



VIEWPOINT OPINION

QUEER THOUGHTS: By Joyce Arnold Ph.D.

Grab the distracted public's attention

Some subjects are sure to grab the often distracted public's attention. Going by the Letters to Editor sections of *The Tennessean* and *The City Paper*, three such subjects have recently garnered attention: abortion, LGBT and immigration rights. I acknowledge this is too simplistic to capture the nuances of different perspectives, but among the particularly vocal who are opposed to LGBT, immigrant and abortion rights, the argument is often that their view represents that of the "founding fathers," and that view is perceived to be an incontrovertible tenet of Christianity. Another way of summarizing the stance is found in a popular proclamation of several years ago, by some Christians: God said it, I believe it, that settles it. The problem comes when that stance fails to acknowledge that the "it" believed inevitably includes a fair degree of interpretation. Our beliefs, whatever they are, all involve our interpretations, based on our understanding, which itself is based on, among other things, our experiences. That's not a bad thing. It's simply a part of what we're talking about when we talk about "faith." Difficulties arise when one person, one group, insists that their beliefs should take precedence over those of everyone else.

One of the most recent examples is in reactions to the story of Rep. Debra Maggart (R-Hendersonville) who responded to an e-mail urging her to vote "no" on legislation that would ban "gay adoption" by asserting that "most homosexual couples have numerous emotional dysfunctions and psychological issues that may not be healthy for children." Not surprisingly, that story resulted in letters of agreement and disagreement with Rep. Maggart.

One writer to the *Tennessean*, a resident of Maggart's 45th state district, wrote that she was "appalled" at her representative's "blanket statement" about lesbians and gays. Another writer noted that if "emotional dysfunctions and psychological issues" were a reason to prevent someone from adopting, then many heterosexuals would also be eliminated. On the other hand, another resident of Maggart's district defended the representative, insisting that Maggart used "research statistics and documented facts to back up her statements," and accused the LGBT community of "heterophobia." It actually isn't clear just what sources Maggart relied upon in her sweeping judgment of gays and lesbians, but apparently there is some dependence on *Focus on the Family's* publications, the conclusions of which are in stark contrast to those of, among others, the American Psychological and Medical Associations. Still another wrote, "As a Christian in a Christian nation (the founding fathers were almost all Christians and founded this nation on Christian principles)," and included her dismay at "homosexuals' mean spiritedness toward heterosexuals."

There were other letters in *The Tennessean*, two coming from individuals long active in the local LGBT community, Carter Witt and Gene Floyd. Witt noted that, "The distance from *Focus on the Family* to the Rev. Fred Phelps is short." Among other things, Witt's comments point out that the more "sophisticated" approach of anti-LGBT arguments, like those of *Focus on the Family*, can be more dangerous than the extreme rantings of a Fred Phelps type. Gene Floyd, synonymous with the local PFLAG chapter, who describes herself as a "recovered Southern Baptist and in Sunday School and church every Sunday," challenges the conclusions of Maggart and others, and then writes, "What really disturbs me is how some citizens and representatives of our state government ignore the precept of 'liberty and justice for all.' The gay community has been judged guilty with no proof and no trial."

Raise the rainbow flag and give three Queer cheers for Carter and Gene, and for every other person who took time to say "No way" to the judgments of Maggart, *Focus on the Family*, and all those who think they know us, and who insist they have the right to judge us. Letters to the editor, as they appear in main-line publications like *The Tennessean* and *The City Paper*, are one way of letting people know that we of Queerdom and our allies are indeed here and out, and there's no way in anyone's interpretation of hell that we're going to be silent.

On Saturday of last week, Marisa Richmond, President of the Tennessee Transgender Political Action Committee (TTPAC) and Board member of the Tennessee Equality Project (TEP), was my guest on *Queer Talk*, a weekly half hour program, which is a part of DJ Ron Slomowicz's long running radio show on WRVU. Marisa, who is a lobbyist, working in the General Assembly with Jenny Ford of TEP, talked about the whole gamut of legislative efforts that are in play in this legislative session. One constant need of organizations like TTPAC and TEP is the attention of the LGBT and supportive communities. You have to get the attention of community members in order to get the volunteers and the funding needed to do the work on behalf of the same community.

Sometimes, in spite of the obvious downsides, the Maggart's of the world do us a favor by making statements that are so egregious, so patently ridiculous, that they create a headline in mainstream publications. They'll probably get her reelected, but at the same time, if "Lawmaker's remarks enrage gays" doesn't grab attention and motivate Queer action, what will it take? There are worse things, of course, but we really don't want to see those headlines. Better to stay, or get, busy working toward "LGBT's Achieve True Equality" headlines. ▼