in public office will help others see that they don't have to live like that either.

QN: You recently came up short in a bid for the NC Court of Appeals—why come out now rather than during the campaign?

RW: For one thing, my personal realization and acceptance process just happened to coincide with the election campaign. I wasn't ready, my wife wasn't ready and our children were not ready. We have been working through this whole process during the last four or five months. During the campaign, I did "out" myself to a number of people, but it wasn't planned. I just began to discuss the issue as I personally became comfortable with my own identity and place in the world. This is not a contrived or politicized thing. Yes, I am a public official, but first and foremost I am a human being very much in the process of self-realization. I first discussed this with my wife in July and we separated in September. Those
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Judge Ray Warren

AIDS Quilt coming to Charlotte

by Brian M. Myer
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE—The Names Project's AIDS Memorial Quilt commemorates the lives of people throughout the country and world who have died of AIDS. The Quilt was the idea of Cleve Jones, a San Francisco gay rights activist and organizer of the Kaposi's Sarcoma Research and Education Foundation. After the loss of his friend Marvin Feldman, Jones made a tapestry in his memory. The idea caught on and soon Jones was joined by others who had lost loved ones to AIDS.

Many cultures around the world have traditions of fabric arts. The AIDS Memorial Quilt is based upon the American tradition of quilting. In the past, neighbors and relatives would gather in groups to sew old scraps of fabric together to make blankets. These blankets, called "quilts," were often beautiful works of art in addition to providing warmth and comfort.

Working together made people feel like a community, giving them the chance to tell stories, trade gossip, sing songs and enjoy each other's company as they sewed. Today, as people gather together to make panels for the AIDS Memorial Quilt, this tradition gives comfort in a time of grief.

The Quilt was first displayed in October 1987 during the March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights and consisted of 1920 panels. When it was again displayed in Washington in 1992, it had grown to more than 20,000 panels. The memorial covered the equivalent of 12 football fields and weighed 30 tons. It now has surpassed 25,000 panels.

Each panel, created by lovers, family and

friends, is designed to reflect the personality and life of the person (or, in some instances, group) being memorialized. As with Jones' original tapestry, each panel measures three-feet by six-feet, the size of a human grave. The Quilt represents more than the tens of thousands of people whose names are sewn into the fabric; it also conveys the sorrow, anger, love and hope of the people who have created the panels.

UNC-Charlotte has announced tentative plans to display portions of the Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt, with final approval expected soon. The Quilt is scheduled to be exhibited in the school's Belk Gym on Friday, February 26 and Saturday, February 27, 1999.

Community volunteers are being sought to assist with planning, fundraising and staffing during the display. Interested folks can call Shane Windmeyer of UNCC's Office of Student Activities at (704) 547-2521 or e-mail slwindme@email.uncc.edu for more information about volunteer opportunities.

Members of the general public may request that the panel of a specific individual (whether a celebrity or a loved one) be included in the display. Requests should include the name, address and phone number of the person making the request; the name or names on the requested panel; and the Quilt block number on which the panel is located (this number can be found by performing a search at www.aidsquilt.org). Individuals may also bring panels to the display for permanent inclusion in the Quilt.

A number of fundraising activities are planned to underwrite the costs of bringing the Quilt to UNC-Charlotte. These events will be reported as details are announced. ▼

The Quilt will be exhibited on Feb. 26 and 27, 1999.

MCC Charlotte to buy building

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE—Leaders of the Metropolitan Community Church of Charlotte (MCC Charlotte) have unveiled plans for the 18-year-old church to purchase its own worship space.

The church's Building Finance Committee recently signed a contract to buy Eastway Christian Church, a 10,000 sq.ft. facility at 1825 Eastway Dr., for \$775,000. Eastway Christian has been home to a Disciples of Christ congregation since the early '60s.

Fundraising plans for this massive undertaking are lofty. A Capital Campaign is underway to raise \$300,000 by January 17; a Bond Program will follow with a goal of \$500,000. A member of the Committee told *Q-Notes* that

the church would have "no problem" meeting the goal of the Bond offering.

Numerous secondary events, including a benefit dance, a raffle and a unique plan to solicit one-time donations from nearly 225 US-based congregations within the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC), are being organized as well.

In an open letter to the community (found on page 2 of this issue), MCC Charlotte pastor Rev. Mick Hinson states, "It is our hope that as we strive to develop MCC Charlotte as a 'Center for Community' that [everyone]...will actively and financially support making this vision a reality."

To assist in this effort or for more information, contact the church at (704) 563-5810. ▼