

Q Notes

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UFMCC experiencing gains, pains

by James N. Birkitt, Jr.
Special to Q-Notes

LOS ANGELES—The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC), the world's largest and oldest gay spirituality organization, has received a \$50,000 grant from the Gill foundation. The grant will be used by the rapidly growing organization for operational expenses.

According to the Rev. Elder Troy D. Perry, founder and moderator of UFMCC, "We are honored to receive this grant from the Gill Foundation. This grant comes at an important time in the life of UFMCC as we prepare for our 30th year of service, continue to expand our global technology base and prepare for the dedication of the UFMCC World Center in 1999."

"We know that typical first-time grants from the Gill Foundation do not exceed \$15,000," said Perry. "So this first-time grant in the amount of \$50,000 speaks to the important work UFMCC continues to carry out around the world."

The Rev. Elder Don Eastman added, "We see this grant as an indication that UFMCC is on the right track in our commitment to social and spiritual justice for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered communities."

"We especially recognize the tireless efforts and visions of Dr. Lo Sprague who represented UFMCC in meetings with the staff of the Gill Foundation," Eastman added.

UFMCC was founded by Perry in 1968 to provide positive, affirming Christian spirituality to the gay community. The denomination, headquartered in West Hollywood, CA, has

grown to 300 congregations in 15 countries and more than 42,000 members and adherents. Since its founding, UFMCC has had a strong global commitment to the civil rights of minority groups and was an early leader in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

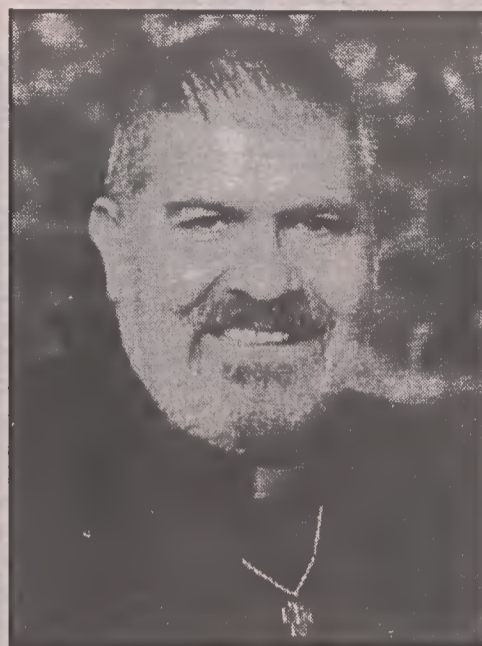
Established in 1994 by Tim Gill, founder and chairperson of Quark, Inc., a Denver-based computer software company, the Gill Foundation supports non-profit organizations which pursue justice and equality for gay men and lesbians.

Threats of violence

UFMCC's continued success can be measured by the backlash they have experienced at the hands of anti-gay extremists over the years. This on-going problem came to the forefront recently when the Metropolitan Community Church of Bournemouth, England received anonymous bomb threats. This was the second time in two months that a UFMCC congregation was the target of such a threat.

Fundamentalist religion may have played a role in the latest bomb scare. According to the Rev. Neil Thomas, senior pastor of MCC Bournemouth, a local fundamentalist church has recently condemned the MCC church. Tensions were further heightened when three members of the fundamentalist church moved their membership to Metropolitan Community Church.

Rev. Perry noted, "These threats are still another reminder of the important work we have yet to accomplish on behalf of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender persons. This marks the second bomb threat against UFMCC



Rev. Elder Troy D. Perry founded UFMCC nearly 30 years ago

congregations in the past two months. Over the past 30 years, more than 20 of our churches have been victimized by arson or firebombing."

"I call upon all people of goodwill to uphold the Rev. Neil Thomas and the congregation of Metropolitan Community Church of Bournemouth with their love and prayers during this time," Perry added.

In April, the 3000-member Cathedral of Hope Metropolitan Community Church in Dallas, TX, the world's largest predominantly gay and lesbian congregation, was the target of a bomb threat posted on the Internet. The threats are under investigation by the FBI. ▼

Poll: gay rights more accepted

by Betsy Gressler
Special to Q-Notes

WASHINGTON, DC—A growing majority of Americans support gay and lesbian equality, according to a new report released by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) Policy Institute. *From Wrongs to Rights: Public Opinion of Gay and Lesbian Americans Moves Toward Equality* is the most comprehensive analysis of trends in public opinion about gay men and lesbians during the past 20 years.

"In its opposition to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender equality, it is the right wing that is out of step with mainstream America," stated Kerry Lobel, NGLTF executive director.

Among other facts, the study shows that strong majorities of Americans now support equality in employment (84 percent); housing (81 percent); inheritance rights (62 percent) and social security benefits (57 percent) for same-sex couples; and gays in the military (66 percent). In addition, disapproval of same-sex relationships dropped a substantial 19 points from a peak of 75 percent in 1987 to 56 percent in 1996. The report also shows the percentage of people opposed to same-sex marriage (and those opposed to adoption by gay and lesbian couples) to be declining.

"These findings confirm that three decades of struggle for gay and lesbian equality has succeeded in winning greater understanding and significant change in public attitudes," said Urvashi Vaid, NGLTF Policy Institute director. "This report proves that over time and in dramatic fashion, the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender movement is winning the battle of public opinion on civil rights issues. Our effort to reach the hearts and minds of the American people by being open and honest about our lives holds the key to our success," added Vaid.

The survey also demonstrates the paradoxical nature of public support, showing that despite the significant gains in positive attitudes regarding legal equality, gays remain unpopular. Despite the anti-gay sentiment, however, the report shows that the public's censure of gay and lesbian relations is declining over time.

"In this report, the continuing paradox of the gay and lesbian experience is laid out before us. Our gains in some ways have been as great as the resistance we still face," said Vaid. "The dislike and disapproval we continue to face should serve as a call to all supporters of gay equality to redouble our efforts." ▼

President protects gay federal workers from bias

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

WASHINGTON, DC—On May 28, President Clinton issued an Executive Order that banned sexual orientation-based job discrimination against civilian employees of the federal government.

"Individuals should not be denied a job on the basis of something that has no relationship to their ability to perform their work," the president noted in a statement accompanying the order.

Gay and lesbian political activists heralded the move which adds sexual orientation to the list of categories for which discrimination is illegal. The others are race, color, religion, sex,

national origin, handicap status and age.

"We applaud President Clinton for this act of leadership and fairness," stated National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Political Director Rebecca Isaacs. "Federal civilian workers will now be covered by a uniform policy."

Previously, the Clinton Administration had instituted the policy agency-by-agency. The Executive Order, entitled "Further Amendment to Executive Order 11478, Equal Employment Opportunity in the Federal Government," ensures a standardized policy for civilian workers throughout the federal government.

"Since early in President Clinton's first term, most Cabinet-level departments and agencies have added sexual orientation to their equal

employment policies, but these policies were not uniformly administered," said Kim I. Mills, education director for the Human Rights Campaign. "This executive order will remedy that situation."

Upon signing the order, the president also advocated for the passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) which is currently before Congress. "I again call upon Congress to pass this important piece of civil rights legislation which would extend these basic employment discrimination protections to all gay and lesbian Americans."

Although ENDA has not been scheduled for a vote in the current session, it came within one vote of Senate passage in 1996. ▼

Democrats mandate inclusion of gay delegates at 2000 Convention

by Wanda Pico
Special to Q-Notes

WASHINGTON, DC—In a landmark meeting, the Democratic National Committee (DNC) voted unanimously last month to require state parties to specifically include gay and lesbian representation as part of their delegate selection process for the 2000 Convention.

"Gay and lesbian Democrats and our community have taken a significant step forward," said Jean O'Leary of California, chair of the DNC Gay & Lesbian American Caucus and member of the DNC Executive Committee, the governing body of the DNC. "These new rules will likely increase the number of openly gay and lesbian delegates to the 2000 Convention and mark the first time that a major national party organization has included gays and lesbians as a priority for selecting delegates to a national party convention."

"These new rules reflect both what we have done for the Democratic Party and this Administration over the years as well as how critical

our community's support will be for a Democratic presidential victory in 2000," said Jeff Soref, vice chair of the DNC Gay & Lesbian American Caucus and At-Large DNC member from New York.

Of the 4925 delegates and alternates to the 1996 National Democratic Convention in Chicago, at least 146 were openly gay or lesbian. The site for the 2000 Convention has not yet been selected, but a Site Advisory Committee was appointed by DNC Co-Chairs Steve Grossman and Governor Roy Romer (D-CO) to review bids from over 20 cities for the 2000 Convention. The Site Advisory Committee includes three openly gay men, including one from our area: Andrew Reyes, the Democratic candidate for the Mecklenburg County Commission District 5 seat, is joined by Terry Bean of

Andrew Reyes, Mecklenburg County Commission candidate for District 5, has been named to the party's site selection committee

Oregon and Andy Tobias of New York.

In January, The DNC Rules & Bylaws Committee voted unanimously in favor of an amendment to the sections of the 1996 delegate selection rules governing outreach and inclusion of groups traditionally active but underrepresented in the Democratic Party. The amendment, submitted by the Los Angeles County Democratic Party Chair, Garry Shay, requires state parties to develop and submit to the DNC outreach plans for delegate selection that include those "historically under-represented" in the Democratic Party because of "race/ethnicity, age, sexual orientation or disability." The new rules also require state parties to give "priority of consideration" to these underrepresented groups in a state's delegate selection process "in order to assist in

the achievement of full participation by these groups."

"This is another example of the Democratic Party's commitment to equal opportunity and the full inclusion of lesbians and gay men in the affairs of the Party at the local, state and national level," said Shay. "While the Republican National Committee spent [their meeting] debating whom to exclude from the Republican Party, the Democratic Party is building on its record of inclusion and participation," Shay continued.

Shay credited passage of the new language contained in his amendment to the work done by Soref, O'Leary, California State Assemblywoman Carole Migden and Gay & Lesbian Victory Fund Executive Director Brian Bond. He also highlighted Grossman's support for the amendment and the strong support of former White House Deputy Chief of Staff and current At-Large DNC member Harold Ickes, who spoke on behalf of the amendment at the Rules & Bylaws Committee meeting. ▼