

# Compassion

I READ Ivan Singer's letter ("Jewish but gay", *AJN* 4/8/00) with sadness.

Unfortunately, it took an event such as Mardi Gras for some people within the Jewish community to acknowledge that some of its members are being ignored, mistreated and cast out.

Many people who were part of the float told me they would be thrilled if there was no need for Mardi Gras. Not everyone relates to the flamboyance, but everyone related to a need for understanding, respect and acceptance within the Jewish community. Sadly, that has been denied to many. As a result of the float and the media coverage, many families have begun talking for the first time in years, many people have been able to shed the burden of silence and to stop hiding who they are.

Mardi Gras began in 1978 as a human rights march, protesting violence towards gays and lesbians. Its primary aim is education and, more recently, celebration of diversity. It has brought an issue out in the open that many have been trying to keep closed. Not everyone in the parade shares the same philosophies and lifestyles, just as not everyone in the Jewish community shares the same philosophies and lifestyles. If all people in the Jewish and wider communities accepted gays and lesbians, there would be no need for a Jewish float; indeed, there would be no need for Mardi Gras.

In regard to ABC's *Compass* program, Mr Singer said if "more positive sides of the Jewish community were reported, our Christian brothers and sisters would get a more positive view of Judaism". Many Christians and Catholics have told me how much they admire many in the Jewish community for their courage, compassion and willingness to understand the issues. As we heard, the float made at least one person (and there were others) change their antisemitic stance.

Many of us have been taught not to air our laundry in public, that what others think of us is more important than anything else. I believe respect, understanding and compassion for people in this community is far more important than the opinions of those outside it.

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