

Stripper's past is key to so-called women's evangelism

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RIVERSIDE, Calif. — Heather Veitch is not your typical evangelical Christian.

The 31-year-old married mother of two visits one strip club a month, paying for lap dances so she can talk to the strippers about God.

The Web site for the ministry she formed with two other women—JC's Girls Girls—features glamour shots of the three that were taken by a porn film director.

The three attend porn conventions, where they pass out Bibles wrapped in T-shirts that read Holy Hottie.

Veitch's approach is based on experience: In the 1990s, she worked as a stripper and, she says, acted in a handful of soft porn movies. She plays up her sex appeal because adult industry workers relate

to that, she said.

"I understand the culture of these girls. They respect that," said Veitch, whose work has received national and international media coverage.

In a posting on the ministry's Web site, Veitch said she was a successful Las Vegas stripper but inwardly feared that her lifestyle was a ticket to hell.

She began attending church, became a Christian, went to beauty school and got married. A year ago, she began reaching out to sex industry workers.

She has an ally in Matt Brown, her pastor at Sandals Church of Riverside. The 1,700-member Southern Baptist congregation is contributing \$50,000 to her ministry this year.

"What good would it do to

send the 'church lady' to an erotica convention?" Brown said. "She's going to get laughed out of the building."

Veitch said she doesn't keep track of how many strippers they successfully reach. Ultimately, she and Brown hope to offer alternatives, such as college scholarships, to women in the sex industry. But Veitch doesn't think the women should have to quit their jobs before entering a church.

"What we say to that is, 'Do we ask gluttons to stop eating too much before they come to church?'" Veitch said. "Sin is sin."

Her ministry partners include a part-time first grade teacher and a stay-at-home mother.

On the 'Net:
<http://jcsgirls.com/>

Pastor supportive of gays to end performing civil same-sex marriages

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ASHEVILLE — An Asheville pastor says he will no longer perform civil marriages for the state because North Carolina denies homosexual couples the right to legally marry.

The Rev. Joe Hoffman, pastor of First Congregational United Church of Christ, announced his decision in a Sunday morning sermon.

"When I sign that piece of paper for marriage, as an agent of the state, I give (het-

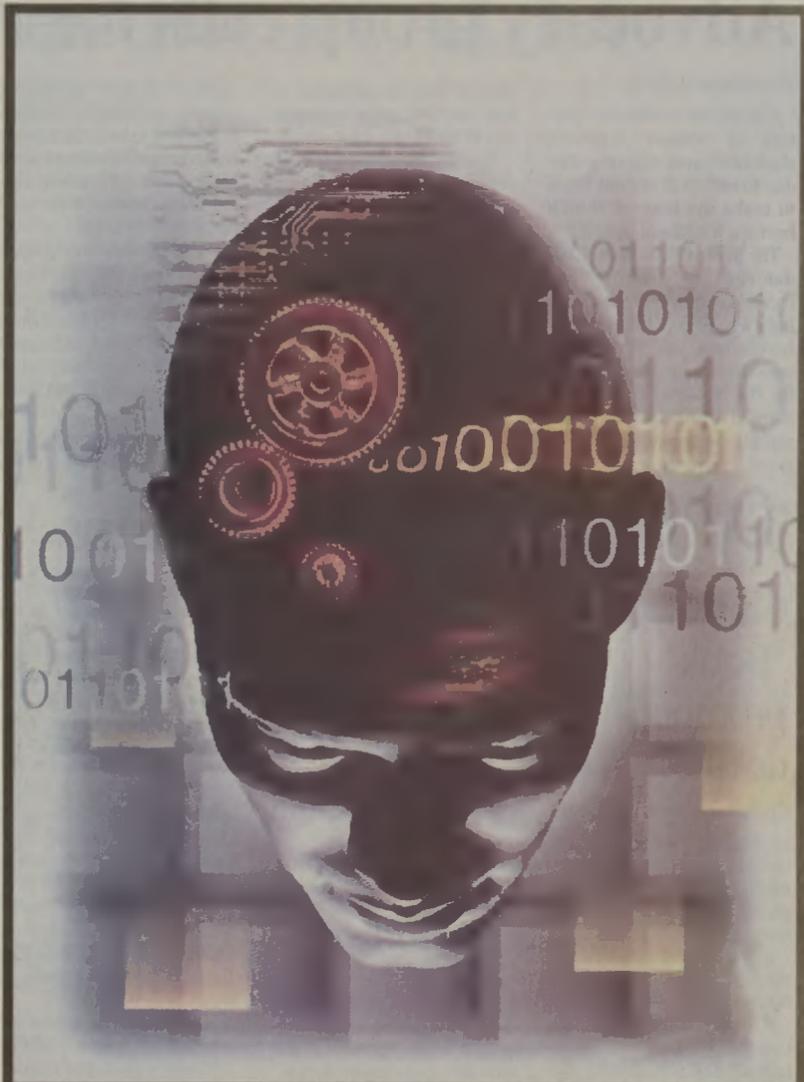
erosexual couples) about 1,100 rights and privileges that gay and lesbian couples do not get," Hoffman said. "I believe in equal rights for all people. As a minister, I was participating in a system that was unjust."

Last year, the 1 million-member United Church of Christ announced its support of gay marriage, becoming the first major U.S. Christian denomination to do so.

But Hoffman said his decision was personal and didn't

necessarily reflect the stand of his 200-member church.

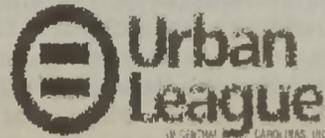
"I hope it will prompt people to think," Hoffman said. "I hope they will question what this is all about. I think for heterosexuals, it will be a small inconvenience to have a religious ceremony and then get it legalized. But I hope it calls attention to the great injustice that people who are gay and lesbian live with every day."



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