



Buffalo / Niagara

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www.PFLAG-buffalo-niagara.org

We meet because we have learned that someone very close to us is Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, or Transgendered.

We try to help one another deal with this information in a positive manner.

Although we do not agree at all times, we try to be understanding.

We offer help to those who seek it, but do not force ourselves on others.

We strive to maintain anonymity while sharing on a level that is comfortable for all of us.

We encourage all to attend meetings for their own benefit as well as that of the group.

It is our hope that when each of us reaches a point of understanding and acceptance, we realize that this is when others need us the most.

Buffalo Monthly Meeting

Sunday, September 20, 2009

2:30–5:00 PM

The September meeting will be a self-help sharing meeting. As always, newcomers will be offered the alternative of meeting privately with a PFLAG parent.

Heritage Room, Westminster Presbyterian Church
724 Delaware Avenue, Buffalo, New York 14209

Use the driveway to left of the church to reach the church parking lot. Walk behind the church to other side of the building (through the nursery school) and enter through the kitchen entrance.

New Parents Meetings

These meetings are scheduled as needed. Please call the helpline.

Christ United Methodist Church Library
350 Saratoga (corner of Harlem Road), Snyder, NY
North of the Harlem Road exit of Route 33

Enter through door closest to the lighted parking lot.

This self-help one-on-one meeting deals with the concerns of parents and family members who have recently learned that a loved one is Lesbian or Gay.

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, Buffalo/Niagara, is a non-profit, all volunteer, community-based organization not affiliated with any ethnic, religious, economic, or political group. Membership is open to all. PFLAG membership lists are kept confidential and mailings are sent in plain envelopes.

Queer Journeys Programs

Queer Journeys is a cable access program sponsored by PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara and coordinated by Camille Cox and Babs Conant. The programs are based on documentaries on GLBT issues. This program only airs in Buffalo, on Mondays at 6:30 pm and Tuesdays at 1:00 am on Adelphia Channel 20.

The schedule for the next two months is:

Sep 7: A Little Respect
 Sep 14: Choosing Children, Pt 1
 Sep 21: Choosing Children, Pt 2
 Sep 29: Our Brother, Dan
 Oct 5: An Unexpected Journey
 Oct 12: All God's Children
 Oct 19: Claiming America's Promise
 Oct 26: The Families We Choose

A short description of the storylines and a full schedule can be found on our website at:
www.PFLAG-buffalo-niagara.org/video_project.shtml

A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE

Matt Surtel, Batavia News

National media commentators are all weighing in on the debate—arguing legal, philosophical and religious points which make it seem like something only affecting lawmakers.

But for Luke Paddock and family, it's a matter of reality. Paddock, 19, is appearing with his mother Karen Schuster and sister Jessica in a television commercial sponsored by the Empire State Pride Agenda, an advocacy group working for equality and justice toward lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. The family matter-of-factly makes its case for gay marriage,

Lifetime Members

Frank Carnevale & James Pilc
 Mary Hewitt

Sponsoring Members

Anonymous (1)
 John & Diane Covert
 Clarice Lechner-Hyman
 Bob Patterson
 James & Mary Ellen Walsh

Supporting Members

Anonymous (2)
 Jane & Tony Benfante
 Babs Conant & Camille Cox
 Shawn Cribari
 Steve and Suzanne Evans
 Brian Hilton
 Russel Hurlburt & John Percy
 Donald Kreger & Ron Ehmke
 Ronda Marvel
 Jeffrey McConnell & Fred Dansereau
 Mark Meyer
 Dennis Stuart

since the issue will influence Paddock's life forever. The commercial is available on the Web and was televised starting mid-June.

"The main reason I did it is they had Equality and Justice Day on April 26 in Albany," Paddock said. "My Gay Straight Alliance from Nazareth (College) all went, and I wasn't able to go because I had a final that day. I was really upset about that and I wanted to go, because I'd been looking forward to that and everything.

"My mom called me and told me about this opportunity, and I hopped right on board," he continued. "We were all excited. I've more recently been quite an advocate for same sex marriage, calling my senator, writing my senator, calling my assemblyman and talking to them—trying to inform them, so I thought this would be a great opportunity to do my part."

The commercial came about after Schuster attended a Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays meeting and volunteered at one of the organization's functions. Empire State Pride called the local PFLAG group requesting people for the commercials, and Paddock's family was recommended.

They filmed the commercial in May in New York City. The family talks about their beliefs, and they're also shown fishing at a spot in Gainesville.

The gay marriage debate has sometimes been heated, with each side seemingly trying to present the other at its worst in some instances. For Paddock, it's more complex. His family's Christian, and he graduated from a Christian high school, before attending classes at Nazareth as a vocal music major. He was part of his church's worship team, class vice president for four years, performed at the Perry Rotary show, represented the state as part of a special chorus in Europe, and received music awards.

"You can do a lot more with conversation than you can with argument," he said. "It's not like it's a big philosophical thing. I just want to be treated equally."

He attends church every Sunday, and the family remains non-judgmental. Schuster said she wants Paddock to have the same chance to settle in his life as Jessica. "It's something I didn't think we'd be doing a year ago today, but when it hits at home, you see the world through different lenses," she said.

The definition of marriage has changed over the centuries, he said. At one point they were arranged, and interracial marriages were banned 60 years ago. So he makes the case politely for his right to marry. "I want to encourage everybody who does support it to contact their senators, because it's coming up for a vote in the (state) senate," Paddock said. "The end of the session is in 23 days now, I think ... we need every senator's support, and a vote for this is a vote against discrimination. If a senator doesn't support equality, he supports discrimination, and that's not a Christian virtue."

Campus Pride Issues Warning

Campus Pride issued a warning regarding the Top 20 "Gay Community Accepted" and "Alternative Lifestyle Not an Alternative" rankings in the 2010 edition of the Princeton Review's annual college guide *The Best 371 Colleges* (Random House/Princeton Review, \$22.99). The national nonprofit organization believes that not only is the use of "alternative lifestyle" problematic when referring to the lives of LGBT people, but the methodology Princeton Review used to garner their findings is too simplistic and could potentially lead to harmful, unsafe choices for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) students looking for acceptance and support during college.

The criteria that Princeton Review used to determine the best LGBT "acceptance" at colleges was not based on significant LGBT student opinions or research related to inclusive LGBT policies, programs or practices as one might expect. Their rankings were based off one single question asked to 122,000 students at the 371 top colleges—whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "Students, faculty, and administrators treat all persons equally regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity/expression."

"This list is an erroneous, misleading indicator of acceptance for LGBT youth and their safety on campus," said Shane Windmeyer, founder and executive director of Campus Pride and the author of *The Advocate College Guide for LGBT Students*, the first-ever guide profiling the 100 Best LGBT-Friendly Colleges, released in 2006 by Alyson Books. "The majority of students responding to such a question—irrespective of response—will be straight. Their perceptions of equality are likely quite different from those of LGBT students."

While Princeton Review—a widely trusted company—believes that their rankings are created to help parents and students determine which school is right for them, Campus Pride believes that parents who are truly concerned for their children's safety and well-being will be misled by these particular findings. Campus Pride strongly believes that given the rise in violence and harassment among LGBT students, there are serious issues to consider when looking for the right college.

Another reason for concern is the dated use of the words 'alternative lifestyle' when referring to the lives of LGBT people. "It's disrespectful and out of touch because it alludes that being gay is a choice and something that can be cured," Windmeyer said. "The insensitivity to language is a major warning sign that this guide does not have the nuanced perspective to be a trusted resource and to truly understand the complexity of LGBT students' lives and needs."

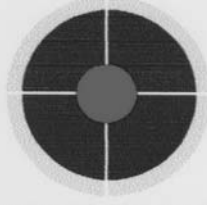
Campus Pride believes that LGBT students deserve better. "Today more and more LGBT high school youth are making life decisions on the college that not only best fits their academic needs, but also a college where they

Kay Patterson, LMHC

Licensed Mental Health Counselor

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Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus

695 Elmwood Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14222

Tickets & info: 883-1277
www.buffalogaymenschorus.org

can live and learn openly in a safe and welcoming environment," says Windmeyer. "If students and families do decide to use the Princeton Review as a resource, I would encourage them to compare its rankings for LGBT schools with those available from the Campus Climate Index (<http://www.campusclimateindex.org>)."

Take Action: ENDA

Earlier this summer, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) was introduced in both the House (H.R. 3017) and the Senate (S. 1584). This legislation will expand the scope of the existing federal law that prohibits employment discrimination to protect people on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. Protecting our LGBT loved ones in the workplace is much needed and long overdue.

We have a good chance of passing this bill into law and we need your help! President Obama has said that he is ready to sign this bill. All we need now is for Congress to take action! It is essential that you contact your Representatives and urge them to support this bill. Also, ask them to become a co-sponsor. To Take Action and help us address the employment discrimination our LGBT loved ones face go to www.tinyurl.com/enda2009. To learn the name of your US Senators and Representative, go to capwiz.com/pflag/dbq/officials.

Why Gay Guys Are Churchier Than Their Straight Brethren?

David Gibson, Politics Daily

As America's leading Christian denominations are once again feuding and splitting over whether they should allow gays and lesbians to marry, or ordain them as clergy, is it a miracle there are any gay Christians? Given Christianity's history of exclusion and often outright homophobia, and the current bloodletting over their role, why do homosexuals bother staying, not to mention believing?

They do both in numbers that might surprise you: A new survey of 9,000 gay, lesbian, and bisexual Americans from George Barna, a well-known evangelical pollster, showed that 70 percent of gay adults describe themselves as Christian and 60 percent say their faith is "very important" in their lives. Granted, those figures are lower than the population as a whole, which register 85 and 70 percent on those rankings, respectively. But Barna, himself a Bible-believing, born-again Christian, points out that the numbers demonstrate that "popular stereotypes about the spiritual life of gays and lesbians are simply wrong."

"People who portray gay adults as godless, hedonistic, Christian bashers are not working with the facts," Barna said. "A substantial majority of gays cite their faith as a central facet of their life, consider themselves to be Christian, and claim to have some type

of meaningful personal commitment to Jesus Christ active in their life today."

Moreover, while Barna's data indicate that homosexual believers tend to avoid active participation in an institutional church, both anecdotal evidence and some research shows that gays and lesbians who are involved in their churches and denominations are often more committed to the church and more involved in ministry than their straight brethren.

To Scott Thumma, a sociologist of religion at the Hartford Institute for Religion Research and co-editor of the volume, "Gay Religion," Barna's results are no surprise. Thumma has been studying gays in churches since the 1980s and he has found gay congregants in every denomination—including evangelical and Mormon congregations and other conservative churches.

Why is this so? Both research and gay Christians point to several factors. The most obvious is that homosexuals find the same things in the church that heterosexuals do: community, family, and a place to live out their calling—their vocation—to help others even as they find their faith enriched. "While I am not going to be ordained in my home denomination of the Reformed church because they have yet to recognize my calling, that doesn't mean I am going to give up," said Ann Kansfield, who co-pastors a Reformed congregation in Brooklyn, N.Y., with her partner, also a lesbian. (Kansfield's father, former head of the national seminary of the Reformed Church in America, lost his position in 2005 because he presided at his daughter's wedding.)

"Nothing is going to keep me from serving the people God has called me to serve, which is something I don't think a lot of people understand. The Reformed Church has been really horrible to me and my family . . . But if I were to leave this congregation in the lurch, I think I would be committing a sin," she said.

Thumma notes that most gay Christians—like most other Christians—join congregations because they like the pastor or the music or the community, with "denominational pronouncements" carrying less weight. In most churches, the attitude toward gays is one of "live and let live," or, quite often, "don't ask, don't tell." It is when gays and lesbians come out publicly, or seek the affirmation of sacraments such as ordination or marriage, that conflicts occur.

There are also other factors at work that may be particular to the Christian LGBT—lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgendered—community and psychology. One of the more controversial theories came in a study some years ago by sociologist Darren E. Sherkat, who compared the rates of religious activity of straights and gays and found that gay men showed significantly higher levels of religious involvement than heterosexual men. Gay men, Sherkat argued, attend church "without having to be dragged to services by female partners—as is the case for heterosexual men."

Among the factors Sherkat cited to explain this phenomenon was a desire by gay men to "avoid the risk of eternal punishment by gravitating towards religious consumption—much like heterosexual women do." Sherkat also wondered whether gay men gravitate to a male-oriented religion with a male savior, Jesus. There are other, perhaps more satisfying, explanations as well.

One is that gays and lesbians are drawn to ministering to others as a result of their own experience, and that the Christian journey of forgiveness and redemption and acceptance resonates deeply with them. "One reason that homosexuals are drawn to service in the church is that many of these people have been wounded themselves. They know what it's like to feel broken, and they want to help others in whatever way they are hurting," said the Rev. James Martin, a Jesuit priest and author, who knows gays and lesbians who work in ministry despite the fact that they cannot openly identify as homosexual. "The Christian paradigm of the scapegoat—the marginalized one, the one who suffers unjustly—is quite powerful, especially for gay people."

In a similar vein, others cite Christian de la Huerta's powerful book on gay religiosity, "Coming Out Spiritually," and his argument that gay people are, among other things, forced to mediate across the gap between their sexuality and spirituality, a divide straight Christians do not have to negotiate. So that makes LGBT people especially adept at helping others navigate a world of binaries, in particular the frontier between the physical and spiritual worlds.

Moreover, the process of coming out as a homosexual is often seen as analogous to the Christian pilgrimage of self-discovery and acceptance. "I have a theory that once you discern one call—that God has created you to be gay—that you are more adept at understanding God's call in other ways, as into ministry," said Kansfield.

Homosexuals who have come to terms with their sexuality also tend to be active in church, and especially in lobbying to change church policies on homosexuality, for the same reasons they are involved in these causes in the secular sphere: because they want Christianity, and America, to live up to their stated beliefs.

"I am deeply invested in the United States, as a country, living up to its constitutional ideals, and the vision of democracy we espouse is deeply moving to me," said the Rev. Rebecca Voelkel, a lesbian and United Church of Christ pastor, who leads faith outreach efforts for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. "Likewise, part of my DNA is as a Christian, as a member of the United Church of Christ. The vision of what the church stands for and espouses really is my identity." (Voelkel notes that many of the toughest skeptics come from within the LGBT community, which understandably equates organized religion to organized opposition to its agenda and its very identity.)

The presence of homosexuals in the Catholic Church can be especially confounding to outsiders, as Catholic leaders are not only sworn foes of gay marriage, but church teaching denounces homosexual acts as a "grave depravity" (and that is some of the tamer language). Moreover, such negative rhetoric crops up despite the longstanding, and some say growing, presence of homosexuals in the clergy and hierarchy and despite new Vatican policies against allowing self-identifying gay men to enter the seminary.

What gives? In addition to all the factors cited above, there is the sacramental view of baptism as sealing Catholics to the church in a bond no one can dissolve. "So the question is not so much why should they feel part of the church, but why shouldn't they?" said Father Martin. Others note the esthetic synchronicities between Christian culture and gay sensibilities, especially in the old-line traditions like Catholicism. Mark Jordan, a scholar of gay religion at Harvard Divinity School and author of several provocative books, such as "The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism," has argued that this sense of drama in the Mass makes churches a favorite stage for "Liturgy Queens," an epithet that Jordan reclaims as a badge of honor. "The liturgy creates its own divas, on both sides of the communion rail. It is a show that makes for ardent gay fans," he writes. "Liturgy Queens need not be members of the clergy, but they are typically found in the vicinity of the altar—or at least in the choir loft." Or, as Father Martin noted somewhat more benignly, Michelangelo was likely gay: "If we didn't have gay Catholics we wouldn't have the Sistine Chapel."

Perhaps the simplest and most convincing explanation for the dedication of gay Christians is found in their very high, and highly orthodox, view of the theology of human dignity—that God created them as they are. "Once you experience God's grace, nothing on earth could make me give up the faith that has allowed me to experience the life-changing power of God's grace," said Kansfield. "No homophobe, no one who wants to beat us up or get us out of the church, nothing is going to chase me away from loving God, and being grateful for the gift of God's grace."

The upshot is that gay Christians are not going away anytime soon, and thus neither are the arguments and divisions and the often-overheated rhetoric. At their General Convention in July, for example, clergy and laity in the Episcopal Church USA decisively ended a moratorium on electing gay bishops (and approved blessings for same-sex couples) just weeks after a potent faction of conservatives split from the main body over the growing acceptance of homosexuals by the church. The splinter group hopes to form a new American province of the worldwide Anglican Communion, perhaps under the jurisdiction of a conservative African prelate.

