

Church scholarships for gay seminarians

CLEVELAND (Jun 16) — The United Church of Christ has created a \$500,000 scholarship fund for people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender and are studying for a master of divinity degree.

The 1.4 million-member United Church of Christ is based in Cleveland.

The scholarship fund was named for an openly gay UCC minister, the Rev. William Johnson, a staff member of the church.

Johnson says he lost his seminary work-study job in 1970 when he proclaimed his sexual orientation. He says that only a scholarship arranged by a church member kept him from dropping out because of financial hardship.

The program will start next June.

Man bashes 'gay dog'

OCALA, Fla. (Jun 16) — George S. Finley, 58, charged with fatally beating a pet dog to death because he believed the animal was gay, has been convicted of animal cruelty, news sources report.

Finley told the court he was upset that his wife's neutered male terrier mix dog repeatedly tried to have sex with another family pet, a male Jack Russell terrier.

Finley insisted he hit the dog accidentally, but the animal later had to be euthanized. Police said Finley hit the dog brutally in the head with a vacuum cleaner attachment arm and then hurled it against a tree. "He felt that the dog was a queer-type dog and it made him angry," said police Capt. Mike McQuaig.

Iowa Univ. OKs partner benefits

WAHPETON, Iowa (Jun 15) — The regents of the University of Iowa have approved a plan to expand health insurance benefits to include gay and lesbian partners of school employees by a 5-3 vote.

Charles Wright, a board director, warned the regents before the vote that their decision "may have severe implications for the board."

Mary Sue Coleman, president of the university, told the regents the proposal had the "strong recommendation" of faculty and staff at the school.

Arrests at Baptist convention

ORLANDO, Fla. (Jun 14) — Police arrested 28 demonstrators from the religious organization Souforce protesting at the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention June 13-14.

Police later released 6 of the protesters on bond, but the other 22 were kept overnight in jail pending a court hearing. All were charged with unlawful assembly.

The Rev. Mel White, co-founder of Souforce, said, "Baptists have made it clear that sexual and gender minorities are not welcome in their church. We are committed to the nonviolent teachings of Jesus, Gandhi and King, and we are going to bring the truth relentlessly to churches that condemn or misrepresent us."

Some 190 people were arrested at a Souforce protest earlier in May in Cleveland during the annual gathering of the United Methodist Church, and the organization is planning similar demonstrations at annual gatherings of

other denominations this year, including the Presbyterian Church (Long Beach, Calif.), the Episcopal Church (Denver), and the Reclaiming American for Christ conference (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.).

The Baptists adopted a statement during the convention that only men can be pastors in the church and strengthening its condemnation of homosexuality. Resolutions also commended talk show host Laura Schlessinger for her "courageous stand" against homosexuality and called on President Clinton to leave the church because of his support of gay rights issues.

Rev. White said the Baptist church had "become the enemy of God's gay children."

Boy Scouts sue state

BRIDGEPORT, Conn. (Jun 14) — The Boy Scouts of America has filed a federal lawsuit against the state of Connecticut, charging that it was "selectively targeted" by being removed from a list of charities eligible for payroll deductions because of its policy of barring gays.

The state's human rights commission ruled in May that the Scouts can't be on a list of charities eligible for state payroll deductions because its anti-gay policies violate state anti-bias laws.

The suit charges the state with "selective targeting of the Boy Scouts for exclusion based on their dislike of the Boy Scouts' message."

The suit claims several charitable organizations are on the state's approved list for payroll donations that also restrict their services, including groups that serve the elderly, specific racial groups or individual religious denominations.

The U.S. Supreme Court is currently considering a lawsuit that challenges the Scouts' right to bar homosexuals from leadership positions within its troops.

Court upholds firing of lesbian

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (Jun 14) — A federal appeals court has ruled that Baptist Memorial Health Care Corp. is within its rights in firing a student services specialist four years ago because of her sexual orientation.

Glynda Hall sued the College of Health Sciences' parent group in 1998, charging religious bias. A district court judge dismissed the case and the appeals court ruling upheld that decision.

Hall claims she was fired after the school learned she was a lay minister at a church that welcomes gays and lesbians.

The appeals court ruled that religious institutions are exempt from civil rights anti-bias laws, even if they receive federal funding and declare they are equal opportunity employers.

Hall's lawyer, Clyde Keenan, said the ruling "would turn a lot of case law on its head." He said, "One of our main points was that you can't have it both ways. You can't get the government to give you money and say we're not going to discriminate — and then turn around and discriminate."

Keenan said, however, he was unsure if Hall would appeal the ruling.

HIV/AIDS Council: New appointees

WASHINGTON, D.C. (Jun 14) — Health & Human Services Secretary Donna

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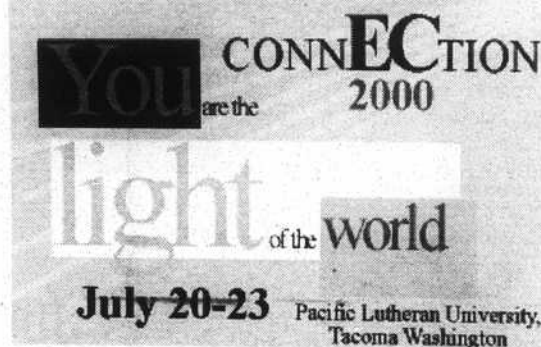
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