



Fortunate Families Newsletter

Number 41

August 2008

Catholic Families Advocating Respect and Justice for their Gay & Lesbian Children

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Words to ponder

“If God is the source of truth and Pope Paul teaches the truth (through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit), then my conscience has to lock-on and follow it. To follow my conscience is to follow the truth.”

-- Madison Bishop Robert Morlino, writing about Human Vitae in the Madison Catholic Herald

“When he was still known as Fr. Joseph Ratzinger, our Pope wrote the following in a commentary on Gaudium et Spes: ‘Above the pope, as an expression of the binding claim of Church authority, stands one conscience, which has to be obeyed first of all, if need be against the demands of Church authority.’”

-- Christine Thomas, letter to editor, Madison Catholic Herald.

“The idea of teaching that cannot change is itself a heresy known as scotosis—the deliberate and willful darkening of the mind that results from refusal to acknowledge God’s presence and power at work. It suggests that the Holy Spirit is now merely resting on its heavenly laurels.”

-- Scott Pomfret, "Since My Last Confession: A Gay Catholic Memoir [NY: Arcade, 2008], pps. 132-3.

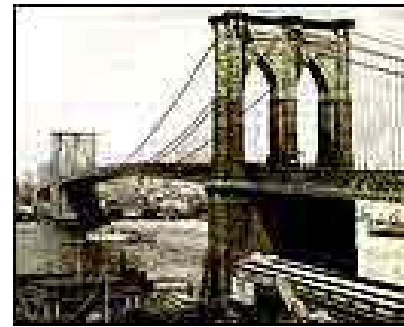
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Thank you for your love: A ministry grows in Brooklyn

By Rosemary Grebin Palms

The Gay Catholic Ministry of St. Augustine Roman Catholic Church in Park Slope, Brooklyn, New York, has just completed its first year of existence. Our chairperson was asked to describe who we are to the parish council, and this is what he said: “I am Gay and Catholic and involved in the Gay Ministry of St. Augustine. As Catholics, we are taught to love one another, and as Gay Catholics we only want to be loved in return. Your acceptance, love and encouragement of our Ministry only strengthen our faith and bring us closer to God. So, on behalf of the Gay Catholic Ministry, thank you for your love.”

Our committee recently sponsored a viewing and discussion of the documentary, “For the Bible Tells Me So.” This award-winning film, recommended by Fortunate Families, follows the stories of five diverse families as they explore Christian interpretations of the biblical references to homosexuality in the context of gay and lesbian family members coming out.

The event was advertised by email and in the church bulletins of nearby Catholic churches. Then came a snag. Someone called the bishop’s office to protest the showing of what he took to be a promotion of heretical teachings, and he threatened to call the papal nuncio in Washington, D.C. The bishop’s vicar called our pastor.



Because our pastor was in the midst of preparations for a transfer to another parish, he was worried that our one-year-old gay ministry would be quashed as soon as he departed.

The committee decided to show the film, but to change the venue to a member's home. In short, the evening was a great success, but not in the way we had anticipated.

Fifteen of us gathered for wine and cheese; we watched the film with rapt attention and a few tears. I was prepared to lead a discussion of the most relevant biblical references (Leviticus 20 and Romans 1). But somehow with this audience of mostly gay, mostly professional, mostly articulate and sympathetic folks, our committee chair alertly re-directed our conversation by asking us to join hands for a moment of prayer and silence. What happened next was described by those present in subsequent (slightly edited) email messages:



"I was feeling disappointed and angry last night -- about the change of location, about the lone complainant. The film was great but, also, a case of preaching to the converted. I was thinking this morning about how the circumstances that led us to another venue gave way to important talk which would (likely) not have taken place under the original conditions. I feel blessed to have been in that powerful assembly last night. It's inspiring and fortifying. To new friends from other parishes -- it was great to meet you all and I look forward to knowing you -- and your work -- more."

"I think it is fair to say that we all learned something from last night, because I was ready to throw in the towel when I heard about the change of location. I became very present to what I would have missed by not attending, and I thank you all. It was an amazing experience all around and I thank you all for being a part of it, participating in this mission."

"I came home and told my partner I had been to a party! Your gracious welcome, the high-caliber people and the heartfelt conversation were truly uplifting. Believe me, I will be talking "behind your backs" about this gathering at my parish and in our bishops' meeting!! Great Church last night!!"

"I loved your calling us to silence and holding hands. It moved us from head to heart and to listening."

"I was moved by the words of those who articulated their frustration and ire the other night. Something shifted, for/with/in me. I'm with them, the angry guys -- one of them, I guess, in that."

"I sometimes get tired of, and impatient with, the church's responses to its gay brothers and sisters and their families. On the other hand, I did find when I was a school principal that patience and diplomacy were the only ways to really create change in people's attitudes and actions. In a slow but sure way we educated parents about our approach to including discussion/literature about gays and lesbians with our children at the school."

"That gathering last night was important and really quite magical."



Right or Rite, Civil Discussion in Order

By Thomas J. Reese, Senior fellow Woodstock Theological Center, Jesuit priest. May 27, 2008. With permission, On Faith at washingtonpost.com.

For almost 2,000 years, Christianity has considered any sexual activity outside of a marriage between a man and a woman to be sinful. This included prostitution, bigamy, adultery, fornication and homosexual activity. In many societies formed by Christianity, these activities and divorce were illegal, although enforcement of the laws was spotty.

The separation of church and state, as well as the desire to free private moral decisions from state control, has led to the legalization of divorce and the decriminalization of birth control, adultery, fornication and homosexual activity (but not prostitution and bigamy). Societal views of homosexuality have changed as we have become aware that homosexuality is an orientation that is not chosen.

While few Americans support the criminalization of homosexual activity, a majority still opposes state-sanctioned homosexual marriages (see Pew Forum survey). Caught in the middle of this emotion-filled issue, politicians came up with "domestic partnerships" as a compromise that gives many or all of the rights of

married couples to gay partners but continued to reserve the “m” word for heterosexuals.

Recently some Christian churches have changed their view of homosexual activity. These churches argue that if God made a person a homosexual then it would not be wrong for that person to establish a committed and loving homosexual relationship that included sexual activity. Some churches have gone so far as to celebrate these relationships as Christian marriages, even if these marriages are not recognized by the state. Such decisions have been controversial even within the churches that have approved homosexual marriages.

The Catholic hierarchy does not support ecclesial or state-sponsored homosexual marriage and still argues that sex outside of marriage, including homosexual activity, is sinful. It no longer supports the criminalization of homosexual activity, and it argues against discrimination against homosexuals. It teaches that homosexuals should be loved and respected (see “Always our Children,” 1997).

The California Supreme Court, like the Massachusetts Supreme Court, has ruled that the state constitution requires that the state recognize same-sex marriages. The court specifically said that churches would not be required to perform such weddings.

Many, even some who support gay marriage, believe that this was an unwise decision on the part of the court. California already allowed domestic partnerships with most of the rights of married couples. By



rejecting what had been a political compromise, the court has made it inevitable that a state constitutional amendment will be put on the ballot in California. The amendment will not only overturn the decision but may also eliminate domestic partnerships.

I agree with those who believe that the California Supreme Court’s decision was unwise, but I would oppose a constitutional amendment that would forbid gay marriages. I believe that this issue should be dealt with by state legislatures, not by the courts or referendums.

Homosexual relationships exist in American society in not insignificant numbers. Even if you consider such relationships immoral, it can be argued that the state has an interest in encouraging these relationships to be stable and long term rather than multiple and short term. State legislatures are used to coming up with compromises that are acceptable to most of the people. They can also return to legislation to adjust it based on experience and future circumstances.

Some argue that gay marriage is a threat to marriage as a heterosexual institution. I have never understood this argument. In an apartment building filled with unmarried couples, both gay and hetero, if all the gay couples got married, it would seem to me that their example would inspire the heterosexuals to think about marriage. I would prefer to reserve the word “marriage” to heterosexuals, but I don’t think it is worth fighting over.

I think it is foolish for churches to expend their political capital opposing the legalization of gay marriage. There are many other

issues of greater importance: abortion, hunger, global warming, peace, health care, etc. Pro-life churches and organizations should especially be suspicious when gay marriage is given more prominence as an issue than abortion. Money and resources that would have gone to pro-life work are being siphoned off to oppose gay marriage.

The issue of gay marriage is not going to go away quickly. It is a highly emotional issue that continues to divide our country. Everyone needs to step back, take a deep breath and count to ten before saying anything. Proponents and opponents need to respect each other and be civil in their debate. My guess is that those who are most civil will win the day.

As editor of the Catholic weekly magazine "America" (americamagazine.org), Rev. Thomas J. Reese promoted discussion on current issues facing the Catholic Church and the world. The "On Faith" panelist is author of Inside the Vatican: The Politics and Organization of the Catholic Church. He is frequently quoted as an expert on Catholic issues.



Position paper on Courage

By Casey Lopata

The Catholic Pastoral Committee on Sexual Minorities (CPCSM), the grassroots coalition of lay and religious pastoral ministers in the St. Paul/Minneapolis area, has prepared a position paper on the Courage apostolate titled, “Beyond Courage to Authenticity.” CPCSM describes Courage as a self-proclaimed “pro-chastity” group that “advocates treating gay persons as if they were suffering from a disease tantamount to

alcoholism that must be arrested through their participation in support groups to help maintain sexual abstinence through the practice of life-long celibacy.”

The position paper is a response to the selection of Rev. Paul Check, Chief Executive Officer of Courage, as a keynote speaker for the Region 8 Deacons’ Conference hosted by the St. Paul/Minneapolis Archdiocese and Archbishop John Nienstedt. CPCSM sent the position paper to all deacons serving in dioceses in Minnesota “warning them of the unethical philosophy and practices advocated by Courage.”



The position paper addresses Courage’s mission and philosophy, and its friendly relationship with the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH). The paper also discusses alternative Catholic perspectives on homosexuality, and Church teaching on homosexuality.

For more information, and to view and/or download the letter to the deacons and the position paper, you can go to the CPCSM website (www.cpcsm.org).



Seeing with Heart

By John Montague, organizer of Canadian Day of Reflection events

One recent Saturday in June, Catholic parents of lesbian daughters and gay sons met for a Day of Reflection in Scarborough, Ontario. Encouraged by the 1997 Bishops Document ‘Always Our

Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children’, Canadian Catholic Parents started meeting six years ago. The Bishops suggest parents:

“...consider joining a parent’s support group or participating in a retreat designed for Catholic parents of homosexual children. Other parents have travelled the same road as you but may have journeyed even further. They can share effective ways of handling delicate family situations such as how to tell family members and friends about your child, how to express homosexuality to younger children, and how to relate to your son or daughter’s friends in a Christian way.”

This year’s event had a mixture of first timers meeting with veterans. Parents came from as far as Sudbury, Peterborough, Orillia and Hamilton. Parents are at various stages of learning about and accepting their child’s sexual orientation. A major topic that people found helpful was the ‘Primacy of Conscience’. As Casey Lopata who presented a few years ago writes: “Conscience is often described as one of Catholic teachings best kept secrets, especially in regards to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender-related ministry.” What does the Church teach? Vatican II Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World spelled it out clearly: “Deep within a person’s conscience one discovers a law which one has not laid upon one’s self but which one must obey. Its voice, ever calling the person to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in that person’s heart at the right moment...For one has in his or her heart a law inscribed by God. One’s conscience is one’s



most secret core and one’s sanctuary. There one is alone with God whose voice echoes in that person’s depths.” Chapter I, Section 16.

As a gay Catholic man, organizing these retreat days has been a calling and a privilege. The anxiety and hurt that Catholic parents experience is palpable. One mother told me how she asked her Pastor if there was any group she could go to for support. He said there was nothing. In the six years I have heard parents tell their stories, one particular one moved me the most. A father of a large family said: ‘I have always wondered why God created me. I realized it was so that my three gay sons would know that they have a father who loves them’.

Catholic Parents experience a ‘coming out’ of their own. It is frequently embarrassing to tell family members, that their son or daughter is gay. Questions about their child’s marital status or dating can be awkward and distance people from their own relatives. Our Catholic community is coming to realize that sexual orientation of whichever type is not a choice, but a gift from God.

Some parents who have been coming for a few years feel called to educate Bishops, pastoral ministers, and new parents. A few guidelines include:

DO learn as much as you can about the broad spectrum of Catholic thinking on issues relating to homosexuality from reputable sources before initiating such a ministry.

DO be prepared to patiently answer fundamental questions,

respond to objections, face opposition, and calm the fears of some parishioners.

DO become familiar with official Catholic Church documents that provide a solid foundation for this ministry and a defense against accusations of unorthodoxy.

DO listen to the personal stories of gay and lesbian Catholics who have abandoned the Church or feel alienated, excluded, or unwelcome.

DO all you can to promote rational, calm, and respectful discussion among people who have different views and opinions about homosexuality.

DON'T expect immediate 100% enthusiasm or cooperation from everyone. It's a threatening topic for many people for many different reasons.

DON'T project the image that this ministry only involves homosexual people and their parents. Every interested parishioner can be invited to participate.

DON'T fail to keep everyone involved fully informed of problems, developments, successes, and disappointments. Everyone has to be on the same page.

DON'T be afraid to talk about the ministry publicly, and don't fail to publicize it in the usual channels of parish communication.

DON'T be discouraged if the initial response is small. Even a handful of people can begin to meet for education, support, and prayer. Start small and grow slowly.

July 2008
Toronto Canada



GLAAD series suggests ways to more effectively discuss issues of LGBT justice with undecided Americans

By Jerry Furlong

The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) has recently introduced a new website feature titled, "Talking About." This series is a set of "discussion resources" designed to help the gay community and its allies more effectively explain key issues of LGBT justice to open-minded Americans.

The series was co-authored by GLAAD and several other organizations that served as contributing editors. It treats six very topical subjects of key importance to LGBT persons and their supporters. The issues, GLAAD emphasizes, "are really about basic human values and needs – our ability to earn a living, be safe in our communities, serve our country and take care of the ones we love."

Specifically, the topics included in the series are overall gay and transgender issues; employment protections for gay and transgender Americans; marriage and relationship recognition for gay couples; adoption and gay parents; hate crimes laws and the "don't ask, don't tell" policy. Each of the six topics is treated in a 4-page presentation.

What distinguishes the series is GLAAD's emphasis on language and approach as essential keys in

getting our message across to "those undecided Americans who can move from ambivalent to supportive when we reach out in terms they understand." Stay away from technical, abstract and highly charged language in your conversations, GLAAD advises. "While this language may be familiar and comfortable to us, it can derail discussion with those who are conflicted, yet supportive, or simply not aware of how their actions – or their inaction – can hurt everyday Americans."

The series suggests two approaches for talking about gay and transgender issues. The first is to "emphasize common ground" – or the common values and beliefs that gay and straight persons share. This style of approach, the series contends, will "help reduce the sense of 'otherness' that some Americans feel when they think about gay people." The second approach is to "illustrate concrete harms" – to help people understand the specific and pervasive injustices that gay and transgender Americans face."

When talking about marriage and relationship recognition, for example, the conversation is often framed in terms of "rights" and "benefits" that are being "demanded." But most people see marriage as something different. "It's about caring, responsibility and commitment." So the series offers these suggestions:

Emphasize common ground: For example: "Marriage is about committed couples who want to make a lifelong promise to take care of and be responsible for each other."

Illustrate concrete harms: For example: "Denying committed couples the security and legal protections of marriage hurts them;

it's wrong to make it harder for committed couples to take care of and be responsible for each other."

In discussing gay and transgender issues, the series recommends basing our comments on the general understanding that the discussion is about "everyday Americans who want the same chance as everyone else to earn a living, be safe in their communities, serve their country and take care of the ones they love."

With this approach, the series points out, the words 'gay' and 'transgender' appear sparingly. GLAAD explains, "That's because this isn't just about gay people. It's not just about transgender people. And it's not just about straight people. It's about all of us."

The issues covered in the series have special relevancy during this political season – especially for those involved in public discourse or ministry. The series may be downloaded at GLAAD's website <http://www.glaad.org/talkingaboutseries/>.

(Editor's note: As long as we're talking about the "Talking About" series, you might also want to visit or revisit the Fortunate Families website educational series, "Let's Talk About Homosexuality." You'll find it under the 'Resources' tab.)

Stories make a difference!

Did something you or someone you know do or say make a positive difference? Make someone more empathetic—perhaps a family member or priest or bishop or legislator or a LGBT person? Please tell us about it. Your story might encourage others whose stories might be exactly what someone else needs to hear!



Did You Know ... ???

A University of Illinois study of lesbian and gay persons living in downstate Illinois found that those with children and strong religious beliefs were more likely to legalize their relationship and hold a commitment ceremony.

-- For more info:
www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/116827.php

"Scores" of United Methodist ministers in California have put their jobs on the line by saying they have or will conduct weddings for gay or lesbian couples. Another 82 retired pastors have signed a resolution offering to perform weddings for ministers who feel they can't do it themselves.

-- Los Angeles Times, July 17, 2008

In a Washington Post-ABC poll, 75% of Americans said openly gay people should be allowed to serve in the U.S. military. This compares to 62% favorable in 2001, and 44% in 1993.

-- [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), July 19, 2008

A study conducted by four retired high-ranking military officers states that allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military is unlikely to cause any significant risk to troops.

-- *Equally Speaking*, HRC, July 9, 2008

About 7 million LGBT Americans have school-aged children. The survey also found that LGBT parents are more likely to be involved in their children's education than the rest of the population.

-- *Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education network (GLSEN), Family Equality Council, and Colage*

The High Court in Ireland has ruled that a lesbian couple living together in a long-term committed relationship with a child can be regarded as a de facto family, thus entitled to rights under the European Convention on Human Rights.

-- *Irish Times*, April 17, 2008



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Calendar

Sep 6 (Sat), 2008



Day of Reflection for Catholic Parents of Lesbian Daughters and Gay Sons and Family Members. St. Matthew's Parish, 8:30am to 4:30pm, followed by Mass. **Baltimore, MD.** Facilitators: Mary Ellen & Casey Lopata. Info: ullzink@comcast.net or mtimjones4@verizon.net.

Sep 18-21, 2008

NACDLGM Conference: Long Beach, CA. Plenary speakers: Bishop Jaime Soto, coadjutor, Diocese of Sacramento; Bishop Raul Vera y Lopez, OP, Diocese of Saltillo, Mexico; Teresa DeCrescenzo, Executive Director and founder of Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services; Sr. Fran Ferder, Co-director of Therapy & Renewal Associates, Seattle. Info: www.nacdlgm.org.



Oct 3-5, 2008

New Ways Ministry Workshop/Retreat for Lesbian/Gay Catholics, Parents, Pastoral Ministers and other interested persons. Franciscan Spiritual Center, **Aston, PA** (outside Philadelphia). Fr. James Halstead, Facilitator. Info: www.newwaysministry.org.

Oct. 17-19, 2008

Next Steps: Developing Catholic Lesbian/Gay Ministry, Eureka, MO (near St. Louis). New Ways Ministry program for all interested in learning to develop lesbian/gay ministry programs—starting one or developing next steps for existing programs. Info: NewWaysM@verizon.net.

Nov. 7-9, 2008

Call To Acton, Milwaukee, WI. Frank DeBernardo and Jeannine Gramick will lead the seminar—**Next Steps: Developing Catholic Lesbian/Gay Ministry Programs.** They will also present a workshop, as will Marianne Duddy-Burke. **Fortunate**



Families will facilitate a caucus for parents, and have an exhibit table. Info: www.cta-usa.org.

Nov. 14-16, 2008

Next Steps: Developing Catholic Lesbian/Gay Ministry, St. Paul, MN. New Ways Ministry program for all interested in learning to develop lesbian/gay ministry programs—starting one or developing next steps for existing programs. Info: NewWaysM@verizon.net.

Jan. 23-25, 2008

Next Steps: Developing Catholic Lesbian/Gay Ministry, St. Leo, FL (near Tampa). New Ways Ministry program for all interested in learning to develop lesbian/gay ministry programs—starting one or developing next steps for existing programs. Info: NewWaysM@verizon.net.

Feb. 27-Mar. 6, 2009

Sr. Jeannine Gramick LGBT-friendly pilgrimage to El Salvador: Land of Martyrs. Contact: Sr. Jeannine Gramick at 301-864-3604 or Gramick@juno.com.

Feb. 20-22, 2009

Next Steps: Developing Catholic Lesbian/Gay Ministry, St. David, AZ (near Tucson). New Ways Ministry program for all interested in learning to develop lesbian/gay ministry programs—starting one or developing next steps for existing programs. Info: NewWaysM@verizon.net.

May 1-3, 2009

Next Steps: Developing Catholic Lesbian/Gay Ministry, Tiffin, OH (near Toledo). New Ways Ministry program for all interested in learning to develop lesbian/gay ministry programs—starting one or developing next steps for existing

programs. Info: NewWaysM@verizon.net.

Aug. 7-9, 2009

Next Steps: Developing Catholic Lesbian/Gay Ministry, Baton Rouge, LA. New Ways Ministry program for all interested in learning to develop lesbian/gay ministry programs—starting one or developing next steps for existing programs. Info: NewWaysM@verizon.net.



Since our July newsletter, 16 people and/or groups contributed to Fortunate Families. Thank you so much for your commitment to supporting our efforts!!!

A special thanks to Mary's Pence for a \$3K grant to support our efforts!

Your donations enable us to produce this newsletter and to identify and produce resources for ministers, parents, and others.

Contributions to the Len Szumiloski Memorial Fund enable us to send resources—including the book, Fortunate Families, and resource manuals, Seeds of Hope and More Seeds—to parents or pastoral ministers who may not be able to afford them.

Your prayers and support strengthen our commitment to help families with LGBT members to know they are fortunate families.

You can contribute online at www.fortunatefamilies.com/donate.htm. There, you can also print a form and send a check or charge.

Fortunate Families, Inc. is a non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) public charity organization. Contributions are fully tax-deductible.

Parents Prayer

Gracious God,
bless us parents of lesbian women and gay men
as we come out of the closet.

As you came out of the safety of heaven in Jesus,
may we parents of lesbian women and gay men come out.

In Emmanuel, God-with-us,
You also came out of a womb of perceived scandal,
out of a wilderness of temptations,
out of a humiliating closet-tomb,
to communicate your love, grace and mercy.

As You were one with Your Child,
may we parents feel one with our own children
who are lesbian and gay.

Merciful God,
Just as the Blessed Mother,
standing at the foot of the cross,
was united with her crucified Jesus,
We pray that our children,
who are crucified by homophobia, heterosexism and sometimes AIDS,
may feel one with your flesh and blood

As You supported Your Child
by gloriously trumpeting his birth,
by ministering to him in his wilderness,
by shaking the earth at his death,
may we support our gay and lesbian children
by celebrating their coming out in honesty and integrity,
ministering to them in the dry places,
and grieving at all the deaths they experience.

As You vindicated Your Child through Resurrection,
so may we bring new life
by reconciling with our lesbian daughters and gay sons,
by speaking up to those who would crucify them,
by welcoming their joys and loves and laughter.

Lord help us know that You are with us in our struggles:
our struggles for information
our struggles for affirmation,
our struggles with those who sit in judgment of us and of our children.
May we come to know Your own coming out in Jesus
as Your identification with us,
Your support for us, and
Your raising us to new life.

*Adapted from Chris Glaser
Day 39, Coming Out to God, 1991*

If you would like to help Fortunate Families in its continuing work to provide resources and networking opportunities for Catholic parents of LGBT daughters and sons, please download this page and send your contribution to:

Fortunate Families
P.O. Box 18082
Rochester, NY 14618-0082

Or you can go to http://www.fortunatefamilies.com/make_a_contribution.htm to contribute on-line.

Thank you for your prayers and support!

Fortunate Families

Yes, I want to help Fortunate Families. Enclosed is my contribution of:

\$100.00 \$80.00 \$60.00 \$40.00 Other \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Pay by check; make your check payable to: Fortunate Families, Inc. ***(Must be in U.S. dollars.)***

Charge your contribution by completing the information below.

Charge my contribution: Visa _____ MC _____ Amount:
\$ _____

Card number: _____ Security #: _____ Exp. Date: _____

Signature: _____

In addition . . .

I'd like to extend my commitment to Fortunate Families for one year by making a monthly credit card donation of \$20 or more. Please charge my card in the following amount:

\$20.00 \$25.00 \$50.00 Other \$ _____/month

Card number: _____ Security #: _____ Exp. Date: _____

Signature: _____