

Gay rights panel rejects Baptist stance on homosexuality

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love and forgiveness and healing," said the Rev. David Horton, president of Gate City Baptist Church in Greensboro and the outgoing state convention president.

The vote was not unanimous. Some delegates opposed the idea because they felt it showed a lack of respect for Baptist heritage, which values the autonomy of local churches, while others

felt the decision focused too much attention on the issue. "Could it be that homosexuality gains our attention primarily because it's not 'our' sin?" said Rob Helton, a delegate from Cherry Point Baptist Church in Havelock. "If

we write a policy (on homosexuality), it seems only fair and right that we write a policy on every sin in the Bible." The Rev. Stanley "Stan" James Welch, pastor of

Blackwelder Park Baptist Church in Kannapolis and the convention's newly elected president, said homosexuality has gotten Baptists' attention because of its visible role in American

culture. "Everything in our culture has pushed it to the forefront," he said. "I think it came out in the culture, and we have to deal with it."

Nonbelievers find a voice for what they believe; or don't believe

By Stephanie Innes
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

TUCSON, Ariz. — Weary of feeling silenced by a culture dominated by organized faith, nonbelievers in southern Arizona—and across the country—are coming out.

Atheists, agnostics and others who fall outside mainstream religion are forming their own organizations—a move counterintuitive to some in a group of individuals accustomed to the periphery. But nonbelievers both locally and nationally say it's time

join together, step up and get some respect.

"I hear people wonder how atheists can be moral. I just think things are getting really ridiculous," said 26-year-old Mary Adde, a University of Arizona graduate student and atheist who is part of a new campus club for nonbelievers.

In addition to the UA club, a local chapter of the international Center for Inquiry—a support and education group for nonreligious people—formed earlier this year, and

members already are sponsoring local movies and debates and writing letters to Congress. Tucson Atheists became an official chapter of the national American Atheists Inc. in March, and also plans more local visibility.

"It is a way for nonbelievers to come together and not feel so isolated. I'm an atheist, and I'm proud of it," Tucson Atheists spokeswoman Dr. Jasmine England said. "A lot of people think atheism is negative and anti-religion. The reality is that church and state should be separate, and in a free society everyone should be free to choose what they believe and don't believe. Even some religious people are against intermixing church and state."

Outside southern Arizona, Hartford Seminary in Connecticut on Nov. 2 officially opened its Institute for the

Study of Secularism in Society and Culture with a mission of increasing understanding of the contemporary significance of secular values.

And Lori Lipman Brown, a lawyer, atheist and former Nevada state senator, began working in September as executive director for the Secular Coalition for America in Washington, D.C., a lobbying group with goals of keeping religion out of government and winning respect for non-religious Americans.

"We want to change the national conversation—to make it unacceptable to make us invisible," Lipman Brown wrote in an e-mail. "Statements claiming that we are all God-fearing Americans, or that there are no atheists in foxholes, are both inaccurate and point out how often we are left out. We want to stop the denigration of atheists in

the United States, and to dispel the myth that we are less moral than theists."

Some of the issues Lipman Brown already has weighed in on include opposing the federal government's reimbursement of churches that helped survivors of Hurricane Katrina and endorsing the removal of "under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance, saying it is a harsh intrusion into the parental and student rights of nonbelievers.

"Groups that are sort of secular or atheist have been emboldened by the religious right and want to counter a lot of what they consider to be the effectiveness of the religious right," said Derek Davis, director of the J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

"We are living in a day when

it's becoming increasingly acceptable to let your anti-religious sentiments be known. You can compare it to the homosexuals who come out, like the basketball player Sheryl Swoopes just did. People are now more willing to come out and say, 'Yes, I'm an atheist.'"

Tucsonan Jerry Karches, a retired physicist, is encouraging local nonbelievers to speak up. Karches fears America is becoming a theocracy.

"President Bush goes to Jesus Christ for advice. Do you know any other leaders doing that in the world?" asked Karches, an atheist who helped found the Center for Inquiry Community of Southern Arizona. "Most of us are very concerned about the direction this country is going

Please see UNBELIEVERS/6B

'Narnia' film screened at conservative ministry

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — About 700 people turned out at the Focus on the Family campus Thursday for a sneak preview of the new movie "The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe."

The closed screening of a 10-minute extended trailer at the conservative Christian ministry's complex included

many pastors and church staffers who plan to organize events around the film in their churches. The movie is based on C.S. Lewis' fantasy novel "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe."

The story, published in 1950, follows four siblings — Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy — sent to live in an old country house to escape the

Please see NARNIA/6B

BIBLE LESSON

Leaving for last time

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proved he was a fiery evangelist who was willing to defend the faith at all costs. This time, the pastoral side of Paul emerged as he prepared the leaders of the flock at Ephesus to walk in their needs of the growing congregation.

Lesson Setting:

Saying good bye seldom is pleasant, whether due to death or another expected or unforeseen event, the changes the absence will cause can be major. Paul had to say good-bye to some friends and colleagues as he continued the path God set before him. Paul was leaving Ephesus to Jerusalem.

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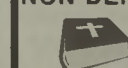
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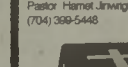
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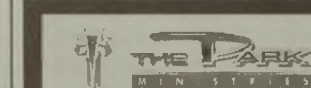
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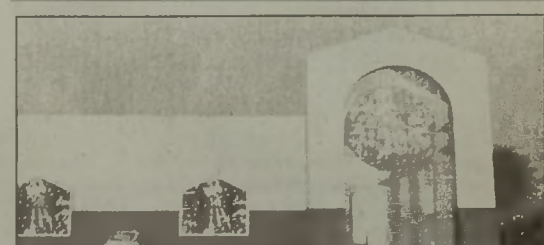
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