

Life and Death in a “Gay” Parish – The Story of Most Holy Redeemer Church, San Francisco

Most Holy Redeemer Church lays just a few blocks from the center of San Francisco’s notorious homosexual Castro District with its strip of gay bars and porn houses. The area just across and up the street of the church where the church convent used to be is a favorite cruising ground for area “gays.” Today the parish is Catholic in name only. But this was not always the case.

The corner stone for Most Holy Redeemer Church was laid in 1900. The parish was created to serve the heavily ethnic population of Irish, Italian and German immigrants in the Eureka Valley. In time, a

convent was build to accommodate the Sisters of Charity, B.V.M. who staffed the parochial school.

Today, MHR, as the congregation calls it, is a “gay” parish – the “inclusive” prototype envisioned by the drafters of the proposed USCCB Guidelines.

The parochial school has long since been closed. The building is now leased to the “pro-choice” Society of Friends (Quakers) as a private elementary school. The Sisters of Charity left in 1979 and are now “gone with the wind,” and the convent has been converted to an AIDS hospice. The Legion of Mary and Our Lady’s Sodality has disappeared.

In 2000, the church was “wreckovated” at the cost of \$1 million. The pews surround a floating altar table on three sides with the tabernacle located ???

Masses at MHR are highly innovative. The congregation holds hands for the Our Father and remains standing for the Consecration. The church has an excellent choir, but the highlight of the service is the kiss of peace with everyone mulling around the pews hugging and kissing everyone else. Same-sex partners opening embrace and kiss on the lips.

The census count for the September 30 - October 6, 2006 at the Saturday evening and two Sunday Masses was 312 men, mostly “gay” males; 74 women including lesbians and their partners, and 6 children. Some old-timers have remained at the parish and there is a scattering of homeless people who call the parish their own.

Because of its strategic location in relation to the Castro, MHR has always had its share of homosexual men and women in the congregation, especially following the end of the Second World War when port cities like San Francisco began to attract large numbers of homosexuals in search of anonymity and a large pool of sexual partners.

In 1981, shortly after the AIDS epidemic broke out in these same port cities, the pastor, Father Tony McGuire, formed a Gay and Lesbian Outreach Committee. Since that time, more than 18,000 AIDS deaths have been reported in San Francisco with an increase of over 1000 new cases every year.

Under Father Rev. Zachary Shore, who served as assistant pastor and pastor from 1989 to 2002, the transition from a Catholic to a “gay” parish continued. To expunge any latent harmful “homophobic” feelings, Shore underwent a moral lobotomy at a New Ways Ministry seminar. Although he admits that most of the “gays” and lesbians in his congregation are active homosexuals, he insists they are also people of faith who engage in numerous works of charity. Individual confession is available, but communal penance services (with general absolution?) attract more participation.

The current pastor, Father Steve Meriwether has been at MHR for more than four years. He has also served as Chancellor for the Archdiocese of San Francisco, both under Archbishop William Levada, who has since been elevated to cardinal and made Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and his successor and bosom buddy, Archbishop George Niederauer. Meriwether openly champions the cause of “gay” liberation. A photo is posted on the parish web site of the priest dressed in full regalia sprinkling holy water on the MHR contingent of marchers at the June 2006 “Gay Pride” Parade. Other parade snapshots include parishioners dressed in bright royal blue T-shirts with the MHR logo and marching behind a banner “Most Holy Redeemer Catholic Church – your parish church in the Castro for 100 years” or riding a trolley-bus decorated with rainbow flags and multi-color balloons. Meriwether says that MHR provides “gays” with community – a place to belong. He says that the archdiocese would like to see MHR take a lower (“gay”) profile, but his pro-“gay” advocacy does not appear to have hurt his career under Levada or Niederauer.

Parish Life Revolves Around AIDS and “Gay” Wants and Causes

Parish life and parish resources at MHR are centered on AIDS and the spiritual, social and political needs and interests of its predominantly “gay” congregation.

The parish resource web-page provides links to the Vatican and the Liturgy of the Hours Apostolate, but as one scrolls down the links take on a different complexion – the Gay Catholic Forum, Dignity/San Francisco, the Conference for Catholic Lesbians, Voice of the Faithful, Pax Christi, USA, etc.

Among the pro-homosexual guest speakers, lecturers, and preachers to be invited to MHR are “gay” Dominican Fr. James Alisson, Richard Hardy author of *Loving Men, Gay Partners* and a popular speaker on St. John of the Cross, and Charlene Tschirhard from the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies.

MHR is a parish of “ministries” of all kinds – almost. There is the MGM “ministry” serving Midlife Gay Men support group, a New Leaf “ministry” for counseling of homosexuals, bi-sexuals and transgendered people. There are AIDS “ministries” of all kinds including a special African fund for AIDS victims. Social justice looms big at MHR, but that justice does not extend to unborn babies. Of the more than 20 bulletins selected at random from 2002 to 2006, the A-word was never mentioned. The bulletin for January 22, 2006 contains not a single reference to the annual prolife events marking the 1973 Roe Vs Wade Supreme Court decision. MHR does support World AIDS Day, and Fair Trade Awareness Month to insure that parishioners buy the politically correct brand of coffee beans.

There are occasional traditional and ethnic celebrations at MHR.

In 1991, Archbishop John R. Quinn Mass held a Forty Hours Devotion for relief from the AIDS epidemic at MHR.

MHR maintains close relations to outside homosexual organizations. In July 2006, the homosexual Metropolitan Community Church of San Francisco, an affiliate of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Churches, began holding its Wednesday evening Taize services in the sanctuary of the church. An MCC-HIV support group also meets at MHR.

Sex Abuse Scandal at MHR

On March 10, 1994, the San Francisco police notified the San Francisco Archdiocese that Monsignor Patrick O’Shea, one of the city’s most politically well connected priests was under investigation for child sexual abuse. In addition to the sexual assault charges that were shortly brought against him, he also had to face charges of stealing \$200,000 in church funds.

O’Shea, who had, at one time, headed the archdiocese’s Outreach program for “gays” and lesbians and also served as Director of the Propagation of the Faith, was accused of the molestation of at least eleven young boys. He was defrocked by Archbishop Quinn and spent two years in jail awaiting trial.

In 1972, while he was serving at Most Holy Redeemer, O’Shea molested two brothers, ages eleven and fourteen. He brought the two boys up to his trailer at Lake Berryessa, plied them with alcohol, forcibly restrained them and then sexually assaulted them. The archdiocese did not contest the charges. On October 13, 2005 the brothers settled for \$1.3 million each. The settlement came just after the archdiocese had settled four suits filed by other victims of O’Shea for \$4 million.

Even though archdiocesan officials knew that O'Shea had "a problem" with young boys, the priest had continued to be shuffled from one San Francisco parish to another where he continued to chalk up victims until his arrest in 1994. On March 29, 2002 the state Superior Court dismissed 224 molestation counts against O'Shea due to the statute of limitations, but the archdiocese continued to pay out huge settlement fees for civil case that did not go to court. As of 2005, the Archdiocese of San Francisco has settled thirty-three sex abuse suits, including those against O'Shea, for more than \$43 million and the lawsuits keep rolling in.

The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence Come to MHR

In late October 2006, all of the moral putrefaction that had been festering for years at Most Holy Redeemer came to a head with the discovery that the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, an organization of homosexual drag queens nationally known for their anti-Catholic and blasphemous parodies, had signed a lease with Father Meriwether for the rental of the large parish hall located under the main sanctuary of the church for charity bingo.

Actually, the first of the salacious "Revival Bingo" games operated by the "Sisters" had already taken place on the evening of September 7, 2006, in Ellard Hall. According to a "gay" reporter covering the night's festivities, prizes for the AIDS fund-raiser included bottles of wine, porn DVDs, and an assortment of sex toys. Punishments inflicted on bingo guests for violating game rules including a rule against ringing cell phones included being forced to kissing the rear end of a "sister" and cavity searches for bare-buttled leather men. The revelry continued from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m.

The parish bulletin for the first week of Sept. 2006 did not mention the "Revival Bingo."

Father Meriwether was out of town for the event. He had checked himself into a rehabilitation facility in Rochester, MN, for depression and alcoholism on August 6 and did not return officially to MHR until his release on October 24, just in time for the second go-around. scheduled for All Souls Day, Thursday, November 2.

During Meriwether's absence, Archbishop Niederauer had appointed Chancery official Rev. Harry G. Schlitt as a temporary administrator for MHR. Rev. Schlitt however was away in Washington, D.C. when the first bingo took place on September 7.

As Master of Ceremonies for the November 2 games, the "Sisters" selected Peaches Christ, a well-known drag queen freaknick notorious for his Midnight Mass film series. Peaches claims to be a descendant of Jesus Christ.

Scheduled to make a special appearance at the November bingo were the finalists for the annual "Bare Chest Men" contest. Seven of the contestants will be putting themselves up for auction at the Eagle Tavern leather bar's dinner/date party to be held on November 12, 2006. To date, more than 40 former "Bare Chest" men have succumbed to AIDS.

Fortunately, the November 2 event never took place. News concerning the “Sister” bingo games w posted on Mark Shea’s weblog, e-mails and calls from irate Catholics flooded the Chancery. On October 31, the “Sisters” were informed by the archdiocese that their lease was canceled. Archbishop Niederauer

put Fr. Meriwether “on leave.” A spokesman for the archdiocese stated that the archbishop was not aware that the “Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence” were leasing MHR’s parish hall and that the entire incident was a most regrettable affair.

Indeed it was. But it was only one of many in a long litany of travesties against the Faith and against Catholic morals that have been permitted at Most Holy Redeemer Church by the Archdiocese of San Francisco for over two decades.