

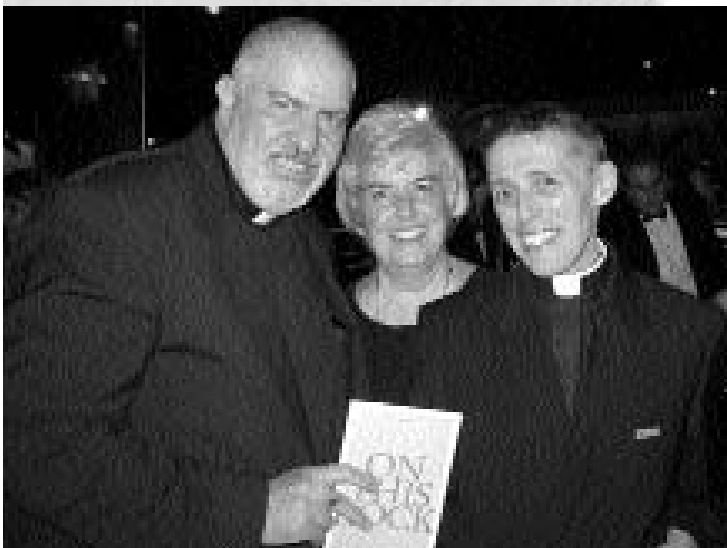
Banquet Nets Over \$80,000 for Capital Campaign

It was a grand and glorious evening that lived up to all the high expectations and then some – truly a singular moment in the annals of this 31-year-old LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) congregation, **Metropolitan Community Church of New York (MCCNY)**.

The October 21st fundraising banquet at the new Copacabana nightclub on Manhattan's West Side added more than \$80,000 to the coffers of MCCNY's **Capital Campaign** for a larger building and opened the possibility for a steady stream of bigger contributions to come by inaugurating Phase 2 of the Capital Campaign.

Franc Perry, chair of MCCNY's Capital Campaign, announced at the banquet that the Capital Campaign has established a Community Development Corporation (CDC) called **Metropolitan Community Charities**. This is a vital step in the fundraising process. It will make possible contributions by foundations, corporations and other large donors who would not give directly to a church. *(If you know of any such potential major donor, such as perhaps the company you work for, please call the church office at 212 629-7440).*

Upon entering the new Copa, located on West 36th Street at 11th Avenue, guests were escorted into a vast cocktail lounge where they immediately saw what the evening was all about: there were four large **architect's sketches** (created by **Jeff Bornheimer**, based on the vision of MCCNY's Pastor, **Rev. Pat Bumgardner**) showing exactly what the Capital Campaign is aiming to accomplish. The architectural sketches displayed interior and exterior views of the proposed new MCCNY church building and the adjacent social services center. The sketches revealed a beautiful and distinctive modern exterior for the new



AT THE BANQUET: Rev. Elder Troy Perry, Founder and Moderator of the worldwide predominantly-LGBT Metropolitan Community Churches denomination, with Mary Jane Gibney & Rev. Pat Bumgardner, Pastor of MCCNY. Excerpts from Rev. Pat's keynote address, page 3. (Photo by Deacon Danny Gonzalez).

The Query NEWSLETTER

**Metropolitan Community Church
of New York**

December 2002

church with an impressive circular dome and a soaring bell tower, and provided details of the 500-seat sanctuary, which – with its raised seating – affords clear sightlines of the pulpit and altar for all worshippers.

The architect's sketches also provided an overview of the expanded church property that the Capital Campaign envisions. The sketches showed that the present 3-story church building on West 36th Street will become exclusively a social services center, enabling MCCNY's **Sylvia Rivera Food Pantry** to increase the number of hungry people it feeds each month from the current 4,000 to more than 10,000, and providing facilities for the church's **Shelter for Homeless Queer Youths** to sleep 60 people a night instead of the current limit of 6.

The sketches disclosed that the new church building will rise on the parking lot on West 35th Street immediately behind the present structure. Purchasing the parking lot is the Capital Campaign's first priority. The sketches also show where the planned memorial garden and chapel will be located on the new property. The chapel will host gatherings of up to 50 people and provide a columbarium where the ashes of deceased saints may be interred.

Banquet guests gathered around the architect's sketches and viewed them with obvious admiration and awe. It was a good way to start the evening, reminding everyone in a concrete manner of why the Capital Campaign's goal of raising millions of dollars over the next few years is so crucial.

There were many familiar MCCNY faces among the crowd in the Copa's cocktail lounge, but just as many newcomers being introduced to the church and its good works for the first time at this event, which had been publicized in *Next* magazine and other queer publications. There were banquet guests from far and wide: **Rich Walker** came all the way from San Francisco to sponsor a table. **Scott Woolweaver**, who has played in the Boston Pops, came from Boston to show his support for **musician/impresario David Raleigh**. There were members of **Governor George Pataki's** staff mingling with the crowd. (Was it just a coincidence that, after the Governor's aides were besieged with impassioned pleas for passage of a state-wide non-discrimination law by guests at

the banquet, the Governor announced the very next afternoon that – 31 years after it was first introduced, and 8 long years after he took office – the bill will finally come to the floor of the State Senate this year?)

Following a lively hour of socializing in the Copa's cocktail lounge, the 500 guests proceeded upstairs to the banquet hall. They had barely finished saying grace, munching on their mescaline salads and selecting their entree option – sirloin steak or portabello mushroom – when the evening's sensational entertainment began.

David Raleigh, a member of the banquet planning committee, recruited an all-star line-up of big-name performers for the evening and served as the master of ceremonies – besides doing more than his share as a vocalist and at the keyboards.

The first selection, performed by the **MCCNY Men's Ensemble** – **David Raleigh, Frank Cruz, Eric James, Tim Mathis** and **Franc Perry** – was an original composition, entitled "On This Rock" (Matthew 16:18), written for MCCNY's Capital Campaign by **David Raleigh**. Its lyrics proclaim in part [copyright 2001 by David Raleigh, reprinted with permission]:

*On this rock will I build My church
A place where My love will set people free
In My house there is room for all
Who gather within to learn about Me.*

*I need your talents and your time
I need your nickels and your dimes
I need you on your knees in prayers
That My love reaches everywhere
I need your body and your soul...*

*I need MCC
Come build it with Me
Let's build MCC
I need you with Me
I need MCC.*

Next up on stage, fresh from a hit run at the Time Café/Fez, was actor/singer **Flotilla DeBarge**, who had the crowd laughing and applauding. **John Bucchino**, award-winning songwriter and singer, then performed. He was followed by **Brian Lane Green**, the Tony Award-nominated actor/singer who made his debut on Broadway as Huck Finn in *Big River* and most recently appeared as Jojo in *The Life* – and who was seen in the popular gay movie *Circuit*.

Saving an exceptional treat for last, **David Raleigh** introduced **Billy Porter**, the star of stage and screen whose Broadway credits include such notable shows as *Miss Saigon*, *Grease*, and *Smokey Joe's Café*, and who has opened for the likes of Aretha Franklin and Rosie O'Donnell and has released his own hot-selling solo CD, but who is perhaps best known to gay film fans for his co-starring role in *The Broken Hearts Club* (which made its national cable debut on HBO2 the night of the banquet). Banquet-

goers who tuned in to WBLS as they prepared themselves for the event heard Billy Porter's current R&B hit "Love Is on the Way" on the radio. **David Raleigh** reminded the crowd how thrilling it was to have a star of Billy Porter's fame performing for an MCCNY fundraiser.

Honoring MCCNY and supporting its Capital Campaign by their presence at the banquet were all three openly LGBT members of the New York City Council – **Councilmembers Margarita Lopez, Phil Reed** and **Christine Quinn**. (Councilmember **Phil Reed**, bless his heart, didn't stop there – he subsequently joined the congregation several times for Sunday morning Worship Services). Likewise attending the banquet was the first openly LGBT person elected to the New York State Legislature, long-time **Assemblymember Deborah Glick**.

Other high officials who regretted that scheduling conflicts prevented them from attending but who sent messages for publication in the banquet's Commemorative Journal included Mayor **Mike Bloomberg**, Congressman **Jerrold Nadler**, City Comptroller **William J. Thompson**, Manhattan Borough President **C. Virginia Fields**, and openly LGBT and HIV+ **State Senator Tom Duane**, prime sponsor of the transgender-inclusive version of SONDA, the state-wide sexual orientation non-discrimination act.

Distinguished guests at the banquet included **Rev. Bishop Zachary Jones**, Founder and Pastor of **Unity Fellowship of Christ Church of New York** in Brooklyn, and the **Hon. Dr. Marjorie Hill** who served as the official Mayoral liaison to the LGBT community in the Dinkins Administration. **MCC Rev. Elder-elect Diane Fisher**, the outgoing District Coordinator, attended. **MCC Rev. Elder Hong Tan** was unable to be present because of the death of his mother, but he wired a message saying, "I am with you in spirit and prayers... The need is SO great and I thank God for all of your faithfulness and vision not only to see but bravely to go forward in faith to claim the vision that will come true." (Congratulations are in order for **Rev. Hong** upon his appointment by London Mayor **Ken Livingstone** as a Senior Health Commissioner in charge of overseeing more than three-quarters of a billion dollars worth of health services each year).

The serious business of the banquet came when **Rev. Elder Troy D. Perry**, Founder and Moderator of the 34-year-old worldwide predominantly-LGBT **Metropolitan Community Churches denomination** (which now has 400 churches with 55,000 members in 22 countries, making it the largest LGBT organization on the face of the globe), took the podium to introduce MCCNY's Pastor, **Rev. Pat Bumgardner**.

Rev. Pat's extraordinarily powerful, compelling and moving **keynote address** opened many hearts (and wallets) at the banquet. A few brief excerpts:

... Tonight I want to talk about the crossroads, the point of decision I believe we who care passionately about the future of this city and its people, especially its children, are

at...Estimates range from 8,000 to 30,000 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children sleeping on our streets every night... You just have to have turned away ONE child – given one child a bag lunch, a hug and a fervent prayer for safety while you turned them out for the night – before you know something HAS to be done. On June 19th of this year, MCCNY opened its doors – inadequate as our current space is – to house the Ali Forney Center, the only space in all of New York City specifically designed to house homeless queer youth. Each night from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m., six young people – hear me: SIX! – out of 8 or 9 or 10 or 30 THOUSAND homeless queer children! – find refuge at MCCNY. About all that is being done for them right now is the provision of a safe place to sleep and shower; a couple of family-style meals (supper and breakfast) and a chance to talk and socialize with other kids like themselves. They need more... They need to get out of a shelter and into safe, affordable and permanent housing – and to do that, they need mentors and professional guidance; they need to finish school and training for jobs and help finding those jobs; they need life skills and good self-esteem and solid spiritual foundations: They need US – believing in their value and worth for the future, and putting our money, our connections, our time and energy where our hearts already are... Children, all children deserve to make it in this world – and adults too. Last month alone, 4,157 people received some form of food assistance through our Sylvia Rivera Food Pantry ministry...



Reverend Pat Bumgardner addresses the banquet.

St. Oscar Wilde once wrote, "God says, 'Wherefore and for what reason can I not send thee into heaven?' 'Because' (humanity answers) 'never and in no place have we been able to imagine it.'" We HAVE been able to imagine it: turning our existing building into a social services center and building a sanctuary on the parking lot behind it. We've been able to bring all kinds of people together from every race and culture and creed to support this vision, and tonight I invite you to join in imagining a spiritual complex where instead of 6, there are 60 kids, not only housed and fed, but part of a center where they would have the professional mentors they need, access to technical training and mental health counseling and the kind of support necessary to stay clean and sober... a spiritual center with an industrial kitchen complex to expand our feeding assistance from four thousand to ten thousand people each month...I want a big church, a sanctuary that can seat 500 or more – I won't lie to you – but that isn't the

whole picture to me; I want the kind of sanctuary...where other community forums and gatherings can happen. It makes no sense to me that in a city the size of New York, there is not one queer-identified and owned space that can seat that many people at a time; to me, that's the old days, when not more than a few of us could congregate without being swept up... New York City is the center of the world. I believe God has called MCCNY to be a spiritual center for this city!

[Full text available at www.mccny.org].

Rev. Pat's speech segued into a 10-minute film about the church and its ministries. The upbeat documentary, created by Alan Roth, featured rousing sacred music by members of the church's music ministry present and past (including the full 30-voice MCCNY choir under the direction of John Fischer, and the unforgettable singing of former Assistant Pastor Rev. Pressley Sutherland, his spouse David Bedella and former choirmaster Frank Cruz) interspersed with scenes of ministries such as the Sylvia Rivera Food Pantry, along with testimonial comments from people served by those ministries and a diverse cross-section of the congregation witnessing to how they found God's love at MCCNY and now seek to bring that love to others by expanding the church and its facilities.

Anything the Query could say about the countless hours of hard work by the banquet planning committee and the volunteers who assisted them would have to be so extravagant to be accurate that it would seem hyperbolic to anyone who wasn't there. So suffice it to say, nothing that's been reported in the past few pages would have happened without the toils of the banquet planning committee: Lynn Scott & Rita Saylor, Mark Gilrain & Mohammad Shatara, Helen Love & Faith Nelson, Cliff Boone & Robert Casaldo, and David Raleigh.

Again, special thanks to MCCNY's Capital Campaign members: Candidate for the ordained ministry Franc Perry, chair; John Madera, scribe; Jeff Bornheimer, scout; Bob France, an attorney who did the lion's share of the legal work necessary to incorporate as a Community Development Corporation; Deacon Malcolm W. Smith; and the Rev. Pat Bumgardner, Pastor.

Contributions to the Capital Campaign can be mailed to MCCNY, 446 W. 36th St., NY NY 10018.



At a pre-banquet publicity event, Rev. Kristen is "crowned" by banquet planning committee members Cliff Boone & Robert Casaldo.

ART SALE BENEFITS CAPITAL CAMPAIGN:

Andre Moreira & Jerome Dumaine, who are on the committee soliciting major donors for the Capital Campaign, file this report: *At the Oct. 21st gala, Tom Cleveland from OmnifineArt made an offer to help raise money. For each item purchased directly from OmnifineArt, the purchaser will receive a 20% discount off the retail price and 30% of the retail price will go to MCCNY's Capital Campaign. All you have to do is mention MCCNY at the time of the purchase. OmnifineArts has exclusive reproduction rights from the entire collection of the Smithsonian and other fine museums around the world, and they also sell art from young painters and sculptors. Two pieces that were on display at the Oct. 21st banquet received lots of inquiries. This artwork would make an excellent holiday gift for yourself or others; also please pass this information along to interior decorators and art collectors you may know. Check the OmnifineArt website www.omnifineart.com or call toll-*

free 1-800-666-4131, ext. 236. This offer lasts until the end of the year and may be extended for the duration of the Capital Campaign if there is enough interest. Thanks to Tom Cleveland and David Chin of OmnifineArt for this generous offer.

MUSIC RECITAL BENEFIT FOR CAPITAL CAMPAIGN:

Daniel Brenna (outstanding MCCNY choir member and soloist) will be offering a classical vocal concert for the benefit of the MCCNY Capital Campaign on Friday, Feb. 14th at 8 p.m. in the sanctuary of Christ and St. Stephen's Church (120 W. 69th St.). Tickets will be available at the door for a suggested price of \$15. See Daniel at church on Sundays if you would like to make a reservation. Djordje Nesic will be Daniel's collaborative pianist as they perform works by Mozart, Kilpinen, Rachmaninov, Sibelius, Kander and other American composers. The following month the program goes on international tour in Finland.

Banquet!



500 people attended the \$100-a-plate fundraising banquet for MCCNY's Capital Campaign. Every one of them deserves to have their picture in the Newsletter. Unfortunately, we regret we don't have space to do that, so we hope no one is offended that these few snapshots must try to convey the enthusiasm that filled the Copa on Oct. 21st. (Photographs by Deacon Danny Gonzalez)

People & Events in the News

SEPTEMBER 11TH OBSERVED: On the first anniversary of the horrific 9/11 terrorist attacks, MCCNY's sanctuary was filled for a special **Service of Remembrance and Hope**. Everyone present received a candle and an acorn. Three voices who spoke: **Deacon Enez Cooper**, whose beloved spouse **Renee Barrett** died; **Daniel Brenna** and **Jerome Dumaine**, who narrowly escaped with their lives that awful day.

11 NEW DEACONS TAKE OFFICE: A record number of new lay Deacons were invested by Pastor Rev. Pat Bumgardner at MCCNY during Worship Services on Sunday, Sept. 29th. Lay Deacons are a vital part of the Pastoral Staff and perform a great number of functions including praying with people who request it. They must complete a rigorous course of instruction and training by the Pastor before being invested. They serve for a term of 3 years, which may be renewed. The 11 new Deacons are: **Jorge Blondette, Montel Cherry, Enez Cooper, Tyrone Jackson, Jesus Montoya, Carolyn Parker, Len Richardson, Norma Sharp, Michelle Slack, Malcolm Smith and Bali White**. They join the 5 Deacons already serving: **Marvin Bagwell, Vernon Bruette, Danny Gonzalez, Sandy Hernandez and Buddy Seaton**.



Some of the new deacons praying as they are commissioned.

REV. DR. ROBIN HAWLEY GORSLINE ORDAINED: Rev. Dr. Robin Hawley Gorsline, MCCNY's Director of Religious Education, was ordained into the ranks of the clergy in the worldwide MCC denomination in the presence of his relatives and friends and the MCCNY congregation on Sunday morning, October 20th. It was a joyous occasion made all the more so by the knowledge that, unlike so many who are ordained at this MCC Teaching Church and then leave to answer calls elsewhere in the denomination, Rev. Robin will be staying here at this church. Rev. Robin's spouse, **Dr. Jonathan Lebolt**, is a member of the evening choir and sang a beautiful solo

during the Ordination Ceremony. **Denise Jansen** and **Rosemarie Napoli** led the congregation in a lovely, moving chant of the **Litany of the Saints**, including not only the traditional canon from Mary Mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene to Joan of Arc but saints of the modern era from Oscar Wilde, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Archbishop Oscar Romero to MCCNY's Sylvia Rivera, Alejandro Ortiz, Adrian Pendragon, Ron Mounts, Gabby Devries, John Orlando, Renee Barrett and all the saints who died on 9/11, and Rev. Robin's own dear deceased loved ones and ancestors.



Rev. Dr. Robin Hawley Gorsline celebrates Communion at his Ordination Service.

COUNCIL OF MINISTRIES MEETS MONTHLY: Rev. Kristen Klein-Cechettini, MCCNY's Assistant Pastor for Congregational Life, hosts monthly meetings (3rd Thursday of each month at 6:30 p.m.) where coordinators and representatives of the church's active ministries gather for the sharing of information and insights and mutual re-energization. Some of the currently most active ministries are: Arcoiris Latina/os Cristianos, A Good Word Library, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Children's (including Sunday School), Choir and Music (under the direction of John Fischer), Christians of African Descent (Deacon Carolyn Parker, chair), 40+, GenderPeople, Men's Programming (Steven Rodick, coordinator), Newsletter, Prayer Power, Religious Education, Sylvia Rivera Food Pantry (Rev. Tawnee Walling, director), 12-Step, Wednesday 7 p.m. Midweek Worship (under the direction of Candidate for the ordained ministry Franc Perry), Women's Programming. These ministries are of course open, **5**

People & Events in the News (continued from page 5)

and volunteers/new members are eagerly welcomed. For more information on how you can participate, contact Rev. Kristen (212 629-7440 ext. 11, or RevKrisKC@aol.com). **Emory Edwards** has assumed the challenge of reviving and upgrading the vital **Welcome Home** ministry; to volunteer or find out more, contact Emory at 201 915-9814 or eedwards@aya.yale.edu

IMPORTANT ANNIVERSARIES CELEBRATED: On October 9th, MCCNY joined with the worldwide predominantly-LGBT MCC denomination in celebrating the **34th anniversary of the founding of Metropolitan Community Churches** by **Rev. Troy Perry** in Los Angeles in October 1968. On Halloween Weekend (with the Imperial Court of NY in attendance) MCCNY celebrated the **9th anniversary** of the acquisition of the present church at 446 W. 36th Street in Manhattan, which made MCCNY the first LGBT religious or spiritual organization in NYC to own its own building. And next month on January 5th (Epiphany Sunday/Fiesta de los Reyes Magos, Dia de los Sabios) MCCNY observes with great joy the **31st anniversary of the founding of this queer congregation** in NYC by the late **Rev. Howard Wells** in January 1972.

CHURCH THANKS ITS VOLUNTEERS: Assistant Pastor **Rev. Kristen Klein-Cechettini** paid tribute to the volunteers whose efforts – often behind the scenes and unheralded – make MCCNY the vibrant congregation and hotbed of good works that it is. Visitors often express astonishment that this church accomplishes with **400 members** what some parishes of several thousand cannot do; that is made possible because, with God's grace and blessing, the members and friends of MCCNY freely devote so much of their time and talent without seeking recognition. But recognition was the name of the game at the first annual "Glinda Awards" on Thursday evening, Nov. 7th. About 60 of the 166 "winners" showed up to receive their awards in person (all will receive certificates). The ceremony was conducted amidst considerable wit and humor by Rev. Kristen, **Deacons Montel Cherry & Michelle Slack**, with music by **John Fischer** and **Carolyn Eufrazio**. One of the many unsung heroes who finally got to take a bow in public was **Howard Herrera**, who creates and places all of the church's advertising. He is responsible for the ads seen every week in Gay City News and other LGBT publications, and he designs the ubiquitous "**God Made Us Queer – MCCNY**" banners and stickers that are used so effectively for outreach and recruitment. The penultimate prize at the "Glindas," the prestigious **Best Overall** volunteer award, went – in a tie – to **Bob Hollinger** and Deacon **Buddy Seaton**. Then the evening ended with presentation of the **Lifetime Achievement Award** to **Joe Kennedy**, who has been an activist for queer liberation since he joined the Gay Activists Alliance

(GAA) more than 3 decades ago. [Editor's note: Rev. Kristen and Query co-editor Les LaRue insisted on inserting that last sentence over the embarrassed protests of your humble editor].

MEN'S GROUP KEEPS BUSY: The Homecoming Dance for the whole congregation in September was hosted by MCCNY's men's programming ministry, which also decorated the church's social hall for the Christmas season at its annual "Sparkle decorating party and devotional." Coordinator **Steven Rodick** reports the men's group has many activities open to all self-identified men including summer barbecues/pool parties, year-round movie nights, lectures, discussion groups (2 recent topics included safer sex and body image) and a prayer-centered event called Direct Connect. Volunteers from the men's group staffed MCCNY's booth at the Gay Life Expo at the Javits Center last month. Besides coordinator Steven Rodick, the men's group steering committee members are **Steve Baker, Frank DiMarco, Howard Herrera, Bob Hollinger, Deacon Tyrone Jackson** and **Mark McNease**. The group was founded nearly 5 years ago by **Mark Steiger, Rev. Pressley Sutherland** and **Steven Rodick**. The new Pastoral Staff liaison to the men's group is Candidate for the ordained ministry **Michael Hydes**.

NEWS IN BRIEF: **Rev. Patrick Cheng**, former Assistant Pastor of MCCNY, has become Chair of **Asian-Pacific Islander** ministries for the entire worldwide MCC denomination.... **Bob Wolff**, former MCCNY Board Member, has written from his home in Vermont to thank his many friends here for continuing to keep him in their prayers during this difficult time of illness.... **Heritage of Pride (HOP)**, the LGBT organization that runs NYC's June Pride events including the march down Fifth Avenue, nominated MCCNY's 2002 float for an award in the "**Best Sound System**" category. Hardly a year goes by that the MCCNY contingent and its float, with music by **David Raleigh's Band** and the choir directed by **John Fischer**, don't garner some kind of public acclaim....



MCCNY's 2002 Pride float: nominated for "Best Sound". (photo by Valerie King)



Troy Perry leads a service outside
the first MCC in Los Angeles.

*The Advocate national newsmagazine notes the 34th anniversary
of the founding of the MCC denomination.*

MORE IMPROVEMENTS, THANKS TO LES LARUE: Once again, the Query Newsletter owes a big debt of gratitude to **Graphics and Layout Editor Les LaRue**. Les's task was especially daunting with the unusual number of pictures in this issue. And, above and beyond the call, Les found a new LGBT-friendly printer (SharpImage Printing, Inc.) who charges no more for 2-color printing than used to be paid for one color. We've also upped our circulation to 1,500.

SPEAKING OUT FOR GOD'S TRUTH: Inspired by the messages heard from MCCNY's pulpit each Sunday and the lessons learned at "Queering the Bible" Bible Study, MCCNY's congregants are empowered and emboldened to speak out whenever they encounter God's Word being misconstrued or misused. Reprinted below are 2 recent examples that reached thousands of readers. The first is a letter by musician and ACT UP activist **Andy Buck** in Gay City News (9/27-10/3/02) in response to a column by Michelangelo Signorile, and the second is a letter by Yours Truly in the Provincetown Banner (7/25/02) in reply to a letter headlined "Town faces God's wrath."

Unless otherwise noted, Newsletter articles are written by the editor.

Photo credits: Pride float by **VALERIE KING**. All others by Deacon **DANNY GONZALEZ**.

THE BIBLE, BY THE NUMBERS

To the Editor:

I just wanted to comment on Michelangelo Signorile's column in last week's Gay City News ("Might Oklahoma be OK?" September 20 - 26). Although I appreciate his overall message, I'd like to correct a couple of his assumptions about the Bible.

First of all, despite claims by Pentecostals, Fundamentalists, and others, it is actually impossible to interpret the Bible literally, unless one is schizophrenic. If anyone claims to you that they are Biblical literalists, ask them how many of each kind of animal Noah gathered onto the ark. The answer is two...and, thanks to some inconsistent editing a couple of thousand years ago, the answer is also seven.

Secondly, it is not true that "we all know too well what the Bible says about homosexuality." Many don't realize that, with one exception, no book in the Bible says anything clear (if anything at all) about consensual homosexual relationships. Temple prostitution, yes. Pedophilia, probably. Inhospitality to strangers – in the case of the Sodom story – yes. (Ezekiel himself flatly states that this was the sin of Sodom. Isn't it ironic, therefore, that inhospitable gay-bashers and not their targets are the actual Sodomites?)

But, if my memory serves, only the book of Leviticus has a clearly stated admonition against men lying with men and women with women. No other Old Testament prophet discusses it. Neither does Jesus. And, of course, in Leviticus, Moses also comes down hard on people who eat pork and mix their fabrics. Which brings us back to those so-called literalists. How many of them are fabric-mixing carnivores?

Homophobes can claim what they want, but please don't fall into the trap that, usually, only lazy journalists fall into (and I don't consider Signorile one of them), by assigning as fact that which is merely myth.

Andy Buck
Brooklyn

Haters are the real Sodomites

To the editor:

The mid-summer letters column in the Banner hardly seems the place for a weighty theological discussion or Biblical exegesis. But I must respond to your letter-writer from Smalltown, Ohio who is as ignorant and ill-informed about Scripture as he is hateful and bigoted when he attacks P-town for "go[ing] easy on gays" and declares, "It sure isn't difficult to figure out why God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah."

The sin of Sodom was inhospitality to strangers, failure to help visitors in need. The prophet Ezekiel quotes God on why Sodom was destroyed: "This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy." (Ezekiel 16 : 49). Jesus, instructing his apostles as he sends them out to preach, said, "If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgement than for that town." (Matthew 10 : 14 - 15). Could Christ have been any more emphatic that the sin of Sodom was inhospitality and rudeness to visitors?

Authorities such as The New Oxford Annotated Bible (Third Edition, 2001) make this crystal clear. Scholars now know that it was not until the medieval Dark Ages that the myth was invented linking Sodom's destruction same-sex love. The truth is that, by their refusal to welcome and embrace P-town's visitors (from a minority group that has been marginalized and discriminated against), it is the inhospitable and hateful ones who –quite literally, according to the Biblical text – are the Sodomites, guilty and facing God's wrath.

Joe Kennedy
New York City

Upcoming Events

See schedule of **Holidays Services** below.

Sun., Jan. 19 at 2 p.m., ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING (members, please attend: MCCNY's 2003 budget will be adopted, election for Board of Directors will be held).

Sat., Feb. 8 at 7 p.m., annual Evening of Entertainment.

Sat., Feb. 15th at 10 a.m., annual Valentine's Day bag lunch distribution to the homeless around the city.

Wed., March 6 at 7 p.m., Ash Wednesday Service with distribution of ashes and Communion.

Tues., March 11th, Lenten Bible Study begins (classes are held at many convenient times throughout the week, at the church and other locations).



Part of the morning choir on Homecoming Sunday. (Photo by Deacon Danny Gonzalez)

HOLIDAYS SERVICES

CHRISTMAS EVE, 7 p.m.: Lighted Nativity scene, Christmas Eve party with hot buffet for all.

CHRISTMAS DAY, 11 a.m.: Service of the Word, Christmas dinner follows in social hall.

KWANZAA, Dec. 29th, 10 a.m. - 7 p.m.: Open to all members and friends. Free admission. Buffet and dancing.

NEW YEAR'S EVE, 31st:

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., Jan. 16, 2003, 7 p.m.:

LGBTQ service sponsored by the church. Beth Simchewsky, Congregation

Sumgardner preaching;

Christmas dinner

Christians; Rev.

service. Contact church office for details.

rs., Jan. 16, 2003, 7 p.m.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Service, Congregation