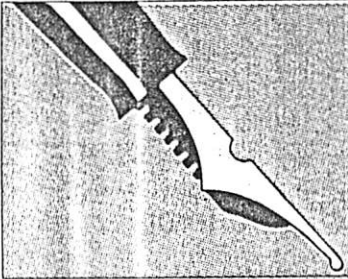
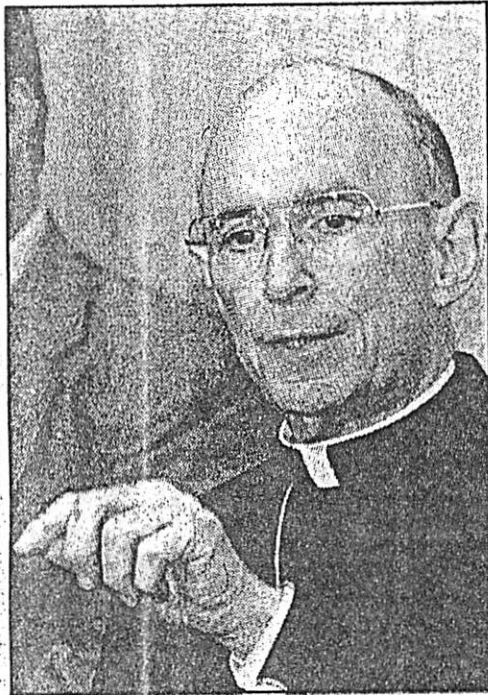


THE GAY WEEKLY OF THE NATION'S CAPITAL



The Washington Blade



Supporters said that Cardinal Bernardin's inclusion of the Windy City Chorus proved he was a "pastor of all."

Gay chorus sings at cardinal's wake

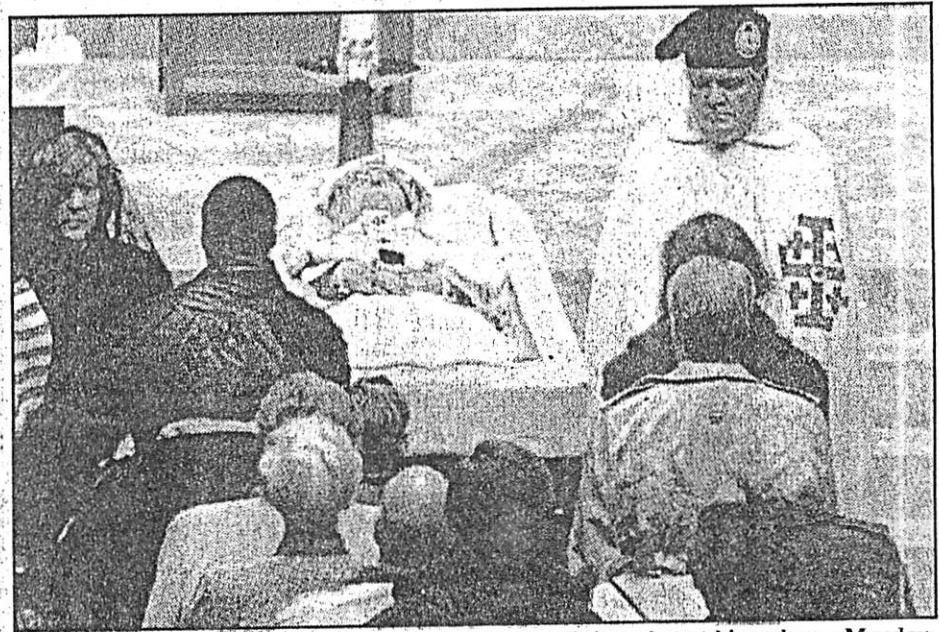
Bernardin's request called a 'magnificent gesture' to Gays

by Wendy Johnson

The Windy City Gay Chorus performed this week at the wake of Cardinal Joseph Louis Bernardin, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Chicago — fulfilling a request made by Bernardin shortly before his death.

The performance Monday night at Chicago's Holy Name Cathedral marked the first time in recent history that a Gay group has been invited by the church to appear at an event on church property, said Marianne Duddy, president of the national Gay Catholic group Dignity U.S.A.

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photos by UPI

Mourners file past Bernardin's casket at his wake on Monday.

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National News

Gay chorus asked to perform at cardinal's wake

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Three weeks before his death, Bernardin, the nation's top-ranking Roman Catholic cardinal, requested that the chorus perform at his wake, said Duddy. Bernardin, 68, died of pancreatic cancer at his Chicago residence on Thursday, Nov. 14. Bernardin's funeral service and burial were held Nov. 20.

"It was a conscious act of the cardinal to do outreach to the Gay community," said Duddy. "This was a magnificent gesture to let it be known that he acknowledged the presence of Gay and Lesbian people within the church community."

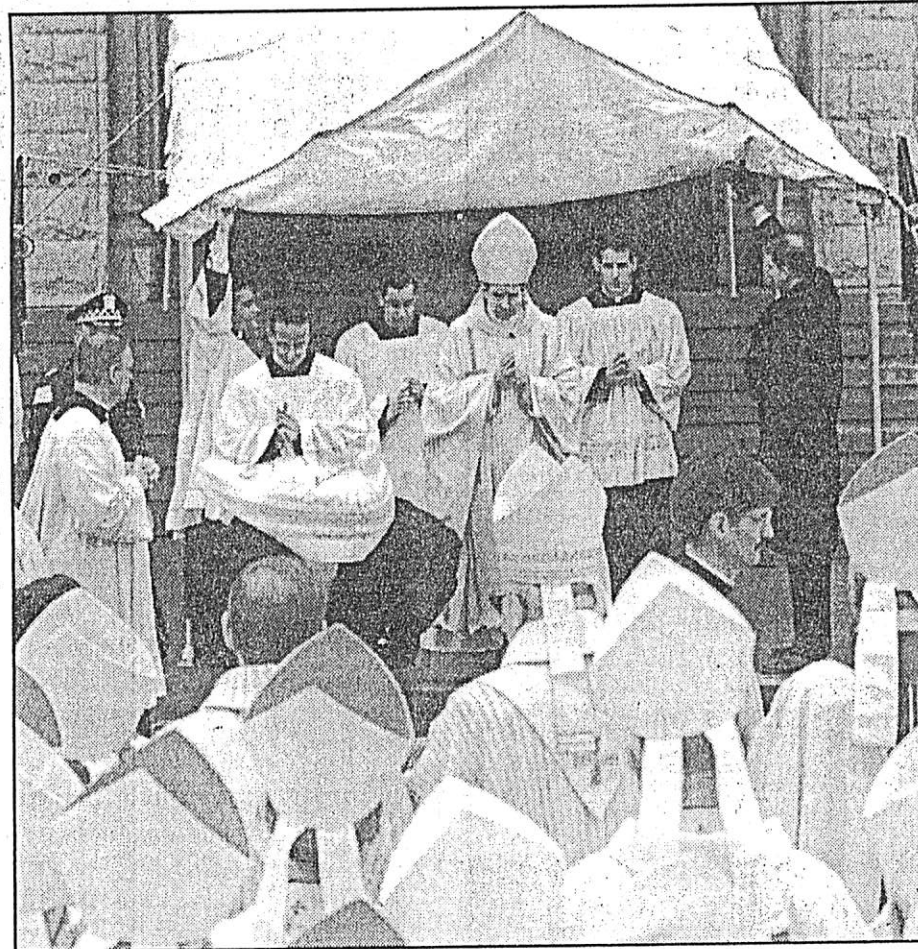
Shortly before 10 p.m. Monday, the all-male chorus filed into the cathedral and at 10:30 began performing from behind a sign that prominently displayed its name, said Bill Young, director of the 18-year-old chorus.

"The response was incredible," Young said of the thousands who attended the wake to view the archbishop's remains. "Many people looked at our sign, saw that we were a Gay chorus, and then sat down to hear us sing."

Rick Garcia, executive director of the Illinois Federation for Human Rights, the state's largest Gay civil rights organization, said the performance of the Gay chorus "sends a very strong message to Catholics and the city in particular that Gay people should participate in the church community and be treated with dignity and respect."

"The inclusion of a chorus for the Gay community demonstrates that Cardinal Bernardin was pastor of all," he added.

The popular Bernardin was known as a conciliator within the church. Throughout



Cardinal Bernardin's funeral

his 14-year leadership of the archdiocese, he held an "interesting" track record on Gay issues, said Duddy.

"He's made very positive statements about the need for support for Gay and Lesbian youth," she said. But Bernardin and Dignity did not always get along.

Bernardin, for example, founded a "competing" ministry in the late 1980s after Dignity began vocalizing its belief that Gay people can be sexually active and live according to the church's values, said Duddy. According to Duddy, Bernardin's ministry was in keeping with

the church's position on homosexuality, which is that Gay people must remain celibate.

In all, however, the archbishop remained a vocal advocate for the respectful treatment of Gay people within the church, she said.

"The church hierarchy has really tried to draw a pretty tight circle on what's OK and not OK to do," Duddy said. "By giving the Windy City Chorus such a prominent role in his wake, Cardinal Bernardin was saying for the last time that we need to draw a wider circle."

Meanwhile, Duddy said that although the invitation has left Chicago Gays "exhilarated and hopeful about the role of Gay people in the church," Gays also worry about whom the pope will appoint to be the next archbishop of the nation's second-largest archdiocese.

"Our sense is that, in general, all the appointments have been fairly conservative people," she said. "The pope is known for appointing very rigid, conservative leaders."

Also up in the air is whether the archbishop's successor will continue the "Common Ground initiative," which Bernardin established in August. Still in a formative stage, the program is an effort by the archbishop to bring various factions of the church together — including Dignity — to discuss the moral teachings of the church, said Duddy.

"In the last months of his life, [Bernardin] had the freedom to speak in support of these kinds of initiatives," she said. "Now, there's a little anxiety about what will happen to these things now that he's gone." ▼

BY JRL