

The Order of Perpetual Indulgence has always sought through habitual manifestation to honour the very powerful women of the early church who so threatened the patriarchal boys club headed by the Holy Father — a club that confined generations of nuns to the cloister and enshrouded them in the torturous impractical and disabling garments right up until Vatican II in the 1960's, barely 30 years ago. We have noticed that those most offended by our Order are males, usually those who have tended to objectify and reduce female nuns to the status of powerless serving women to the male hierarchy.

While Mr Ford is correct in saying that Christian nuns are amongst those at the forefront of providing care to PLWA's, I would add that many Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence have been and still are involved in our community's response to AIDS both through a playful and positive approach to safe/r sex promotion and a direct hands-on involvement through CSN, Ankali, the AIDS Council, BGF and other organisations. The hierarchies of the major Christian denominations however, have been noticeably lacking in any sort of compassionate response to the epidemic. In fact, in many cases their lofty pronouncements have been counter productive, homophobic and most un-Christian. I know from my discussions with Christian nuns that many of them share our anger and frustration at this and support our efforts at drawing attention to the more ridiculous and un-Christian attitudes of the august fathers.

The concept that Christian nuns are putting their health at risk by nursing persons with HIV/AIDS has puzzled us considerably. Are these sisters of other orders doing something with their patients that will put them at risk — exchanging body fluids? sharing needles?

Mr Ford's assertions that the Order of Perpetual Indulgence is responsible for the appalling street attacks made on gay men and lesbians seems to completely deny the obvious that homophobia and violence against gays and lesbians is one of the fundamental sicknesses of our society and has existed for far longer than the Order of Perpetual Indulgence. The suggestion that bashers should be encouraged by the gay community to turn their violence against the Sisters

reflects a disturbing attitude to any person Mr Ford considers does not conform to acceptable behaviour and appearances.

There are people both inside and outside of our community who believe that if gays and lesbians are quiet and invisible, that they will be accepted. The Sisters reject this lie. Silence and invisibility have led only to dismissal, persecution, and death for many. As long as there is a denial of human rights and persecution of people for being "different", there is a role for the Order of Perpetual Indulgence.

The Sisters offer a prayer to the most Holy Dingo (all praise her ferality) that Mr Ford will find the joy and delight of the path of Perpetual Indulgence.

*Mother Mary Armageddon
to be a Ilabit with you
Order of Perpetual
Indulgence,
Sydney,
for Sr Venus de Lilo
Sr Salome Body
Sr Seven Daily Adventures
Sr Antonia Bavaria
Sr Monstera Deliciosa
Hysterica
Sr Oscar Raven Wilde
Sr Mary Annalingus
Sr Mary Queen of Scots
Sr Mary Third Secret of
Fatima
Mother Mary Ambivalent
Vacillation
Sr Tuppovea Lacinia
Honey Bear
Sr Janus Tumarama
Rockpool*

Catholics and AIDS

Dear Monsignor Editor,

I was reading my Catholic Weekly last week. It had a lovely eight page feature on Cardinal Newman, but omitted to say he was a queen. It also featured a report of Cardinal Sin's 30 minute sermon to the Asia/Pacific AIDS Conference in Canberra which was politely heard in silence, despite its being quite unrepresentative of the spiritual traditions of the Asian region, and quite insulting to gay men and to all people with HIV. He would prefer the deaths of thousands in the Philippines, rather than amend his archaic foibles about non-procreative sex.

I also noticed a two page report by a Catholic delegate to the San Francisco Conference. This reminded me that the Catholic church people involved in AIDS work in NSW seems to have decided to break the international boycott of that conference. So what happened to the solidarity with people with HIV and the compassion that we hear about in the sermons? We put up with their judg-

ementalism and moral idiocies, and when their commitment is tested, they flout the solidarity of community organisations around the world, and travel across borders forbidden to people with HIV.

It's time all charities, schools and hospitals receiving taxpayers money were completely secularised.

*Sister Mary Third Secret
of Fatima,
Order of Perpetual Indulgence*

LETTERS

The sad case of Mother

Dear Sister Editor,

It's always the good who suffer, isn't it, while the wicked seem to prosper? But nevertheless we can rally to defend those paragons of faith who walk amongst us.

Mother Inferior may have been demoted, but those loyal have renamed him Mother Despite.

Mother Despite... those overcome by sins of ambition, greed, envy and talentless anarchism. Mother Despite deserves the eternal respect of all the community due to his tireless efforts in humoursously destroying stigmatic guilt.

Mother Despite... those who have brought the internal life of the Order into public disrepute. We are after all a religious sisterhood, not the federal Liberal party, or Tiananmen Square. We need to restore some dignity.

The silly ideas of progress propagated by those Vatican II dupes have a lot to answer for!

*Sister Marie Marcelle
Lefebvre
Sorority of Tradition
and Loyalty Order of
Perpetual Indulgence
(Underground)
Stanmore.*

Dear Editor,

After all the fuss generated in recent weeks by the demotion of ex-Mother Inferior, I feel it is time that someone takes responsibility for informing the public of the real history of the internal difficulties in the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence.

Too often, those who contribute to the good of others buckle under the stress. The sad truth of the

matter is that Fabian had veered away from the usual diverse spiritual goings on inside the sisterhood, and had increasingly been drawn to brutal, smelly and offensive voodoo rituals as a means of snaring an endless supply of new husbands.

In the middle of the night, during an otherwise pleasant and productive retreat in the bush, several nuns were woken from their slumbers by distressing squawking shrieks.

Naked, in the middle of a strange design chalked onto a large flat stone, stood the then Mother Inferior, his eyes turned inward, chanting incoherently, with a beheaded chook in his right hand circling rhythmically over his head.

Scared that he might seek to retain inordinate powers over the other nuns, and particularly in view of the younger novices, the convent as a whole acted swiftly in self protection. We did not want a Papa Doc regime to consolidate within the order.

Many of us have since suffered weird ailments, but we know we did what was correct at the time.

We wish Fabian well in his recovery and invite Sydney Star Observer readers to contribute to the cost of the Deprogrammers.

*Truthfully and
regretfully yours,
Sister Erzuli
Stanmore.*

Ed note: An anonymous note on religious newspaper, slipped under the door during the night, suggested we might receive letters on this affair which are not bona fide. We cannot accept, however, that members of a religious order would lie about such weighty matters and this regrettable correspondence is published in good faith.



Burning of Joan of Arc

ORDER OF
PERPETUAL INDULGENCE:
SOME PRESS
CLIPPINGS.

LETTERS

Religious preference

SIR: Please, no hypocrisy!

Gays and lesbians are fed up with being mocked, and rightly so. However, the Gay Mardi Gras was used as a vehicle to mock another minority. I refer specifically to nuns. Respect, dignity and rights must be extended to all regardless of sexual, political and religious preference.

Don't expect respect if you can't show respect!

Mary Haines,
Edwin Street North,
Croydon.

February 17 1992.

Sisters disgust

Dear Editor,

Another Mardi Gras is over and the huge crowd, including gay Christians, whilst marvelling at the spectacle of the parade were again disgusted at the performance of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence.

These obnoxious creatures do no good for the gay cause and are the reason for the latest outbreak of gay bashings in Sydney. They are an insult to the Catholic nuns who take a vow of poverty and work very hard for no monetary gain in hospitals and hospices, both in Sydney and here in Newcastle with AIDS patients.

The last months and days of the lives of our gay friends are made as comfortable as possible by the wonderful women who do this work at great risk to their own health and well being.

Our gay leaders and administrators should immediately persuade this group to disband and burn their habits and uniforms. If they won't listen to reason then the poofter bashers should be given free rein to break them up.

Congratulations on a fine publication.

Bruce Ford
Islington

SSO 9 MARCH 1992

In defence of the Sisters I

Dear Editor,

With regard to the letter by Bruce Ford (SSO 126) calling on our 'gay leaders' to 'persuade' the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence to 'disband and burn their habits and uniforms' or that the 'Poofter bashers should be given free rein to break them up.'

Whilst Mr Ford seemed to find the Sisters 'obnoxious', he is terribly incorrect in saying that they do no good for the gay cause and are the

reason for the latest outbreak of gay bashings in Sydney."

Does Mr Ford really believe this?

I personally believe that the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence have, in their own frivolous but effective way done more than many of the other smaller gay organisations to promote safe sex and fun, apart from which they do show how idiotic some of the customs, rights and viewpoints of the mainstream religious organisations in this country are.

They have for many years now worked hard to promote the message of safe sex by giving their time and energy to things such as appearances on Gaywaves on 2SER-FM, involvement with the NSW Users and AIDS Association, as well as this they give up their recreation time to attend many other gay and AIDS/HIV related programmes, groups and meetings.

The Sisters played an integral part in Mardi Gras with their history excursion and by having a stall at fairday. They were also there when the Steam Train departed Central Station on 11 February.

Their appearances are charismatic, and always fun.

As for the Sisters being the cause of the recent increase in bashings, need I say more than if there was any substance to this bullshit, I'm quite sure that the Sisters would have disbanded long ago, and that there would be no need for the extra measures that people like Steve Ford at Surry Hills Police Station are taking to find out the reasons why the bashings are occurring and how they could be remedied. Nor would the march on 4 March have been necessary.

The Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras is our night, the one time of the year when flaunting our pride and ourselves is totally permissible, and anyone who was offended by anyone or anything displayed therein should probably have stayed at home. As for Bruce Ford, anyone with your viewpoint on the Sisters is helping the likes of Marie Bignold and Fred Nile and all the other bigots who would like to see our community crumble.

Gay Pride is a fabulous thing, I am proud to be gay, and proud of the community of which I am a member and an employee, and while we have so many people like Bruce Ford who criticise and make unfounded negative remarks in this world, our pride and self esteem are hindered from being given the support and self esteem

they need.

I believe the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence to be fabulous and would like to congratulate them on their wonderful approach to making life fun.

Scott Redmond

In Defence of the Sisters II

Dear Editor,

I bet Bruce Ford is regretting writing that letter which appeared in your last issue. We all go overboard occasionally, when we're in our cups or when we've got a bit too much shit on liver, and we all live to regret it. Afterwards. Especially when the end result is a lot of psychopathic drivel, a la the Festival of Blight.



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Still, Bruce's letter is instructive. It tells us a lot about Bruce himself.

His knee-jerk defence of Roman Catholic nuns (who, in my experience, are quite capable of looking after themselves) brings back memories of that Catholicism (blinkered, bigoted, brainwashed) which I had thought had been consigned to the dustbin of history at the time of Vatican II; and his suggestion of violence indicates neither tolerance nor Christian charity - it reeks of the mindless and the mean-spirited, but then that's my experience of Christians in general anyway.

And the whole of his letter shows that he (if not a plant of the Festival of Blight) may be a homosexual but he almost certainly is not gay. If he were, he would not need reminding of the Sisterhood's oft-proclaimed mantra: *No More Guilt*.

For your penance, Bruce, three Hail Marys and a good Act of Contrition. And repeat after me, Bruce, a thousand times if that's what it takes for you to sink into your miserable skull, that excellent hortatory ejaculation, for which you'll probably get a plenary indulgence, *No More Guilt*, Bruce, *No More Guilt*.

Noel McGuire



Sydney lesbians and gay men celebrating St Patrick's Day outside the Irish Tourist Board Offices in Martin Place. The Gay and Lesbian Equality Network in Dublin had called for international protests in favour of "sexual and reproductive freedom". Although the European Court has ruled against Ireland's anti-homosexual laws, the government has taken no action to repeal them.

As passers by were leafleted, Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence sang new lyrics to the traditional songs *When Irish Gays are smiling* and *'In Ireland's fair land, where gay love is banned, there lived a young lesbian named Molly Malone...*

The protest was organised by the Gay Solidarity Group and included dozens of letters and phone calls to the Irish Embassy in Canberra.

NB. The banner and headline translates as "Freedom for gays".

In Defence of the Sisters III

Dear Editor,

About once every two years some semi-closeted queen writes to the gay press suggesting that the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence be banned, usually on the grounds that their dress and behaviour 'gives gays a bad name.'

No matter what these calls to ban the Sisters say about the writers' tolerance and their attitudes to the civil rights of others, they are proof positive that the Sisters succeed in their aim to make us all reconsider our sacred cows. And, despite their vows of parody, the good Sisters are no less gay for what they do: 'zapping' is one of the grandest of the Gay Lib (and Christian) traditions.

But in the 10 or more years I have been reading the letters to editors about the Sisters, no matter how shocked, self-righteous or

indignant their tone, none has ever advocated violence against them. Bruce Ford's suggestion (SSO Number 126) that the "poofter bashers should be given free rein to break them up", in my view, is sick and twisted and brands the man as an honorary poofter basher himself.

Bob Hay

In defence of the Sisters IV

Dear Editor,

What a blessed Christian your correspondent Bruce Ford is! Blessed to have the opportunity, in SSO 126, to take advantage of the tolerant forum of your letters page to espouse intolerance, hatred, and incitement to violence against the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. And for good measure, a little scare mongering about HIV transmission to boot!

If the good nuns of Newcastle were in fact carrying out their AIDS care

work at "great risk to their own health and wellbeing" then the recent earthquake, one would surmise, must have toppled many a year's knowledge on basic precautions against contracting the virus.

Ford finally wraps up his words of wrath by congratulating your fine publication. Apparently undeterred in his own religious zealotry, he possibly missed the preceding fine-issue's chilling item, 'Iran's final solution'. Death to all homosexuals (regardless of their habits!) as the religious punishment. Ford's affront, it seems, would mercifully be placated by the lesser retribution of an Aussie poofter bashing.

Might I suggest, however, that this letter does in all fairness provide a veritable treasure trove of quotes for your Bastards' Corner. Indeed, the whole wretched epistle would find itself in good company there.

Simon Richards

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In defence of the Sisters V

Dear Editor,

The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence are responsible for increasing violence against lesbians and gay men? The Sisters should be poofter bashed? Crowds at Mardi Gras hated Sisters? Obnoxious creatures? There are gay leaders and administrators that should get SPI to burn their habits? Catholic nuns risk catching HIV from patients?

An anonymous
Yiddish-speaking nun

In Defence of the Sisters VII

Dear Editor,

We find Bruce Ford's attack on the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence (SSO 126) as truly ironical!

Why does he stop with the good Sisters? Why doesn't he go further and describe the men in drag at the Mardi Gras 'as obnoxious creatures [who] do no good for the gay cause' because they mock those good women who are our mothers and wives and sisters and daughters and friends?

Why doesn't he redstretch his logic further still and say that gay Christians who watch the Mardi Gras are moral drags and hypocrites who encourage an unholy celebration while pretending to be Christian?

Let's face it, suggesting that "poofter bashers should be given a free rein to break [the Sisters] up" is not very Christian, is it?

Strange, but we think it's not so much the Sisters, but men like Bruce who encourage poofter bashers.
S. Foster and friends

Editor's note

Bruce Ford's letter in SSO 126 about the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence provoked strong response. Due to space constraints, the Star Observer is not able to publish all letters received on this issue.

In support of Bruce Ford

Dear Editor,

I write to support most of the letter written by Bruce Ford (9th March) about those disgusting, frivolous and rich Sydney nuns who belong to the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. We poorer and more serious nuns find them no end of a problem.

They ARE the reason for the recent outbreak of gay bashing because of their wanton and lascivious behaviour. More than that they probably cause the

spread of AIDS with their light hearted and uncaring ways - what an example to set! Being gay and having fun. Disgusting! We realise that the church believes homosexuality to be a sin, and that God loves us but not our filthy and unnatural ways, but is that really any excuse for these Sydney nuns to impersonate these kind, loving and accepting people?

We in Maitland have felt embarrassment at being missions of a mother house that has hit such heights of depravity and good times! And with due respect, your newspaper dragging all of Sr Venus de Lilo's dirty underwear through the gutter was no help!

They aren't good money managers either. Do you know that the Order set aside a considerable sum of money to purchase ramekins to donate to the PLWA Day Centre so the PLWA's would have something tasteful to eat their soup from but it has been squandered on Mardi Gras decorations? What are they to eat their soup from now!

However Mr Ford's notion of soiling the poofter bashers onto them won't help. It just gives them a chance to wear red scapulas with pride. The beating they got from the candle-wielding Christians in 1988 proved that. However, we would love to chat to Mr Ford about other nasty and horrible things we could do to these disgraceful, indolent, disrespectful, dirty-minded scrimshankers who don't seem to realise what a serious business being gay is. They must be on drugs!

Sr Mary Editorial Collective, or A Concerned Maitland Nun (name supplied), or Sr Monstero Deliciosa Hysterica St Neville The Martyr's Convent of Perpetual Succour, Maitland.

The Sisters strike back!

Dear Editor,

After deep and thoughtful discussion at our most recent Nuncheon, my sisters have instructed me to respond to Mr Bruce Ford's letter regarding the Order of Perpetual Indulgence, published in the last issue of your praiseworthy publication.

While we feel confident that most of the faithful in our community are aware of the Order's aims and philosophy, our message obviously has not travelled as far as Islington, an oversight which our Maitland house is endeavouring to correct. In the interim however I will try to correct some of Mr Ford's miscon-