

CATHOLIC COURIER

Diocese of Rochester

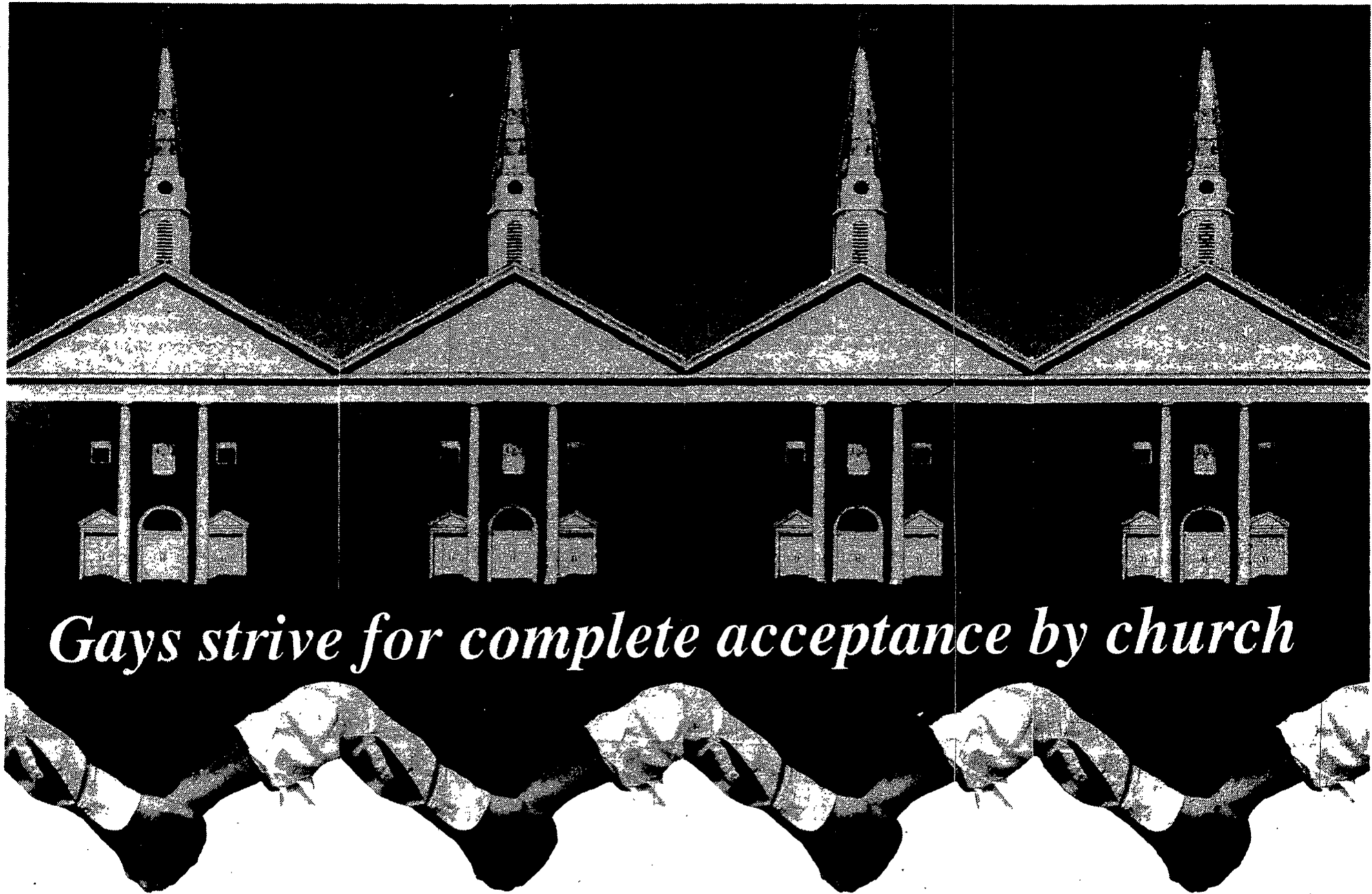
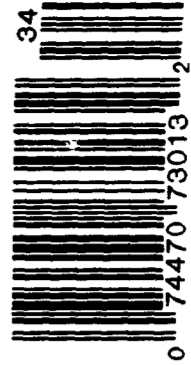
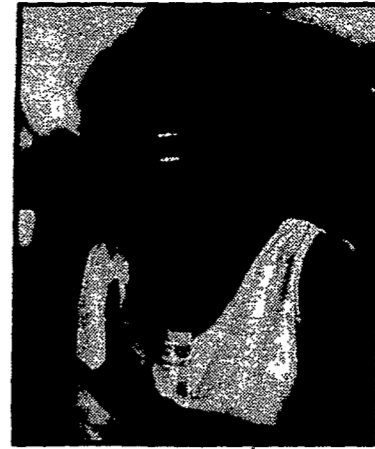
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16 pages

Musical message

Students from all over Monroe County are learning how to create a "City at Peace" by writing and performing a musical that embodies the title's philosophy of social harmony. Page 9.



Gays strive for complete acceptance by church

EDITOR'S NOTE: Fictitious first names have been used throughout this article to refer to individuals who asked not to be identified for publication.

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Christian lore has it that St. Luke, author of one of the four Gospels, was a physician, and that this profession influenced the writer's emphasis on the compassion of Jesus.

St. Luke's Gospel reflects that concern when it speaks of a man named Simon of Cyrene who helped carry the cross of Christ as He stumbled His way to the crucifixion.

It might seem fitting, then, that both St. Luke's and St. Simon's names adorn a Rochester church in which a group of gay and lesbian Roman Catholics and Episcopalians worship each Sunday evening with the group Dignity/Integrity Rochester.

For it is healing, compassion and acceptance that many gay Catholics seek when they worship according to the Roman rite. And it is the desire to find modern Simons that motivates gay and lesbian Catholics to look for those who might help them carry the cross of social stigma and misunderstanding that has burdened many homosexuals in countless ways both large and small.

"I think a lot of gay people have had extremely bad experiences with the Catholic Church in particular," remarked "Mary," a Dignity member, in explaining the alienation many of her peers feel from Christian denominations. "There's the assumption in the Catholic Church that everyone gets married and everyone has children. By assuming that, (the church) blocks out gay

people, single people, gay single people," she said.

Sheila Sloan, Dignity's membership chairwoman, echoed Mary's sentiments. "It's very difficult to participate in a worship service when the underlying message is God loves everyone except you because you're an aberration of nature."

God does love the homosexual, the church teaches, but He frowns upon homosexual behavior. Such a teaching is not as easily understood as it is stated. As one Dignity member put it, no heterosexual person stays up nights thinking about how his sexual orientation pits him against society and

Courage stresses chaste adherence to the church's prohibition against homosexual behavior, and its members meet in small support groups to encourage Christian fellowship and to overcome the feelings of loneliness gay people frequently experience in their struggle to live without physical intimacy.

Courage's approach grows out of the Catholic teaching that there is no sin in being homosexual, but rather that homosexuality is an objective disorder. Although an individual may not be responsible for his or her homosexual orientation, he or she nevertheless has a duty to keep the disorder

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the church, whereas many homosexuals have tortured themselves over that very issue.

It is possible in the Catholic Church to find people like Simon who are willing to listen and worship openly with the gay person. In general, these people take one of two different approaches toward homosexuality, pointing out the discrepancy that exists between traditional church teaching on sexuality and recent interpretations of sexual orientation.

Courage, a group of about 200 Catholic homosexuals scattered throughout 11 U.S. dioceses, enjoys the endorsement of several bishops, including John Cardinal O'Connor, archbishop of New York.

in check.

On the other hand, Dignity/USA's 4,000 members, including gays, their friends and family members, consider the active gay lifestyle to be an acceptable Christian lifestyle. As a result, Dignity chapters have been expelled in recent years from most Catholic parishes where they formerly held services.

Last year, the organization may have sealed its fate with the Catholic hierarchy when a Dignity task force released a document on sexual ethics, stating:

"We are not alone in regarding official church teachings on issues of sexuality as not in touch with the human experience ... We find that the more sexuality is in-

tegrated into the totality of our lives, the more joyful and peaceful is its genital expression." This document directly contradicted Catholic teachings on homosexuality as spelled out by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in a 1986 pastoral letter to bishops entitled "On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons."

In it, the cardinal cited such Old and New Testament condemnations of homosexual behavior as found in the Genesis stories of the men of Sodom, in Leviticus and in the writings of St. Paul.

"In Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, in the conditions necessary for belonging to the Chosen People, the author excludes from the People of God those who behave in a homosexual fashion," Cardinal Ratzinger wrote, adding that St. Paul similarly excluded those who behave homosexually from the Kingdom of God.

Yet those who dispute church teachings point out that no explicit references to homosexuality were made by another prominent New Testament figure — Jesus Christ.

"Nowhere in the Gospels ... does Jesus Christ speak out against homosexuality," said Paul Schieb, regional representative of Rochester's Dignity chapter to the national house of delegates. "The Roman Catholic Church is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, and nowhere has he been found to clearly speak out against homosexuals."

Dissenting theologians also have claimed that Scriptural condemnations of homosexual behavior apply to prostitution, promiscuity and cultic rites, rather than to loving, committed, monogamous relationships.

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