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Melissa Etheridge

## Final MMOW preparations are underway

by Bob Findle  
Special to Q-Notes

In just two weeks, the Millennium March on Washington (MMOW), the fourth national GLBT march for civil rights will take center stage in the nation's capital and around the world. On Sunday, April 30, organizers are expecting hundreds of thousands to march from The Ellipse, located between the White House and The Washington Monument, to the National Mall, which stretches out before the Capitol. The rally begins at noon and features a list of speakers described as "unprecedented" by Dianne Hardy-Garcia, executive director of the March.

GLAAD Executive Director Joan M. Garry reported that she, along with a number of GLAAD staff members, will be on hand to lend support. "My family and I are looking forward to being a part of the historic event," she said. "Let's not forget that this is an election year, and we must make our issues known vocally and visibly. This march presents us with an opportunity to do just that."

Because it is an election year, organizers have established a "GLBT Vote 2000" campaign to increase voter registration and education so that the community's voting power is maximized.

In addition to the actual march, many other events are being held in conjunction, including the Millennium Festival, April 29-30. Billed as the largest national festival in history, it will feature vendors, community groups, food, entertainment, dance areas and a family area.

Other weekend events include the Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) national conference and the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC) hosts "The Wedding: Now More Than Ever!" on April 29. The public demonstration and non-sectarian ceremony — led by UFMCC founder Rev. Elder Troy Perry — will be open to all couples wanting to make a public statement of vows. That afternoon, the AIDS Memorial Quilt will stage a new panel dedication, with about 150 new panels expected. That night, Equality Rocks, a concert featuring Garth Brooks, Ellen DeGeneres, Melissa Etheridge, Anne Heche, Kristen Johnston, Nathan Lane, k.d. lang and the Pet Shop Boys will hit RFK Stadium. Throughout the weekend there are several dance parties, mini-conferences, rallies, dinners, religious ceremonies and a variety of entertainment.

For complete March information, call (202) 467-8100, email [MMOW2000@aol.com](mailto:MMOW2000@aol.com) or access [www.mmow.org](http://www.mmow.org)

Volunteers are being sought to help with everything from handing out flyers to office tasks to on-site festival/march work. Those interested in volunteering can use the above contact methods to obtain more information. ▼

## Equality NC appoints interim executive director

by Wanda Pico  
Special to Q-Notes

RALEIGH—The Board of Directors of Equality North Carolina PAC, a nine-year-old statewide political action group that works to advance GLBT issues, has announced that staff member Ian Palmquist will serve as interim executive director until the search for a permanent director is completed.

The position came open in late February with the departure of MK Cullen. She stepped down to prepare for a move to Washington, DC and a new position with the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), a national organization focused on GLBT issues in schools. Cullen will become GLSEN's first Director of Public Policy. Prior to her resignation, she led Equality NC PAC through a fruitful four-and-a-half-year term. The organization is conducting a national search to find her suc-

cessor.

"We feel that Equality NC has developed into an important and strong organization that will be able to attract an experienced and talented executive director," said Jeff Prince, chair of the Search Committee. "For that reason, we are being very deliberate and moving carefully to find the right candidate. While everyone associated with Equality NC is eager to see the position filled, we want to be certain we attract the right person for the position."

Palmquist, who joined the staff of Equality NC in October, is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a former co-chair of Queer Network for Change. His background and experience are expected to facilitate a smooth transition into the next executive director's tenure. Following that, he will shift into the role of Administrative Director.

"We are fortunate to not only have some-

one as talented as Ian to lead us during this time, but someone who cares so passionately about issues affecting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered North Carolinians," said Board Co-Chair Phil Wells.

Among Palmquist's current projects are coordinating the endorsement process for the May 2 primary election and working with candidates who are supportive of GLBT issues, as well as overseeing the day-to-day functions of the organization.

"With the primary and general elections and a number of interesting projects, this is going to be a busy year for Equality NC PAC," said Palmquist. "I'm excited and ready to help move the organization forward during this important time."

For more information on Equality NC, contact Palmquist at (919) 829-0343 or email [EqualityNCPAC@aol.com](mailto:EqualityNCPAC@aol.com). ▼

## Reform rabbis affirm same-sex unions at conference

by Dan Van Mourik  
Q-Notes Staff

GREENSBORO, NC—Breaking with tradition, the world's largest organization of rabbis voted overwhelmingly to support ceremonies, including weddings, for same-sex couples. The vote, the first by a major religious denomination, came during the annual conference of the Central Conference of American Rabbis recently held in Greensboro with about 500 participants. Leaders of the Reform Jewish movement, the dominant strand of American Judaism, said they hoped their action might influence liberal Protestant denominations now debating the treatment of gays and lesbians.

At a news conference immediately following the vote, the group's president, Rabbi Charles A. Kroloff, said: "I've never been prouder to be a rabbi — I think this is one of our finest days."

"My dream is that every gay and lesbian Jew in America will feel comfortable in every Reform synagogue throughout our land, and I also hope that other clergy groups will hear us loud and clear and that they'll be inspired to move in the same direction," said Kroloff. "In my mind, this is the direction of history — this is where we're all headed, to affirm the rights of our fellow Jews and our fellow human beings."

The resolution approved by the Reform rabbis does not use the words "wedding" or "marriage" and does not require any rabbi to perform any ceremony. Instead, the resolution says that "the relationship of a Jewish same-gender couple is worthy of affirmation through Jewish ritual." The resolution also says the rabbis will support those who officiate at "rituals of union"

for same-gender couples, as well as those who do not officiate at such ceremonies. The resolution further calls on the rabbis' group to develop educational and liturgical material about such ceremonies.

More than 500 of the 1800 Reform rabbis, representing 1.5 million Reform Jews, have said they are performing or are willing to perform same-sex ceremonies and some are using the word "wedding," while others use phrases such as "commitment ceremony." Many ceremonies include elements associated with a Jewish wedding — a couple standing under a canopy, the recitation of seven blessings, and the smashing of a glass.

For the Reform rabbis, the nearly unanimous vote brought an end to years of controversy. Even though the group voted 10 years ago to endorse the ordination of gays and lesbians as rabbis, the issue of gay relationships was so divisive that two years ago the group withdrew a resolution from its annual convention rather than endure heated debate.

The rabbis did not allow reporters to witness the vote and no vote count was taken as it was a voice vote, but those present said that only two or three rabbis spoke against the measure and fewer than 10 voted against it.

Rabbi James Bennett of Temple Beth El in Charlotte, the Carolinas' largest Reform Jewish synagogue, called the passage of the resolution a proud moment for the movement. "It is a public affirmation of the fact that the rabbis in the Reform movement have taken the very bold position to say it's an OK thing.... This is one prejudice that we will not sit quietly by and watch," Bennett said.

The vote marks another sharp break between the Reform movement and the more traditional conservative and orthodox movements. And the action was swiftly denounced by them as divisive and contrary to biblical teaching.

"I'm deeply distressed by the passage of this resolution, because it drives another wedge in the united fabric of the Jewish people," said Rabbi Steven M. Dworken, executive vice president of the Rabbinical Council of America, which represents Orthodox rabbis.

And, of course, Rev. Fred Phelps, from Topeka, KS, showed his face in Greensboro. But Phelps, who has devoted his ministry to condemning homosexuality, picketed the conference for just a single morning. He and four other members of his Westboro Baptist Church walked along sidewalks, carrying signs that included racial slurs against gays and Jews. But they didn't stay long nor have much of an impact on the conference.

But the reaction from gays and lesbians was understandably far more favorable.

"For gays and lesbians, this is a historic and prophetic moment," said lesbian Rabbi Denise Eger who leads the Kol Ami congregation in Los Angeles. "We now have the chance to stand in holiness under the marriage canopy."

"This bold, historic decision to affirm our relationships sets a new standard for inclusiveness and equality for a major religion," said Human Rights Campaign Executive Director Elizabeth Birch. "This forward-thinking policy paves the way for voices of reason and fairness within other denominations to step forward and demand that the love that is preached is also practiced." ▼

## ACLU fights for inclusion of gay prom couples

by Eric Ferrero  
Special to Q-Notes

NEW YORK—Vowing to continue standing by youth who want to bring same-sex dates to their school proms, on March 31 the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) released a resource guide to help young people combat discrimination.

For decades, youth and their families have tangled with schools over whether high school students can bring same-sex dates to school-sponsored proms. The new resource comes just as young people nationwide are beginning to think about proms, which typically take place in April and May.

"Every year at this time, we start receiving calls from students across the country whose schools are refusing to let them bring same-sex dates to the prom," said Jennifer Middleton,

an ACLU Lesbian and Gay Rights Project staff attorney specializing in youth and schools issues. "Schools are increasingly justifying this discrimination by saying they fear for students' safety if they bring same-sex dates. That's an unacceptable argument that is not legally supported. The bottom line is students have the right to bring same-sex dates to the prom and schools are obligated to ensure their safety."

"Who Are You Taking to the Prom This Year?" includes the text of US District Judge Raymond J. Pettine's ruling in the landmark gay prom case, *Aaron Fricke v. Cumberland High School Principal Richard B. Lynch*. In that 1980 case, the court ruled that Fricke's First Amendment rights were violated by the school's refusal to allow him to take another male to the prom. The Court also found that the school was required to ensure Fricke's safety at the

prom.

This year, disagreements with schools have already flared up in several locations nationwide, including Roanoke, VA — where the Floyd County school district refused high school junior Tiffany Lapine's request to bring her girlfriend to the junior prom, but relented after an appeal from the ACLU.

Meanwhile, the group continues working to ensure the rights of a Connecticut student who wants to bring a same-sex date to the prom. In response to the youth's request, the school recently held a student election to determine whether same-sex dates should be allowed at the prom. The students voted for an opposite-sex only prom, so the school refused to allow the student to bring a same-sex date. As in Roanoke, the ACLU is working to resolve the matter before taking the school to court. ▼