



Fortunate Families Newsletter

Number 45

December 2008

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

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Words to ponder

“Never in history have gay Americans been so blessed. So in this season of bounty and conflict, let us pause to give heartfelt thanks.”

-- Deb Price, Nov. 24, 2008 (see column on p. 5 of this issue.)

“The real challenge to the family right now is male irresponsibility and misbehavior toward women. If the Hispanic Catholic and evangelical churches really wanted to protect the family, they should address the issue of wife beating in Hispanic families and the misbehaviors of the father against the mother. But no, they go after gay marriage. It doesn’t take any brilliance to notice that this is hypocrisy of such magnitude that you blame the gay couple living next door for the fact that you’ve just beaten your wife.”

-- Richard Rodriguez, gay, Hispanic, Catholic author, in interview with Jeanne Carstensen, Nov. 25, 2008, salon.com.

“All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.”

-- Julian of Norwich

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Listening Parents Network – Coming Soon!

by Casey Lopata

If you’re the parent of a lesbian daughter or gay son, when you found out, did you have anyone in whom you could confide, someone who would understand? Was there another parent of an LGBT daughter or son to whom you could turn? Did you feel isolated?

In January, thanks to a grant from the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Fortunate Families will make it easier for Catholic parents like you—parents who have an LGBT daughter or son and have related questions or concerns and want to email or talk with other Catholic parents who have traveled this journey. The Listening Parents Network page on the Fortunate Families website will list some Catholic parents who have worked through those questions and concerns. This is a pilot project. Pending a successful evaluation, we plan to add more parents.

The listing will include: kinship (e.g., mother of a gay son), name, location (e.g., Troy, NY 12180, Diocese of Albany), email address and/or phone number, and other relevant info (e.g., part of parish-based support group).

These Listening Parents are volunteers, offering time and support to other parents. They do not officially represent Fortunate Families (which is not a member organization), but they support the Fortunate Families mission, are comfortable with having an LGBT daughter or son, and have Fortunate Families resource materials. They can be a powerful sign of hope that the struggle can strengthen a parent’s love and that their family can become more honest, respectful, and supportive.

Watch for an announcement of the activation of the Listening Parents Network in January!

Family Life: Fortunate Families

By Thomas C. Fox, NCR editor, tfox@ncronline.org.

National Catholic Reporter, November 28, 2008



Members of Fortunate Families join the Gay Pride parade in Rochester, N.Y., in July 2007.

This is a love story, shaped by sadness, pain and hope, and it began in November 1983 when a 19-year-old boy sat down with his mother on their living room sofa and with tears in his eyes, said, “Mom, I’m lonely. I’m lonely for another man.”

As the mother, Mary Ellen Lopata of Rochester, N.Y., tells the story, her son, Jim, wasn’t referring to any man in particular. His words, “I’m lonely,” simply described his experience of longing for companionship as a gay man. Lopata recounts that it took years from that encounter for her to face and process her pain and years longer before she had the courage to share her story with others. “I was shocked and confused. I cried and cried.”

That moment marked the beginning of what for Lopata has been a 25-year journey that has done nothing less than revolutionize her life, and give solace to countless other gay and lesbian children and their parents. Lopata’s conversion -- and that’s what it was -- has, by the accounts of many, reshaped the way countless Catholics, and in some cases their bishops, view and receive gay and lesbian persons.

At first Lopata, echoing stories of other Catholic parents of gay and lesbian children, felt isolated. Her son, she said, was the first gay person she had ever known, and just by being himself he challenged the stereotypes she had of gay people.

“The only thing I knew for sure was that I loved my son. Everything else was confusion. Why did this happen?”

How did it happen? Am I to blame? What does this mean for Jim ... for his family? Is this a sin? What about church? How can we ever tell our friends?”

If knowing other gay persons was a stretch, knowing their parents seemed a further impossibility. She started to research the subject at her local library, being careful not to be too public about the books she was checking out. She said little to outsiders.

It was in 1987 that Lopata took another step. Her parish decided to hold a workshop on homophobia and homosexuality. She worked behind the scenes to publicize it. “The most important thing that workshop did was to break the silence around homosexuality. I came away from that experience knowing that if I loved my son as I said I did, I could not remain silent. Somewhere along the way, I began to realize what a special gift Jim is to me, to our family, and the whole body of Christ -- not in spite of, but because he is gay.”

That’s the conversion, or core insight, that comes to most parents of gay and lesbian children.

Lopata and her husband, Casey, got increasingly involved in gay and lesbian organizations: New Ways Ministry; Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG); and Dignity.

In 2004, the Lopatas, attempting to fill a gap in the gay and lesbian persons network, formed Fortunate Families, based in Rochester, with the mission of ministering to Catholic parents of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children. It has grown since, becoming a national network that reached out with support and encouragement. As Fortunate Families states: “We connect parents to work for welcome and justice in the church for their lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) children.”



-- NCR photo/Thomas C. Fox:

Casey and Mary Ellen Lopata offer information about Fortunate Families at the 2008 Call to Action conference in November.

Fortunate Families offers counseling, retreats and days of reflection for parents of LGBT children. It sends out a monthly newsletter that reaches some 2,100 people in seven countries on the Internet

and by postal mail. It maintains a Web site, the hub of its networking information center, at www.fortunatefamilies.com.

Catholic parents of LGBT children are not just grateful for the organization, they are fervently so.

Terri and Rich Dalke, parents of a gay son, wrote in an e-mail:

“Fortunate Families supports us as we value and treasure our family story, learn to speak it and share it with our friends, our family and our faith family. ... Casey and Mary Ellen are the lifeblood of Fortunate Families ... prophets of our day.”

Deb Word, mother of a gay son, wrote: “Casey and Mary Ellen have great insight and a wealth of resource materials. By keeping in touch with Catholic parents on a monthly basis through their newsletters they remind us that the struggle still goes on in other homes. They remind us of the need to reach out to our church fathers, to tell our stories, to ‘put a face’ on the issue that our church would sometimes like to sweep under the rug.”

Part of the Fortunate Families culture



involves encouraging parents to honor, value and share their stories to break the silence of isolation and oppression. “Once parents reach a point of understanding and affirmation of their LGBT daughter or son,” Mary Ellen Lopata said, “we encourage them to channel their frustration and anger -- which is part of the journey -- into constructive action to educate others, especially in the church, about the whole and holy lives of gay and lesbian people, and then to stand together for justice.

“Parents are in a unique position to make a difference. Others may not agree with us, but no one, no

institution can deny our experience. It is essential that parents first let those in authority know what it is like for parents of LGBT daughters and sons in the Catholic church; and second, be out-and-proud role models for other parents who may not yet know they have an LGBT daughter or son.”

Word says her son is a musician who teaches in urban minority schools. She writes that having a gay child has opened her eyes to other gay children in her parish and diocese who “can’t be out with their own parents.” She is more “out,” she adds, than her son, “because I feel like I can be an activist in ways a gay schoolteacher can’t.”

The Dalkes say that their son has provided “endless blessings,” among them “a deeper level of intimacy and trust among the three of us, an opportunity to face our own homophobia, to become educated, to live our own ‘coming out’ process as parents, a deepening of our faith, and experiences unlike any others we had ever taken.”

“The greatest burden,” they added, “was to learn that our son was in so much pain and we didn’t know it. That he felt his choices were to come out to us or to commit suicide. He said he felt that by coming out to us he risked losing us forever, due to our active involvement within the Catholic church, basing that on things he read and heard the hierarchy of the church write and speak regarding homosexuality.”

Ten years ago, the Dalkes began their own parish ministry called “Outstretched Hands,” ministering locally to the parents of gay sons and lesbian daughters. “What we

have learned is that there are families further along in this process and others just beginning.”

Fortunate Families encourages Catholic parents of LGBT children to share their stories as a means of breaking their silence. In 2003, Mary Ellen Lopata wrote a book called *Fortunate Families*, a resource book that tells parents’ stories.

To get a wider understanding of the situations of these Catholic parents, Fortunate Families took a survey last year. Through its growing network it sent out forms that were completed by 229 parents reporting on 242 LGBT children. Among the principal findings were these:

- * Parents are significantly more comfortable now than when they initially learned they had a LGBT child.
- * Parents who know at least one other parent of a LGBT person are significantly more comfortable now.
- * Parents with higher comfort levels are more likely to share their stories.
- * Parents said that advocating for justice in society and church were helpful experiences.
- * About half the parents said they were willing to counsel parents of LGBT children.
- * Asked if anything else would be helpful to them, one theme eclipsed all others: Parents want the institutional church to be more accepting of LGBT persons.

The pain and discouragement many Catholic parents of LGBT children feel is difficult to measure from the outside. That’s why storytelling has been so important to them. To those on the outside, some background helps.

The church has taught that homosexual acts are immoral, and until only recently the church held that homosexuality was a chosen lifestyle. In recent years, most scientific evidence has shown it is not chosen, but the product of one's genetic makeup, part of nature itself. No matter what, the church holds that homosexual persons must remain celibate throughout their lives.

Through the 1970s, as new understandings on homosexuality were entering the culture, Catholic leaders issued various statements that showed deeper understanding while offering more apparent compassion to gay and lesbian persons. Then, in October 1986, Pope John Paul II made his first major statement on homosexuality, marking a departure from some of the more hopeful statements coming out of the church in the decade before.

The statement was written by then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation of the



Doctrine of Faith, now Benedict XVI. In harsh and

uncompromising language, the document, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons," written in English (not Latin) and aimed at the U.S. church, stated: "Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder. Therefore special concern and pastoral attention should be directed to those who have this condition, lest they be led to believe that the living out of this orientation in homosexual activity

is a morally acceptable option. It is not."

The key is the phrase "objective disorder." The Vatican had not used such language before, and it outraged many. The word, in effect, from the Vatican was that even if homosexuality is not freely chosen by each individual, it is nevertheless inherently and objectively wrong. It's not merely that homosexual activity is wrong, but homosexuality itself -- the orientation of being emotionally, psychologically and physically attracted to members of the same sex -- that is objectively wrong.

In the years that followed, many U.S. bishops used the document, taking a hard line on any gay or lesbian organizing in church institutions, further marginalizing the already marginalized.

In October 1997, in part reacting to the seeming lack of compassion toward LGBT Catholics, and getting input from people like the Lopatas, the U.S. bishops issued a 20-page pastoral message called "Always Our Children," aimed at the parents of LGBT children. It is the most compassionate and welcoming statement of its kind. It reads in part:

"Every person has an inherent dignity because he or she is created in God's image. A deep respect for the total person leads the church to hold and teach that sexuality is a gift from God. Being created a male or female person is an essential part of the divine plan, for it is their sexuality -- a mysterious blend of spirit and body -- that allows human beings to share in God's own creative love and life."

Especially encouraging to the Fortunate Family network of

parents were words that described their children as children "of God, gifted and called for a purpose in God's design." The statement was supportive and compassionate, welcoming and embracing, and came under fire from conservatives in the church.

But the Catholic church's continued official ambivalence in its response to gay and lesbian persons became clear in November 2006, when the U.S. bishops voted overwhelmingly in favor of a new document called "Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination." In that declaration they asked Catholics again to welcome gay and lesbian persons into their organizations while using words taken from the 1986 Vatican statement about "disordered" orientations.

Adding to the pain felt by Catholic parents, their LGBT children and others, Bishop Arthur J. Serratelli of Paterson, N.J., chairman of the doctrine committee, which developed the document, admitted his committee never consulted a gay or lesbian person before writing the paper.

To get a sense of how it was received by parents, consider a letter written by a mother of a gay son, sent to the Lopatas about the same time.

"This has been a 10-year journey," the mother wrote. "With the love and respect of those who came before us, we have been able to move from the pain and sadness, loss and grief, to joy, courage and passion, to have a voice in places that our son cannot, to carry the message that God's love is given to every person, that this precious son of ours is the same son that we and God conceived, carried, gave birth to, and had baptized into the

Catholic family. Although he feels too tired to fight for a place at the table, we will spend our last breath carrying the message that God loves each of his precious children and we do too."

In the final analysis, it's difficult to gauge the impact of the Fortunate Families network, the Lopatas say. "Impact is not always tangible. We talk with people in person, or on the phone, or have e-mail exchanges. Sometimes, not often, we hear back from them that our conversation or the resources we had to offer were helpful in healing a relationship between a parent and a child. Sometimes, often years later, we learn that a parent has attained the knowledge, wisdom, confidence and tenacity to start or be a part of a local Catholic parents of LGBT children's group, for faith-sharing and community. Most often we don't know how the story ends."

But the Lopatas are hopeful. "In the 24 years or so that we've been attending and facilitating parents' retreats and days of reflection, the atmosphere has changed significantly. In the early years, Kleenex stock must have done well as most parents cried and expressed their fears. Now, stock of companies dealing in blood pressure pills must be doing well as most parents express anger, primarily at the institutional church, for how it treats their LGBT daughters and sons."

Asked what parents without LGBT children do not know about families with them, the Lopatas were quick to offer a hefty list. On the list were these:

* Families without LGBT children may think of sexual orientation only as a "sexual issue." In fact,

this is not about an "issue," but about who they are.

* They might not know of all the injustices suffered by LGBT persons. They might not realize their duty to stand up for the rights of all God's children.

* Families with LGBT members know that "gay rights" are not "special" rights, but equal rights.

* Parents without LGBT children will never know that unique assurance that God's love, of course, extends to an LGBT child exactly as he or she is -- without footnotes or an asterisk. Parents of LGBT persons experience the revelation of God's love in unexpected ways.

* Families not blessed with LGBT children do not realize that families with known LGBT members are fortunate families. Indeed, if you spend much time with a group of Catholic parents of LGBT persons, a whole new stereotype of gay people emerges - - one where gay people are paradigms of love, caring and spirituality.

A love story, indeed.

Support for NCR

Editor's NOTE: We are thankful to the National Catholic Reporter for writing about Fortunate Families. NCR has treated gay and lesbian issues in its reporting and editorial content for many years, offering an ongoing, rare forum for fair and enlightened discussion. As you know, though, many newspapers are hurting today. NCR is no exception. Their unique contribution to the Catholic community must continue. Please say a prayer for their continued health.... And if you have an interest in subscribing, offering financial help or just learning more, contact NCR's home page www.ncronline.org.

Despite challenges, savor this year's blessings



by Deb Price
Nov. 24, 2008

Reprinted with approval 'The Detroit News'

President-elect Barack Obama's great love of Abraham Lincoln has me spending chilly evenings curled up with a history book or two. Turns out that honest, sad-eyed Abe knew the importance of staying in close touch with gratitude, of giving thanks even in the midst of turmoil and disappointment.

In October 1863, President Lincoln was locked in the middle of the terrible Civil War that was "testing," as he would put it a few weeks later in Gettysburg, whether a "nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal ... can long endure." In other words, not only was victory nowhere in sight, he didn't even know whether the nation would survive.

Yet, Lincoln chose that moment to turn Thanksgiving into a national holiday to be celebrated every November.

Putting his well-hidden sunny side on display, he issued a proclamation accentuating the positive: "The year that is drawing towards its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source ... others have been added.... (H)armony has prevailed everywhere except in the theatre of military conflict...."

My first thought was, "Hey, that's a mighty big exception, President Pollyanna!" But upon reflection, I

realized Lincoln was striking exactly the right tone. Thanksgiving Day comes at the end of autumn, when everything that can be harvested that year has already been taken. Winter's harshness is quickly closing in.

Late November is the perfect time to express appreciation for the bounty that will provide comfort throughout the coming season, when spring isn't even a glimmer in Mother Nature's eye. Lincoln's upbeat declaration is a reminder Thanksgiving isn't the time for financial-ledger accounting of the year's results: If spring was too soggy and the apples had worms, that's a discussion for another day.

Thanksgiving is a time to focus on the year's blessings. And those of us who are gay or gay-friendly have plenty to savor:

- Lt. Gov. David Paterson, who fondly recalls the gay couple who helped raise him, unexpectedly stepped into New York's governorship and soon declared that his state would honor same-sex marriages performed elsewhere.

- Following the example first set by neighboring Vermont eight years ago, New Hampshire joined the ranks of civil union states. Almost no one rose to object.

- Connecticut quietly opened the doors of marriage to gay couples. Seeing that Massachusetts lives comfortably with gay marriage, Connecticut voters passed on the chance to hold a constitutional convention and fight over the breakthrough.

- An estimated 18,000 gay couples married in California after a landmark ruling. Six million Californians voted in favor of gay people keeping the right to marry.

When they failed, the state's top court agreed to hear arguments in favor of nullifying the anti-gay-marriage measure that narrowly passed.

- With an increasingly progressive nation watching his every move, the president-elect posted a long gay-friendly "To Do" list on his website. And nobody blinked.

Never in history have gay Americans been so blessed. So in this season of bounty and conflict, let us pause to give heartfelt thanks.

Reach Deb Price at (202) 662-8736 or dprice@detnews.com.



The Empty Tomb: Cardinal Newman's last laugh?

by David Gibson, October 8, 2008

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Was Cardinal Newman gay? Or (as the joke has it) simply divine? That was the controversy that dominated the dust-up over exhuming John Henry Newman, the great nineteenth-century English convert to Rome, in order to move his body to a more suitable location for veneration—that in anticipation of his beatification (the penultimate step to canonization) by Pope Benedict XVI next year.

Newman, you see, had requested—indeed insisted, with his final breath—that he be buried in a grave at Rednal Hill cemetery outside Birmingham with Ambrose St. John, a fellow Oratorian who Newman described as the great love of his life. “I wish, with all my heart, to be buried in Fr Ambrose St John’s grave—and I give this as my last, my imperative will,” he wrote, “This I confirm and insist on.”

Many today thus insisted that removing Newman’s body from the grave would violate his last wishes as well as what they saw as a relationship that was more than Platonic—hence Newman was, improbably, becoming a gay icon of the twenty-first century. Andrew Sullivan—a gay English Catholic—“dished” on this argument here.

Not surprisingly, that argument sparked more than a bit of debate, and strong counterreactions. Those reactions may say more about a 21st-century American culture that is hinky about male friendships than it does about Newman. Still, theirs was an especially intense bond. Here is the English Catholic journalist Austen Ivereigh at “In All Things” on the relationship between Newman and St. John:

The two men loved each other deeply, had a life-long friendship, and lived together. And since Newman’s death in 1890 they have remained in the same grave in Rednal, about eight miles from Cardinal Newman’s house in Edgbaston, outside Birmingham.

In 1854 Newman wrote: “We have bought (I trust) a burying place — under the Lickey Hills, just about eight miles off — it is a most beautiful spot. . . . We are going to build a cottage there and ultimately

a mortuary chapel.” They share a tombstone with the inscription “out of shadows and phantasms into the truth” etched across it.

Newman wrote after the death of St John in 1875: “I have ever thought no bereavement was equal to that of a husband’s or a wife’s, but I feel it difficult to believe that any can be greater, or anyone’s sorrow greater, than mine.”

The Cardinal -a hyper-sensitive, even delicate man — had intense friendships of the sort common in that age, especially in all-male bastions such as the clergy and Oxford.

But Ivereigh’s judgment that it is a bit much to consider the two men as a “couple” or “partners” in the modern, homosexual sense, seems about right, even if one must also consider the possibility that they were homosexually-inclined men who shared an intense if chaste relationship.

Is there anything wrong with that? A Newman biographer, Father Ian Ker, seemed to think so, penning a piece in the Vatican newspaper (CNS story here) in which he blamed the “homosexual lobby” for stirring up controversy (actually the first hurdle was a British law barring exhumation; that was eventually waived) and echoing a favorite line that celibacy can only be a sacrifice for a heterosexual not a homosexual because only a straight man is giving up marriage with a woman. “The only reason for which celibacy could be a sacrifice was that Newman, as every normal man, wanted to get married,” Ker said. Ker seemed on firmer ground with this point:

Nowadays there is no concept of friendship. In those days they had

a concept of a loving friendship we have lost today,” he said.

“You no longer can say you love your friend,” he said. “But in those days people spoke quite openly of their love for their friends. Is this going to get to the point when fathers no longer can say they love their daughters? It is quite horrendous the implications of this nonsense.”

Alas, last week in a Geraldo moment (remember the safe opening from the wreck of the Titanic?) the gravediggers opened the tomb and...nothing! According to a church statement:

“Brass, wooden and cloth artefacts from Cardinal Newman’s coffin were found. However there were no remains of the body of John Henry Newman. An expectation that Cardinal Newman had been buried in a lead-lined coffin proved to be unfounded. In the view of the medical and health professionals in attendance, burial in a wooden coffin in a very damp site makes this kind of total decomposition of the body unsurprising. The absence of physical remains in the grave does not affect the progress of Cardinal Newman’s cause in Rome.”

It does quash the prospect of relics, at least of the first class. And what of the gay controversy? Austen Ivereigh again has the best epitaph to the whole affair:

There is something very Newnesque about the end to this story. A shy, delicate, bookish man, he was never at ease with some of the aesthetic and ritual habits of the Church to which he spectacularly converted in 1844. The fact that there will be no lying-in-state, no marble sarcophagus to venerate, and no

relics to distribute (beyond the few locks of hair that exist), seems hugely appropriate.

And how apt, in retrospect, seem the words of the epitaph which Newman and St John chose for their tomb: *Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem* — “Out of shadows and phantasms into Truth.”



There are known to be several gay penguin couples in zoos across the world Photo: GETTY

Gay penguins steal eggs from straight couples

27 Nov 2008 With Permission from the Telegraph (www.telegraph.co.uk)

A couple of gay penguins are attempting to steal eggs from straight birds in an effort to become "fathers", it has been reported.

The two penguins have started placing stones at the feet of parents before waddling away with their eggs, in a bid to hide their theft.

But the deception has been noticed by other penguins at the zoo, who have ostracised the gay couple from their group. Now keepers have decided to segregate the pair of three-year-old male birds to avoid disrupting the rest of the community during the hatching season.

A keeper at Polar Land in Harbin, north east China explained that the gay couple had the natural urge to become fathers, despite their sexuality.

"One of the responsibilities of being a male adult is looking after the eggs. Despite this being a biological impossibility for this couple, the natural desire is still there," a keeper told the Austrian Times newspaper.

"It's not discrimination. We have to fence them separately, otherwise the whole group will be disturbed during hatching time," he added.

There are numerous examples of homosexuality in the animal kingdom, but gay penguins have captured the public's attention more than any other species.

A German zoo provoked outrage from gay lobby groups after attempting to mate a group of gay male penguins with Swedish female birds who were flown in especially to seduce them. But the project was abandoned after the males refused to be "turned", showing no interest in their would-be mates.

In 2002 a couple of penguins at a New York zoo who had been together for eight years were "outed" when keepers noticed that they were both males.

Calendar

Jan. 23-25, 2009



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. Other dates/locations below. Info: 301-277-5674 OR info@newwaysministry.org OR www.newwaysministry.org.

Feb. 7, 2009 (Sat)

Day of Reflection for Parents of Lesbian Daughter & Gay Sons,

Rochester, NY. Catholic Gay & Lesbian Family Ministry, facilitated by Mary Ellen & Casey Lopata. Info: fkennedy@dor.org.

Feb. 20-22, 2009

Next Steps: Developing Catholic Lesbian/Gay Ministry, St. David, AZ (near Tucson). [See Jan. 23-25 for info]

Feb. 27-Mar. 6, 2009

Sr. Jeannine Gramick, SL, LGBT-friendly pilgrimage to El Salvador: Land of Martyrs. Itinerary includes liturgy at site of Archbishop Romero's martyrdom. Info: gramick@juno.com OR www.newwaysministry.org/Pilgrimage/pilg09brochure.pdf OR Sr. Jeannine at 301-864-3604.

May 1-3, 2009

Next Steps: Developing Catholic Lesbian/Gay Ministry, Tiffin, OH (near Toledo). [See Jan. 23-25 for info]

Jun 13, 2009 (Sat)

Day of Reflection for Parents of Lesbian Daughters and Gay Sons. Scarborough Foreign Mission Society, **Scarboro, Ontario (near Toronto).** Facilitated by Mary Ellen & Casey Lopata. Info: johnmontague@sympatico.ca.

Jun 22-24, 2009

New Ways Ministry retreat facilitated by Rev. Diarmuid O'Murchu. Daylesford Abbey, **Paoli, PA** (near Philadelphia). Info: info@newwaysministry.org OR www.newwaysministry.org OR 301-277-5674.

Jul 2-5, 2009

DignityUSA 19th Biennial Convention. Speakers include: Dr. Mary Hunt and Richard Rodriguez. **San Francisco, CA.** Info: www.dignityusa.org.

Aug. 7-9, 2009

Next Steps: Developing Catholic Lesbian/Gay Ministry, Baton Rouge, LA. [See Jan. 23-25 for info]

Sep. 23, 2009 (Wed)

National Bisexuality Day. Info: www.thetaskforce.org

Sep 24-27, 2009

Catholic Association of Lesbian and Gay Ministries (CALGM) National Conference. Las Vegas NV. Info: www.nacdlgm.org.

Oct. 9-11, 2009

New Ways Ministry retreat facilitated by Michael Crosby, OFM Cap. Stella Maris Retreat Center, **Skaneateles, NY** (near Syracuse). Info: info@newwaysministry.org OR www.newwaysministry.org OR 301-277-5674.

Oct. 11, 2009 (Sun)

Solidarity Sunday. Dedicated to the memory of the many, including LGBT, persons who lost their lives through violence because of who they were or perceived to be. Info: www.dignityusa.org/solidarity. Also **National Coming Day.**

Nov. 6-8, 2009

Call To Acton, Milwaukee, WI. Info: www.cta-usa.org.



Since our November newsletter, 9 people and/or groups contributed to Fortunate Families. Thank you for your commitment to supporting our efforts!!!

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

Fortunate Families year-end appeal

NOTE: You may have received this appeal letter by mail. If you have already sent your year end donation, we sincerely thank you.

Christmas, 2008

Dear Friend,

My husband Casey tells me I'm too old to write to Santa...so I'm sending *you* my Christmas "wish list" this year! It's a short one – just a plea and a prayer that you can help Fortunate Families continue its work.

Our stories are changing hearts; our call for justice is being heard -- thanks to you and many other wonderful people like you. With your prayers and with your dollars, you have helped extend our "reach" in ways that touch not only our fortunate families and LGBT daughters and sons, but our larger Church community as well.

Our newsletter now reaches record numbers – more than 2,100 individuals and groups. Our redesigned website is alive with information and activity. With the posting of the educational series "Let's Talk about Homosexuality" earlier this year, our website "hits" more than doubled in January and February. Currently, we are exploring the possibilities of adding audio and video educational material to the site.

Fortunate Families facilitated Days of Reflection in Baltimore, Detroit and Rochester, N.Y. this year, and made presentations in Massachusetts, Michigan, New York and California. Board Member Ann Franczyk spoke to college groups and high school faculties in Pennsylvania. And we received calls for information and materials from a half-dozen colleges and universities, including Notre Dame University.

Right now, we are running hard to introduce the new Fortunate Families "Listening Parents Network" – a nationwide network of Catholic parents ready to lend a compassionate ear to other Catholic parents who are confused or troubled about their child's orientation and "just need someone to talk to." Exciting possibilities!

But none of this happens without the help of the Spirit...*and* the support of people like you! Please consider a gift to Fortunate Families. You can contribute online at <http://www.fortunatefamilies.com/makeacontribution.htm> ... or mail your gift to Fortunate Families, P.O. Box 18082, Rochester, NY 14618-0082.

Thank you....May the blessings of the Christ Child be yours.

Mary Ellen Lopata, President

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/donate.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:

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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.

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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:

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