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Baptist church opposes Pride parade

by Don King
Special to Q-Notes



CHARLOTTE—A minor media storm erupted at the end of January when *The Charlotte Observer* and a local television station reported that First Baptist Church seriously opposed the June 5 NC Lesbian and Gay Pride Parade and Celebration. The church campus is in the same block as Marshall Park, the rally site and start/end point for the parade, which prompted one Charlotte City Council member to remark that the event must be "targeting the church."

The steering committee for NC Pride '94 delivered a letter to the church which offered monitors during the parade to keep participants off church property and to meet with church officials to address other concerns.

In informal talks before a scheduled Charlotte/Mecklenburg Parade Committee meeting (the authority which issues parade permits), the steering committee agreed to a police department recommendation to move the staging time for the parade from noon to 1:00 p.m. and to start the parade at 2:00 p.m. rather than 1:00 p.m.

The minister of the church, acknowledging the positive actions taken by the steering committee, said he would not speak against the event at the Parade Committee's February 3 meeting. While he remained true to his word, another church official did speak against the event and was the only voice at

the meeting raised in opposition.

The Parade Committee voted unanimously to proceed with the NC Lesbian & Gay Pride Parade with the schedule change and other minor considerations to accommodate First Baptist.

"One thing that came from this experience is that it's good to keep lines of communication open, and it's much better to address a possible area of contention right away so that it can be kept within reasonable parameters," said Sue Henry, co-chair of the Charlotte Steering Committee for NC Pride '94.

"That's what we did with First Baptist concerning the step-off time for the parade, and I think it's real important. So often, it's when humans forget that we can talk to each other and listen to each other that we get into trouble," Henry added.

Dan Kirsch, the other co-chair of the Charlotte Steering Committee, commented, "There are many battles surrounding a gay/lesbian event like this, and it's just not worth it to spend energy over one hour's disagreement about a starting time. This whole thing placed us in a good light and means we have fewer problems to face."

In its coverage of the Parade Committee's 4-0 vote, *The Charlotte Observer* quoted Charlotte Mayor Richard Vinroot as saying he would not oppose the right of any group to assemble. Vinroot had previously voiced his dislike concerning the gay and lesbian event being held in Charlotte.

On the same day, an *Observer* columnist wrote "Gays 1, Christians 0" in praising the Steering Committee's accommodations and berating the church for its stridency. However, in the same column, the writer found the idea of homosexual sex "repulsive."

House member pushes AIDS project abandoned by Clinton

WASHINGTON, D.C.—On Saturday, January 22, Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-New York) and AIDS activists and lobbyists from around the country gathered in the nation's capitol for a National Legislative Strategy Conference focusing on a bill Rep. Nadler recently introduced into the House of Representatives. The bill, HR 3310, would establish an intensive, coordinated AIDS cure research program much like the "Manhattan" research project during World War II which developed the atomic bomb and the "Apollo" project in the 60s that put a man on the moon.

The one day conference was attended by Rep. Nadler and members of his staff as well as representatives of the White House Office of AIDS Policy, the Human Rights Campaign Fund (HRCF), the National Association of People With AIDS (NAPWA), the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), the AIDS Survival Project, Gay and Lesbian Americans (GLA) and ACT UP chapters from around the nation. The meeting was held at the Institute for Policy Studies, over fifty people participated.

HR 3310, also known as the "AIDS Cure Project," was introduced into Congress on October 29, 1993. Since that time, Ronald Dellums (D-CA) and Major Owens (D-NY) have signed on as cosponsors of the legislation. The bill will undergo minor changes and be reintroduced by Nadler within several weeks. The AIDS Cure Project would focus a team of diverse researchers on the search for a cure for AIDS. The project would be free from government red tape and the excessive influence of the pharmaceutical industry.

During the conference activists debated and discussed strategies to push the AIDS Cure Project through Congress. Conference attendees decided to use 1994 to build sup-

port for the project and to push for Congressional hearings on the project next year. Early this spring activists will launch a national campaign to increase public awareness of the need for the project and solicit additional cosponsors of the bill as well as search for a sponsor of the bill in the Senate. That national campaign will focus on building grassroots support for the project in key districts around the country and will include lobbying, letter writing and phoning members of Congress in their home districts and in Washington urging them to support this legislation.

As a part of his campaign, Clinton promised a "Manhattan Project" on AIDS research. One year into office the President has failed to take action. During his Dec. 1st World AIDS Day address, AIDS activist Luke Sissyfag disrupted the President's speech demanding "Where's the 'Manhattan Project' to search for a cure?". The next day, in an editorial, the *New York Times* echoed Sissyfag by saying the disruption was "only fair" and that Clinton needed to come through on his promise.

Sissyfag, who organized the conference, said "The failings of the current AIDS research program are apparent, even Clinton has acknowledged this. The need for an intensive research project is clearer than ever. The AIDS Cure Project is the blue print of a research agenda to unlock the secrets of AIDS and find a cure. It's time for the gay community to put its political muscle behind this project and put an end to this plague that threatens us all." Re-emphasizing his support for the project, Congressman Nadler added "This new project can speed discovery of a cure for AIDS by mounting a more coordinated and concentrated research effort to put an end to this deadly epidemic as quickly as possible."



Luke Sissyfag (left) and Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-New York)