

The FRONT PAGE

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Serving the Carolinas Gay & Lesbian Communities for Over Eighteen Years

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Jim Osborne, right, a friend of Matthew Shepard at the University of Wyoming, talks with an unidentified friend after reading a poem about Shepard at a news conference in Pittsburgh, Friday, Nov. 13, 1998. The news conference announced the formation of a strategy to coordinate efforts of gay and lesbian groups seeking equal treatment. (AP Photo/Keith Stakovic)

Friend Of Slain Man Urges Activism

PITTSBURGH (AP) — When college student Matthew Shepard was beaten to death in an apparent hate crime last month, the world was robbed of its image as a civilized society, a friend said at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's annual conference, "Creating Change."

Jim Osborne, who attended the University of Wyoming with Shepard and carries his picture in his wallet, urged people at a national gay-rights conference to get involved in grass-roots efforts to strengthen hate crimes legislation.

"It's up to us now. Don't give in to the hate; hate is deadly," Osborne said October 13. "A young, incredible voice has been silenced. Be his voice."

Borrowing a page from conservatives, NGLTF is urging community leaders to promote civil rights legislation at the local level. A new campaign, "Equality Begins at Home," aims to strengthen local efforts through town meetings, rallies, prayer breakfasts and the display of portions of the AIDS quilt during the week of March 21-27.

Task force executive director Kerry Lobel

said her group would give \$5,000 to the campaign in each state. The idea, she said, is that gay people should not have to flee their hometowns to live well. She cited a popular stereotype that all homosexuals live on the East or West Coast.

"So many of us fled our homes for those places because we wanted a different kind of life," she said. "But people are not fleeing any longer."

Among those in middle America was Shepard, who was found on Oct. 7, beaten and tied to a fence post outside Laramie, Wyo. He died a few days later at a hospital. Two men have been charged with his murder, and authorities believe the crime was motivated at least in part by Shepard's homosexuality.

"Never again will my day get better because I met Matt walking across campus," said Osborne. "We don't get to know what his favorite book was, or his favorite song."

Nadine Smith, an activist from Florida who attended the conference, said small-town change "will go down in history as a major turning point in our movement."

Congregation Argues Same-Sex Resolution

■ Ministers say they can officiate at same-sex ceremonies; some members reject that interpretation.

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (AP) — A statement approved November 15 by members of Wake Forest Baptist Church stopped short of affirming same-sex unions, but asked that God bless "all loving, committed and exclusive relationships between two people."

However, according to a report in the *Winston-Salem Journal* (11/17/98), members of the church differ in their interpretation of the statement.

Wake Forest Baptist's ministers, the Rev. Richard Groves and the Rev. Lynn Rhoades, say that the statement gives them the right to officiate at same-sex ceremonies — a break with their state and national Baptist conventions.

Rev. Warren Carr, the former senior minister of the church, said that the ministers' jobs may be in danger if they conduct such ceremonies. He noted that an amendment that would have spelled out the ministers' right to officiate at such marriages was ruled out of order.

In the absence of the amendment, Rhoades bases her assertion on the first part of the statement: "Believing, as we do as Baptists, in the doctrine of the Priesthood of Believers and in the competency of every Believer to interpret the Scriptures responsibly and faithfully, we acknowledge that only God can bestow spiritual blessings."

That part "affirms and supports our right to interpret the Scripture," she said. When they perform same-sex ceremonies, she said, their jobs will be safe.

The vote on this statement was the congregation's latest event in a year of

wrestling with the divisive issue of same-sex unions. Joe Foster and Susan Parker, gay members of the board of deacons, had filed a motion asking that the church affirm same-sex unions.

The decision followed a tense two-hour meeting behind closed doors attended by about 125 of the 325-member church, which meets on the Wake Forest University campus but is not governed by the school.

Groves characterized the statement — approved by a vote of 90-33 — as a compromise between those who wanted the church to affirm same-sex unions and their opponents.

The congregation had previously given permission to use church space for same-sex ceremonies. Groves said there have been a couple of requests for same-sex ceremonies but no definite plans.

"I'm pleased our ministers have the opportunity to participate in these ceremonies," Susan Parker told the *Raleigh News & Observer* (11/16/98). "It's important for gays to know this service is now available through Wake Forest Baptist Church."

The Rev. Mac Brunson, the Baptist State Convention president, had warned that the convention would end its relationship with Wake Forest Baptist if the church voted to affirm same-sex unions.

After the vote, he said, "Regardless of how they phrase it, they're sanctioning same-sex marriage."

The state convention in 1992 ended its relationships with Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh and Olin T. Binkley Memorial Baptist Church in Chapel Hill. They are the only two convention churches that have publicly affirmed gay unions.

The convention cuts ties with member churches by refusing to accept their donations. Beyond that, the ties are symbolic. And so is the severance of those ties, said the Rev. Nancy Petty of Pullen Memorial.

"What the Baptist (convention) did to Pullen and Binkley and now, possibly, Wake Forest, it really goes against what Baptists have historically affirmed: the autonomy of every church to discern God's leading," Petty told the *Winston-Salem Journal* (11/16/98).

The issue is not going away, said the Rev. W.W. Finlator, a former minister of

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Full Text of Statement

The following is the full text of the statement approved by Wake Forest Baptist Church members on October 15:

"Believing, as we do as Baptists, in the doctrine of the Priesthood of Believers and in the competency of every Believer to interpret the scriptures responsibly and faithfully, we acknowledge that only God can bestow spiritual blessings.

"Therefore, though we cannot, as a church, bless any relationship, we do with joy petition God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, that He bless, insofar as it conforms to His will, any and all loving, committed, and exclusive relationships between two people."