



Grand marshals: Rainbow World Fund's road trip

by **Jim Provenzano**

j.provenzano@ebar.com

Imagine riding in a bus painted in rainbow colors. But instead of lip-synching songs around Southern California, your bus travels to Mexico, bringing medical and art supplies to children. Then it takes you to Guatemala, where you learn about poverty-stricken communities, and how to help them. Your tour guide is a nun who was banned by the late pope for being too gay-friendly.

No, it's not a fanciful psychedelic dream out of a *Partridge Family* episode or a Beatles movie. The Rainbow World Fund will premiere its rainbow bus at San Francisco's LGBT Pride Parade, as it is honored this year as organizational grand marshal.

"We'll use the bus itself as a parade float," said RWF director Jeff Cotter, who spoke while working with a crew that was busy painting the bus. "Afterward the bus will be used for an humanitarian aid trip to Mexico."

Having already delivered \$390,000 to American hurricane evacuees, \$250,000 in emergency supplies for the Southeast Asia tsunami medical relief, and supplies and financial aid (\$355,000) to various projects in Guatemala, other RWF projects include launching a land mine eradication project for Cambodia, an HIV/AIDS case management program in South Africa, and a water project in Honduras to provide safe drinking water to a village. RWF has quickly established itself as an innovative, low-overhead nonprofit dedicated to more than raising money.

The fund also focuses on building bridges between previously separated giving communities like Catholic charities and LGBT causes.

Cotter's plan may sound idealistic, if weren't for the fact that he's already made such an impact. After Pride, the rainbow bus will stop in cities south of the Bay Area.

"We're going to fill it up along the way with school supplies and art supplies," said Cotter. "We're also collecting medicine. Even aspirin can be life-saving, to get a fever down for a young child."

Participants can donate about \$1,200 to go along on the trip. "Right across

the border are orphanages and clinics," said Cotter. "They need supplies. It'll be a way to educate people about what we do and to actively participate in some international aide work."

Cotter said his organization will also focus on U.S. needs. "We may do a trip to New Orleans, to help fill the bus with supplies that are needed. Some schools were wiped out. Musical instruments are often a last priority, so we hope to get donations."

Other RWF trips include a return to Guatemala in July; the 10-day humanitarian visit includes Guatemala City, San Lucas Toleman, and traveling to rural areas to meet with LGBT community members and humanitarian aide workers to see what their needs will be.

Sister Jeannine Gramick, a Catholic nun censured by Pope John Paul II for starting New Ways Ministry, an LGBT-inclusive Catholic parish, will guest-lecture during the educational tour. "Participants won't be digging ditches," said Cotter, who sees the trip as a cultural and humanitarian venture.

Bridging civil rights workers with those in the communities of faith, from Catholic to evangelical communities, will nurture what Cotter calls the concept of "one human family," as the colorful bus reads.

Building bridges shifts what Cotter termed "the separation consciousness" between these communities, specifically the religious communities, who in most cases, have a history of attacking and maligning LGBT communities, yet take on many duties of providing care for impoverished communities.

Cotter, who was raised Catholic, sees his work as a bridge. "Our guides are two American nuns who have lived in Central America during the various wars. That's why we do the work that we do, by showing the church who we really are, and what we care about, and that we make a huge positive contribution to the world."

For more info, visit www.rainbowfund.org.

06/21/2007