

Gay Meeting Causes Church Dispute

Fifth Estate Collective

1970

In a virtually unprecedented move, Reverend Robert Morrison, rector of St. Joseph's Episcopal Church, has called for the resignation of Richard Emrich as diocesan Bishop of Michigan, calling him "unchristian, inhuman and irresponsible."

This call comes in the wake of the decision of the Episcopal diocese of Detroit to cut off funds for Reverend Morrison's church because he allows the Gay Liberation Front, a homosexual group, to meet at the Church.

Morrison's blast came as a culmination of two years of feuding with Emrich (pronounced I'm rich or I'm right) over the role of the Church in the community. St. Joseph's has served as a regular meeting place for numerous revolutionary and black groups and some speculate that Emrich simply used the gay issue as a ruse to cut off a needed movement resource.

But Morrison and his vestry are holding firm. "In effect," the pastor said, "the bishop is coercing us to kick this group out of the church. And we simply won't give in to this type of fascist tactic."

Morrison called Emrich's view toward homosexuals "inhuman" and said it was consistent with the inhumanity of his leadership of the church in other areas of social concern such as the war, human rights and poverty. Emrich recently held up funds earmarked to several black groups that were to be used for community projects.

Morrison said, "This man is irresponsible and should no longer be bishop."

"Because of his inhuman views," he continued, "I am convinced that the bishop is unchristian; he is inhuman; he has lost track of the decency of mankind and I call upon him to repent of his evil and of the overt and covert acts he has perpetrated on humanity. in the name of humanity I ask him; I implore him; I demand that he resign as bishop of the diocese of Michigan as a show that he has repented of his evil."

The bishop is planning to retire in a year, but it is not known at this time whether or not it is a show of repentance on his part. He was unavailable for comment on the matter.

John Tower, senior warden of the church, said he had polled the vestry and they had voted to support Reverend Morrison and the use of the church facilities by the Gay Liberation Front. He noted however that the use of the church by revolutionary groups has led to a decline in church membership.

Tower said that when Reverend Morrison retires in June the vestry is planning to ask the bishop for a change in the form of the church and a return to funding by the diocese. Both Tower and Morrison said that the church would remain open to movement groups because "that's what Christianity is all about," but that all inner-city churches were facing financial and membership crises and could not make it without financial assistance.

As Morrison and Tower spoke for St. Joe's, they were flanked by GLF members Vaughn Grubbs, James Toy and Debbie Quigg.

Grubbs, acting as a spokesman for the group, noted that homosexuals are an oppressed minority within society and that the GLF was formed in Detroit this year to fight for their right to be themselves and to stop "police harassment, blackmail and job refusal."

Grubbs said the group will initiate political activity and “learn to defend ourselves.” The GLF has a speaker for the April 15 anti-war march in Detroit. “We seek to improve the self-concept of homosexuals and their relationships with one another and to create our own institutions to bring this about,” he said.

Grubbs stated that the group will support and identify with others seeking liberation, especially women’s liberation “because the oppression of women is also based on artificially imposed sexual roles and identities.”

“We’ve been playing an act for a long time. Now we will begin to be ourselves,” Grubbs said.



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