



# Fortunate Families Newsletter

Number 19

June 2006

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

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## ***Words to ponder***

*I don't think it [same-sex marriage] should be used as a campaign tool, obviously.... It requires a lot of sensitivity to just talk about the issue — a lot of sensitivity.*

-- 1st Lady Laura Bush, May 14, 2006 on Fox News Sunday.

*Over the pope as the expression of the binding claim of ecclesiastical authority, there still stands one's own conscience, which must be obeyed before all else, even if necessary against the requirement of ecclesiastical authority. This emphasis on the individual, whose conscience confronts him with a supreme and ultimate tribunal, and one which in the last resort is beyond the claim of external social groups, even of the official Church, also establishes a principle: in opposition to increasing totalitarianism.*

-- Theologian Joseph Ratzinger, 1969 comment on Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Freedom, in Ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Doctrine of Vatican II*, vol. V, p 134.

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## ***Parents Voice Project***

By Casey Lopata

Soon, you will get our email or mailing inviting you—if you're the parent of a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender persons or questioning (LGBTQ)—to complete a survey. If you're not such a parent, please pass on the email or survey to someone who is.

The Parents Voice Project, generously funded by a grant from the Wheaton Franciscan Sisters, has two phases. The first phase is the survey, which has two aims: 1) to catalog the needs of Catholic parents, and the gifts and talents these parents can offer to other Catholic parents to make this particular journey more positive and faith-filled; and 2) to assess Catholic parents' interest in participating in collaborative efforts with other parents.

Phase two is the development of a North American network of Catholic parents who will be encouraged and supported to raise their voices, individually or together, to call for a more just and loving response to our LGBTQ daughters and sons. NOTE: The greater the response to the survey, the stronger the network.

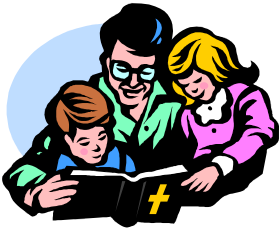
Parents can be an especially powerful force in two areas.

First, by virtue of their faithfulness and service in the church, parents are more likely to be listened to by church ministers than are their LGBTQ children. As faithful Christians knowledgeable about LGBTQ persons, parents have the right and duty to speak the truth of the goodness of their LGBTQ children to church leaders.

Second, parents can best support and engage other parents wherever they are on their journey--empowering them to move from the early stages of tears and fears to acceptance, understanding, and finally appreciation of their special roles in the work of justice for their LGBTQ children.

In times of great stress and uncertainty, we all need support to hold fast to the compassionate Gospel message. By building a community of Catholic parents of LGBTQ daughters and sons, together we will foster the willingness and the courage to be prophetic voices in both the church and the world, bearing witness—by sharing our stories—to the faithfulness and integrity of our families and our LGBTQ children.

**Please complete the survey to join your voice with the voices of other parents seeking justice for their LGBTQ sons and daughters.**



## ***Always Our Children: Hope amongst the mixed messages***

*By Ann and Chet Franczyk*

*Announcing the new Catholic parents group in Springfield, MA, this article will soon appear in the Greater Boston PFLAG newsletter. Printed here with permission of the authors, co-founders of the group.*

“Being Catholic is in my bones,” my friend pronounced. It seems that despite her best efforts, she can not deny the influence her Church persistently plays in her life even as she approaches her golden years – an influence in which she admittedly continues to find much solace and peace. I concurred. Being Catholic is in my bones too.

In 1998, our then newly turned 16 year old son announced to us that he was gay. He told us that it was something he had known for as long as he could remember and that it was something he could not change nor would choose to change. He sweetly spoke of his love for us and confidently knew of our love for him and explained that, “nothing changes.” He said it was a realization which awakened in him as early as the 4th or 5th grade while a student at St. Thomas the Apostle School in West Springfield. He learned much at St. Thomas, not the least of which was that he was a child of God, created in His image and likeness and loved with an abiding and all-embracing love. He learned that “catholic” meant “universal and encompassing-all.”

And yet there was a fear in us upon the delivery of his news. How did our Church really feel about our son? Why were words like “disordered” and “condition” used by our institutional Church to describe our son’s self-identity? That was not what our son was feeling about himself.

How could we make sense out of all the mixed messages we heard? On the one hand, a woman from our local parish wrote a note offering us condolences, suggesting that, “what she had heard about our son must be a prank because we were good Catholic parents and would protect our children against the evils of the world.” And on the other hand our pastor, Fr George Farland was willing to attend a PFLAG meeting and sit on a panel of community religious leaders and support our son and us when PFLAG stated that they were having a difficult time finding a Catholic priest to

agree to be part of the group. The mixed messages have persisted. The institutional Church’s response to the hot button, gay civil rights issues of the day has been less than welcoming, and yet some bishops have openly and unconditionally welcomed their dioceses’ gay and lesbian brothers and sisters.

So, as the calcium leaches readily from my middle-aged, post-menopausal bones the “catholic” remains, tenaciously protecting the aging frame from total fracture – reminding me of all that came before. Weren’t the miraculous graces of Baptism, Penance, Eucharist, Confirmation, and Matrimony bestowed upon my husband and me many years ago? Wasn’t that grace alive within us still? Wasn’t it in Confirmation when we became “soldiers of Christ,” that we were commanded to love others as our God loves us? Wasn’t it through the sacrament of Matrimony that we ultimately were blessed with the gift of our son? And what of my husband and my 16 years of Catholic education, characterized by the dictates of Vatican II, which taught us that we were the Church?



Is what we were reading and becoming aware of with regard to our son and his sexual orientation, our Church’s response? What does the Church say about our son? And how do we define Church? Is this our church? And if we are the Church, what are/were we saying about our son? Anything?

Discovering *Always Our Children* was truly a God-send. This document, authored by the

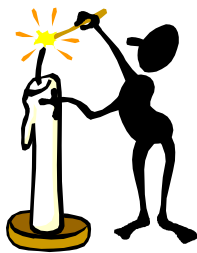
National Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1997, speaks to parents of GLBT persons – assuring them of God’s and the Church’s deep and abiding love of their children. It states that our gay children, “are gifted and called for a purpose in God’s design” and ought to be welcomed with compassion and love. It pledges that our gay children are “always our children and that nothing can ever change that.” Unfortunately, this important work of the institutional Church has been largely disregarded by many – both within and outside of the Church. We wanted people to be aware of the important work the institutional Church had done in writing this pastoral letter. We wanted to make this a living document.

Armed with this pastoral message, we visited our Bishop Timothy McDonnell and told him of our plan to start a support group for parents and friends of GLBT persons within the Diocese of Springfield. Its words of affirmation and all-inclusiveness would be the basis for our mission statement. We felt energized and empowered.

We were welcomed with that same pastoral spirit. Our Bishop listened. We told the Bishop our son’s story, explaining that all stories are not as hope-filled and happy. We told him how some children’s stories are at best lukewarm and others filled with desperation. We told him that gay youth may be at risk and that these same gay youth and their parents needed him. And he listened. When the Bishop mentioned homogenital sex, we explained that something as one dimensional as sex could never adequately explain or define our son’s personhood. We asked the Bishop if he had ever loved a gay person,

explaining that to love a gay person is to never see the world the same way again. And he listened. We asked him if he would support our idea – and he said yes.

*Always Our Children* meets the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of the month at Sacred Heart Church in Springfield, Ma. All are welcome. Its mission is to reach out to gay youth and their parents and friends. Its message is a simple one, “to love others, as God has loved us.”



### ***Gay Clergy: Brothers, Display Those Candles!***

*A Reflection by Fr. Howard B. Hall, Diocese of Baton Rouge, LA. March 2006, 44th Anniversary of Ordination*

It was 1950 when this Catholic kid entered high school seminary amid a creed that proclaimed "It is better to light one little candle than to curse the darkness". One of the less-bright realities of those seminary days was the treatment - or perhaps non-treatment- of the issue of sexuality. Sparse words from authorities to us seminarians were warnings against a "particular friendship" with a fellow seminarian or the dating of females. Neither did parents or society at large have much to say about "the birds and the bees" and the word "homosexual" was rare or non-existent in any conversation.

Having experienced some same-sex attraction since fifth grade in an all boys Catholic school and

living through a "neutered" seminary life I was ordained in 1962 into a newly created diocese in a renewing post-Vatican II church. Those were halcyon days for me despite my spike in sexual self-understanding and a late-maturing first time struggle at what choosing celibacy really meant.

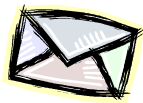
A first assignment in a mid-city parish brought me into the "gay world" when a young man inquired about a new ministry in California for homosexually-oriented Catholics called "Dignity" I assisted in setting up a local chapter and attended the first national convention in Hollywood. I was surprised by the attendees' rootedness in our Catholic faith and its devotions. A few years later when Catholic parents seeking to understand their two gay sons were referred to me I would join them and a Presbyterian minister in forming a local chapter of PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). As the specter of HIV-AIDS raised its head I would attend the conferences of NCAN (National Catholic Aids Network) and become involved with a local Catholic hospital in setting up a still-extant hospice. The lives, stories and spirituality of persons that I met in Dignity, PFLAG and NCAN, including those of gay clergy, enlightened the unfolding of my own priestly journey.

In the mid-years of my priesthood I would process my own same-sex orientation through spiritual direction, counseling and sharing my journey with a few close friends. I served on diocesan committees developing a policy for employees with AIDS and also one of the first sexual abuse policies in the nation. At my suggestion to our bishop an ad-hoc group hammered out over almost five

years a pastorally sensitive statement on ministry with gay and lesbian Catholics and their families. The abuse statement was enacted; the other two policies languished.

My brotherly outreach to same-sex oriented priests includes understanding words to many of my own gay classmates and hosting an affirming retreat for nine gay priests. A nationally known professional psychologist, who works widely with bishops, clergy and religious around the U.S., worked with us. The next year he and I made contact with all the bishops, vicars for clergy and priest continuing education directors in my province offering a similar retreat but sadly no one was willing to broach the issue. More recently, I have served on the board of NACDLGM (National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian and Gay Ministries) and helped set up our diocesan ministry DBR/HOPE.

About five years ago when rumors began of the development of what has recently become known as "The Instruction" from the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education and Seminaries, I compiled a cross-section of quotations on both sides of the issue of homosexual persons and priesthood. These included the Pope's secretary Juaquin Navarro-Valls argument that gays could not be priests and Bp. Tom Gumbleton's sharing of his journey with his gay blood brother. I mailed the compilation to every person listed in the official Kenedy directory as priest continuing education and priest personnel director for U.S. dioceses. I included a personal letter suggesting that with the surfacing of such conflicting



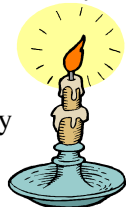
argumentation and the possibility of a statement impacting their priests it might be good to begin a clergy dialogue in their diocese. Of the hundreds of mailings the response was "underwhelming" one positive letter. Whatever went on in local dioceses and behind Vatican doors, including closed consultations, we now see the formal statement and its partially questionable and surely hurtful rhetoric whose sad effects we experience filtering through the life of our church.

Since the Instruction's release we have had a plethora of reactions, statements and opinions along with the resignation of at least two U.S. priests and the official "coming out" of many more, some reported in the national press. Knowledge of same-sex oriented clergy was in many cases responded to by bishops, presbyterates, families, parishioners and friends with words similar to what I recall from my own bishop, now a neighboring archbishop; something like: "Howard, you are the same person for me that you were before what you just said about your orientation. I respect who you are and value the ministry you share in our diocese". We know the value of African Americans and women in our church and its ministries. We are just beginning to learn about and value our same-sex oriented priests and deacons.

It is interesting, and sad that Cardinal-elect Levada in his recent homily at the North American College (Seminary) on the occasion of the installation of its new rector noted that it is unfortunate when priests indicate publicly that they are "gay". (I suppose the only good ones are those "in the closet".) He also said that we could not properly image

Christ and minister well to couples. Perhaps this is because we are not fully "in persona Christi" being, in Catechism terms, defective priests (but, of course, NOT to leave). It is sad to see the rhetoric continue. Even more pointedly, I wonder what those seminarians think and feel as they hear such a "don't ask, don't tell" message offered them in their preparation for priesthood.

Let me now invite my brother gay clergy, "Come out, come out, wherever you are!" I recognize the risk, challenge and particularly the bind such light-filled revelation might have for some, especially those young in ministry and with little security. Maybe



transparency is a bit easier for me after 43 years of service and now "semi-retired". Yet we have the example of a brother in John XXIII who risked to "open the windows" that the Spirit might renew the church. Now is the time for that Spirit to address our church through each of us doing what we can to "open our closets". It is only when our parishioners, friends and bishops see our faces, hear our stories and more fully know us and our ministry, as we live our celibate sexual journey, that they can come to appreciate and perhaps deeply love and affirm who we really are. And not only we gay priests and deacons but this is also true for the huge number of dedicated gay and lesbian Catholics who serve faithfully and with faith-filled witness as teachers, liturgists, nurses and other ministers in such a large number of our Catholic parishes and institutions. They too deserve like affirmation!

Too long have our closets been "bushel baskets". So brother

priests and deacons the Spirit waits for YOU to hoist your lighted candles upon the biblical lampstand within today's church.

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Wakefield, LA 70784,  
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## ***The Good Shepherd of Brokeback Mountain***

By Kevin Elphick

Originally published in the May 2006 Empty Closet (Rochester Gay Alliance of the Genesee Valley). Reprinted with permission of the author with a few minor corrections.

Given all the hype around Brokeback Mountain as a “gay cowboy movie,” people are probably past saturation point with reviews and commentaries. But I want to suggest another angle: Brokeback Mountain as a modern day spin on the parable of the Good Shepherd. The author of the short story which gave rise to the movie, Annie Proulx, is very explicit that it is not about gay cowboys. I’d venture it’s more about shepherds. She’s quoted in an interview saying, “Excuse me, but it is NOT a story about ‘two cowboys.’ It is a story about two inarticulate, confused Wyoming ranch kids in 1963 who have left home and who find themselves in a personal sexual situation they did not expect, understand, or can manage. The only work they find is herding sheep for a summer: some cowboys!” (“At Close Range with Annie Proulx” An Interview with Matthew Testa 12.7.05)

Effectively, Brokeback Mountain is about two contemporary shepherds in love. Some churchgoers may already know that the fourth Sunday of Easter is celebrated as “Good Shepherd Sunday” in many denominations. It would be great to see preachers using this Sunday as an opportunity to preach on Brokeback Mountain.

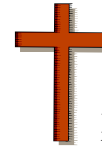
The movie itself quickly opens on its protagonists taking on their job as sheep herders. Panoramic pastoral scenes of the men herding sheep grace the screen. Together they take the sheep up into the mountains. “In good pastures I will pasture them, and on the mountain heights shall be their grazing ground.” (Ezekiel 34: 14)

Of the two, Jack Twist in particular is portrayed as the good shepherd. He is seen carrying a lamb, helping a sheep across a river, and pulling burrs from another’s wool. Like the most ancient artwork portraying Christ, Jack Twist is shown carrying a lamb over his shoulders. To present afresh the 2000-year-old image of the Good Shepherd, there could be no better convention than to hide him as a 1960s ranch hand who falls in love with another man. Hidden in the character of Jack Twist is the ancient image of the Good Shepherd.

And like the Good Shepherd, Jack Twist’s violent death becomes the main catalyst for conversion. In the aftermath of Jack’s death, his lover Ennis experiences a profound conversion experience which plays itself out in a shift in his relationship with his daughter. Like the Good Shepherd of our Easter celebration, it is Jack’s blood-stained garments which, as relics, come to embody and

memorialize the love of these shepherds.

It might seem unconventional to portray the Shepherd as a lover too, but the Lover-Shepherd is a familiar figure in the Jewish and Christian traditions. One has only to think of the Shepherd King David and his beloved, Jonathan. (I Sam. 18:1) The Lover in the erotic canticle of the Bible, the Song of Songs, is a shepherd (Song 1:7). Surprisingly, even the austere St. John of the Cross unites the images of shepherd and lover. His poem is worth quoting here in its entirety for its parallels to Brokeback’s story of shepherds in love:



*A lonely young shepherd toiled,  
unaware of pleasure and  
contentment,  
His thoughts fixed on another  
shepherd... his heart wounded by  
love.  
He is in tears, not from the pain of  
love...  
but more from knowing he’s been  
distanced.  
One thought— that he is kept at a  
distance by his beautiful  
shepherd—  
is of such great pain that he travels  
to another country to be misused,  
his heart wounded with love.*

*Says the young shepherd: “It’s  
agonizing that you draw back from  
my love  
and do not seek my company....”  
and his heart was wounded with  
love.*

*Finally, after many years, he  
climbed... spread his arms open —  
He had remained persevering—  
and he died,  
His heart wounded by the love.  
(Juan de la Cruz, “Otras  
canciones a lo divino de Cristo y el*

alma”)

I don't want to suggest that either Annie Proulx or Ang Lee were consciously evoking the image of the Good Shepherd (or even less, that they were aware of John of the Cross' poem). But I do believe the story of Brokeback Mountain is so widely powerful specifically because it does evoke universal archetypes of love and commitment.

Ennis and Jack's love is sacred and reveals the divine character of relationship and longing. Their love, set amidst the grandeur of pastoral images of animal flocks, mountains, and astride horseback, reveals a universal love, the infinite longing, like that between God and humanity, ever aching to be fulfilled and consummated. Hidden in the love of two sheepherders, is the archetype of that same Good Shepherd who envisions our life together beside restful waters, in verdant pastures... "If you and me had a little ranch together, little cow and calf operation... it'd be some sweet life..."

I'll be looking forward to Brokeback preaching. I want to hear my pastor's sermon celebrating the love between Jack and Ennis. I want to hear it preached how like our Good Shepherd was Jack's love and longing for Ennis. I want to know that the Good Shepherd still walks the American West. I want a homily that warns against Ennis' mistake of giving into societal conventions and missing out on a life lived, partnered with Jack. I want to be warned against the myth of masculine stoicism and instead embrace Jack's passion and love. I want to be enjoined to go up to the mountaintop to discover

love. Until then, I'm still waiting for that sermon on the Good Shepherd of Brokeback Mountain.



### ***Catholics can "firmly agitate" within the church***

*Letter to the Editor, June 2006 Empty Closet, the Gay Alliance of the Genesee Valley (Rochester, NY) newspaper.*

In your May 2006 issue, one columnist (Ally Howell, Acting on Faith) wrote that, "With the possible exception of the Roman Catholic Church, it is possible to quietly but firmly agitate within a faith community for acceptance of LGBT members."

Your readers should know that, just like those in other Christian faith communities, Roman Catholics can firmly agitate for greater acceptance. In fact, the Church, in Canon Law, officially welcomes such agitation. Canon 212, paragraph 3 says: "In accord with the knowledge, competence and preeminence which they possess, they [Christian faithful] have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinions on matters which pertain to the good of the Church, and they have a right to make their opinion known to the other Christian faithful, with due regard for the integrity of the faith and morals and reverence for their pastors, and with consideration for the common good and the dignity of persons."

In 1976, the U.S. Bishops said: "Homosexuals, like everyone else, should not suffer from prejudice against their basic human rights. They have a right to respect, friendship and justice. They should have an active role in the Christian community." This was reinforced in the 1997/98 U.S. Bishops pastoral statement, *Always Our Children*, when they said: "To our homosexual brothers and sisters .... Though at times you may feel discouraged, hurt, or angry, do not walk away from your families, from the Christian community, from all those who love you. In you God's love is revealed. You are always our children."

If you would like to know how we and others "firmly agitate within" the Roman Catholic Church, check out our web site (and our links to other sites), subscribe to our newsletter, and email us suggestions for how we might do that better.

Mary Ellen and Casey Lopata,  
*Fortunate Families*



### ***News Notes***

There are 53 openly gay elected officials in the U.S. – including 61 state legislators and 3 members of Congress – up from 49 in 1991.

-- *USA Today*, May 9, 2006

\* \* \* \* \*

In a June 7 CNN interview, Washington's Cardinal McCarrick, in support of the proposed Federal Marriage Amendment, said, "we really have to continue to define marriage as we've defined marriage for thousands of years as a union between a man and a



**Sep. 29-Oct. 1**

Catholic Parents Network  
**Workshop Retreat for Lesbian/Gay Catholics, Parents, and Pastoral Ministers.** Aston, PA. Info: 301-277-5674 or www.newwaysministry.org.

**Oct. 14**

**Retreat for Gay/Lesbian couples.** Mercy Prayer Center (Rochester, NY). Info: jgb4tun8family@aol.com

**Nov. 3-5**

**Call To Action.** Milwaukee, WI. Includes a workshop by Mary Ellen and Casey Lopata, and a caucus for Catholic parents of lesbian daughters and gay sons. Info: 773-404-0004; cta@cta-usa.org; http://www.cta-usa.org



Thank you for your prayers and support. Since our April newsletter, 20 people and/or groups contributed! We are grateful for your support!!!

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

contributions are fully tax-deductible.

Your donations help with efforts like this newsletter and with resources for ministers, parents, and other family members.

Contributions to the Len Szumiloski Memorial Fund enable us to send Fortunate Families resources, including our book, Fortunate Families, and our resource manuals, Seeds of Hope and More Seeds, to pastoral ministers who may not be able to afford them. It also enables us to purchase resources, books, CDs, videos, and DVDs for use in Fortunate Families ministry.



You can contribute by check or charge, or by going to this link: http://www.fortunatefamilies.com/make\_a\_contribution.htm

Your prayers and support strengthen our commitment to help families with gay, lesbian, and bisexual and transgender members to know they are indeed fortunate families.

A special thank you to departing Board members Tom Ferrarese and Rosalie Muschal Reinhardt. And welcome to new Board members Ann Franczyk (W. Springfield, MA),

Linda Karle Nelson, and Tom Nelson (both Detroit, MI).



**Stories please!**

Fortunate Families believes that when parents of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons share their stories with their family circle, their faith community and the larger society, our families, church, and society will be better.

Do you have a story that affirms that belief? Please share that story with us and with others in this newsletter.

Please send your story to us.

By email: info@fortunatefamilies.com  
Through our web site: www.fortunatefamilies.com  
By postal mail: 239 Highland Parkway Rochester, NY 14620



Your story could be exactly what a reader needs!

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(see reverse side)

Charge my contribution: Visa \_\_\_\_\_ MC \_\_\_\_\_ Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Card number \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**In addition . . .**

I'd like to extend my commitment to Fortunate Families 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 for # of months \_\_\_\_\_  
Card number \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_