

Upcoming Events

MCCNY SPIRITUAL RETREATS – May 9-11 and Sept. 12-14: To be held at the Incarnation Center (www.incarnationcenter.org), an Episcopal retreat center on a lovely 350-acre site – complete with its own lake and outdoor labyrinth – in Ivoryton, CT, about two and half hours from NYC. All-expenses-paid cost for each retreat is about \$120. Sign up immediately, as space is limited. Contact Rev. Kristen Klein-Cechettini at the church office, 212 629-7440 ext. 11.

"FASHION ON GENDER," a transgender charity fashion show to benefit MCCNY's Sylvia Rivera Food Pantry – May 20 at 8 p.m. Suggested donation \$-10.

STAFF OF THE QUERY NEWSLETTER:

Editor: Joe Kennedy
Layout & Graphic Design: Les LaRue
Editor: Les LaRue
Photographer: Deacon Danny Gonzalez

Unless otherwise noted, Newsletter articles are written by the editor. The Query is indebted to the dozen or so volunteers who kindly give up one Sunday afternoon every three months for a "Newsletter mailing-out party." Ministries of the church are encouraged to keep the Newsletter informed of your activities so we can spread the word to our circulation of 1,500.

HOLY WEEK SERVICES:

- † PALM SUNDAY, April 13 at 10 am and 7 pm, Blessing and Distribution of the Palms, Rev. Pat Bumgardner, preaching.
- † Wednesday, April 16th at 7 pm, Foot-washing service, Candidate Franc Perry presiding.
- † HOLY THURSDAY, April 18th at 7 pm, "queer liberation seder" in the social hall, Rev. Kristen Klein-Cechettini and Rev. Dr. Robin Hawley Gorsline presiding.
- † GOOD FRIDAY, April 18th at 7 pm, Stations of the Cross and Reading of the Passion, Lavender Light Gospel Choir and MCCNY Spectacular (!) Choir performing.
- † HOLY SATURDAY, April 19th at 3 pm, Annual Easter Banquet in the lovely Refectory at Union, Honoring Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS and Faisal Alam.
- † HOLY SATURDAY, April 19th at 7 pm, Easter Vigil Service with Lighting of the New Fire
- † EASTER SUNDAY, April 20th at 10 am and 7 pm, Celebration of the Resurrection, David Raleigh's Little/Big Band! and MCCNY Outrageous(!) Choir performing.

The Rev. Troy D. Perry preaching Good Friday through Easter!

Tickets still available for
the Easter banquet with
Rev. Troy Perry
Sat., Apr. 19, 3 PM.
Call 212 629-7440

Metropolitan Community Church of New York
446 West 36th Street
New York, NY 10018

An Easter Message From the Pastor by Reverend Pat Bumgardner

Believing is Seeing

Easter 2003

Dear Friends,

As we prepare to once again celebrate this central feast in the Church year — the Resurrection of Jesus the Christ — I am struck by the final benediction of John's Gospel: "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe."

There are so many things our hearts hunger and thirst for, so many things our eyes long to see.

I do not know where we will be by Easter, but now as I write this people are fighting and being wounded or captured; some are dying. I want to see peace on this earth.

The city we live in is proposing mammoth cuts to community based organizations, such as ours, that serve and care for people living with AIDS. We need more, not less, money for food and supplies. We want to see abundance.

We've prayed and strategized and worked — some have genuinely sacrificed— for a new home for MCCNY. Everyone is ready to see our vision realized.

The Query Newsletter

Metropolitan Community Church
of New York

April 2003

Many things are yet before us, but we hold on to our dream, our vision, the promise. We see with the eyes of faith. And it's that holding on with courage and conviction — that visionary glancing ahead — that characterizes us as the kind of blessed people John's Gospel was talking about. — There is no place I would rather be for Holy Week and Easter; no people I find more inspiring than you who make up MCCNY. You give life and breath to the truth and the promise of the Gospel. Thank you for your witness. You give me hope, and a sense of the possibilities before us. For this resurrecting blessing, I thank you.

I hope that you, too, will make MCCNY your spiritual center this holy season as we celebrate.

With Love,



Rev. Pat



A BREAKTHROUGH FOR SAME-SEX MARRIAGE EQUALITY? **Maribelle Vazquez**, a leader in MCCNY's Arcoiris Latino/a ministry, and her spouse, **Sophia Pazos**, get their marriage license application at the City Clerk's office on Valentine's Day. They and other same-sex couples from the church are pursuing legal action. (Photo by Deacon Danny Gonzalez)

MCC Says: End Discrimination In Marriage Now

The frigid weather outside was only a prelude to the bigoted cold shoulder that same-sex couples from Metropolitan Community Church of New York (MCCNY) received when they demanded marriage licenses on **Valentine's Day**. The **City Clerk** turned them away empty-handed, insisting that marriage and the 1,049 specific legal privileges that come with it are reserved only for heterosexuals. But the MCCNY couples say this outrageously discriminatory message of second-class citizenship for queer people will not be the last word. Represented by attorney and MCCNY member **Ted Bohn**, the same-sex couples are filing Article 78 challenges in

court to overturn the administrative action of the City Clerk. At the same time, MCCNY will aggressively pursue every avenue to achieve **Rev. Troy Perry's** dream of making state-recognized same-sex marriage a reality in his lifetime.

MCCNY Pastor **Rev. Pat Bumgardner** and her spouse of 16 years, **MARY Jane Gibney**, along with eight other same-sex couples from the congregation and more than a dozen friends, supporters and representatives of the queer media (including a film crew from the **PBS's *In the Life***) arrived outside New York City's Municipal Building across the street from City Hall shortly after dawn to be first in line on that bitter cold Valentine's Day morning. When the Municipal Building's doors opened at 8:30, there was a hassle immediately when a queer-phobic security guard tried to bar **Gay City News** photographer **Doug Meszler** from entering to cover the protest. Saner heads ultimately prevailed, and the MCCNY group proceeded up to the Marriage License Bureau in the City Clerk's office.

Rev. Pat and **Mary Jane** asked for a marriage license application at the appropriate window and were given one. **MARIBELLE VAZQUEZ**, a leader in MCCNY's **Arcoiris [Rainbow] Latino/a ministry**, and her spouse, **Sophia Pazos**, asked for a marriage license application and were given one. Then a gay male couple asked for a marriage license application. They were refused. This stirred up more turmoil.

The editor of this Newsletter asked **City Clerk Victor Robles** why a gay male couple was a denied a marriage application after two lesbian couples had been given marriage license applications. Robles at first angrily and emphatically denied that any same-sex couples had been given marriage license applications. When it was quickly made evident to Robles that this statement was false and that indeed two lesbian couples had received marriage license applications from the proper window (see the page one photo of **Maribelle Vazquez** and **Sophia Pazos** receiving their marriage license application through the window), the official explanation changed to another absurdity: the lesbian couples were given the marriage license applications because **no one could tell they were same-sex couples**, but the gay male couple was refused because they were **"TOO OBVIOUS"**. Probably the truth, as hinted in the **New York Blade's** report on the incident by **Kevin Spence**, was that an employee at the window in the City Clerk's office gave out the initial two applications to the same-sex couples because (as she reportedly whispered to Rev. Pat in hushed tones) "I'm with you, I'm for it, I'm gay too," but then she had to stop for fear of losing her job.

African-American, Latino/a and white, lesbian and gay male, young and middle-aged – asked for marriage license applications at the windows and all were denied. Rev. Dr. Robin **Hawley Gorsline**, MCCNY's director of religious education, and his spouse, **Dr. Jonathan Lebolt**, decided to take another tack. Rev. Robin went up to the window to seek their application by himself. He was refused. The clerk insisted on seeing who his intended betrothed was before giving him the application. But rather than leaving the window meekly, Rev. Robin remained for half an hour demanding to see where it was written that one's proposed spouse had to accompany one to the window to get a license application. All the while the many heterosexual couples who flocked to the City Clerk's office for Valentine's Day had to wait, and the line outside the Municipal Building had grown to more than an hour's wait. "I'm very proud of Robin" for staying at the window and demanding his rights, said Jonathan, as quoted by **Andy Humm** in **Gay City News**.

Perhaps the touchstone of the day in media coverage was photographer **Doug Meszler's** color picture in **Gay City News** of MCCNY **Deacons Montel Cherry & Michelle Slack**, a picture showing sad but very loving spouses supporting each other after they were – in the words of the picture's caption – **"TURNED AWAY...at the City Clerk's office."**

Meanwhile, **Rev. Pat & Mary Jane**, and then **Maribelle & Sophia**, filled out their applications and proceeded to the next window to get their actual marriage licenses. They were denied. But they would not leave without a lengthy discussion and debate. Maribelle & Sophia remained at the desk for an hour. The clerk at the desk brought over the City Clerk's counsel to explain the refusal to issue them a marriage license. Finally, after long individual meetings with various same-sex couples, City Clerk Robles and his counsel agreed to a **group meeting** with all the same-sex couples, their supporters and their attorney Ted Bohn. Robles said he was only obeying the law as interpreted by his office's counsel. Rev. Pat thanked Robles for treating the protesters with courtesy; he had not called the police and had them arrested, even though they had clearly created a spectacle and slowed things down for hours on an already very busy, hectic day in his office. (Part of the reason for the non-violent treatment of the protesters by the City Clerk's office stemmed from the great **respect Robles developed for Rev. Pat** years ago when he was a City Councilmember and she lobbied him on behalf of justice for LGBT people).

Before departing, the same-sex couples and their supporters sang **"WE SHALL OVERCOME"** and announced that they would see the City Clerk in court.

The protest at the City Clerk's office was one of 120 such actions by MCC churches all across the country on



Leather Sunday at MCCNY found these congregants dressed for the occasion. (Leather Sunday photos by Deacon Danny Gonzalez).

Diversity and inclusiveness are hallmarks of this church. Ask a **transgender** person what one of the most trans-friendly places in NYC is and the answer will be "MCCNY." Ask a leather person what one of the most leather-friendly places is and the answer will be the same. No wonder an informal motto of this queer church is, **"Whether you're into leather or lace or anything in between, you've come to the right place at MCCNY!"** The 400-member Metro Bears club holds their meetings at MCCNY and have donated generously to the church's social services ministries. When **Wally Wallace**, the former manager of the legendary **Mineshaft** club, died, the gay leather community overflowed MCCNY for his memorial service (organized by **Deacon Marvin Bagwell**). The church's congregation always gets a chuckle when Rev. Pat refers to Leather Sunday as "an ancient liturgical tradition" because they know she's talking not just about MCCNY's long-standing policy of inclusiveness for leather people but to Biblical references as well – **John the Baptist**, of course, wore leather (Matthew 3:4), and centuries before that the description of God's prophet Elijah sounds a lot like those guys at the Metro Bears meetings: "a hairy man, with a leather" garment (2 Kings 1:8). In more recent times, according to **The Other Side of Silence** (1998, Henry Holt & Co. NYC), John



Rev. Pat Bumgardner wears the leather stole given to her by NYC's leather community in appreciation for the church's inclusive attitude to all in the LGBT community.

Loughery's scholarly history of gays in the 20th century, in 1968 Los Angeles **"a tall, well-built bear of a man, Troy Perry"** was called by God to be a prophet for a new generation. The congregation of the handsome, gregarious leatherman named Rev. Perry (who was then 28 years old) grew so rapidly that, Loughery relates, at first some wags wondered "whether MCC...was flourishing...[only] because the founder was so determined, handsome, and charismatic." That question, Loughery continues, was soon answered "as MCC branched out" across the country and around the globe.



*An MCCNY banner marks the gathering spot for the church's contingent as the **Inclusive St. Patrick's Parade** assembles in Queens.*

The 2-mile march through Sunnyside and Woodside, organized by gay activist **Brendan Fay**, is a rebuke to and a protest against the Manhattan parade that refuses to allow LGBT groups to march behind their own banners, as all other groups can. **The New York Times** headline called the Queens event "A Parade That Has Gays and the Mayor" and quoted Mayor Bloomberg as declaring, "I'm glad everybody can come and march in this parade – I wish all parades were that way." (So why doesn't he boycott parades that discriminate?) MCCNY's participation in the inclusive Queens parade is both a call for social justice and an act of outreach.

PUBLISHED LETTER REVEALS GOOD NEWS TO THE WIDER COMMUNITY: MCCNY's Interfaith Celebration of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday and the Capital Campaign's fundraising banquet at the Copacabana last year were brought to the attention of the whole queer community in this letter published in **Gay City News** (10-16 Jan 03):

January 8, 2003

To the Editor:

We agree with the letter writer Dion Brown (**Gay City News**, January 3-9, 2003) that the LGBT media should widen its definition of what's news – in other words, what interests the community – to go beyond a few stereotypical subjects.

Dion mentions adding sports coverage for starters.

We'd also like to see much more about the activities of the major LGBT religious congregations in the area, such as Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), Unity Fellowship Church (UFC), and Congregation Beth Simchat Torah (CBST).

Week in and week out, these LGBT houses of worship pack their pews with a total of a thousand people – and many times that number on special occasions. They play an important part in the life of the queer community and the struggle for social justice. To cite just 2 examples:

At their annual LGBT Interfaith Celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday, these three congregations are sending hundreds of letters to the White House demanding immediate freedom for 13 African Americans who are in jail in Texas on phony, trumped-up, racist charges.

Recently, 500 people paid \$100 and up to attend a fundraiser for MCC at the Copacabana. Out public officials such as Margarite Lopez, Phil Reed, Christine Quinn, and Deborah Glick were there, along

with prominent entertainers like Flotilla DeBarge and Billy Porter, plus nationally known gay religious leaders including Rev. Troy Perry and Bishop Zachary Jones. The governor sent a staff member with greetings, and the mayor sent a letter of support. The fundraiser launched a multi-year, multi-million-dollar drive by MCC to get bigger facilities – with a seating capacity of 500 people (for LGBT meetings and community forums as well as religious services); with an expanded Homeless Queer Youth Shelter to house 60 kids a night (instead of 6), and with an expanded Sylvia Rivera Food Pantry to serve 10,000 meals a month (instead of the current 4,000) to people living with AIDS and other folks in need.

All these ingredients – trendy fundraising locale, well-known politicians and entertainers, lots of money raised for a good cause that will have a real impact on the lives of people in our community – seem to add up to "newsworthy", yet there was nary a peep about it in the paper.

Yes, mainstream religion has been one of the worst oppressors and slanderers of queer people. And yes, that makes it MORE – NOT LESS – important for **Gay City News** to keep the community abreast of developments in the large, growing, fully and proudly queer and social justice activist religious congregations that are charting a new path into a liberated future right here and right now.

Rita Saylor and Lynn Scott
Ocean Grove, NJ

People in the News

Rev. Elder Arlene Ackerman visiting MCCNY last month. Rev. Arlene, the new Regional Elder (akin to Presiding Bishop) for region three in the worldwide predominantly LGBT Metropolitan Community Churches denomination, hailed MCCNY as an "Anchor Church" in the region. (Photo by Deacon Danny Gonzalez).



Board member **Gayle Davis** introduced MCCNY's special celebration of **Kwanzaa** Sunday. Then, as members and friends of the church's **Christians of African Descent (CAD)** ministry (chaired by **Deacon Carolyn Parker**) sprinkled the libation and lit the 7 Kwanzaa candles, they testified about the meaning of each of the Kwanzaa principles to them as queer people of color..... Among the members of **MCCNY's Asian Pacific Islander (API)** ministry who played leading roles in Worship Services on Lunar New Year Sunday were Board member **Susie Chin** and **Boone Young**. Look for more special events featuring MCCNY's API ministry in May, when the church celebrates **Asian-Pacific Islander Month**.... In his recent appearance as a guest preacher at MCCNY, **Rev. Durrell Watkins**, Pastor of Christ the Liberator MCC in East Brunswick, NJ, demonstrated why Sunday attendance at his church has tripled (to nearly 100) since he arrived there: with his forceful, delightfully fast-talking style, he told the truth about certain notorious right-wing "fundamentalist preachers".....You never know what you'll miss if you skip church on Sunday: **David Raleigh** recently arranged for a surprise soloist – the famous star **Brian Lane Green** (featured in April's Out magazine) – who performed new, original spiritual-themed works plus classic hymns including "All to Jesus I Surrender".....**Russell Murphy**, devoted longtime member and a former Deacon at MCCNY, has been elected Vice President for Member Services of **InterPride**, the coalition of more than 120 LGBT Pride organizations worldwide whose events are attended by more than 18 million people a year. Russell has held every important position at **Heritage of Pride (HOP)**, which conducts the June Pride festivities here in NYC, and he is a stalwart volunteer for numerous queer causes. MCCNY **Deacon Buddy Seaton** is another well-known HOP volunteer.....**The 31st anniversary of the founding of MCCNY** on Epiphany Sunday in January 1972 was an occasion for celebration and thoughts about the church's founding Pastor, the late **Rev. Howard Wells**. Rev. Pat reminded the congregation that he arrived in NYC with nothing but a Bible, trust in God, and instructions from

Rev. Troy Perry to get an MCC up and running. Also fondly brought to mind at the anniversary celebration was the late **Mac McCarty**, a founding member of MCCNY. Mac passed away last year and **REMEMBERED THE CHURCH IN HIS WILL; that's a very good idea and example for all of us!**



DANIEL BRENNNA at a recital in Finland last month. Before taking their performance to Europe, Daniel and his piano accompanist **Djordje Nesic** held a benefit recital in NYC in February that raised more than \$1,400 for MCCNY's Capital Campaign. Daniel performed vocal works by Mozart, Rachmaninov, Kilpinen, Sibelius, Weill and Kander. Daniel is an award-winning world-class tenor who sings in the choir and as a soloist at MCCNY Worship Services.

WHO'S WHO AT MCCNY:

The Reverend Pat Bumgardner	Pastor
Deacon Malcolm W. Smith	Personal Assistant to the Pastor
The Reverend Kristen Klein-Cechettini	Asst. Pastor for Congregational Life
The Reverend Robin Gorsline	Director of Religious Education
The Reverend Tawnee Walling	Dir. of the Sylvia Rivera Food Pantry
Ms. Luisa Soriano	Asst. to the Director

Candidate for the Ministry Jen Hoffman	Web Site Manager, Religious Education
Candidate for the Ministry Michael Hydes	Video Ministry, Sunday School
Candidate for the Ministry W. Franc Perry	Wednesday Celebrations

Deacon Danny Gonzalez-Feliciano	Arcoiris Ministerio
Deacon Marvin Bagwell	
Deacon N. Buddy Seaton	Usher
Deacon Vernon Bruette	
Deacon Sandy Hernandez	
Deacon Brenton Buchanan	
Deacon Jorge Blondett	
Deacon Montel Cherry	Ministry of Appreciation
Deacon Enez Cooper	
Deacon Tyrone Jackson	Men's Programming

Deacon Jesus Montoya	
Deacon Carolyn Parker	Christians of African Descent
Deacon Len Richardson	Video Ministry
Deacon Norma Sharp	
Deacon Michelle Slack	
Deacon Bali White	

	Ministry of Appreciation
	Men's Programming
	Christians of African Descent
	Video Ministry

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	Christians of African Descent
	Video Ministry

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Clergy and Board Members can be e-mailed directly through the church's website, www.mccny.org

Valentine's Day, prompting *The New York Times* to headline in its main news section, "Gay Couples Pop Big Question, But the States' Reply Is the Same." The Times reported that the Founder and Moderator of the MCC denomination, **Rev. Troy Perry**, and his spouse, **Philip Ray DeBlicek**, sought their marriage license in Los Angeles, while the Pastor of MCC Hartford, Rev. George Chien, and his spouse Rev. Julio Flores, sought their license in the Connecticut capital where the Legislature is considering a measure legalizing same-sex marriage.

Here in New York, **Rev. Pat** was one of the featured speakers at a **Marriage Equality** event at the LGBT Community Services Center where **State Sen. Tom Duane** and **Assemblymember Richard Gottfried** announced that they will introduce a **Right to Marry** bill in both houses of the New York State Legislature this month. Rev. Pat told the cheering crowd at the rally some of the reasons marriage rights are "not trivial," including the plight of a survivor whose spouse has died when there is no legal recognition of the relationship.

MCCNY's Social Justice ministry invites you to enlist in our ongoing and escalating campaign for marriage equality for same-sex couples.



Some of the protesters for same-sex marriage rights at the New York City Clerk's office on Valentine's Day. Pastoral spouse **Mary Jane Gibney** (second from left in picture) and **Rev. Pat Bumgardner** flank the "Marriage License Bureau" sign. (Photo by Deacon Danny Gonzalez).

Homeless Queer Youth Shelter at MCCNY Under New Management: the Church's

The **Homeless Queer Youth Shelter** at MCCNY is now run directly by the church – just as the **Sylvia Rivera Food**

Pantry at MCCNY always has been. The Shelter serves LGBTQ young people who have been kicked out penniless onto the streets by their families of origin because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. To visit the Shelter at MCCNY and observe first-hand the desperate situation of these young people is a heart-rending experience that no words can convey; to witness what the Shelter does for them is truly one of the most heart-warming experiences one will ever have.

The Shelter is open from 11 p.m. to 8 a.m. every day of the week. Its full-time adult staff includes MCC Candidate for the Ordained Ministry **Michael Hydes**, who recently preached a moving sermon about his experiences as a teen-ager when, as a result of the discovery by religious authorities that he was gay, he was abruptly fired from his job, thrown out of the place where he was living and dumped on the street – literally spat upon – without friends or support of any kind. Sadly, that is the situation that many of the youths Michael now serves at the Shelter find themselves in. MCCNY's unique Shelter is their only refuge.

While **Rev. Tawnee Walling** has applied for outside long-term funding for the shelter, **contributions from members and friends of the LGBT community for this vital social service are needed NOW** to keep it open until those grants come through. **Please send your checks to Metropolitan Community Church, 446 West 36th Street, NY NY 10018, marked Attention Homeless Youth Shelter**, or call the church office at 212 629-7440 for more information on how you can contribute.

When the Homeless Queer Youth Shelter opened on June 16, 2002, it was – as the Newsletter reported at the time – a joint venture of MCCNY (which provided the space and other amenities) and the Ali Forney Center run by Carl Siciliano (which provided the staffing and financial support from grants). In February 2003, the Ali Forney Center decided to focus on youths who are prepared to live in an apartment-type setting, and consequently the Ali Forney Center with its staff and funding moved to a 2-room apartment at 807 Ninth Ave. MCCNY then assumed full responsibility for managing the drop-in Shelter at the church for homeless queer kids from the street. Even (especially!) in these difficult economic times, won't you please open your heart and wallet to provide shelter and a safe space for these young people who are the most vulnerable among us? (As of press time, the generosity and efforts of MCCNY's congregants have raised \$13,025 for the Shelter, including a \$5,000 grant obtained by **Daniel Brenna** from his employer. Now it's YOUR turn to contribute).

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHARITIES OF NEW YORK INCORPORATED:

It's official: Corporations, foundations and other large donors can now give tax-exempt contributions to **Metropolitan Community Charities of New York**, a non-profit **Community Development Corporation** (CDC) established to fund – and greatly expand – the church's social services agencies such as the Sylvia Rivera Food Pantry and the Homeless Queer Youth Shelter. This is closely linked to the Capital Campaign for a bigger, better home. For more information, contact **Deacon Malcolm Smith** in the church office at 212 629-7440 or email Malcolm@mccny.org. Thanks are in order to **Bob France**, an attorney and MCCNY member on the Capital Campaign Committee, and **Luis Rodriguez**, an attorney and MCCNY Board Member, for their successful work in getting the CDC incorporated, and to the Capital Campaign chair, Candidate for the Ordained Ministry **Franc Perry** (also an attorney, by the way), and his volunteers who are actively soliciting grants at this time.

ART SALE BENEFITS METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHARITIES:

Andre Moreira & Jerome Dumaine file this report: Tom Cleveland from **OmnifineArt** has extended 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 new CDC**. All you have to do is mention MCCNY at the time of the purchase. OmnifineArt 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. Check the OmnifineArt website www.omnifineart.com or call toll-free 1-800-666-4131, ext. 236. Thanks to **Tom Cleveland** and **David Chin** of OmnifineArt for this generous offer. Andre & Jerome emphasize this a great deal for art buyers and for the church. They appeal to everyone in the congregation who knows people in the decoration and interior design industries to spread the word about this offer.

ARCOIRIS [RAINBOW] LATINO/A MINISTRY CELEBRATES ANNIVERSARY:

Rich Torres, the Coordinator of MCCNY's Arcoiris ministry, files this report: Arcoiris Latino/a de Cristo (ALC) is thrilled to be arriving at its first anniversary. In this short time, by volunteering our talents and resources, we have managed to blossom into a vital and voracious ministry to MCCNY and our community at large thanks to the generosity of its participants and friends. We provide an outlet for fellowship and emotional refuge to all identified Latinos/as with a

mix of social and spiritual nourishment for the soul, and it has been working for us.

Our "Circulo de Oracion" [Circle of Prayer] has become oxygen for those who feel disenfranchised from religious traditions. Our makeup widely varies culturally, economically, and academically, but everyone's participation is equally valued, and the trust and confidence we build during prayer evokes the Holy Spirit. We read the biblical passages from the Sunday Worship Service and expound on its meaning and relevance to our identity and in our relationships.

"Papo's Movie Night" has grown exponentially throughout the year, bringing together an even wider variety of populations in a friendly and accepting environment. Movies are chosen by vote but no one is ever bound to the choice. Dinner is always and event, and you never know who you might meet.

Dominican, Puerto Rican, Mexican, South American – whatever the region – our holidays are well represented and celebrated with food, music and tradition. All in all, not a bad start.

We look forward now to a new year with more events like "Noche de Oracion y Vasilon" [Evening of Prayer and Party] and "La Palabra a la Playa" [the Word at the Beach] and cultural field trips to museums, theater and other places of worship like local meditation centers and reading rooms. We hope for even greater participation among a wider variety of the Latino/a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and straight community who wish to break boundaries for prayer and fellowship. We will continue Latino/a outreach and support other MCCNY ministries. We need your help, support and participation.

(To read this article in Spanish, see the Newsletter online at www.mccny.org.

(Para leer este artículo en español, pueden verlo en la carta de noticias en línea www.mccny.org)



Camaraderie reigns whenever MCCNY's Arcoiris Latino/a ministry gets together.

Martin Luther King Day Observed:



Celebrating Dr. King's birthday, 250 sing "We Shall Overcome." To the left immediately behind Rev. Kristen Klien-Cechettini is City Councilmember Phil Reed.

MCCNY hosted New York City's 6th annual LGBT Interfaith Celebration of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday in January. MCCNY's 250-seat sanctuary was packed for the two-and-a-half-hour long service, which is co-sponsored each year by the city's 3 largest LGBT congregations: MCCNY, Unity Fellowship Church (UFC), and Congregation Beth Simchat Torah (CBST), the nation's largest LGBT synagogue. Speakers included **Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum** of CBST, **Rev. Jeff Haskins** and **Rev. Gale Jones** of UFC, and Rev. Pat Bumgardner of MCCNY. **The Lavender Light Gospel Choir** and the choirs of co-sponsoring congregations sang. **MCCNY's choir** under the superb direction of **John Fischer** gave an especially beautiful performance.

Those present signed letters to the President of the United States demanding immediate freedom for 13 African-Americans who are in jail in Tulia, TX on phony, trumped-up racist-motivated charges.

In her statement from the pulpit, Rabbi Kleinbaum sharply criticized President Bush for using the actual date of Dr. King's birthday to make a statement opposing the University of Michigan's affirmative action policy. Like all the speakers, Rabbi Kleinbaum called for greater recognition of the historic role that **Bayard Rustin**, a gay man, played in the civil rights movement.

Rev. Haskins of UFC in Brooklyn recalled attending the 1963 March on Washington as a 10-year-old and preparing sandwiches to serve the marchers. He too lauded Bayard Rustin's major influence on Dr. King and his position as the principal organizer of the March on Washington. Rev. Jones of UFC in Manhattan noted that her congregation is the

"baby" of the interfaith celebration's co-sponsors, observing its first anniversary in this month **when MCCNY celebrates its 31st anniversary** and CBST its 30th. Rev. Jones proclaimed the importance of keeping in mind the heroic deeds of "the ancestors" – both the Africans who remained steadfast even in the holds of slave ships coming to these shores hundreds of years ago, and the LGBT rebels who rose up in the **Stonewall Riots** of June 1969. She lamented that some young folks today enjoy the freedoms and privileges that the black civil rights and LGBT liberation struggles made possible without acknowledging their debt to those ancestors. Like the other speakers at the event, Rev. Jones also called upon everyone in the LGBT community to **stand up more strongly for transgender people** in our community.

Pastor Bumgardner, remembering Dr. King's impassioned words about "the fierce urgency of NOW," declared there are urgent crises we face now, today as well. Describing Dr. King as not merely a dreamer but a "doer" with a great sense of strategy to accomplish his goals, she called for similar action today against the evils of poverty, disease, looming war and lingering racism. Citing the outrageous miscarriage of justice in **Tulia, TX**, she exhorted those present not to leave until they had signed a letter to the President demanding immediate freedom for the 13 people wrongly jailed there.

The celebration opened with everyone singing the unofficial African-American anthem, **"Lift Every Voice and Sing,"** and concluded with an emotional rendition of the black civil rights movement's anthem, **"We Shall Overcome."** After the service, **MCCNY's Christians of African Descent (CAD)** ministry hosted a lavish reception with a buffet dinner in the social hall.



At a reception after the service, Rev. Pat Bumgardner of MCCNY, and Rev. Gale Jones and Rev. Jeff Haskins of Unity Fellowship Church cut a cake donated by Congregation Beth Simchat Torah. Inscription on the cake reads, "Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., 1929-1968, Your Dream Lives On!" (MLK celebration photos by Deacon Danny Gonzalez)