



Bond, Foreman speak at Creating Change

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DETROIT—In this U.S./Canada border city next to an icy Detroit River, more than 2000 activists, civil rights leader Julian Bond and New Hampshire Episcopal Bishop Gene Robinson gathered last week to celebrate the **20th National Conference on LGBT Equality: Creating Change**.

“Dr. King didn’t march from Selma to Montgomery by himself. He didn’t speak to an empty field at the march on Washington,” Julian Bond told the audience at the opening plenary. “There were thousands marching with him and before him, and thousands more who did the dirty work that preceded the triumphant march.”

Bond added that civil rights means equal treatment before the law “and there is no one in the United States who does not or should not share in these rights.”

“Rights for gays and lesbians are not special in any way,” he said. “It isn’t special to be free from discrimination.”

At the event, which gained national media coverage that included reporting by Spanish-language television network Univision, there were about 100 forums, ranging from those focused on GLBT elders, Latinos and immigration to workshops on media mastery, leadership training and religion for activists of all generations.

SAGE (Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders) brought its support group “SAGE positive” from New York, which provides compassionate care for positive seniors (age 50 and up), many of whom have been taking HIV medicines for more than 20 years and have added uncertainty, depression and the side effects of their HIV drugs to the stigma that comes with aging.

“They’re walking guinea pigs. Nobody really knows what’s going to happen to someone who’s 77-years-old and been taking HIV meds for 25 years,” said Lee Chew, one of SAGE’s social workers.

Chew mentioned that because many of these seniors were infected way before the advent of antiretroviral drugs and thought they were going to die years ago, some have spent all their money and are now bankrupt.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, which sponsors Creating Change, gave a community service award to 73-year-old trans woman activist Barbara Satin for her work in the St. Paul-Minnesota area, where she’s helped make LGBT-companionate services and housing available.

Satin is also a member of the United Church of Christ’s executive council, the first trans woman to hold such a high position in a religious denomination in the U.S.

The plenaries were emceed by outspoken political humorist Kate Clinton, who joked about

President Bush and radio host Rush Limbaugh, whose head was attached to the leather-dressed body of a gay man on the big screens for the roaring audience.

Matt Foreman delivered his final speech as NGLTF executive director, scolding some members of the GLBT coalition in charge of lobbying for passage of the federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act last year, for doing the “enemies’ dirty work” when they decided to take out gender identity protection from the bill. Foreman asked the audience, “Is something wrong with that? You bet!”

Emphasizing that the body of a trans woman shot execution-style on the streets of Detroit laid unidentified in the city’s morgue as Creating Change took place, Foreman added, “I don’t think I need to tell anyone here why gender identity protections are so vital. But there is also a principle here: We are one community, one people, period.”