

The following are excerpts from: ***Gays and Grays: The Story of the Gay Community at Most Holy Redeemer Catholic Parish*** by Donal Godfrey, SJ, 2007. Published by Lexington Books.

“(In the 1970’s) . . . Numbers were declining, instead of it being packed as I remembered it. There were few people in the pews. I did the bookkeeping for the parish. The Irish were leaving, the school had closed, there were not enough students, and parishioners were very upset about this.” Mary Geracimos, quoted in Godfrey MS, p19.

“Specifically, their goal was to overturn one of the oldest and strongest taboos in the culture, but beyond that, it was to challenge all the conventions surrounding the “traditional” nuclear family. The Castro -- or what they called their ‘liberated zone’-- was a kind of laboratory for experimentation in alternative ways to live.” Frances Fitzgerald *“Cities on a Hill: A Journey Through Contemporary Culture”* p18; cited in Godfrey p13

“To Marie O’Connor, (last principal of Most Holy Redeemer School), the final decline of the school was dramatic. In rapid succession, twenty-one of the neighborhood bars became gay bars.” Godfrey p16

*“Despite Fr. (Cuchulain) Moriarity’s possibly benign neglect of the gay community, it was after all during his time as pastor that MHR’s first outreach to gays began, albeit informally, thanks to the self-effacing parish deacon, Laurence Rolle, who remains a parishioner. Perhaps because Moriarity was ill or distracted, Rolle had more influence than one might expect from a deacon. A gay man himself, Rolle had a personal interest in making Most Holy Redeemer a place where gay people felt welcome. **His coffee hour each Sunday in the rectory dining room attracted mostly gay men, more and more of whom started coming to church and finding their way onto church committees.** Rolle would make a point of mentioning gay issues in a positive light when it was his turn to give the Sunday homily – a definite departure from the pastoral approach of Moriarity and his predecessors.”* Godfrey p20. (Emphasis added).

“ ‘They came from the chancery, the personnel board, to ask questions, to see whom to send. We have to replace Fr. Moriarity, they said; ‘What kid of pastor do we need in this parish?’ I said, ‘The parish is gradually becoming more gay. These are the demographics of the area. This needs to be thought about in making this decision.’ There was absolute stone-dead silence in the room. . and the meeting went on to another point.’ Deacon Laurence Rolle, quoted in Godfrey p27.

“Fortunately, Archbishop John Quinn was well aware the question needed to be asked, and chose a man who turned out to be especially suited to the new sociological profile of the parish. Under Father Anthony McGuire—‘Fr. Tony—the parish was reborn.... Anthony McGuire became the ninth pastor of Most Holy Redeemer parish in 1982.” Godfrey p27-28.

“The two gay men (on the MHR advisory board) suggested we start a gay and lesbian outreach. And that was approved 12 to nothing.” Godfrey p29..

“ ‘Much to our surprise, we sent out some invitations and 65 people showed up for a potluck. Over about a year’s time, and many potluck dinners, the group grew to over 100 people...Sunday mornings at ten o’clock Mass these days, you can go and find the place nearly full. About 60% of the people are gay or lesbian.” Godfrey p 29.

Dale Meyer...quoted in Proceedings of Interfaith Conferences on AIDS and ARC (held in San Francisco, 21-22 March 1987) p130.... “Most estimates of MHR’s gay parishioners are considerably higher now.” Godfrey p57, footnote 7.

*“The Gay and Lesbian outreach Committee—so unique, so bracing, so critically what the parish needed when it needed it—eventually withered away, a victim of its own success, **when the entire parish had taken on the work it was formed to begin.**” (Emphasis added) Godfrey p29.*

“What MHR was doing was without precedent anywhere in the Roman Catholic Church.” Godfrey p30.

“On September 22, 1984, four members of the Outreach Committee, along with Fathers McGuire and Brennerman and Sister Clea Herold, hosted a social hour, dinner and extended conversation with Archbishop Quinn in the parish rectory. This very significant event not only helped educate Archbishop Quinn, it was a sign of hope for parishioners that the Institutional Church in San Francisco was beginning to take gay Catholics seriously. The Outreach Committee also set up a booth at the Castro Street Fair.” Godfrey p31.

*Footnote to the above: “One of the most colorful members of the committee was simply known to everyone as Pansy...Pansy Bradshaw helped to write a definitive guide to San Francisco . . . ‘Betty and Pansy’s Severe Queer Review of San Francisco: An irreverent opinionated guide to the bars, clubs, restaurants, **cruising areas**, performing arts, and other attractions of the queer Mecca.’ Most Holy Redeemer was reviewed positively in the early editions; more recently, the parish is simply listed along with other ‘queer-positive religious organizations and churches.’” Godfrey p58, footnote 14. (Emphasis added).*

McGuire used his marvelous sense of humor to touch his flock’s imaginations and to lubricate tense situations. His humor was even on display at his final Mass of Thanksgiving in the parish. In his homily he deadpanned that when he first arrived in the parish, he just thought ‘Hail Holy Queen’ was a good entrance hymn! This line was captured on tape in a television news story about McGuire’s leaving the Castro. Of course, the entire assembly broke into laughter.” Godfrey p34..

“When a former Catholic asked McGuire if his AA group might use the hall for a Halloween party, McGuire thought it sounded like a very appropriate request. When he

said yes, he had no idea everyone would turn up either in drag or wearing practically nothing! The next day the woman who, in his words, was ‘the second most uptight parishioner,’ called and was furious. She berated him over the impropriety of such goings-on on church property. “It was like Sodom and Gomorrah!’ she thundered. To which McGuire answered meekly, with his mischievous humor, ‘Well, maybe Sodom.” Godfrey p36.

“Kevin Ballard was there one occasion when someone confronted McGuire, demanding to know how he could accept all those people living ‘alternative lifestyles’:
‘It’s true, (McGuire) said people in our parish do need to be called away from gossip and from promiscuity and much else; but isn’t it easier to for people to make hard moral choices in a community that loves and accepts them. He just avoided the moral stuff...Later people can be challenged if it is needed, or maybe it will just happen naturally.” Rev. Kevin Ballard, SJ, quoted in Godfrey p38.

“In his early days as Pastor, McGuire also had to deal with protests from the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. The “sisters” first appeared in San Francisco on Easter Sunday 1979 as a group of four gay men in nun’s habits... ‘What happened was that one day before Christmas a notice on a telephone poll (sic) said the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence are coming to Most Holy Redeemer for Christmas Midnight Mass...The Sisters came dressed as Marie Antoinette. Festive garb is the way people dress in the Castro on big occasions. So they came and sat in the front row, and during the homily one of them was giving me these eyes, it was very distracting...’” Fr. Anthony McGuire, quoted in Godfrey p39.

“Fr. Randy Calvo (now Bishop of Reno) remembers the tension in the church at that midnight Mass: At the beginning of the service someone started screaming—but he turned out to be ‘one of our own crazies: Charles. A former Cistercian, who hung around the parish. Well, there was a great deal of relief once we identified it as one of our own crazies.’... Since that Christmas, MHR and the Sisters of perpetual Indulgence have continued to interact from time to time” Godfrey p40-41.

“When I spoke with Sr. (Cleta Harold) about entering RCIA, I was clearly not about to compromise anything regarding my sexuality. I didn’t go into a lot of details, but I showed up in my Levis and leather jacket and talked about my background as a Gay activist, clearly not about to change that...I talked about my background with witchcraft and the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, and my disagreements with certain points of the catechism. Sister never batted an eyelash, but asked if I could show up Sunday mornings at 8.” Jack Fertig (aka “Sister Boom Boom” of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence) quoted in Godfrey p 42.

“One of the first encounters I had was with Jim Stultz, President of the parish council at the time. He came to me and said I’d like to interview you before you get to the parish . . . I remember one thing he talked about. He criticized someone who gave a homily at MHR bashing people for going to the gay baths, and all that. He said that was uncalled for. My point was, you can hardly expect me to teach what is contrary to the church, and he said,

oh no, absolutely not. But is there not a lot more for us to talk about in the Gospel that is useful for our lives? I said yes. Broaden the whole thing, the focus in this parish does not have to be one thing. That was an eye opener.” Fr. Randolph Calvo (now Bishop of Reno, Nevada), quoted in Godfrey p48.

“(Fr. Anthony) McGuire kept in touch with Archbishop Quinn and invited him regularly to the parish. In fact Quinn came frequently and loved his visits to MHR.” Godfrey p52.

*“Well the question in my mind was, the people who make a conscientious decision to live together as a gay couple, and then they come to communion, just like people who make a similar decision on birth control, you don’t harass them. You respect their decision. The next step was, ‘Can a clearly gay couple take on open ministries in the church?’ Like if a gay couple apply for ordination, that would clearly be an obex. **What about Eucharistic Ministers? I though maybe I should consult [Archbishop Quinn], but then we already had them!**” Fr. Anthony McGuire, quoted in Godfrey p52. (Emphasis added.)*

“(Rev. Jim) Mitsulki (of Metropolitan Community Church) has very fond memories of “Fr. Tony” ...Mitsulki speaks of a certain revolving-door factor operating between their respective congregations. Some attended services at both churches . . . Sometimes parishioners from Most Holy Redeemer went to MCC for same-sex weddings they could not hold at MHR.” Godfrey p54.

“(Fr. Zachary) Shore said it is not surprising that the two Castro area churches have formed a holy union. According to (Rev. Penny) Nixon, many of the MCC congregants were brought up Roman Catholic. And according to Shore, about 90% of his Catholic flock are gay or lesbian.” Don Lattin “Giving Thanks Together, San Francisco Chronicle 11/26/1998; quoted in Godfrey p63, footnote 70.

“In examining this connection (between holiness and homosexuality) Rodriguez refers to what he calls “the large numbers of homosexuals in the clergy.” Richard Rodriguez, quoted in Godfrey p72.

“In my search of the parish Record of Internments for this period I find that in 1980 the deaths in the parish are all of older people, aged (in order): 108, 95, 82, 80, 86, 92, 76, 72, 74, 82, 61, 64, 75, 59, 72, 82, 85, 54, 92, 83. By 1985, the ages of the deaths read (again in order) 42, 40, 42, 29, 27, 45, 43, 62, 82, 84, 39, 59, 102, 39, 35, 32, 33, 39, 37, 51, 57, 88, 81, 48, 61. The impersonal data give stark statistical witness to what happened in the years in between. The younger deaths in 1985 are of men and almost exclusively due to AIDS.” Godfrey p84.

“By 1990, Most Holy Redeemer was definitely the Roman Catholic Church with the largest percentage of ‘out’ gay parishioners in the world. Gay people themselves sometimes find it ‘too gay.’ They may come to Most Holy Redeemer to reconcile their sexuality and their faith, and if they succeed, they may no longer need Most Holy Redeemer. They may switch to a more ‘ordinary’ parish, closer to home, or with a bigger

choir, or more or less ethnic diversity. If they fail, they may give up Catholic worship altogether.” Godfrey p101.

“And for the centennial observance in 2001, banners were placed on lampposts in the neighborhood representing MHR’s bell tower, reading ‘An Inclusive Catholic Community.’ Even so, the parish shares some of the limitations as well as the strengths of the neighborhood. The Castro, like the parish, remains largely gay and male....” Godfrey p102.

“Like (Fr. Anthony) McGuire , (Fr. Zachary) Shore was never judgmental about his parishioners lives...” Godfrey p103

“Well, Tony and Zachary are very different people, and I think one of the good things Zachary has brought to the parish is that he is kind of innocent. I think of the baptism we did of the child of the first gay couple. Tony would not have done that; at least the way we did it.” John Oddo, MHR music director, quoted in Godfrey p.103.

“The baptism of children being raised by gay couples took place publicly at the 10AM Sunday liturgy....One gay couple, Dan McPherson and Kevin Gogin, active MHR parishioners while McGuire was pastor, did adopt a daughter, Sarah, in 1998, but she was quietly baptized outside the parish at St. Ignatius Church . . . Rob Lane & Don Propstra’s adopted son was baptized as a regular liturgy in the parish on October 21, 1990 . . . “Kevin and Dan [Gogin and McPherson] were the godparents.” Godfrey p104.

“The ecclesiology is that we are here and we do belong to the church, the general church, and it is saying that we are not going away. I think he (Archbishop William Levada) knows that, and so instead of going around making announcements, which he is inclined to do on subjects, I think he is just sort of backing off and staying away. I think that is his way of dealing with it.” Kathleen Carey, former Pastoral Associate and DRE at MHR, quoted in Godfrey p110-111..

“MHR itself has marched as a parish in the San Francisco Gay Freedom/Gay Pride Day parade since 1998.” Godfrey p112.

*“But it was a first for a Catholic **parish** (emph. orig.) in San Francisco. Parishioners who marched were unsure what to expect, some expected the worst, but found themselves moved by the overwhelming response of the crowd. Since 1998, taking part in the Pride Parade has become an MHR tradition. (Fr. Zachary) Shore’s semi-tacit sanctioning of a parish presence in the parade lent the Church’s legitimacy to this event of the gay community...” Godfrey p112. (Emphasis added).*

“On (Gay Pride) parade day, June 25, 2005, Fr. Tom Hayes celebrated the 8:00AM Mass. He asked parishioners to join him in a special blessing for those who would be marching that morning. Then, with his typical wit, he exhorted those marching to make

sure they gave a special blessing with a sign of the cross to the television cameras...: You never know who may be watching you.” Godfrey, p114.

“Dear Archbishop,

A week ago Friday, October 15, I was appalled to see the headlines of the San Francisco Examiner read ‘Catholics anti-gay Funds.’ As a priest of the Archdiocese of San Francisco and Pastor of Most Holy Redeemer Church, I cannot accept the decision of the Bishops of California to allocate financial assistance to Senator Knight’s Protection of Marriage Committee. (Proposition 22, which defined Marriage as between a man and a woman).” Letter from Fr. Zachary Shore to Archbishop William Levada; Godfrey, p115

“Most Holy Redeemer, on Diamond Street in the Castro, calls itself ‘an inclusive Catholic community.” By that the parishioners mean they invite gays and lesbians into the parish, which is part of a church whose doctrines say their sex lives are a sin.” Bay Area Reporter article, quoted in Godfrey, p117.

“I do have frustrations with the parish-principally with people who seem to feel it’s so exhausting to declare they are gay and are Catholic, such a feat of mental gymnastics that nothing else should be asked of them...If MHR burned down, I have no doubt they’d attend services at a gay synagogue before going to Mass at another Catholic Church. Hence, to the extent they have any religion, their religion is being gay or being around other gay people.” Patrick Mulcahey, quoted in Godfrey, p.128.

“So one Sunday I went to Mass, and I thought, oh my, this place is so gay. . . My older sister, she probably belongs to Opus Dei, I brought her here one time, and she wrote a letter saying that all these men who have sex with other men are going to communion. My sister said, ‘You know, it is social at MHR, and that should not be part of religion. You go there to save your soul...’ Her letter said it was her duty to tell me that I was sinning!” Charles Bold, quoted in Godfrey p124.

“The institutional Church is blind, ‘just doesn’t get it,’ in the same way Jesus was initially blind and didn’t get it with the Canaanite woman. A parish such as MHR calls the rest of the institution to conversion...” Godfrey, p130.

“I interviewed Catherine Cunningham and her partner Rose Gallo, a long time lesbian couple who are active parishioners; Gallo is parish council president.” Godfrey, p131-132.

“Many priests and members of religious congregations, as well as former priests and religious, regularly attend Most Holy Redeemer. The Vatican II Institute at Menlo Park, a renewal program for Catholic clergy from around the country, recommends their students attend Mass at MHR.” Godfrey MS, p154.

“If God must become Asian or African, then God is also in some sense queer and at work in the queer community.” Godfrey MS, p 134

“Is it less appropriate for gays to imagine Jesus as gay than for African Christians to picture him as black, Asian Christians as Asian?” Godfrey, p 134.

“These are the people who might only attend Mass irregularly, but still have a sense of belonging to the community...” Godfrey p136

“The question is can a gay person be authentically Jewish or Christian or Catholic?” Godfrey p136.

“I believe in other words, that the gospel must always be inculturated into every culture, and this must include gay culture.” Godfrey p138.

“It started to dawn on me how gay it (MHR) was only after I started going there—you know the whole social thing, they are looking for boyfriends!” Jeff Ferris, quoted in Godfrey, p140.

“I didn’t have to check my gay identity at the door. Coming to MHR, I could bring it openly. That I could not do at a regular parish. It was very affirming to me as a gay man....I was hoping to meet someone here and I think Marty was too...Zachary (Fr. Zachary Shore) said ‘do I know him?’ Someone said, ‘You know, Michael and Marty.’ So the pastor knew me as part of a couple before he knew me as an individual.” Michael Vargas, quoted in Godfrey, p142-143..

“Despite the (Vatican ban of July 13) ban, Sr. Gramick and Fr. Nugent spoke again at Most Holy Redeemer.” Godfrey, p147

“I think it (MHR) can be a model for other parishes.” Sr. Jeanine Gramick, quoted in Godfrey, p148.

“The Catholic Church is not a credible moral voice within the gay community.” Godfrey, p153