

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

SERVING WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA'S LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDERED COMMUNITY

ALL SOULS TO BLESS SAME-SEX UNIONS

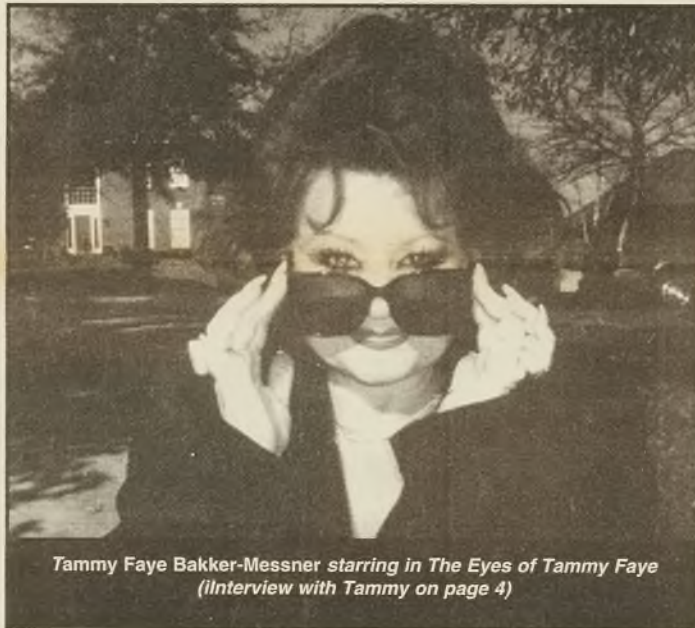
by Carolyn Ogburn

A WONDERFUL SHOCK

On Sunday, September 24, 2000, the Cathedral of All Souls in Biltmore Village made public its decision to bless the unions of same sex couples. According to an interview with the Very Reverend Todd Donatelli, the church was not trying to make a statement. "We are simply trying to take care of the needs of our congregation."

Nevertheless, a statement was made. Just prior to last Sunday's sermon, members of the Parish Council joined before the congregation and announced their mutual decision to support the gay and lesbian members of the Parish by performing same sex unions and recommitment ceremonies. "It was a shock, honestly," one parishioner told me. "A wonderful shock. And when the congregation burst into applause, tears were running down my face. I sure didn't bring enough tissue last week!"

The Council joined the congregation for the rest of the service, which continued with Reverend Donatelli's calling for those who were in agreement with the parish decision to respect the silence of those members of the church who were not clapping. In the following week, Donatelli heard from many members of the congregation who support the motion. A few parishioners have chosen to find another church; others continue to feel a part of the congregation, "agreeing to disagree." For many months, the Parish Council had been meeting to address the issues faced by the Cathedral and its parishioners. The blessing of same sex union was only one of many needs that were voiced during this time, but it was clearly one of the



Tammy Faye Bakker-Messner starring in *The Eyes of Tammy Faye*
(Interview with Tammy on page 4)

more controversial. While the Universalist Unitarian Church, the Metropolitan Community Church, and the Unity Church of Christianity have openly affirmed their support for gay and lesbian unions, the Episcopal Church at its 73rd General Convention stopped just short of such an affirmation. In a passage from the resolution on Human Sexuality that was distributed to the members of All Souls prior to last week's service, the Church acknowledged that "there are currently couples in the Body of Christ and in this Church who are living in marriage, and couples who are living in other life-long committed relationships...(and the Church) will provide for them in the prayerful support, encouragement and pastoral care necessary to live faithfully by them."

The Cathedral has the support of Western North Carolina's Bishop Robert Johnson, but Donatelli expects that not every parish in the Diocese will look kindly on the Cathedral's inclusive act. "My heart rate will probably pick up a few beats when I stand in front of (the other Church leaders)," admitted Donatelli. But it is clear that he is committed to steering the Cathedral closer to full inclusion of the GLBT community members. "If we limit ourselves to speaking only through authorized channels, we do not have a community; we have a pseudo-community", Donatelli declared during the following Sunday's service. "Does God confine the gift of the Spirit to authorized channels? When we raise questions that

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PRIDE PAC ENDORSEMENTS ANNOUNCED

LGBT GROUP ACTIVE IN COUNCIL OF STATE RACES FOR FIRST TIME

Raleigh - Equality North Carolina Political Action Committee has announced its endorsements for the November 7 General Election. This round of endorsements marks a number of exciting firsts for the organization and North Carolina's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

This year, the statewide LGBT political organization is active in the race for Governor for the first time, endorsing Democrat Mike Easley. During a meeting with representatives of ENC PAC in April, Easley became the first candidate for Governor in North Carolina history to actively seek the support of the LGBT community.

At that meeting, Easley expressed strong support for the organization's legislative agenda. As Attorney General, Easley has already demonstrated a commitment to fighting bias violence, and is committed to supporting hate crime legislation that includes sexual orientation and gender identity.

In another round of firsts, ENC PAC met with and endorsed candidates for the Council of State and Court of Appeals. These candidates pledged to use their offices to help advance equality for LGBT North Carolinians.

"It is very gratifying that so many candidates, especially for the Council of

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Photography: Lisa Emery

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