

29 December 1977

Dear Bishop Clement,

*First of all, I would like to share with you a letter from a friend of mine in New York City, whom I frankly asked to visit your church and tell me about it. Now, you must understand that David is a "confirmed" agnostic who views my interest in religion with amused tolerance at best. At any rate, the letter (I will type it out since his handwriting is not the best):*

"Dear Bud,

I was prepared to write a funny irreverent letter about my trip to the Church of the Beloved Disciple on 14th Street, but after having been there I am left with nothing but respect for them.

If it was possible to recapture the early beginnings of Christianity ---a small group of outcasts, despised by organised society and gathering in an impossible place to worship---this Church certainly comes close. Two hundred-pound bull dykes, Puerto Rican street transvestites, middle-class college students and the rest of us shoulder to shoulder.

The service is Catholic, but with an important difference; communion is (and I quote) 'open to all of you regardless of your denomination. We want to share this blessed rite with everyone in attendance.' That certainly put an end to the 'my God can beat up your God' syndrome of most religions.

The sermon was a re-affirmation of God's love for all his people, including homosexuals. Clement read the Biblical passage about 'those who will villify you falsely in my name' and that led into a discussion of Anita Bryant and organised religion in general.

It was an afternoon of love and in a way I deeply regret that I couldn't take part, but I just cannot make that leap of faith necessary to become a religious person. BUT, for those gay men and women who are religious, this place is certainly a sanctuary. Pope John would have been very proud of Bishop Clement and his motley crew.

I have avoided discussing any of the dogma, etc., since I assume you will cover that in your own correspondence with the Church. But having seen the place, small and unpretentious, and met the people, warm and truly Christian, you couldn't be in better company if you join up with them.

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to have a fascinating afternoon.

Love,

Dave"



This letter has been sitting on my desk since the end of October, and it frankly made me ashamed, because of the tone of the letter which I wrote your secretary (which is undoubtedly why I haven't received an answer). It is ironic that someone from outside the Church like Dave was the one to bring me up short.

Since I wrote you last, we have made a small beginning ... the Rector of Holy Trinity, in what I can only describe as a fit of alcoholic pique, pitched his choir and organist out of the Parish the week before Christmas. The Curate and members of the church, with others of like mind, are beginning to meet for Eucharist in a parishioner's house. I should hasten to explain that the Curate is not canonically attached to the Parish ... he is Headmaster of a local school and supplies on Sundays at Holy Trinity. Anyway, this includes some of the members of the gay community whom we are hoping to reach.

What some of the group have suggested is asking you if it would be possible for a priest to come out for a one or two-week mission, possibly during Lent, so that we can get to know your Church better. The local MCC pastor is enthusiastic about taking us under his wing as far as a place to meet, which is fine since most of us have too many friends to leave MCC totally behind, and these parishioners of Holy Trinity (who have a lovely large home) have offered bed and board if a priest could come out.

We would go with our Anglican curate except that if we openly announce a gay Catholic service he will be unfrocked in short order, and he's not quite ready to tackle the whole business of coming out (obviously, since he's a headmaster!).

We are about thirty strong at this point, ten in the schola and twenty in the congregation. I do wish that you could answer some of the questions I posed in my letter to your secretary (I'm sorry ... his name disappeared in the maelstrom on my desk), even though I probably posed them in an offensive manner. We really aren't as obnoxious and "high-church" as I must have sounded, and we do want to get to know you and your church. We particularly would like to have cassettes of one of your services, a sermon, and perhaps one of your seminary classes, which we will be happy to pay you for.

Well, I guess that's about it ... I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely in Christ,

*Bud Clark*

R. Harold ("Bud") Clark