



**THE BANNER OF THE DESERT**  
**THE NEWSLETTER OF PFLAG PALM SPRINGS/DESERT COMMUNITIES CHAPTER**

Our Chapter's 25<sup>th</sup> Year, November 2020, Volume 25, No. 11

**VIRTUAL PFLAG MEETING**  
**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 15<sup>TH</sup> 2:30 P.M.**

In lieu of our regular monthly meeting at the Cathedral City Library, will be a virtual meeting, via Zoom. This will be a place to discuss your thoughts and concerns and an opportunity to connect with other PFLAGers.

Just email us at [info@PSpflag.org](mailto:info@PSpflag.org) prior to 2:00 the 15<sup>th</sup> and you will be added to the list. This will be an invitation-only meeting, so be sure to RSVP now! Note: you need to RSVP the November meeting even if you had sent in a request for the October meeting. You can expect an email invitation to arrive Sunday and can join with audio/video or by phone.

Remember, your PFLAG-PS family is here and available to you by phone at 760-202-4430 or via email at [info@PSpflag.org](mailto:info@PSpflag.org) if you want to connect.

Visit our Facebook page and share your thoughts, feelings and insights on your individual experience and insights on current events

**SUPPORT FOR TRANSGENDER AND GENDER EXPANSIVE FAMILIES AND ALLIES**

Meetings are the first Wednesday of each month. Next Zoom meetings: November 4 and December 4th from 6 pm - 7:30 pm. Please email [info@trans.health](mailto:info@trans.health) or call the Transgender Health and Wellness Center at (760) 202-4308 for more information.

**A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR**

– Mike Balasa

The Pope surprised his followers by telling an interviewer that he supported Civil Unions for same-sex couples. Up to this time, the Church was firm in the belief that homosexual behavior was sinful; although, this doctrine is seldom mentioned and, according to polls, most Catholics have a favorable view of the LGBTQI community. The last poll taken of Catholic attitudes in 2018 found that 75% were LGBTQI supportive and among younger Catholics under 40, the favorable rating was near 80%.

I have heard some criticism that same-sex marriages would still be banned in Catholic Churches and that constitutes continued prejudice and condemnation. I am grateful that so many religions accept LGBTQI people into their congregations, accept LGBTQI ministers and perform same-sex marriages. The fact that some sects do not perform same-sex marriages doesn't bother me. I get upset when any religion wants to use their religious dogma to influence the law and make same-sex marriage illegal.

It was a wonderful day in June of 2015, when the Supreme Court ruled that same-sex marriages must be recognized in all states. Today, nearly everyone knows of married same-sex couples and they are in existence in every community. Even rural states have large populations of same-sex couples according to latest Census figures. This summer Carol and I lived in a rural town in Northern Montana, and the town clerk was a married Gay man.

With the acceptance of same-sex marriage by most people, it was shocking to hear from two members of the Supreme Court criticizing the decision to legalize same-sex marriage. The new Justice, in Senate

testimony, refused to publicly comment on how she would rule on same-sex marriage. In the past, she has made statements opposing it and has allied herself with anti-LGBTQI groups. The need for PFLAG, GLAAD, ACLU, NCLR and other support groups is still necessary. There is still a sizeable minority that is fighting hard to persecute and disenfranchise LGBTQI persons. I hate to admit it but that hateful minority will never go away and we must be on guard forever.

### **IS SAME-SEX MARRIAGE THREATENED BY A CONSERVATIVE MAJORITY ON THE SUPREME COURT?**

The internet news magazine, LGBTQ Nation reported that couples in St. Louis, Missouri have mobbed City Hall for marriage licenses in fear that the new Supreme Court Justice, Amy Coney Barrett might join other Justices in taking away marriage equality. A local pastor in an open and affirming church was unexpectedly busy officiating at several same-sex marriages. Pastor Tori Jameson said, "She (Justice Barrett) is notoriously anti-LGBTQ. She has made statements against Roe, against immigration. I worry about our rights being rolled back if she gets in. But I don't have a lot of political power. I'm just a community pastor."

Jameson, responding to the worry in the LGBTQI community offered free weddings to any same-sex couple. She told reporters that it was important to make a statement to the politicians of how important it was to have the safety of legal marriage to same-sex couples, many of whom have children.

In response to Jameson's offer, florists, bakers, photographers and others volunteered their service for four days of group weddings at Jameson's church. One volunteer, a photographer, said, "I am part of the LGBTQI community, and I have dear family and friends who are part of the community. Can you believe it has only been five years that these humans have been able to be legally married just like any hetero couple? Five years, and now it feels like that human right is under threat again with potential upcoming changes to the Supreme Court."

The US Senate, Democratic caucus issued a statement about the nomination process of Barrett, "This has been a sham process from the beginning. Amidst a global pandemic and ongoing election, Republicans are rushing to confirm a Supreme Court Justice to take away health care from millions and execute the extreme and deeply unpopular agenda that they've been unable to get through Congress".

### **REMEMBERING GEORGE ZANDER**

Five years ago, on November 1st, 2015, George Zander and his husband, Chris, were brutally attacked on a street in downtown Palm Springs. George was pushed down and suffered a fractured hip. Chris was beaten with a tire iron and suffered a serious concussion. George never recovered and six weeks later, on December 10th, he died.

George was a major LGBTQI leader in the community. He was the leader of the local Equality California office. He organized demonstrations, fund raisers and led training sessions for local activists. George was a longtime supporter of PFLAG and often presented reports at monthly meetings about current political activities. He gave his last PFLAG presentation just a few weeks before the violent incident. George has a star on the sidewalk outside of Kaiser Grill honoring his memory

### **FREE SEX EDUCATION PROGRAM NOW AVAILABLE TO TEACHERS**

Planned Parenthood announced they are making available a program to teach about sex. The program is designed for students in 6th grade and up. The program is a comprehensive, medically accurate curriculum. Planned Parenthood Director of Education, Chrissy Comorik wrote, "The pandemic makes it difficult for teachers to get the sex education training they need and for students to get the sex education they deserve, but Sex Ed To-Go makes it easy."

The course, available to teachers and other youth-serving professionals as well as parents who want to teach their children at home, provides lessons that make their teaching more effective: "All teachings are based on best practices with age appropriate language and are relevant to all settings (the course includes

specifics on California state laws. Courses can be taken at any time, from any smart device, and includes classroom materials (lesson plans, slides, assessments) and links to other resources.”

Nine courses can be assigned to students, 8th grade and up, available on line. Courses include anatomy and physiology, pregnancy prevention, sexually transmitted infections, how to access services and how to use a condom.

Because of the pandemic [Planned Parenthood](#) is offering the courses free for the remainder of the year.  
<https://www.plannedparenthood.org> The teacher portal is available at [SexEdtogoTeachers](#) and the student portal is at [SexEdtogoStudents](#).

### **CAN WE LEARN A LESSON FROM POLAND ABOUT THE RISE OF THE EXTREME RIGHT WING**

Just a few years ago Poland was considered a progressive, successful country - a shining example of the recovery of Eastern Europe. Now that is no longer true. This past month the right-wing party now in control made abortion illegal, and the women in the country are on strike. Demonstrations and protests are rocking the country. The government has made the LGBTQI community outsiders with no rights or safety. An artist was arrested and charged with blasphemy for depicting a saint with a rainbow halo. Several area jurisdictions have declared themselves LGBTQI free and outlawed all public displays of LGBTQI symbols. There is no same-sex marriage or employment protection.

A Polish publication from KOD International, a Polish organization for the defense of Democracy, listed the strategy used by the right-wing to amass power: “They will use fear and distorted truth. They will call their supporters true patriots and accuse the other side of being traitors. Division of the country is their goal. They will control the press by using the terms “lies” and “fake news”. There will be a barrage of encouraging threats of conflict and the need for authoritarian laws. There will be no restraint on distortions and lies from them. Laws will be proposed that are shocking - they will back off giving a sense of victory, but they will return with new less threatening legislation that slowly dismantles Democracy. They will take control of the judiciary. They will alienate foreign allies and make foreign trade difficult. And, finally, they will attempt to destroy the electoral process to remain in progress.”

The editor-in-chief of the KOD International publication, wrote, “With each passing day, the government is moving the country further away from the liberal West and towards the authoritarian models of the East. Hundreds of thousands have protested against every illiberal, unlawful step. Every time we believed it couldn’t get any worse, we were wrong. This is why we want you, our American friends to be spared the shock, the awe, the disbelief of this happening to you. Let’s hope history proves us wrong and the US wakes up in time. Oppose any changes to electoral law that an authoritarian regime wants to enact—rest assured it’s only to help them remain in power longer. And above all be strong, fight, endure and always remember you’re on the good side of history. Every authoritarian, totalitarian, fascist regime in history has eventually failed, thanks to the people,”

### **FRANCIS IS A POPE OF A DIFFERENT COLOR**

by Bob Warburton

In the 1960s the world seemed new and the Pope was John XVI. The Second Vatican Council had taken place; the Altar no longer faced Christ but rather the flock, and Mass was no longer said in Latin. For the Holy Roman Catholic Church it so much had changed, and by 1980 when Ronald Regan became President it was said, "the only left in this Country is the religious left." This period is when I converted to Catholicism. The most important thing was a person being moral and true to oneself.

Now that does not mean that at that time Catholicism was great for LGBTQUIA folk, but neither was any other place. Religion generally did not really get us, and there was a part of Catholicism which did support us. I joined through the support group Dignity in the U.S., and there were other groups that sprung up throughout the world. Unfortunately the Church took a lurch to the right when Pope John Paul decided the Church needed a

Reformation "backwards." For example, in my work with Dignity Denver we kept a dialogue with Bishop Casey and when he was made aware of a group of Catholics performing Conversion Therapy operating in a Church owned office building, he removed them. The Diocese started running our stories and covering our Community in the Diocesan Newspaper. Bishop Casey was soon retired and replaced by a conservative's conservative who made Cardinal and has since been disgraced.

Within the next ten years Dignity was thrown out of every space that had anything to do with the Roman Catholic Church. In 1987 in Bal Harbour, Florida Dignity voted for a statement saying that us having sex was consistent with our love. My spouse and I were at Bal Harbour and voted for the statement, but did not expect quite the ferocity of the response we would receive. A few groups disavowed that statement and were allowed to stay with the Church. In 2005 John Paul died and Cardinal Ratzinger, the man who labeled homosexuality as an "intrinsic moral evil" became Pope Benedict XVI, and for many all hope was lost. Then GOD SPOKE. Pope Benedict resigned. An Argentine Cardinal who casually spoke to members of the Gay Community who were members of his flock became Pope.

All right, the God spoke stuff may be incorrect, and the adulation of Francis by progressives may be overdone, but after 30 years of condemnation, this Pope doesn't hate us. Has he done anything official for the LBGTQIA Community in the Church? No. The Church is so large and immovable, anything he has tried with Women's Rights, Rights of those hurt by the Church, and improving the position of Sisters of the Church has been monumental, and yet not enough. In comparison, Francis has said a few nice things about our Community, and has been lauded

Let me add a few words of praise for Francis. He has not said anything official and only two things off the cuff, but he knew what he was saying would be heard worldwide. In 2013 on an air flight speaking to reporters he offered, "if someone is Gay and is searching for the Lord and has good will, then who am I to judge him". Then just recently in a documentary in a give and take with a Gay man talking about his spouse and three children, "the Pope is heard saying, "homosexual people have a right to a family...What we have to make is a law of civil coexistence, for they have a right to be legally covered." I stood for that (in Argentina)." In the same film he also says of course no to same gender marriage. Well of course he is not a saint, but after years of abject hatred from the top, it is nice to hear a little give.

#### **JUDGE BLOCKS RULE THAT WOULD DENY HEALTH CARE TO LGBTQI PATIENTS**

A federal judge blocked the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services from enacting a rule that would allow health care providers to deny services to LGBTQI people. The new rule was a n attempt to cater to religious extremists who consider discrimination based on sexual orientation or sexual identity a part of their religious freedom..

Judge, James Boasberg, U.S. District Court of the District of Columbia, wrote, "Allowing the new rule to take effect would impede the public interest by threatening the health of LGBTQ individuals at large, some of whom will likely develop increasingly acute conditions on account of their delaying necessary care of refraining from transparent communication with providers out of fear of discrimination." The Judge cited the Supreme Court June ruling prohibiting workplace discrimination on the basis of gender identity of sexual orientation.

*(More on next page)*

**DEAR FRIENDS — IT IS TIME TO JOIN OR RENEW PFLAG MEMBERSHIP**

If you would like to join PFLAG Palm Springs/Desert Communities, print and mail the form below or join online at [www.pspflag.org/joindonate.html](http://www.pspflag.org/joindonate.html)

All our expenses go to furthering our mission. Our expenses are for materials that we supply to individuals, schools and supporting organizations; the information phone line, newsletter production, support to local schools' Gay Straight Alliances; and, many other occasional expenses such as the Pride Parade.

When you join and support the local PFLAG chapter with a membership of \$30 or more, we send your name and a portion of the fees (\$15) to PFLAG National, making you a member of both the National and our local chapter of PFLAG. You will receive all publications and notices.

Members sometimes don't realize that if you join National PFLAG directly you are not on the membership rolls of the PFLAG Palm Springs/Desert Communities. PFLAG National does not notify us that you joined, and they do not share any of the membership fee.

**MEMBERSHIP FORM**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Phone No. \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Suggested Donation: Family Membership \$50 \_\_\_\_\_ Individual \$30 \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to PFLAG Palm Springs and mail to:  
**PFLAG Palm Springs, PO Box 4326, Palm Springs, CA 92263**

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PFLAG INFORMATION LINE: (760) 202-4430

EMAIL: [info@pspflag.org](mailto:info@pspflag.org)

**Chapter Officers**

Co-presidents: Christine Hammond, Dan Smith, Sly Zelnys, Treasurer: Peter East

Emeritus members: Mike and Carol Balasa

**ANOTHER WAY TO SUPPORT PFLAG**

Every time you shop online using AmazonSmile, PFLAG Palm Springs-Desert Communities will receive a donation from the AmazonSmile Foundation.

[smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com)