

Gay parade infuriates Catholics

St. Pat's a target, group tells mayor

By Liz Trotta
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NEW YORK — A Catholic lobbying group has sent a caustic letter to Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani demanding that he alter the route of the Gay Pride Parade, now scheduled to start in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral, or face a reaction that will be "public, timely and costly to all those involved."

The Catholic League gave the mayor until Friday to respond. League President William A. Donohue also demanded that Mr. Giuliani issue a statement "condemning anti-Catholic bigotry, as well as other forms of bigotry."

The organization, which claims 200,000 members nationwide, is not allied officially with the archdiocesan office of Cardinal Francis O'Connor, but a source close to the case said the cardinal had approved the letter, a copy of which was obtained by The Washington Times.

The Gay Pride Parade, set for June 25, traditionally begins at Columbus Circle on Manhattan's West Side. Last year, homosexual activists pranced naked in front of St. Patrick's. Others made obscene gestures toward the landmark cathedral.

The New York Native, a homosexual newspaper, reported yesterday that the parade mustering point would be at Fifth Avenue and 52nd Street, barely two blocks from the cathedral, and begin at noon. Mr. Donohue pointed out that the homosexual assembly would coincide with the exit from the cathedral of worshipers who had attended the cardinal's 10:30 a.m. Mass.

"You have an obligation to denounce all forms of bigotry, and not just those that are politically correct," said Mr. Donohue in his letter to the mayor. "There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that if the Nazis wanted to begin a march in front of a Jewish synagogue, or the Klan wanted to start in front of a Baptist church in Harlem, you would never allow it."

Janice Thom, co-chairman of Heritage of Pride, the parade sponsor, said the event has started on Fifth Avenue for the past four years. She added that last year's march past St. Patrick's was organized by another group, "Spirit of Stonewall," marking the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall riots.

"Our formation area is large," she said. It needs more than two blocks of Fifth Avenue."

In response to Mr. Donohue's charge that her group has targeted St. Patrick's, she responded briskly, "That's an interesting idea."

A spokesman for the mayor, Cristyne Lategano said: "Mr. Giuliani has not yet seen the letter, but when he does, the administration will respond personally to Dr. Donohue. We look forward to addressing his concerns with him directly and not through the media."

She added that parade permits are issued by the Police Department.

During his 1993 mayoral campaign, Mr. Giuliani marched in the Gay Pride Parade.

In his letter, Mr. Donohue warned that he "would not settle for seeing Fran Reiter after Catholics have been bashed" as he did last year. Miss Reiter, a deputy mayor in charge of community affairs, is the homosexual community's contact point in City Hall. She did not return telephone calls.