

CAROLINA CLIPS

Former Baptist Leader Urges Compassion

CHARLOTTE—Speaking from both a position of faith and from his personal experience, former Southern Baptist Convention president Rev. Jimmy Allen said that churches must develop compassion for people with AIDS or fail in their mission as centers of faith.

"Families of faith across this nation are dysfunctional," Allen was quoted as saying by the *Raleigh News and Observer*. "They fail to realize that what we need to be is compassionate. If we fail, we fail to be what God wants."

Allen's remarks were part of an April 23 sermon to the congregation of Myers Park Presbyterian Church.

Though Christians are involved in caring for people with AIDS, Allen said more need to join the effort. He acknowledged that some may still be afraid to be associated in any way with the epidemic, though, saying, "The stigma has not diminished in the minds of a lot of churches."

Allen commended those members of the Myers Park congregation who are currently ministering to PWAs, and encouraged others to do so, too. He also said that while other churches don't want to deal with the issue of AIDS, the epidemic cannot be ignored any longer.

"There's a romance to distant need," Allen told his audience. "We like our catastrophes to be in distant places that we can come back from."

Allen, who describes himself as the last of the moderate Southern Baptist Convention presidents, is no stranger to the AIDS crisis. Four of his family members have been infected with HIV.

His daughter-in-law Lydia contracted HIV as the result of a tainted blood transfusion and died in 1993 at the age of 37. Both of her sons were also infected. Bryan died in 1985 at eight months of age; 12-year-old Matthew is near death in Dallas, TX.

Allen also has a gay son, 41-year-old Skip, who has tested HIV-positive.

Allen is writing a book about his family's experience.

Sex Ed Debate Flares in McDowell County

MARION, NC—After an eighth-grade teacher came under fire in February for conducting a worksheet discussion with her students about various sexual activities, the McDowell County Board of Education approved the formation of a task force to create new guidelines for the teaching of sex education.

According to a report in the *McDowell News*, the board's March 21 decision calls for a task force to develop a family life education policy that would spell out what teachers can tell their students about sex.

Cynthia Davis, health education coordinator, presented a first draft of the proposed policy. It says family life education will encourage "pro-family relationships and the traditional pro-family atmosphere," and that sexual abstinence until marriage will be encouraged and promoted during each grade level of the family life course.

The policy further states that the terms "husband," "wife," and "spouse" will be used in the curriculum instead of "sex

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The Front Page

FREE!

Vol. 16, No. 8

April 28, 1995

Serving gay men and lesbians in the Carolinas since 1979

Chapel Hill Recognizes Partnerships

By Beth Harrison

In a move gay rights activists hailed as historic, the Chapel Hill Town Council voted unanimously to allow residents to register their domestic partnerships and to extend some benefits to the partners of town employees.

The April 24 vote makes Chapel Hill the second town in the state to officially recognize domestic partnerships. The neighboring town of Carrboro approved similar measures last September; to date, five couples have registered their relationships with the town clerk. Prior to the domestic partner measures, both towns long-standing prohibitions on discrimination based on sexual orientation in the towns' hiring practices. In fact, it was 25 years ago this year that Chapel Hill first included affectional preference in its employment anti-discrimination policy.

The Chapel Hill Town Council approved a definition of domestic partnership as two people who live together in an intimate relationship outside of marriage in which the partners share financial responsibility.

The measures, proposed last year by Chapel Hill Town Council member Mark Chilton, give gay and lesbian couples—as well as unmarried heterosexual couples—recognition as families. Council members also approved a series of associated policy changes. Among them:

—Town employees will be able to take paid sick leave to care for their partners or their partners' children.

—The town's development ordinance will contain a new definition of the word "family" to include registered domestic partnerships.

—Supervisory relationships between town employees who are domestic partners will be prohibited.

—Domestic partners of elected officials will be required to disclose their real estate holdings.

The policies became effective immediately. A measure to extend health insurance benefits to domestic partners was not voted on during the April 24 meeting. Instead, the council decided to defer consideration of that issue while they explore the matter.

The delay was prompted by a memo to the council from Town Attorney Ralph Karpinos in which he said the town does not have clear authority to provide insurance for unmarried partners. Karpinos cited state law which gives Chapel Hill only the authority to provide insurance to employees' dependents, noting that state statutes do not include domestic partners in the definition of the word "dependents."

Town Manager Cal Horton told the council in a memo that eight town employees would enroll their same-sex partners in health insurance programs, and that 22 employees would enroll their opposite-sex partners if given the opportunity.

Council Member Lee Pavao said the issue is not

going to be forgotten, though.

"I would like to see us take the challenge on benefits," Pavao told the council. The council then directed town staffers to research state law and Chapel Hill's options regarding health insurance.

Prior to its votes, the Town Council heard from several members of the public who supported the measures. No one spoke against them.

Gloria Faley, a Chapel Hill resident who has been with her partner for 17 years, told the members about the many practical problems that non-traditional families confront. She spoke of tax inequities, child custody, parental rights and responsibilities, and issues that arise when one partner becomes ill or dies.

Faley told the council she believes in "the true meaning of family values—love, respect, and commitment," and that the measure will help strengthen families.

Dan Coleman, a member of the Orange County Greens, a local environmental group, said the measures will help deal with social fragmentation by continuing Chapel Hill's long tradition of supporting non-traditional families.

"It's important that the Chapel Hill Town Council speaks out against the rhetoric of hate," he said. He added that he believes the measures will foster relationships of care and commitment.

Compared to the fractious debates that marked Carrboro's domestic partner vote last year, the positive tenor of the Chapel Hill town meeting was a relief for local activists.

Doug Ferguson, a Carrboro resident who came to the meeting to show support for the measure, said, "I was surprised there was no one in opposition to the measure. At least if they were there, they didn't speak."

He added, "The difference between the Carrboro and Chapel Hill town meetings was like night and day. The only reason I can come up with is that when domestic partner registration began in Carrboro, the world didn't end."

"I think that helped allay a lot of people's fears." After the vote, supporters of the measure expressed their appreciation for the Town Council's decision.

Faley said the decision was especially important in the current political climate.

"The mood of the nation has been really negative as far as gays and lesbians go. This is like a breath of fresh air."

She added, "I'm proud of the council members for taking a stand."

Former Town Council member Joe Herzenberg, who was the state's first openly gay elected official, echoed Faley's sentiments.

"This is a very happy occasion," he said. "We're especially grateful to council members Mark Chilton and Lee Pavao for their support, and to Cal Horton, who enthusiastically supported all the various reasons for the town council to pass this measure."

Herzenberg also thanked the members of the public who spoke in support of the measures.

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Triad Political Group Forms

In an effort to strengthen the political acumen and clout of the Triad area's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community, area leaders have begun laying the groundwork for a new political organization. Organizers plan a kick-off potluck dinner on Monday, May 22, in Kernersville; the dinner is open to anyone interested in helping to develop the group and its agenda.

The idea for a political organization originated among several members of an informal group, Power of One, which has met monthly in the Triad since last fall. While Power of One consists mostly of area business leaders and activists who get together to network and exchange information, some people saw a need for greater political organizing and activism in the wake of last November's elections.

Since Power of One was already established and in place, its members decided to act as a springboard for a new group devoted to grassroots political organizing. While the agenda is still very much in the development stage, organizers expect the organization's functions to be varied. Tentative plans include educating elected officials about the

issues confronting their lesbian and gay constituents; working with local media to ensure fair and accurate coverage of the community; holding voter registration drives; and keeping voters informed.

At this point, organizers have no intention of establishing a political action committee. Instead, they want to form an organization that can lobby for particular issues such as the Employment Non-Discrimination Act and reform of the state's Crime Against Nature law, can campaign for specific candidates, and can conduct business without the constraints imposed on PACs.

John Neal, owner of White Rabbit Books and Things, is a member of Power of One and an organizer of the political group. He said, "This organization will work to affect positive political change for our community. Anyone who would like to join us in that work is welcome."

For more information about the organization or the potluck, or for directions, call Neal at (910) 272-7604; Jeff Lawson of the Triad Business and Professional Guild at (910) 274-8759; or Flora Isasi of P-FLAG at (910) 760-8865.