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EQUALITY
TOLEDO

Rally for Equality

“Issue One is history—we are moving forward”

EqualityToledo organized a Rally for Equality on Saturday, Oct. 1, 2005, to celebrate and support the public launch of Equality Ohio, the first statewide GLBT organization in Ohio. The Rally for Equality was held in front of the Lucas County Courthouse. Live music by the vocal group Spectrum started the rally where featured speakers and members of the crowd had a chance to voice their thoughts. The rally also provided an opportunity to proclaim “Issue One is history and we are moving forward!”

Kim Welter, EqualityToledo Executive Director, provided welcoming comments and Reverend Cheri Holdridge of Central United Methodist Church emceed the program and introduced each of the featured speakers. Wade Kapszukiewicz, Lucas County Treasurer, called on elected officials to speak out in support of issues of justice, togetherness, and a sense of fairness, including employers providing benefits for domestic partners. Accompanied by his young daughter, Emma, Mr. Kapszukiewicz emphasized his desire that politicians work toward making a better community for future generations. Dr. Carol Bresnahan, Vice Provost for Academic Programs and Policies at the University of Toledo (UT), explained how lack of domestic partner benefits had a personal impact on her family. Troy Anaya,



Esq., representing the Ohio ACLU, followed up by reviewing a recent Michigan court ruling that medical coverage is a benefit of employment, not marriage, and therefore cannot be denied under the state’s “marriage protection” amendment. “It’s only a matter of time before change comes to Ohio.” Rev. Edwin Yates, Pastor, A New Life Metropolitan Community Church, and Brenda Spurlin, representing Rainbow Area Youth, also spoke to the importance of equality.

Almost 200 supporters gathered for the rally that was broadly covered

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representing the UT's Spectrum, a GLBT student group, described his experiences with discrimination, "not as a Hispanic person, but as a gay man." He acknowledged his mother in the audience as "the woman wearing the 'I Love My Gay Son' t-shirt."

Dr. Pat Groves, UT professor, emphasized how much progress supporters of GLBT rights had made in the past thirty years, remembering low turnout for a 1970s rally she had attended in Columbus. Rob Salem,

by the local media. Rally participants signed a banner in support of equality, and following the Rally for Equality, some members of EqualityToledo delivered the banner to the statewide rally in Columbus and participated in the afternoon launch of Equality Ohio.

EqualityToledo's successful rally attests to the momentum that the movement for GLBT rights in Ohio has achieved since the 2004 elections.

Notes from the Executive Director

by Kim Welter



I would like to thank the members and supporters of Equality Toledo for making it possible for me to be the Executive Director. Grant opportunities and memberships in national organizations are an organization's ability to maintain paid staff. Therefore, it is important to the future of Equality Toledo that we continue to employ an Executive Director. I am honored to hold that title at this time.

I envision a northwest Ohio with a strong, organized network of organizations working for equality for all Ohio citizens, particularly the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender population. It will take more than cooperation, however, to enact change in Ohio. We must change the hearts and minds of our fellow citizens through education using face-to-face conversations about divisive issues.

October 11, 2005 was National Coming Out Day. This year's theme, "Talk About It," encouraged all persons who support "GLBT equality to speak openly about it. Maybe you're coming out for the first time ever, or maybe you're just talking with a neighbor, coworker, friend or acquaintance about GLBT issues for the first time. Regardless, coming out and being out is the most important thing you can do" (Human Rights Campaign, Coming Out Project). I invite you to adopt "Talk About It" as your motto for the future as well. If you are unsure about how to talk about GLBT issues, please contact Equality Toledo for information. We would love to support you as you have supported us.

Some simply know people in their congregations who might be interested in Equality Toledo and pass on information to them. Organizations in conflict over the issue of religion and homosexuality have sought resources to help facilitate discussions. Liaisons from a number of congregations work with Equality Toledo to further promote our message and to 'Talk About It' with members of their own congregations. And finally, hats off to those congregations who, with their ruling body's permission, offered their religious/spiritual organization's name for public printing in support of Equality Toledo's mission. As of this date, I am proud to say that this list includes the groups below and I am confident that this list will continue to grow in the near future.

A New Life Metropolitan Community Church
 Central United Methodist Church
 Lutherans Concerned/Toledo
 Maumee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church
 Redeemer Lutheran Church
 St. Lucas Lutheran Church
 St. Mark's Episcopal Church
 Trinity Episcopal Church

If you are part of a religious/spiritual community that would like to become a supportive organization or engage in conversation with Equality Toledo, please contact me at 419-344-0045 or kim@equalitytoledo.org.

Building relationships and talking out issues are major focuses for me as EqualityToledo's Executive Director. This is especially true for folks in the religious/spiritual community. I have spent many delightful hours speaking to pastors and lay leaders of a variety of religious/spiritual organizations across Northwest Ohio in the past six months.

Working by referral I have met with thirty-six different such organizations so far and have a list of more to approach. Pastors and lay leaders have been helpful and supportive in many ways.



Working Together for Equality in our Community

* * *

Mission: EqualityToledo works for equality for all Ohioans regardless of their marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, through education, anti-defamation efforts, and activism.

EqualityToledo Board of Directors

Diane Britton

Mark Mockensturm

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Mary Powers

Rob Gilsdorf

Michelle Stecker

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What the Bible Really Says

by Rev. Dr. Michelle Stecker, Pastor
Faith Community United Church of Christ

When Jesus was asked by a lawyer almost two thousand years ago to identify the most important aspect of true religion, Jesus replied: "You shall love the Lord the God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus condensed the Ten Commandments into the law of love.

After answering the lawyer's question, Jesus wanted the lawyer to understand how radical it is to love your neighbor by telling him the story of the Good Samaritan. At this time in history, the Samaritans were hated by the Jews; they were social outcasts, very similar to gays and lesbians in our day. In the story, Jesus surprisingly elevated the Samaritans to the level of "neighbor" and depicts them as models of faith.

The message of the Christian Bible, and of all great world religions, is love, not hate. Gays and lesbians are affirmed and loved by God. As an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church USA and the United Church of Christ denominations, I call upon the religious leaders of our nation to stop spewing hatred and bigotry from their pulpits, and to start embracing the extravagant love of God.

Summer-Fall Events

EqualityToledo held its first public event at the Old West End festival during the weekend of June 4-5. Volunteers Ken Dymond and Rob Gilsdorf organized a fund-raising yard sale while

straight friends socialized in the Lake's beautiful backyard while learning more about Equality Toledo. Keith Wilkowski and Lourdes Santiago joined the party as well as reporters from The City Paper and the Free Press.

Arne and Nancy Larson hosted an afternoon poolside House Party on September 10, one of late summer's warm and sunny days. Participation by their neighbors and co-workers contributed to this successful event. There was good discussion amongst the attendees about issues related to equality in Ohio.

On October 11, UT's Spectrum and EqualityToledo co-sponsored a candlelight vigil to remember Matthew Shepard and to call for an end the hate against GLBT people. Spectrum officers Meghan Morris and Alessondra Hernandez spoke along with Rev. Michelle Stecker, Louis Escobar, and Diane Britton.

EqualityToledo organized a fall educational lecture series held on the first Wednesday of each month at UT's Eberly Center for Women. On September 7, Rev. Dr. Michelle Stecker, Pastor, Faith Community United Church of Christ, discussed "What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality." Diane F. Britton, UT History Professor, presented the October 5 lecture, "There is Nothing Traditional About the History of Marriage." Dr. Carol Bresnahan, UT History Professor and Vice-Provost for Academic Programs and Policies and Convener of the President's Commission on Diversity, made the final presentation on November 2, "Diversity at UT: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly."

Upcoming Events

February 11, 2006 — GLBT legal workshop at

ET board members staffed an informational booth. Dozens of individuals stopped by to learn about the organization.

EqualityToledo members attended the July 31 Unity Picnic at Millbury's Sonrise Park. They sold memberships and t-shirts while talking to many new friends. Local candidates Lourdes Santiago and Paula Hicks-Hudson stopped by the ET table as did Dave Schultz.

Randy and Janna Lake hosted an evening House Party on August 27. Their gay and

the UT Law School.
Spring 2006 — Equality Toledo Annual Meeting



Share the Momentum with your Friends – Host a House Party

Would you like to host a house party? EqualityToledo is happy to work with you on planning an event at your home. These are fundraising events, but the focus is on education and relationship building. For more information, call Kim Welter at 419-344-0045 or contact her at kim@equalitytoledo.org.