

AFFINITY

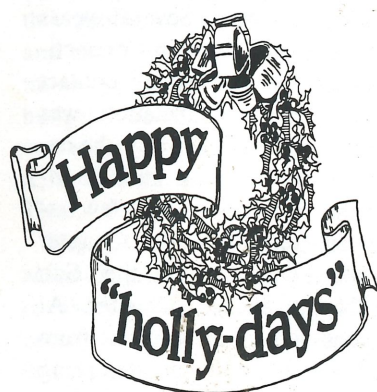
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Have you moved???
Are you moving soon???
Call (503) 244-2526 or
e-mail: AlanB1107@aol.com

Q-Saints to the Rescue

On Tue., 10 Dec 1996 Gwaithur@aol.com wrote:

> Dear q-saints,
> it all is happening so fast. Bummer that I finally made some friends and now must die
[The following were responses posted on q-saints—phone numbers have been excluded for privacy purposes]

<After the message he left this morning, I tracked down his father at BYU and left a message about Bill's posting on the Internet regarding wanting to die.

After his father heard the message I had left earlier, they went downstairs to find his room locked. They broke in and found Bill comatose on the floor. He was taken to the hospital where they lavaged (pumped) his stomach but didn't find any pills. They are still not sure if he took any, but have him under both medical and psychiatric observation. Currently, they suspect he is in a catatonic state.

As well, his family sends their thanks to "those on the Internet" who have been trying to help him, and to let them know about his wish to die. As with most of those close, such as family, they had no idea he was hurting so much, much less wanting to die. They also mentioned that "they knew" (referring to his coming out to them on a note pinned to the wall). As well, they are going to let me know what happens with him.>

Please include Bill and his family in your prayers.

—Jim Adlhoch

<Please don't! I can't say I'm the right person to talk, I've been through my own share of pain with having to deal with the stuff the Church put on me because of my sexuality. But if you wait and let time go by you will find you can create anew for yourself and get all the things the Church said you could only get from them. There's a whole wonderful world out there of caring people, many of them gay people who have been down the same path you're on. There is more love in this universe than we can imagine, even when we're alone.>

—Brenda Mobley

<Bill, Give me a call. If I'm not in, leave a message with your #, I'll get back to you.>

—Richard Lamborn

See Q-Saints on page 7

LETTERS TO OUR READERS

Reaching Out
(Re: Campaigning)

Am I LDS?

It is ironic. Although I am still listed as a member "in good standing" on the church rolls. I honestly no longer feel that I belong. I still firmly believe in a lot of the ideas; some of them I have great difficulty with.

I have had some very urgent and pressing needs for someone from the Church to contact me. I started with my very, very good friend, who is the current Bishop {and will be until tomorrow} when he will be released as he is moving to California—a great loss for our community. He and I have been the best of friends for about 20 years. He also knows "all" about me, and has chosen to say nothing about it. I will be in Church tomorrow morning, basically to say goodbye to him, as more than likely I will never see him again.

I have contacted everyone in the Church that I can think of, from the High Priest Group Leader, the EQ Pres. various counselors in the Bishopric, the Stake Mission leader {also a long time friend}, and members of the Stake High Council. How many have returned my calls? Zip, zilch, nada! It's as if I don't exist. I am not asking for help from the Church as I don't feel I should since I have not been in regular attendance, nor have I been tithing—{a matter of medical expenses being so high, I have nothing left.} The only one who has spoken with me recently is my friend, the outgoing Bishop, but he has been so horrendously busy getting ready to move, winding up his current Bishop's duties, that all he's had time to do is talk on the phone. He is aware of my situation, and does realize it's urgency, and I know he is trying to get someone to call on me.

The big problem being, that although I have been HIV+ for a lot of years {now about 12}, and up to this point have not

had problems. Suddenly this monster has decided to rear its ugly head. I have been "keeping the faith" on my own, and yes, I do "talk" with Heavenly Father all day, and sincerely try to listen to what the Holy Spirit is trying to tell me. It appears to me, like I said, that the Church chooses to pretend that I don't exist. If that's the case, so be it. Ironically, the only real help I am getting is from another member of the Church who doesn't live anywhere close to me; and from my best friend who knows that I am gay—good God, he knows everything about me. Although he is not LDS, he has an aunt, who is one of the "head honchos" in the Genealogy Library in SLC. This dear, sweet, friend, whom I love with all my heart, has told me he will never abandon me, and I know this for a fact. He has also told me, that although he has always considered himself totally "straight", he has recently realized that this is not the case and that he has definite sexual feelings toward me. This too, terrifies me, as our relationship has been so wonderful all these years, I'm afraid if it goes further, as he is suggesting, it would destroy what we already have. I honestly think that these fears of mine are unfounded, as I know him well enough to know that he means what he is saying.

So, how would I answer the question, "Am I LDS?" Quite frankly, I don't know. If any of my brothers and sisters in Affirmation or Q-Saints can give me an answer or any advice whatsoever, I would greatly appreciate it.

And, yes, you who are a member of the Church and my friend, you know who you are, and I will be writing you a long explanation, which I know is long overdue. My love to all of you, and I could sure use your prayers, along with a note or two.

Thanks and with Love,
Julian R. Kaiser-Taylor {aka Lance}
oakcreek@juno.com

At 12:42 PM 10/23/96
-0500, Joseph P. Smith
wrote:

"My experience with Affirmation is typical of someone who does not and has not ever lived in an area with an Affirmation Chapter. I have experienced the frustration of attempting to begin a chapter in my former home, Albuquerque. I found little national support and not much local interest at the time. I participate in Affirmation as much as possible, through the mailings, keeping in touch with other members and attempting to attend any activities when I travel to cities where there is a chapter."

Thanks for the response. I can appreciate your feelings regarding your frustration of attempting to start a local chapter. Several years ago I lived in Connecticut, and my only contact with Affirmation was through *Affinity*, the national publication of Affirmation, and a few letters from the Chapter Director of the San Francisco Chapter. At one point someone from Boston was attempting to get a chapter going, but we were spread out in CT, NH, and MA;

See *Reaching* on page 9

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

After two years as Affirmation's Executive Board, it is time to say goodbye. Jennifer, Rod, Duane, and I thank all of you for your support and encouragement we have received from you. It has been an amazing two years-filled with highs and lows. Affirmation has grown, become more prosperous, organized, and is indeed, ready to enter a new era under the direction of Rick Fernandez and team. We wish Rick every success as he enters upon this journey.

Thank you to all who have worked with the Executive Board in doing the work required to make this organization succeed. Thank you, in particular, Debbie and Alan—without your steadfast skills and dedication, we just wouldn't be where we are today—nor poised for the great future successes this organization is destined for. Thank you Seattle and Los Angeles for two terrific conferences! Thank you Michael for being the love of my life and my biggest supporter.

As I prepare to put out the lights of this part of my life, I can't "flick the switch" without adding one final comment—a hope. It is my hope that the members of Affirmation might learn to love and tolerate diversity among ourselves the way we wish others would do so for us. Our future success depends on it. God Bless and Best Wishes! Happy Holidays and a Prosperous New Year to all!

Scott MacKay—Executive Director (1995 & 1996)

On behalf of the new executive board of Affirmation, I want to wish everyone in Affirmation a very Merry Christmas and a wonderful New Year. It is a pleasure to greet you all and to let you know how excited I am about this opportunity to serve you in the coming year. I am confident that there is nothing we can't accomplish if we work together to achieve it.

During this Christmas season, it is natural that many of our thoughts are focused on gifts. We think about what we want to give, and about what we want to receive. We sometimes worry about how much our gifts will cost, and what all this gift-giving will do to our budget. There's a gift that I'd like to focus on, however, that doesn't cost any money at all. It may cost us time, effort and patience to find it, but it's far more valuable than anything money could purchase. This is the gift of self-worth.

The gift of self-worth gives you confidence, inner peace and the ability to rise above the limitations that the criticism and opposition of others would impose. Self-worth makes vision possible, and vision opens up the world of possibilities and solutions to us. Such vision raises our heads from the ground to look to the horizon and beyond, allowing us to focus not on what is but on what could be.

This kind of expansive vision is what Affirmation needs more than anything. Almost all of us in Affirmation came from a place where we were told that we were bad, sick, selfish, pitiable or damnable.

Almost all of us have incorporated that message into our vision of ourselves. No wonder that so many of us think in terms of what is wrong and bad, not just with the church, but far worse, with ourselves. There are many things that are wrong and harmful around us. But if our goal is to overcome these negatives, we need to focus on loving ourselves, and gaining inner strength from affirming what is true and positive inside of us.

That is where Affirmation plays a key role. Affirmation's name is not an accident. We are the beneficiaries of others before us who had a vision more expansive than the falsehoods and hostility they had to endure. The name they chose speaks to the reality that Affirmation provides a positive alternative where people learn a new way of seeing themselves, the world and the church. We know that each of us will grow only to the extent that we are affirmed in our self-worth and fundamental dignity. Where others attack us, we remind ourselves that we are wonderful, beautiful, gifted people. Our unique gifts are invaluable and enrich others immeasurably, if we let them.

That is the whole point of this holiday message, to request that each of you think about and identify what your specific gifts are. Let's not hide our light under the bushel of self-doubt, indecision or fear. Remember the scripture, "Love casts out all fear." Love yourself—you deserve it. Love yourself—even if you don't think you deserve it, you need it! And as you love, you will be enabled to love others, and share your gifts. Affirmation needs your gifts. Countless others still in the darkness of homophobia and ignorance need your gifts. Make this coming year the time when you share your light. I am committed to creating specific opportunities for each of you to come forward with your unique gifts so that you can help Affirmation reach our goals for this exciting new year. Happy Holidays!

Rick Fernández
1997 Executive Director

SPIRITUALITY

This is a poem I wrote one day after church, part of my own therapy. I thought I'd share it with [Affirmation]. By Ken

C.H.U.R.C.H.

Church!
Is where I should be!
Church?
Is where I.....isn't it?
With people sitting in neat little rows
Like versions of the Stepford family
All staring straight ahead—with invisible blinders
Never looking to the right
Never looking to the left
Always straight ahead.
For isn't it said: straight is the way and narrow is the path
and few, there be that find it?
The chosen ones
The called ones
Sitting silently, trapped in their own world
For all is well in Zion,
All is well.....Hell!
Has any one of them ever walked in my shoes?
Felt my love, my trials, my failures,
So that they might truly know my heart?
Only God can know my heart!
Judge not lest ye be judged.
Judged different? In what way?
Different? Why?
Am I not the same?
Am I not kind and loving and do I not share and serve?
What has changed?
What has turned me into the plaque?
Touch me, am I not human?
Kiss me, am I not real?
Cut me, do I not bleed?
Am I not a child of the same Father as you?
I am a child of God.
Lead me. Guide me.
Walk beside me.
See what I see.
Feel what I feel.
I have not changed.
You have changed.
I don't see LOVE.....anymore!

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How Can I be more Spiritual

Recently a friend of mine asked me a simple yet difficult question. "How can I be more spiritual?" Before I could give him the Sunday School answer, he continued, "and I don't mean by praying or reading the scriptures."

The cookbook recipe for spirituality has given me limited results: Prayer (bargaining with God), reading the scriptures (getting lost in 2nd Nephi), fasting (followed by bingeing), and service projects for the Church (that took care of other people's problems while allowing me to co-dependently ignore my own). How does one find one's spiritual balance with SELF, OTHERS, AND GOD?

I was mentioning this to another friend, who suggested I answer a question with a question: "What are the things you do that make you feel closer to God?"

So I posed this question to myself, and these are some of the things I found:

When I learn something new that heightens my awareness of myself or the world around me.

When I am with my family or close friends, I feel a connection between them and our creator.

When a friend forgives another for their trespasses.

When the first rays of the sun rise in a red, orange, then yellow ball, or when the sun sets over an ocean horizon with that final flash of green. The roar of the surf against a white sandy beach. The trails of Muir Woods, Mount Tamalpais, or Yosemite National Park. The evening fog rolling over the hills of San Francisco, changing the city lights into a soft yellow glow. The serenity of a Japanese tea garden.

When the Gay Men's Chorus sings, "We are a family," or Barbara Streisand sings, "Nothing's gonna harm you."

When Affirmation marches in a Lesbian and Gay Pride Parade or when Affirmation gathers at its annual conferences.

When spring reclaims the dormant sleep of winter with new life...with the brilliant colors of the azaleas and dogwoods.

When someone smiles at me or cheerfully greets me when I am having a bad day. When a loved one hugs or kisses me. See Spirit on page 9

FAMILY ISSUES

These kids know their Bible

To my Mormon, former-Mormon, Jewish, Lutheran and never got around to asking your religion friends:

One the way home tonight I heard this on the radio. These are some twisted things that little kids "supposedly" said RE the Bible I may not have remembered them right...there may be more. (or I'm sure this group could come up with some)

1. Adam was created by God and Eve was created from an apple;
2. The name of Noah's wife was Joan of Arc;
3. Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day and a ball of fire by night;
4. King Solomon had 700 wives and 300 porcupines;
5. One of the 10 Commandments is: Thou shall commit adultery;
6. Moses got the Ten Commandments at the Mt. Sinai Hospital;
7. Jesus' mother was Mary and he was conceived by an immaculate contraction;
8. Jesus had 12 opossums;
9. The Epistles were the wives of the Apostles;
10. The early Christians were persecuted by the Genitals.

(Speaking of Genitals...Several years ago I won a game of Scrabble with a group of Mormons with that word!)

Made me smile. Home alone tonight, doing laundry and baking bread. (wish I could share the loaf...but don't think I could pull off one of those loaves and fishes routines.) See what kind of Saturday night excitement you unmarried young guys have to look forward to when you grow up.

—Mike in Minneapolis



Church Today

Dear Friends,

I attended a missionary farewell of one of my son's friends today. It was excellent, and I would like to just share a few thoughts with you.

The father of the missionary, who is gay, played a most beautiful organ solo. I was grateful that he was allowed to do so. As he was playing, I felt sooooo proud of him—that he could be at the meeting and also participating despite false judgments of him—made by many, many of the people in attendance. I also thought what a great loss for the Church to not to include him as a member anymore.

The Mother of the missionary and ex-wife of the gay father, gave a wonderful talk. She spoke very openly about the difficult year they had just experienced (her husband 'came out' to her and they have divorced), but was very positive about the knowledge she had gained from her experience and said that she loves her ex-husband very much. It was very touching—especially for those of us who knew the reason for the divorce, etc.

There was a beautiful musical number by the missionary and three of his friends. One of the young men singing *I have heard*—is also gay. He has such a wonderful voice, and is a great person, and I fear the church will lose him also.

I wished with all my heart that diversity could be welcomed instead of condemned in our Church.

I love you all,
Millie in Provo

Beautiful Thing

Hey All...

I have seen *Beautiful Thing* four times and I bought the soundtrack. They have a great web site <http://www.movienet.com>. I printed out 5 pictures of Jamie and Ste...This is the most "beautiful" movie I've ever seen!

—Curtis

On Tue, 19 Nov 1996, Jon Schild wrote:

Someone a few days ago mentioned the movie *Beautiful Thing*. I saw it Saturday night and again Monday night. I plan to go at least once more.

If you want to see a genuine gay romance, without explicit sex, drugs, or AIDS, don't miss it. It really is, like the title says, a *Beautiful Thing*. — Jon

Missionary Coming Out story

I would like to share with you my story of how I came out on my mission on the Navajo Indian Reservation. If anyone has any questions or comments, please post them or email me. I will be happy to answer. I hope this story helps someone out there in some way.

I was raised up in the church. My entire extended family on both sides are LDS. In fact my ancestors were in the Martin Handcart company that came to join the saints in SLC. I was always the spiritual kid in the Sunday school classes. I was the spiritual Elder on my mission. I was the Eagle scout, the reverent person, and the mature person. Such was life as a Mormon. It was cold and painful. Yes, I went through the motions, at times I even think I felt the spirit. But there was a monster lurking inside. It hid in the dark corners of my soul. I was aware of it at an early age—my first Homosexual feelings began at the age of 7. I had a rule for my neighborhood friends—if you went into my room you had to have your shirt off. I even asked one of my friends if I could lay on top of him, which we did in innocence.

When I went on a mission I felt that if I worked as hard as I could this dark monster would be forced out of my soul. I proceeded to become a tight anal missionary. I kept all the mission rules to the letter. I demanded my companions to do the same as well. I rarely laughed or joked around. I was on the Lord's mission and I was going to get rid of this monster.

I started my mission in Albuquerque, New Mexico. After being there for a few months, I was sent to the Navajo Indian Reservation. It was there that I began to change. It was the people, it was the beauty surrounding me, it was the peace and solitude of the desert, it was the Navajo culture. I slowly began to relax. I was learning about a whole other world. The older Navajo people were beautifully at peace with themselves. They did not rush or force, they just lived in the present moment.

We slept in a trailer in the Chapel Park-

ing lot. At night fierce winds beat against the aluminum sides of the trailer. Outside the stars shone in brilliance. The desert evenings were often silent and peaceful. It was at this times that I would sit outside the trailer and think. I told my companion that I was praying and needed to be alone, but really I just thought and looked around. I was meeting so many beautiful people—people who live their lives in peace despite the fury adversity that exists on the Reservation.

Not too long ago the white people had come to the Reservation and tried to bury the Navajo culture and religion deep in the desert where the Navajo people were left to live and die in dry hostile lands. The white people had tried to change them—to strip them of their pride and culture. The Indians were the savage, the heathen, the drunks.

The white people tried to change them every way they could. They sent out the missionaries, the priests, the government representatives, and the teachers. They brought in strange languages, alcohol, welfare, and TV.

Despite all these efforts I met Navajos who kept their history, were proud of themselves, were at peace. I saw the Navajo culture flourish and grow. I saw the children learning Navajo in school. It was beautiful.

On those peaceful desert nights when I sat by myself in front of the trailer in the church parking lot, I dared for the first time to recognize the monster inside. I dared to climb down to those dark corners and see what was there. What I found was surprising and beautiful. Instead of the monster that I thought was there, I saw a

reflection of myself. It wasn't dark or evil, it was beautiful. It wasn't bad or good, it simply was.

This transformation took a while. I had to peak into that corner once in a while just to make sure the monster had not appeared. It never did. After that point I felt closer to the Navajo people than ever before. I began to realize that I was wrong to try to make them change religions or cultures. They are beautiful just as they are. Who was I to ask them to be something they are not? Who was the church to ask me to be something I was not. Instead of converting the Navajo people, they converted me. I was blessed.

It no longer mattered what the church said about being gay. The truth of my own existence was much more powerful and real than anything the gentlemen in Salt Lake could say. I was finally at peace with myself. I was finally happy and full of life and spirit. That was all the confirmation I needed—what I was doing was right.

There are more details to my coming out on my mission that I will share later. I don't want to make this message too long. I will say that I left my mission early and came home happy and out. Never again will I feel repressed. I no longer have dark corners to hide from myself and others. I am full of light and peace now. Life is beautiful.

—Ryan Christensen

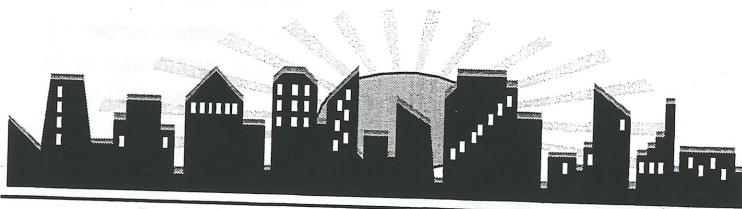
UPCOMING EVENTS

1997 International Affirmation Conference 20 Years of Service August 21 - 24

Salt Lake City will show its true colors by living up to that prophetic statement that "This Is The Place" when it hosts the 1997 National Affirmation conference to celebrate 20 years of service to the Lesbian, Gay, Transgender Mormon, and Ex-Mormon population on the beautiful University of Utah campus.

Many people have already expressed interest in helping organize a celebration of pride and accomplishment in our community.

The Organizing committee is interested in hearing your ideas. Please contact Duane Jennings at 32 East Bryan Ave, Salt Lake City, Utah 84115-1602.



The 1997 Intermountain Conference on Sexuality

The 1997 Intermountain Conference on Sexuality sponsored by Family Fellowship will be May 2, 3, and 4th at the University of Utah School of Social Work.

The conference is still in the planning stages. However, Jean E. Dubofsky, P.C., former Colorado Supreme Court Justice and lead attorney in the Colorado Amendment 2 appeal, will be one of the speakers!!!!

Any of you who have attended this conference in the past know that there is a wealth of information to be found there. Please plan NOW to attend. You are the ones that make the conference great.

GAMOFITE Retreats

If you're interested in joining Gamofites, please know that you are welcome to join us. You'll find we offer an opportunity to associate with Gay Mormon Fathers in an environment of unconditional Love and Acceptance. For information please contact Michael Farr at (415) 282-1257 home, (415) 284-8703 work, or Email: SanFran007@aol.com

Q-Saints from page 1

<I'm going to de-lurk now. I've been lurking for a long time, but your message got to me.

I hope your enigmatic message was not literal. If it was, please know that there are literally hundreds of people out there who can help you through the difficult times. I'm not sure if this is what you meant, but if you want to die, or feel in such despair that it doesn't seem worth it, please hold on.

I can empathize with you. There has been a time in my life where the desire to end this existence was overwhelming. But I held on, and thankfully. My life is so full of joy and wonder now. It wasn't easy, but it is worth it. I also know what it can do to a family and friends. My best friend took his life many years ago because of his sexuality. You can never know the pain and suffering his loss caused his family, his friends and me. It might seem like it now, but it is no solution, only a much greater pain and suffering.

All I can offer you is this: "it might sound contrite, but hold on for just one more day." Everyday, just tell yourself you'll hold on one more day. Call a hotline, call someone. Please. > —Trey

<BILL, Whatever is happening in your life, do not feel like you must endure it alone. You have friends, many of us who are here to listen. DO NOT DESPAIR. We have all been there before. DO NOT do anything to harm yourself. We love you as the Savior loves you and you are a most precious child of God. If you must 'sing' the song we all know so well. We love you brother and are here for you. I'm off to work but will return this evening about 10:30 Central Time. If you want call collect.

—Mike in Minneapolis
WE LOVE YOU BROTHER and are here to carry you through these difficult times.>

See Q-Saints on page 8

AFFIRMATION NEWS

Results of the 1997 Affirmation Executive Director Election

The results of the 1997 Election for Affirmation Executive Director are in. Rick Fernandez has been selected as the 1997 Executive Director. His term of office will run from January 1, 1997 to December 31, 1997.

The Election process was a success; 143 ballots cast as follows:

91 Rick Fernandez
45 Rob Killian

7 Others (5 for Ben J. of Los Angeles, 1 for Ken F. of Seattle, and 1 for James K. of Philadelphia).

The Executive Board congratulates both Rob and Rick on their dedication to Affirmation and the great work we are united in. Jennifer, Duane and I pledge our efforts at managing a smooth transition between now and January.

We will closely work with Rick and team to assure Affirmation continues to run smoothly. We had two excellent candidates—a tribute to the strength and quality of our membership and the urgency of our cause.

—Scott MacKay

Editor's Note:

It has been a pleasure to 'serve' Affirmation as the *Affinity's* managing editor. It seems like only yesterday when Scott MacKay visited me in my hospital room and told me that he was inspired to ask me to help out with *Affinity*. His timing couldn't have been better. I was in recovery for 6 weeks, therefore I had plenty of 'time' on my side to prepare for this calling. When word got out that I accepted Scott's offer, some members didn't feel that I had enough LDS experience to tackle this position. You make your own conclusion.

I would like to Thank **ALL** of you for your support, encouragement and especially your articles. *Affinity* is a successful OUTREACH source to our members because of all the contributing editors. Again, Thank You.

Please extend the same support and encouragement to *Affinity's* new managing editor—James Kent.

Debbie Dexter
Affinity's Managing Editor
May 1995 - Dec 1996



Q-Saints from page 7

<I posted a message in this same emotional vein last year on the news group soc.motss. It was this long, weepy affair about being afraid of becoming someone so hated by my parents and friends I couldn't stand the thought of doing it, nor could I stand the thought of staying closeted. I received 100 or so replies to that message, which, taken together, said more or less "We know it hurts. We know it's difficult. But we did it, so will you, and you will not only live through it, you'll wonder why you didn't do it earlier; in other words, get down off your cross cause somebody needs the wood." (That last part someone actually did say to me. I was so offended at first, but I've come to realize they were right) Don't die man. Live! You're on the brink. Take that first step. It's your life.>

—Scott(y)

<You are all amazing!

The messages that have come across both public and private, and the outpouring of love from everyone here have been incredible.

The feelings of righteous indignation also burn within me as well. I feel that there is a special judgment waiting for those who, for whatever reason, would drive youth to feel they aren't worthy of their mortality, and to feel the only resort is to end it. (I'm really trying to be Christian about this, and it's damn difficult!).

The love and outpouring of support in just the last few hours is something that many in church leadership should stand up and take notice of!>

—Jim Adlhoch

<Good Lord, he was serious....

I suppose there's a special place reserved in heaven for people like you, Jim, who actually respond to situations like this instead of just posting semi-helpful words to the internet. Makes my "buck up little camper" message to him seem so, well, pointless....I hope he's ok.

Hey you snoops at 50 E So. Temple, how many more incidents like this is it going to take before you people lighten up? uh?>

—Scott(y)

Reaching from page 2

we probably had good support from the National Affirmation at the time, but that was a much different era in Affirmation and the GLB community.

Over the years, we have seen people try to make a difference in helping those that don't live within a chapter. Jacki and Tere are working as New Chapter Development Chairs and they have put together a wonderful packet of information. They have sent off several packets to people throughout the US, if not the world.

Marty Beaudet served as National Executive Director for two years during a low period in Affirmation. I know Marty spent several hours a month talking with gay and lesbian Mormons all over the world both on the phone and the internet. Q-Saints was an idea that Marty and others conceived and developed so that we could reach out to those that did not live in an area of an organized chapter.

Every day someone in Affirmation realizes that we can and should be reaching others. It is nice to see that realization come about, because I know that one or two or twelve people can not do this alone. Paul Mortenson had this realization some twenty years ago.

For me, I have experienced living far from a chapter and never able to attend national Affirmation conferences for not only financial reasons, but internalized fears of what I might discover at these conferences.

I have also experienced living near a chapter, even being a chapter director, of a somewhat organized chapter. I have seen people come into the chapter with expectations and hopes that have gone unfulfilled. Often these people leave and never return without realizing that they themselves have the key to this fulfillment that they seek. Those that stay and begin to serve others realize that the fulfillment comes from service.

I thank you Joseph Paul Smith and all those that have come before and after us for having the desire to serve our peers. I trust it will be a rewarding experience for all involved.

I think Rick asked me to assist him as I have a perspective that is not typical—I do not live in an area with a large organized chapter. I think there are many things we can do to enhance Affirmation, its outreach, newsletter, and the like. There are many people who could benefit from Affirmation who do not live in an organized area. I think it is time to ask what can we do for Affirmation as individuals and leaders to enhance outreach and make it a dynamic force in our respective communities.

Again, the time is certainly right, but our history does indicate that we have always reached out. This has always been the purpose of Affirmation. Perhaps we have never realized our full potential, but we have always strived to reach out to those that have been alone.

There are some on Q-saints that have been involved with Affirmation (that is, reaching out to those in need) for years. Ricky Gilbert, a.k.a. EdithHead comes to mind. I've already mentioned Paul Mortenson (who isn't on Q-Saints), and it would be unfair to not mention our own and wonderful Ina Mae Murri (also not on Q-Saints) who has reached (and continues to reach) out to hundreds, if not thousands, of individuals from many far away places.

If you have other questions or comments, please feel free to e-mail me privately or in the open forum.

Thanks again for your note. I'm glad you took the time to respond.

Tim Merritt
San Francisco

Spirit from page 4

When I am able to help those less fortunate around me.

When I am sitting in a cathedral or visiting the grounds of an LDS temple.

When I read the poetry of Robert Frost, the prose of Kahlil Gibran, or gaze at Salvador Dali's "The Last Supper of Christ."

When I read the letters or look at photographs that fill me with memories of loved ones who are no longer with me.

When I can share the laughter of a good joke, or the sorrow of a tear.

And yes, while giving or receiving a priesthood blessing, or reading the scriptures (other than the Isaiah passages in 2nd Nephi).

These are just a sample few ways I can feel spiritual and connected with God.

I am a firm believer that Gays and Lesbians are very spiritual in nature, but they have been lied to so much that they believe the lie that they are *incapable of being spiritual*.

The test and gift of spirituality is not being told where or how to find it, be it religious dogma or meditative mantras. It is a journey of self-discovery, and a willingness to leave behind the safety nets and rule books and charismatic leaders and in some cases despots who claim that they have the answers to everything worth asking.

It is my hope that each and everyone of us can feel a spiritual closeness to God wherever our journeys take us.

—James Kent

DIRECTORY

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Scott MacKay (714) 998-2052

SENIOR ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Jennifer Hatch

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

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Managing Editor

Debbie Dexter

Contributing Editors

James Kent, Tim Merritt, Julian R. Kaiser-Taylor, Ken, Mike, Millie, Curtis, Jon, Ryan Christensen, Buck, and Aaron.

World Wide Web

<http://ng.netgate.net/~jfirth/affirmation>

CHAPTERS

ATLANTA

P.O. Box 4157
Atlanta, GA
(404) 244-9576
PARLYPRATT@aol.com

CHAPTER-AT-LARGE

P.O. Box 517
Jacksonville, Ark, 72078
(501) 982-2624
AFFIRMCHLG@aol.com

HAWAII

P.O. Box 75131
Honolulu, HI 96836-0131
(808) 737-6679
JIMC@uhunix.uhcc.hawaii.edu

LAS VEGAS

3151 Soaring Gulls Drive #2004
Las Vegas, NV 89128
(702) 256-0162
LVSaints@aol.com

LOS ANGELES

P.O. Box 46022
Los Angeles, CA 90046
(213) 255-7251
LASaints@aol.com

ORANGE COUNTY

P.O. Box 8982
Fountain Valley, CA 92728
(714) 502-8844
SaintsOC@aol.com

NEW YORK CITY

Murray Hill Station
P.O. Box 527
New York, NY 10156
LarryManh@aol.com

PHOENIX

P.O. Box 26601
Tempe, AZ 85285-6601
(602) 264-1042 or
(602) 553-8674
DEC15@aol.com

SAN DIEGO

P.O. Box 86469
San Diego, CA 92138
(619) 283-8810
KYMERAL@aol.com

SAN FRANCISCO

P.O. Box 26302
San Francisco, CA 94126
(415) 641-4554
CATIM@backdoor.com

SEATTLE

P.O. Box 23223
Seattle, WA 98201
(206) 820-5729
KENEBOY@aol.com
SHARI@Microsoft.com

WASATCH

P.O. Box 526175
Salt Lake City, UT 84152
(801) 534-8693
WASATCHAFF@aol.com

WASHINGTON D.C.

P.O. Box 77504
Washington, D.C. 20013
(202) 331-4425
TODDCHRIS@aol.com

INSIDE USA

AFFINITY FOR WOMEN

C/O Ina Mac Murri
4163 Doane Street
Fremont, CA 94538
(510) 490-5425

EDITOR

(215) 335-2223
JAMES.KENT@philfr.nana.gov

FAMILY FELLOWSHIP

P.O. Box 9451
Salt Lake City, UT 84109
(801) 272-3806

FAMILY & FRIENDS

(310) 378-3938
BATKIN7222@aol.com

GAMOFITES

(415) 282-1257
SanFran007@aol.com

CHICAGO

233 E Wacker Dr Apt 3013
Chicago, IL 60601-5103
(312) 240-0801

MINNEAPOLIS/ST. PAUL

1404 Charles Ave
St. Paul, MN 55104
(612) 641-8666

HOUSTON

C/O A. Clarke, Lovette Cottage
6310 S. Main Street
Houston, TX 77005
(713) 953-0903
DaveLDS@aol.com

IDAHO-BOISE

P.O. Box 72
Eagle, ID 83616
(208) 939-0009
BOISEBEAR@aol.com

NEW MEX/WEST TEXAS

2330-A South Solano
Las Cruces, NM 88001
(505) 521-3607
RHAWES@nmsu.edu

PHILADELPHIA

2409 Bleigh Ave. 1st floor
Philadelphia, PA 19152
(215) 335-2223

PITTSBURGH

4811 Elsworth Ave.
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

RICHMOND, VA

3524 Grove Ave #2
Richmond, VA 23221
(804) 358-3492
DANVA@aol.com

SACRAMENTO

2174 34th Street
Sacramento, CA 95817
(916) 731-5922
HAZELBLUE@aol.com

UPSTATE NY

(518) 438-5115
LVFAY@aol.com

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

(707) 823-9464
ghokanso@santarosa.edu

OUTSIDE USA

AUSTRALIA

P.O. BOX 359
WAHROONGA, NSW,
2076
(02) 489-1255

CALGARY

1123 8th Street E
Calgary, AB T2G2Z6
(403) 237-6879

EASTERN EUROPE

C/O Toni
P.O. Box 5063
41040 Zagreb, Croatia
(385-41) 24-54-21

ENGLAND

Michael D. Walker
2/55 Ossington Street
London W24LY
GORDO@vossnet.co.uk

NORDEN

C/O HOFA
P.O. Box 332
FIN-00131 Helsinki
Finland
NJALSSON@cc.helsinki.fi

SWEDEN

Storgatan 57 B, 2TR#8119
S-831 33 Ostersund
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