

# Hallelujah!

## Many Amens Follow Dedication of Sunshine Cathedral's New Home

By Ian Drew

The call to worship was a little more riveting than usual at Sunday services on October 28 at the Sunshine Cathedral in Fort Lauderdale. The choir was led by the striking vocals of Jason Warner, an established singer and longtime church member who flew in from Los Angeles for the special day of services.

"It is amazing to see how a vision has brought a church with an initial membership of 30 to a church with over 1,000 members," he noted.

What made that day different from all other days is that it was the Official Dedication of the 30-year-old congregation's sprawling new location at 1480 SW 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

Formerly belonging to the Southwest Baptist Church, the Sunshine Cathedral moved into the space in June after members of Southwest moved farther west and brought their church with them. To keep the ties, the Southwest Pastor will come back to serve as Guest Pastor at Sunshine Cathedral services in the near future.

The new Cathedral complex, according to the Sunshine Cathedral's Senior Minister Pastor Grant Lynn Ford, is "the fulfillment of a 10 year dream." It allows the Cathedral, which is the Fort Lauderdale chapter of the multi-denominational Metropolitan Community Churches, to play an even more central role in the community.

A new stage and pulpit were added to the newly christened Walter Lawrence and Stephen Lewis Worship Center, as well as a 200-seat second chapel, a social hall, bigger office space, classrooms and music suites. The old church's bookstore was updated to include sections of interest to the Cathedral's diverse membership.

Plans for a coffeeshop and a multimedia center, which will create programs to go along with Cathedral services and events, are being finalized for use early next year.

According to Buildings and Grounds

Director Nick Boyko, "We worked to improve the facilities one room at a time. Historically, the Cathedral has always been a center of our community. Now we have the space to really bring that to fruition."

Besides holding Cathedral services, the new location will continue to play host to three other religious groups – the Fellowship Tabernacle, Dignity, a Roman Catholic sect, and the Art for Living Institute, which promotes spirituality connected with Eastern practices including Hinduism and yoga.

Boyko also says that other groups in the community, including Alcoholics' Anonymous will use the grounds, and the classrooms will be used for the Cathedral's new Light University.

Slated for a January 2002 opening, the University was created by the Cathedral as a "living enrichment center." The classes will range from the spiritual to the secular, including everything from Bible study to classes in scuba diving and a Weight Watchers group specifically designed for gay men.

There are currently three Cathedral services every Sunday - two at 9:15am and 11am, respectively, and a third service at 6pm with a contemporary Christian focus. Wednesday evenings offer an Evensong service with a more contemplative and meditative feel.

Pastor Ford says he hopes to have six or seven services on Sundays eventually, as well as a full program for every day of the week.

The services incorporate rituals, prayers and songs from several different Christian denominations and include members from all races, creeds, classes and sexual orientations. This has become the tradition of Metropolitan Community Churches worldwide.

"In spirit, we are ecumenical, which means we incorporate the whole house," Ford says. "This is a house of prayer for all people."

The first Sunday services at the new space were held June 18. The Official Dedication Services were originally scheduled for September 16 but were pushed back after the September 11 attacks. Incidentally, the September 16 services

state to divide the school board and the community," the statement says.

"The lesson plan in question is aimed at preparing teachers to respond to the anti-gay epithets many students regularly use in school. None of the words listed in the plan are meant to be raised by the teacher. GLSEN Fort Lauderdale is not using – and has no plans to use – the lesson. GLSEN believes that harassment in our schools is wrong, and efforts by those opposed to GLSEN to distort the facts divide the community. Sadly, it's the students who walk the hallways in fear that are the losers in this debate."

Palazzo says that GLSEN looks forward

boasted the Cathedral's largest attendance numbers ever with more than 845 people attending one morning session alone.

Pastor Ford comments that the events on September 11 have triggered a national spiritual awakening that has manifested in the number of attendees at Cathedral services. "People are now hungering for hope and we offer that," he says.

Also carrying a message of hope in his rousing sermon was the Dedication Services' special guest, Metropolitan Community Church Founder the Reverend Elder Troy D. Perry.

Reverend Perry founded the MCC in 1968 after searching for years for a church that would accept his lifestyle. He started his own church nine months before the Stonewall Riots and jokes, "We were pregnant with them."

The Church has since grown from a group of 12 in his living room for the first service to 52,000 members worldwide in 18 different countries.

According to Perry, the MCC is now one of the fastest growing spiritual movements in America. Its largest congregation is in Dallas and currently boasts 3,000 active members. They are currently building a \$26 million dollar church designed by famed architect Philip Johnson.

The Sunshine Cathedral was in the first group of 15 churches to open in the United States. Reverend Perry attended services for the first three months of its opening in 1972.

Perry made history in 1970 for marrying the first gay couple in Los Angeles and then unsuccessfully sued the state of California to gain legal rights for the union. He also credits the South Florida community with helping him in his personal mission for equal rights, which is also a mission of the MCC.

In 1977, at the height of Anita Bryant's anti-gay crusades in Florida, Perry collected over \$77,000 at a Fort Lauderdale fund-raiser to knock down

a similar initiative in California.

Though he plans on retiring in 2005, he continues to believe in the Church's united front. He encourages all of his ministries to include and accept all members of the community. "God loves everybody," Perry says. "He didn't create anyone so he could sit around and have something to hate."

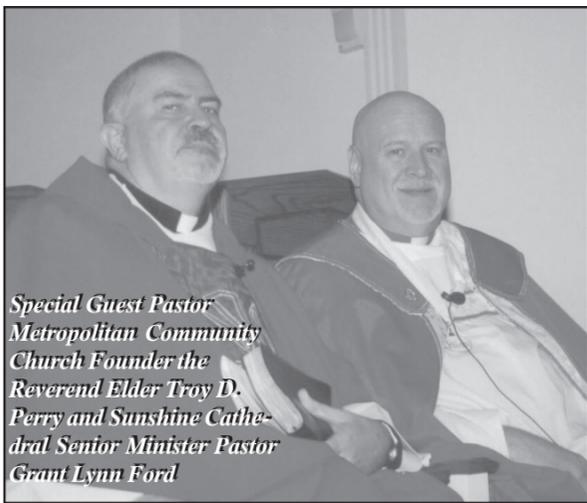
The Reverend Chuck Eastman, Minister of the Coral Gables Congregational Church, was also a guest speaker at the celebratory services and offered praise with Perry to the Sunshine Cathedral.

"Grant Ford and the Sunshine Cathedral have made an incredibly important impact on the quality of life in South Florida by showing love in the face of bigotry and caring in the face of neglect. They have made us a better community," he said.

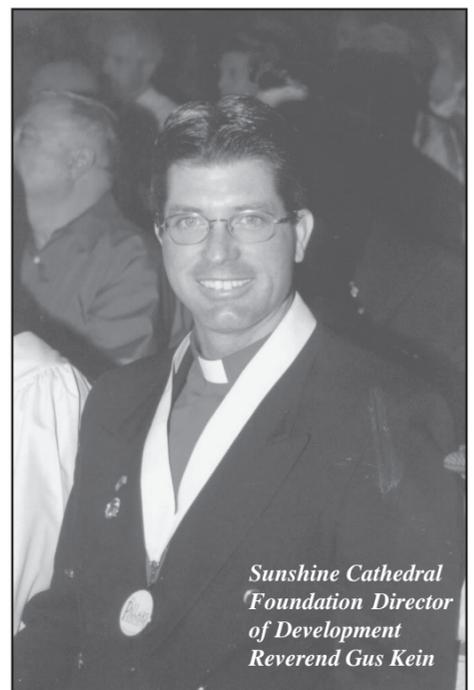
For a full list of programs and services of the Sunshine Cathedral, visit their website at [www.sunshinecathedral.org](http://www.sunshinecathedral.org), or call 954.462.2004.



The October 28th Official Dedication Service at the Sunshine Cathedral



Special Guest Pastor Metropolitan Community Church Founder the Reverend Elder Troy D. Perry and Sunshine Cathedral Senior Minister Pastor Grant Lynn Ford



Sunshine Cathedral Foundation Director of Development Reverend Gus Kein

## GLSEN Issues Response to School Board Decision

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schools to support the success of teaching and learning.

The GLSEN statement says, "The agreement with GLSEN would have promoted understanding and tolerance by providing sensitivity training to teachers, guidance counselors, social workers and school psychologists."

The statement also responded to the less-sufficient measures proposed by anti-gay speakers at the Board meeting. "Some community members opposed to GLSEN's work promoting tolerance and understanding have tried to use a lesson plan from another

to a continued partnership with the schools, and she points out that students are able to learn more and achieve academically because of the safer, more welcoming environment that is being created.

GLSEN's mission is to make sure that all students learn to respect and accept all people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. GLSEN has procured its efforts largely through teacher and administrator training and by providing information.

According to the 2001 National School Climate Survey, 87 percent of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students report

regularly hearing slurs like 'fag' and 'dyke.' 69 percent of the students do not feel safe in school because of their sexual orientation and 40 percent report not knowing a single staff member who would support them.

In contrast, the Miami-Dade County Public Schools now offers domestic partner benefits to their employees as well as Safe School Awareness training through their local GLSEN chapter.

According to Robert Loupo, co-chair of the Dade GLSEN chapter and a counselor at a Dade public school, the process took several years to be implemented through various programs and alliances.