

Gay church stresses zero tolerance: Metropolitan Community Church

by [John Dart](#) in the [June 5, 2002](#) issue

Though some Catholic leaders blame homosexual priests for much of their church's sexual-abuse problems, the predominantly gay Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches has had no sexual-abuse liability claims filed against the denomination in the past 25 years. Yet the California-based church body has not been free of offenders.

The worldwide MCC, which has almost 400 clergy, half of whom are women, emphasizes a "zero tolerance for all forms of child sexual abuse and sexual misconduct" and informed local law authorities of offenses in two cases in recent years, MCC spokesman Jim Burkitt said. A pastor outside the U.S. was fired over abuse of a minor in the 1990s and a U.S. minister was dismissed for downloading child pornography on his computer, Burkitt said.

In early May, the part-time pastor of a small MCC congregation in Rapid City, South Dakota, resigned after his other employers learned of his conviction in 1989 for attempting indecent liberties with a 15-year-old boy while he was a Catholic priest at Holy Cross Catholic Church in Overland Park, Kansas. James Forsythe, who resigned from the priesthood in 1990, was sentenced to one to five years in prison but was released after three months and sent to a Catholic facility in New Mexico for seven months treatment, according to the Associated Press.

Later, Burkitt said, Forsythe joined an MCC congregation in Denver and was ordained in 1996 as a staff associate—at each step of the way telling church officials of his past. Forsythe took the Rapid City post in January 2000, informing the church's board and members of his conviction. However, Forsythe, now 47, was not required under Colorado law to register as an offender and mistakenly assumed South Dakota also did not require it. He registered in Rapid City, but police said he would not be charged.

Troy Perry, the MCC moderator, said sexual propriety has been an important issue for him since he started the church in 1968. "My generation of gay males had to put up with the label of 'child molesters,'" he said, referring to a then-common belief that pedophilia was invariably a homosexual act. Not only that, "I was raped when I was 13 years old," he said. "I know what it is like to be manipulated as a teenager."

An agent with a southern California insurance brokerage that serves some 2,000 churches of varied denominations confirmed the absence of sexual misconduct claims against the MCC. "I've worked with the MCC since 1978, and in that time there have been zero claims against the church," said Charlie Cutler of Tom Cutler and Associates. "They have very, very aggressive policies on these issues, with police background checks and policies such as the two-adult rule when supervising minors."