

## viewpoint JEN MABE



Why, like a battered wife, do gay parishioners make excuses and hide the bruises suffered all these years from the Catholic hierarchy?

# Battered by the church

AFTER MOVING AWAY FROM MY home parish recently, I came to realize that I was fed up with the Catholic Church. The years of not being valued for my opinions and my talents by the church, simply because of my sexual orientation, had finally gotten to me.

I asked myself why I should try so hard to defend, love, honor and be faithful to something that hasn't done the same for me. When I couldn't answer that question, I went searching.

Over the past few months I've sought to buck the Catholic Church in the harshest ways that occurred to me. I've tried to find solace in faiths and spiritualities like the Episcopal and Lutheran Churches.

I've tried Judaism. I've even delved into some mild versions of Wicca and witchcraft.

In the end, though, nothing felt quite right. No matter how much I tried to immerse myself in these new spiritualities, I still couldn't get away from the tug at my heart, pulling me back to the church I was raised in. I just wasn't "home."

Every road I took led me back to the Catholic Church. All my "church shopping" led me back down a road of pain and heartache that I've experienced all to many times before.

WITH ALL THE RECENT LEGAL advances in the area of gay marriage and civil unions, I don't have to tell anyone how adamantly the Catholic Church has spoken out against such things.

Just this week, Pope John Paul II again spoke out against our families from the

pulpit. Still, my Catholic faith is deeply ingrained and is a cherished part of who I am, so I try to give the church the benefit of the doubt.

"They're not always like this," I find myself saying. "I know they love me. They just don't know how to show it."

And then I attended Mass at what is listed as a "gay-friendly parish," but the priest there railed against gay marriage and "practicing" homosexuality.

It hit that I feel and I sound like a battered wife.

This "gay-friendly" priest claimed that to condone same-sex marriage would be to tell God that He got it wrong. He went on about how it was a "good Catholic's" duty to "witness" to practicing gay men and lesbians about how living what we would define as a full and complete life was against God's laws.

After that I got up and walked out, and I wasn't the only one.

The truth of the matter is that they aren't always like this. Not all of the Catholic Church is abusive toward its gay or lesbian members.

I was a part of a non-abusive parish for four years, a parish that taught that the examination of conscience each individual goes through is more important than what a group of sheltered men in the Vatican dictate. Now I feel lost.

THE PROBLEM IS THAT THE MOST prominent and vocal members of the Catholic Church are speaking out against gay marriage, while those who would defend the dignity of the gay and lesbian

community are silenced by fear — fear of being reprimanded, fear of being excommunicated, fear of being removed from a community where they are doing some good, however quietly.

And once again, the hierarchy has effectively shut down all lines of communication, constructive criticism and change.

In the process, they are driving away some of their most devout followers. They are driving away their teachers and their fund-raising organizers. They are driving away their choir directors and their parish council members. They are driving away those who could be the most valuable to them.

The real question I should be asking myself is why — why do I keep going back? Why, like a battered wife, do I continually make excuses and hide the bruises and scars I've suffered all these years at the hands of the Catholic hierarchy?

The only answer I can offer is that I have a deep love for my Catholic faith, and I have the hope that one day they will see the abuse they've heaped upon their gay and lesbian children.

I have the hope that they will see what they have done to the very people they should've loved unconditionally.

And I have the hope that when they finally see their mistakes, they will truly be penitent.



Jen Mabe is a graphic designer for the Washington Blade and can be reached at [jmabe@washblade.com](mailto:jmabe@washblade.com).

Come be apart of

*"The Living Room"*

If you have been recently diagnosed within the last year or have never been part of an HIV support group, *Us Helping Us* has a safe space for you.

**Groups starting now**  
for more information call Ken,  
202 546-8200



Funded by Bristol-Myers Squibb Company & D.C. Department of Health, Administration for HIV/AIDS CFC# 7703

G|L

GEORGETOWN LASER

LASER HAIR REMOVAL

**\$50 off your first treatment**  
**Gift Certificates Available**

202.333.4445

CALL FOR FREE  
CONSULTATION  
WITH OUR M.D.

