

*“Parents are the LGBT prophets of today.*

*Some, like the prophets of old,  
didn’t originally want the job!”*

*... Frank DeBernardo - Executive Director, New Ways Ministry*

## Fortunate Families, Inc. 2010 Annual Report

### A Report from the President

Dear Friends of Fortunate Families,

Okay – so most of us would never apply for the job of prophet! Just the same, as I’ve watched you come together, work together and pray together this past year for the love of your children, I can’t help but be in awe of your witness. You make such a difference!

To borrow a line from Sinatra, 2010 was a “very good year” for Fortunate Families. Let’s look back quickly and see how your efforts supported justice and inclusion for our LGBT children.

Among the highlights: In April, we announced expansion of the Listening Parents Network to a total of 121 parents in 59 dioceses located in 27 states, two provinces of Canada, and Nicaragua.

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*Fr. Bob Pierson, OSB approaches the altar to offer Mass along with more than 50 attendees at Fortunate Families’ first-ever parents’ conference, held October 22-24, 2010, in Techny, IL.*

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*Fortunate Families President Linda Karle-Nelson welcomed parents to the opening session of "Joining Hands - Reaching Out." Many parents shared loving stories of their experience with LGBT daughters and sons. It was a memorable evening.*

called Joining Hands–Reaching Out. And in November-December, with the dynamic advocacy of board member Deb Word, we helped spearhead a national Advent campaign promoting the wearing of rainbow ribbons to heighten awareness of the psychological and sometimes physical pain many LGBT teens suffer at the hands of bullies.

Between highlights, the job of reaching out to parents, LGBT persons, allies and others goes on at this all-volunteer organization. In 2010, we expanded the newsletter list, added resources to the website, introduced the new email communication FORUM and fielded more individual calls, letters and emails than at any time in our 6-year history.

The “thanks” goes to you for your support, your involvement and your prayers. Your love for your children is what makes Fortunate Families work. We hope you take a few minutes to review this Report and see what your love is accomplishing.

We are grateful for you.

Linda Karle-Nelson  
President

Also in April, we co-sponsored with other Catholic LGBT ministries a newspaper ad decrying the decision of Colorado hierarchy to refuse enrollment in a parish school to two children of a lesbian couple. This same month, we also issued a joint statement challenging the firing of a Catholic school religion teacher, with 28 years experience and glowing recommendations, because she was a lesbian.

In June, Fortunate Families responded to the U.S. Bishops’ opposition to the Employment Non-discrimination Act (ENDA) by sending an open letter to federal legislators, protesting the Bishops’ misleading and inappropriate statements.

In September, after months of prep work, Fortunate Families joined with DignityUSA, New Ways Ministry and Call To Action to form the coalition Equally Blessed. (See the interview with Casey and Mary Ellen Lopata on pages 4-5 for more information.)

In October, Fortunate Families held its first conference for parents – a gathering of more than 50 people,

### 2010 Income and Expense Report

#### Income

Contributions	\$30,838.00
Book Sales	1,094.43
Other Income	121.59
Parents’ Conference	<u>5,425.50</u>
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$37,479.52</b>

#### Expense

Cost of Books	\$ 1,370.26
Administrative	1,147.42
Postage/Shipping	2,144.14
Print Materials	3,595.75
General: fees, equipment, supplies, publications, etc.	5,004.92
Telephone/Communications	1,122.60
Meetings/Travel	6,535.24
Parents’ Conference	<u>9,788.96</u>
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>\$30,709.29</b>

**Net Income** **\$ 6,770.23**

# Joining Hands – Reaching Out

## Fortunate Families’ 2010 Gathering Unites Catholic Parents and Ministry Leaders

Fortunate Families held its first-ever national conference October 22-24 in Techny, IL. It was a fulfilling and memorable weekend, made more so by the presence and participation of leaders from five of the most prominent organizations involved in Catholic LGBT ministry in the U.S.

The Friday evening opening session was highlighted by personal stories lovingly shared by the more than 50 parent-attendees – an experience one mother described as “overwhelming.”

Saturday, informative panels and presentations were offered by ministry leaders Frank DeBernardo of New Ways Ministry, Marianne Duddy-Burke of DignityUSA, Sheila Nelson of the Catholic Association for Lesbian and Gay Ministry (CALGM), Mary Ellen Lopata of Fortunate Families and Nicole Sotelo of Call To Action. Noted trainer Rev. Vicki Wunsch facilitated a session on the “Power of Strategic Storytelling.”

Evaluations were very positive. Wrote one attendee: We don’t have to take this journey alone.” And another: “How I wish we could get our pastors here.”



Saturday morning panelists: Mary Ellen Lopata, Fortunate Families co-founder; Marianne Duddy-Burke, executive director of DignityUSA; and Frank DeBernardo, executive director of New Ways Ministry described new ministry initiatives.



Sheila Nelson, president of CALGM, completed the morning panel. Trainer Vicki Wunsch (center) facilitated the afternoon workshop. Saturday evening, Nicole Sotelo, program director for Call To Action, joined the “hot button” discussion.



Nancy Mascotte of South Bend, IN participated in the Q&A following a panel presentation. Tony Garascia, also from South Bend, lectured at Sunday mass.



Left: Jerry and Artemae Anderson, from Detroit MI, shared their story with other parents at the opening session. Right: Marianne and David Nichols from Sarnia, Ontario, discussed the power of story-telling in a breakout. Attendees came from 16 states and one province of Canada. Many are active at home in LGBT ministry.

# *Equally Blessed: Creating a Catholic Movement for LGBT Equality*



Casey and Mary Ellen Lopata co-founded Fortunate Families in Rochester, NY in 2004.

In May, 2009, Fortunate Families co-founders Mary Ellen and Casey Lopata were invited by the Arcus Foundation to join a dozen other prominent Catholics to develop a 5-year strategic plan for building within the Catholic Church a movement that affirms the moral equality and civil rights of LGBT people. An outcome of this process was the formation of a new pro-LGBT coalition of four national ministries, named *Equally Blessed*. The Annual Report editor asked Mary Ellen and Casey what this all means for Fortunate Families – and for our LGBT children.

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**First, congratulations on being selected to help with this ground-breaking initiative. What is it that we mean when we talk of “building a movement” within the Church?**

**Casey:** Polls show a majority of Catholics support LGBT persons and oppose discrimination against them. But this only becomes a “movement” if and when this majority can be mobilized. That means networking, communication, education, organizing and motivation.

**So what kind of Catholic expertise was represented on the planning group?**

**Casey:** The group was a diverse mix of gay and straight advocates including ministry leaders, academics, theologians and other movement-related professionals.

**One outcome of the planning was the creation of *Equally Blessed*. Who makes up this coalition and what is its purpose?**

**Mary Ellen:** The *Equally Blessed* partners are Fortunate Families, Call To Action, DignityUSA and New Ways Ministry. We seek full equality for LGBT people, both in the church and in civil society.

**Will Fortunate Families now change any of its current activities or plans – and how will expenses and donations be handled?**

**Mary Ellen:** Fortunate Families’ corporate and financial structure is unchanged, our mission remains the same and our current activities continue. Each ministry continues to be solely responsible for its own fundraising and operational expenses. We will not co-mingle contributions or financial assets.

**How will Fortunate Families interact with *Equally Blessed*?**

**Casey:** While any major questions will require review and approval by our board, I’ve been authorized by our directors to act as the Fortunate Families’ liaison with *Equally Blessed*. Mary Ellen and I have been privileged to know and work with the leaders of these other ministries for many years. They are exceptionally talented and dedicated individuals. We will use phone, email and periodic meetings to consider, plan, execute and support *Equally Blessed* initiatives.

**What longer-term benefits do you see coming from the collaboration of these four ministries?**

**Casey:** The joint voices and efforts of Equally Blessed will be greater and more effective than the sum of each organization's separate endeavors, just as the Body of Christ is more than the sum of its parts.

The coalition speaks on behalf of many thousands of Catholics represented in its respective ministries – as well as for untold thousands who have no other way to be heard or heeded.

We are just beginning to uncover the potential we know is there, but of this we're certain: By uniting our talents, contacts and capabilities in common initiatives, Equally Blessed will significantly improve our collective ability to respond quickly, advocate clearly and command greater public and media attention in the work for LGBT justice and inclusion.

***How about other positives coming from the overall strategic plan?***

**Casey:** The theologians, academics and others who developed this plan are also planning activities in support of the strategic plan, some of which will include participation of Equally Blessed. We'll keep you informed of these activities as they are announced.

***We sense real excitement for the significant potential this strategic approach offers pro-LGBT ministry. Should we?***

**Casey:** Absolutely! The time is right. You may have seen the Public Religion Research analysis that shows Catholics remain more accepting of homosexuality than any other U.S. Christian tradition. Fifty-eight percent of Catholics agree that homosexuality should be accepted, vs. 30% who say it should be discouraged, and 59% support adoption by same sex couples who meet all legal qualifications.

**Mary Ellen:** And more than two-thirds of Catholics believe that same-sex couples in long-term committed relationships should have the same rights as married heterosexual couples in the areas of hospital visitation, health insurance and pension coverage. Six in ten Catholics support the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, according to the Human Rights Campaign.

**Casey:** Another important omen of change: A majority of Catholics under the age of 30 – 60% of them – favor same-sex marriage, compared to 25% of Catholics age 65 or older. Catholics, as a group, are more supportive of same-sex marriage than Americans in general.

We are a powerful demographic force and important

voting constituency. Catholics represent about 24% of the U.S. population.

A movement, indeed! The growing LGBT support among Catholics is a welcome and encouraging sign of progress and has created unprecedented opportunity.

Yes – we're excited!



## ***Early Advocacy from Equally Blessed***

**October, 2010** - Washington Post publishes "On Faith" essay titled *The Spiritual Side of Coming Out*, released by Equally Blessed and written by Frank DeBernardo, executive director of New Ways Ministry.

**October, 2010** – Media release issued: *Equally Blessed, a Catholic Coalition, Comments on Carl Paladino's Remarks*. (Paladino is the defeated 2010 Republican candidate for governor of New York.)

**November, 2010** – Media release issued: *Catholic Bishops Silent on Gay Suicides, 2000 Catholics and Four Catholic Organizations Issue Anti-Bullying Statement: 'We stand on the side of love.'*

**November, 2010** – Media release issued: *Advent: A Season of Hope for LGBT Youth – A Catholic Mom Speaks Out on You Tube Video*.

**December, 2010** – "Religion Dispatches" interview with Frank DeBernardo: *Equally Blessed – Wear a Rainbow Ribbon to Mass*.

*(The essay and media releases noted above are accessible at [www.fortuantefamilies.com](http://www.fortuantefamilies.com).)*

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*"I fully support Fortunate  
Families joining Equally  
Blessed....Your newsletter  
...is helping me 'hang on,'  
at least somewhat, to my  
connection with the  
Catholic Church."  
...Mother of a gay son*

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*"I thank and applaud every-  
one at Fortunate Families.  
This is work desperately  
needed in our church and  
society."*

*...Father of a lesbian  
daughter and gay son*

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**Bill Pickett** for keeping the Fortunate Families web site up to date and trouble shooting computer problems.

**Tom Ferrarese** whose wise guidance and in-kind donations support the smooth running of the FF office.

...and to:

- **Luanne Brando Ercolando**, office volunteer and superior proofreader,
- **Eileen & Bruce Kunsman** and...
- **Shirley & Dave Newman** and...
- **Sue & Bill Schaefer**, ...who regularly and cheerfully, in spite of paper cuts, prepare the newsletter for mailing,

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*"It was heartbreaking to walk with our son as he struggled with an ever-increasing awareness of his own personal truth... Today we see the healthy signs of new life developing within him. The process of freeing his spirit has begun, and we are so grateful. Our time spent with a Fortunate Families Listening Parent was one of those times when we saw God's light breaking through to shine in the darkness."*

*...Mom and Dad of a gay son*

### *With gratitude*

*we recognize the Fortunate Families Board of Directors. They give generously of their talent and time to bring the hope of justice and love to parents of LGBT daughters and sons.*

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# *"Never give up."*

*That's the father of a lesbian daughter talking. He was sharing with other parents at the Fortunate Families conference his belief that parents can be the difference-maker in the LGBT child's journey to justice and inclusion.*

*We "get" his message. But we need your help.*

# Yes . . . I want to help Fortunate Families.

I want to contribute: \$100 \_\_\_\_\_ \$80 \_\_\_\_\_ \$60 \_\_\_\_\_ \$40 \_\_\_\_\_ other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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