

## **Challenging the Status Quo**

Creating Change Turns 20

by Tomas Guerra

February 11, 2008 - 12:00 pm ET

(Detroit) With attendees that included homeless youth, LGBT and straight elders, civil rights leader Julian Bond and New Hampshire Episcopal Bishop Gene Robinson, the **National Conference on LGBT Equality: Creating Change celebrated its 20th anniversary** last weekend.

On Thursday at the opening plenary, civil rights leader Julian Bond said, "Sometimes it is the simplest of acts: sitting at a lunch counter, going to a new school, applying for a marriage license, casting a vote, that can challenge the way we act, the way we think."

Bond, who helped integrate Atlanta's movie theaters, lunch counters and parks, said that rights for gays and lesbians are not special rights in any way.

"It isn't special to be free from discrimination. That's an ordinary and universal entitlement," he added. "That's why when I'm asked, are gay rights civil rights, my answer is always: 'Of course they are.'"

During the annual event, a 2000-strong mix of university students, young activists and senior activists were part of forums aimed at forming coalitions and acquiring leadership skills.

There were also workshops focused on immigration, LGBT Latinos and the growing senior population, including one hosted by SAGE (Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders) that addressed aging with HIV.

"In our churches we have so much erroneous information on how you get HIV and how it is transmitted," said Rev. James Curry, from Detroit, during the forum.

Rev. Curry — who's affected by the disease and also lost his own sister Pattie Jean, an intravenous drug user, to the epidemic in 1987 — said that "many churches deliver a message of hell and damnation. They have so much erroneous information."

The Task Force also granted an award for activism to Mandy Carter and one for community service to Barbara Satin to recognize her work as a transgender activist in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area.

The 73-year-old helped make possible the ongoing construction of 41 housing units for LGBT seniors above the Minnesota church "City of the Lakes" and she's also a member of the executive council of the United Church of Christ, the first transgender woman to hold such a high title in that denomination.

Matt Foreman also delivered his last speech as executive director of the Task Force, highlighting that the percentage of the U.S. population protected from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation has risen from zero in 1970 to 52 percent now.

Foreman and Satin also talked about ENDA (the Employment Non-Discrimination Act) and stressed the need to continue the fight for a bill that will not exclude gender identity.

During the Friday plenary Foreman accused “our friends” (members of the LGBT coalition to pass ENDA) for doing the “enemies’ dirty work for them” by taking out gender identity protections before that part of the bill was even put on the floor by anyone in Congress last year.

Foreman asked the audience, “Is something wrong with that? You bet! If we want to pass an inclusive ENDA we need to do it together.”

Creating change was held at the Marriot Hotel in downtown Detroit and the plenaries were hosted by comedic political commentator Kate Clinton, who hilariously took on radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh and President Bush among others.