

FUTURE GAY HERO

Justin Cannon

Spurred by a letter to the editor of his religious college newspaper condemning homosexuality with Bible verses, Justin Cannon decided to set the record straight.



Then he realized that he isn't. "I wrote my own letter responding to his use of Leviticus," he said. "While I was writing it I realized I was defending myself. I realized that I was gay."

So the 20-year-old French and religion major at Earlham College, a Quaker school in Richmond, Ind., published his own study dispelling antigay myths about Bible interpretations and in March launched his own Web site, www.truthsetsfree.net. "In my research I found that there's really no context for homosexuality in the Bible," he said, noting that Leviticus also condemns eating shrimp and wearing clothing made of two fabrics. "You need to understand what it meant at that time."

Recently Cannon has been doing presentations and appearing on radio talk shows. And orders for his 36-page study have been coming from churches and schools across the country. He plans on pursuing a career as an Episcopal priest.

CAMPUS WATCH

Within days of voting to prohibit military recruiters from their student union because of the armed services' ban on openly gay soldiers, students at Southern Oregon University in Ashland found fliers placed on dorm room doors and in student mailboxes calling for the murder of gays and lesbians. "The Bible says that homosexual offenders should be put to death!" read one.

In response the students held a campus protest on May 26 and a rally the following evening, and university president Elisabeth Zinser sent a campuswide letter condemning the incident.



STRAIGHT ALLIES

Fighting for our stories

■ The Kernal staff and friends (from left): Maria Krauter, Daniel Munn, Shannon Fanshier, Travis Mattias, Rudy Cachu, Joel Paramo, Janet Rangel, Christine Sun of the ACLU, and GSA director Carolyn Laub

Some of the editors at East Bakersfield [Calif.] High School's student paper, *The Kernal*, are graduating this year, but that hasn't derailed their commitment to see that a series of articles on gay students eventually gets published in the paper. In late April John Gibson, principal of the school in California's Central Valley, forced the editors to remove a slate of five gay-themed pieces that featured candid reflections from out students. Citing safety concerns, Gibson later said the articles could only be published without the students'

names. But that didn't fly with the students. They sued, and a Kern County superior court judge on May 25 denied an emergency request to allow the articles to appear in the paper's year-end issue.

"Our whole editorial staff has felt all along that this is extremely important," said *Kernal* editor Joel Paramo, 18, who is now pushing to get the articles published in next year's first issue. "It's not because I'm gay or that any of the other editors are gay. We just feel that this is an important issue that shouldn't be dismissed with a compromise. The students featured in the articles have a right to be who they want to be."

Rudy Cachu, a 17-year-old East Bakersfield junior, is one of those students. Completely out at school, Cachu had no qualms about being profiled in *The Kernal*, though he's grown a bit weary of the wider media attention it has drawn. "In

the beginning it was really important to me that my name was attached to the article," he said. "But at this point it's like people pretty much know that I'm one of them, so what's the difference?"

The difference is the right to freedom of speech, said American Civil Liberties Union attorney Christine Sun, who is representing the students. "The names cannot be divorced from the context of the speech," she said. "Being open about your sexuality is expression. It's not something that you have to hide. It's not something that these students should have to hide. It's disconcerting that this principal is saying, 'You have to hide your identity, or we can't protect you.' If it's true that there could be some sort of reaction that would cause some harm to them, the principal has the obligation to find a way to protect them without censoring them." —Dan Allen