



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WORCESTER HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION AND CITY MANAGER'S COMMUNITY TASK FORCE ON BIAS AND HATE CRIMES TASK FORCE DENOUNCES MR. HETERO CONTEST

WORCESTER, Mass. (February 16, 2006) – On February 18, 2006 the City of Worcester will become known as the site of the first Mr. Hetero Contest. The contest creator and organizer, the Rev. Tom Crouse, has made various statements through his radio program, his Web site and various media engagements that lead the Worcester Human Rights Commission to believe that the contest will likely encourage hatred, intolerance and mockery of the Worcester **mostly, but not exclusively, about the gay community. Recently, Rev. Crouse made derogatory, inflammatory and hate- filled comments about Muslims and Catholics.**

As a result of the Rev. Crouse's public statements, the Worcester Human Rights Commission **and the City Manager's Community Task Force on Bias and Hate Crimes** feel strongly obligated to remind the citizens of Worcester that the Mr. Hetero Contest represents one perspective only – one that does not foster diversity, harmony or tolerance within our community.

The Commission and **Task Force** fully acknowledge and respect the rights of all citizens to freely express their views and to engage freely in expressions of their faith. At the same time, the Commission and **Task Force** believe these freedoms can be used in ways that foster unity instead of division.

The freedoms of speech and religion are among the most valuable of our civil and human rights. However, these rights should not be used to denigrate other groups of people, but to engage people with opposing views in meaningful conversation that produces a stronger and more vibrant community. The Mr. Hetero Contest does not work to this end.

Through the Task Force, Worcester is pursuing certification as a No Place for Hate, a program of the Massachusetts Municipal Association and the Anti-Defamation League. The mission of the No Place for Hate campaign is to create programs that actively promote inclusion and respect for individual and group differences while encouraging residents to speak out against hate and intolerance.

Members of the Commission and the **Task Force** will participate in a peaceful, candlelight vigil from 5:30 pm. to 6:30 p.m. in front of Mechanics Hall, located at 321 Main Street, Worcester on Saturday, February 18 (<http://www.iWorcester.com>). Please join those who believe in the ability and strength of the Worcester community in saying no to hate and demonstrating a belief in the rights of all people – not just some people.

About the Worcester Human Rights Commission

The City of Worcester's Human Rights Commission, established in 1975, is comprised of volunteers whose mission is to make Worcester a better place to live, work and visit by fostering a sense of hope where diversity, harmony and tolerance thrive.

Commission members work closely with the City of Worcester's Office of Human Rights to ensure that all residents of Worcester are treated fairly and equally by reducing bias, bigotry and prejudices. Through outreach, educational programs, events and advocacy the Committee and the Office of Human Rights promote ways to increase respect in our community and safeguard equal access and opportunity for all.

About the City Manager's Community Task Force on Bias and Hate Crimes

The City Manager's Community Task Force on Bias and Hate Crimes, established in 2000, is a partnership of concerned citizens, including representatives from the Office of Human Rights, Worcester Police Department and Worcester Public Schools, as well as representatives from Christian, Jewish and Muslim faith traditions and community based organizations. The focus of the Task Force is to foster a community of justice, where acts of prejudice and hate will not be tolerated. Members of the Task Force facilitate the reporting of hate incidents and crimes, develop strong community responses to such acts, provide support for those impacted by such acts, and host education and community-building activities.

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