

HISTORY OF FORTUNATE FAMILIES

1992

March: Eight religious and lay ministers (including Casey & Mary Ellen Lopata, parents of a gay son) from Rochester, NY attend a New Ways Ministry Symposium. Inspired and committed to do something, the group begins meeting regularly and eventually becomes Catholic Gay and Lesbian Family Ministry (CGLFM) within the Diocese of Rochester.

November: CGLFM facilitates a meeting with Rochester Bishop Matthew Clark and gay and lesbian Catholics and family members to discuss the 1992 Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith letter, "Responding to Legislative Proposals on Discrimination Against Homosexuals."

1994

July: National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian & Gay Ministries (NACDLGM, later Catholic Association for Lesbian and Gay Ministries - CALGM) is founded at a meeting of representatives from thirteen dioceses. Casey & Mary Ellen Lopata are among the 28 founding members. In 1995 Mary Ellen is elected to the first board of directors, serves on the executive committee from 1997-2003 and as president 2001-2. Since 1998, Casey has served on the Pastoral Resources Committee.

October: The first national retreat for Catholic parents of LGBT persons, sponsored by New Ways Ministry and facilitated by Sr. Jeannine Gramick & Fr. Robert Nugent, is held in Stamford, CT. Casey & Mary Ellen Lopata attend and become charter members of the Catholic Parents Network which emerges from this event.

1995-1996

Casey & Mary Ellen Lopata are consultants to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Marriage and the Family on *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children -AND- Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*, issued in September 1997.

1996

September: CGLFM and the Diocese of Rochester formalize their relationship, agreeing to mutually consult on LGBT-related matters and that CGLFM will minister with gay and lesbian Catholics and their families on behalf of the Diocese.

1997

March: CGLFM and the Diocese of Rochester celebrate a Mass with Gay and Lesbian Persons, Families & Friends. Bishop Matthew Clark is presider/homilist. Over 1300 people attend. Preceding the Mass, CGLFM facilitates a Bishop Clark listening session with lesbian and gay Catholics.

1998

September: Casey & Mary Ellen Lopata chair the annual NACDLGM conference. Held in Rochester, the theme is "Imaging Justice." Protesters outside only made the closing Mass more memorable for those celebrating with Bishop Clark.

2001-2002

July 01: *Seeds of Hope: Compassionate Ministry with Gay and Lesbian Catholics and Their Families—A practical resource manual* edited and published by Casey Lopata.

August 02: *More Seeds: A supplement to Seeds of Hope* edited and published by Casey Lopata.

2003

October: *Fortunate Families: Catholic Families with Lesbian Daughters and Gay Sons*, by Mary Ellen Lopata with Casey Lopata, published. (Trafford Publishing) It's full of stories and includes the results of an in-depth survey of Catholic parents of LGBT daughters and sons.

2004

April: Recognizing the unique position parents of LGBT persons have within the Church and society, Casey & Mary Ellen Lopata leave CGLFM and start Fortunate Families as a nationwide resource and networking ministry to, for, and with parents dedicated to seeking justice for LGBT persons and their families. ♦ Casey publishes 1st Fortunate Families newsletter explaining move from CGLFM to Fortunate Families.

December: Fortunate Families becomes a not-for-profit corporation.

2005

January: Fortunate Families adopts by-laws and elects its first Board of Directors (all from Rochester, NY): Mary Ellen Lopata (President), Tom Ferrarese (Secretary/Treasurer), James Buckheit, Jean Kearse, Casey Lopata, William Pickett, and Rosalie Muschal-Reinhardt.

April: Casey & Mary Ellen Lopata receive New Ways Ministry's Bridge Building Award "For compassionate ministry, personal witness, and national leadership to promote justice for lesbian/gay Catholics, their parents, and families."

August: Website up and running thanks to Bill Pickett.

November: Fortunate Families awarded a grant from the Wheaton Franciscan Sisters to support a survey of Catholic parents of LGBT daughters and sons, and to help develop a nationwide ministry of Catholic parents.

2006

January: Fortunate Families awarded a grant from Mary's Pence, to support the mission and general operations.

February: Fortunate Families receives 501(c)(3) status from IRS.

April: Ann Franczyk (MA) joins the Board.

June: Tom and Linda Karle Nelson (MI) join the Board.

July: Parents Voice Project survey of Catholic parents of LGBT Daughters and Sons launched.

2007

January: Fortunate Families awarded a 2nd grant from Mary's Pence, to support the publication and distribution of the Catholic Parents Voice Project report.

March: Fortunate Families Board of Directors attends New Ways Ministry Symposium in Minneapolis. They facilitate a listening session for parents to tell their stories to Bishop (Ret.) Joseph Sullivan of Brooklyn, and Archbishop (Ret.) Francis Hurley of Anchorage.

July: Jerry Furlong (NE) joins the Board.

August/September: Parents Voice Project Survey Report of Catholic Parents published, and sent to all U.S. Bishops.

2008

January: First part of the eight-part educational series "Let's Talk about Homosexuality," developed by Jerry Furlong, is released on Fortunate Families website, followed by weekly release of other seven parts. ♦ Fortunate Families awarded a 3rd grant from Mary's Pence, for Board development and leadership.

August: Representing Fortunate Families, Casey & Mary Ellen Lopata join a group of prominent Catholic thought leaders to engage in a dialog that lays the foundation for a long-term strategy to build a pro-LGBT movement within Catholicism. Sponsored by the Arcus Foundation, additional convenings continue through 2013, producing grants from 2010 through 2014 to help Fortunate Families to build capacity for outreach and advocacy.

November: Fortunate Families is awarded a grant from the School Sisters of Notre Dame to help develop and produce resource materials and experiences for Catholic parents who volunteer to be "parent peer listeners" – later to be called Listening Parents. ♦ A major article featuring Mary Ellen & Casey Lopata, and the work of Fortunate Families, appears in the National Catholic Reporter.

2009

January: Fortunate Families introduces nationwide Listening Parents Network, Catholic moms and dads of LGBT children who volunteer to field phone calls and email messages from other Catholic parents who may "just need someone to talk with" in a safe and confidential way. Names and contact information for 49 Listening Parents are publicly listed on the Fortunate Families website.

April: Fortunate Families celebrates 5th anniversary, having grown from a Rochester-based ministry with national connections to a network of some 2,500 parents, family members and allies, living in 50 states and several other countries.

July: Michael Harmuth, (CA), Myrna Ohmann (MN), and Deb Word (TN) join the Board.

September: The Listening Parents Network nearly doubles to 94 parents (66 households), in 26 states, three Canadian provinces and 50 dioceses. Mary Ellen Lopata steps away from the Board president position held since the ministry's founding in 2004, and is replaced by Casey Lopata.

2010

April: The Listening Parents Network expands again - now numbers 123 parents in 90 households in 28 states, three Canadian provinces and 61 dioceses. ♦ Fortunate Families launches Facebook page.

July: Rebeca del Cristo (FL) joins the Board providing Latino/a representation. Linda Karle Nelson becomes Board president.

September: Fortunate Families joins with Call To Action, Dignity USA and New Ways Ministry to form the Equally Blessed coalition. This significantly increases Fortunate Families' visibility.

October: "Joining Hands-Reaching Out," the first parents' conference sponsored by Fortunate Families, is held in the Chicago suburb of Techy, IL. More than 50 parents and allies from 15 states and Ontario, Canada, attend a program highlighted by nationally prominent speakers.

2011

February: Fortunate Families hires part-time office assistant.

March: As an Equally Blessed partner, Fortunate Families co-sponsors the first-ever Congressional Briefing to present positive Catholic perspectives on LGBT equality to federal legislators & staffs.

July: The Listening Parents Network now has 135 parents in 28 states, 64 dioceses - and even Nicaragua. ♦ More parents fluent in Spanish join the Network. Spanish translations of some materials are placed on the website. ♦ Tom Ferrarese (NY) and Beth & Tony Garascia (IN) join the Board ♦ Casey & Mary Ellen Lopata receive DignityUSA's President's Award for Extraordinary Leadership as Founders and Co-Directors of Fortunate Families.

September: Board member Deb Word tells her story at one of four conferences put on by a collaboration of Roman Catholic and non-denominational divinity schools, entitled *More Than a Monologue: Sexual Diversity and the Catholic Church*. Her presentation is later included in a book of the same name, with the sub-title *Voices of our Times*, published in 2014.

2012

January: The Listening Parents Network now totals 143 parents, including five who have transgender children.

March: Fortunate Families begins Twitter "tweets."

July: Ed Buechel (KY) joins the Board.

November: Mary Ellen and Casey Lopata are joined by their gay son Jim as guests on the DignityUSA webinar series *Queer Catholic Faith*.

December: Fortunate Families awarded grant from the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation for 2013 to provide interactive events where Catholic parents of LGBT children can gather to build community and learn strategies to advocate, in their faith and civic communities, for justice for and affirmation of LGBT persons. ♦ Casey Lopata publishes 87th Fortunate Families (Voices for Justice) newsletter and relinquishes editor responsibilities. Since the ministry's founding in 2004, free newsletter distribution has grown to more than 3,300 subscribers.

2013

January: The Fortunate Families Newsletter is published under its new name, *Voices for Justice*.

April: Over 625 campus ministries are added to the newsletter distribution list. ♦ A Parents Gathering is held in Pleasanton, CA. ♦ Fortunate Families Blog launched. ♦ "If the Church Is Serious About Welcoming Gays..." by Mary Ellen Lopata and Marianne Duddy-Burke (DignityUSA Executive Director) is published in the April 5 New York Times.

July: Deb Word becomes Board president. ♦ In Minnesota and Michigan, Listening Parents join in public advocacy for marriage equality. ♦ A Parents Gathering is held in Cincinnati, OH.

September: Jenny Naughton (CA) joins the Board. ♦ A new every-other-month electronic communication, *The Families Forum*, is introduced.

October: Parents Gathering held in Flagler Beach, FL

November: Parents Gatherings held in Detroit, MI and Atlanta, GA.

December: Fortunate Families awarded grant from the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation for 2014 extending the Parents Gatherings for another year.

2014

January: Fortunate Families begins a transition to full service, day-to-day, office support provided by the Associations Development Group (ADG) management company. ♦ The Listening Parents Network now has 147 parents in 103 households (including six who are Spanish-speaking and five with transgender children), in 30 states, two Canadian Provinces, and Nicaragua, and in 68 dioceses.

February: Lisa Covington (IN) joins the Board. ♦ Dignity Minneapolis, Fortunate Families, and Call To Action Minneapolis collaboratively sponsor a gathering of parents in Minneapolis.

March: Fortunate Families headquarters officially moves from Rochester NY to ADG, Albany NY.

June: Mary Ellen & Casey Lopata retire from Board and relinquish administrative responsibilities.

August: Fortunate Families Board hosts parent afternoon of reflection at Chicago Cenacle Center.

November: Fortunate Families hosts "Parent Day of Advocacy, Support, and Reflection" at Call To Action Conference in Memphis TN. Facilitated by Deb Word and Caitlin Ryan, Executive Director of Family Acceptance Project. ♦ Fortunate Families Atlanta hosts retreat day for LGBT persons and family members that begins with Mass celebrated by Archbishop Wilton Gregory. ♦ Fortunate Families Detroit hosts weekend parent gathering. The Archdiocese would not allow NWM's Frank DeBernardo to speak in the host church so, after a late move, it takes place in a non-diocesan site.

2015

September: Fortunate Families Board members and Casey & Mary Ellen Lopata participate in Equality Blessed LGBT-supportive actions at the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia. Two Evenings of Reflection are led by Casey and Mary Ellen.

2016

February: Fortunate Families hosts an afternoon of reflection for Catholic families & allies of LGBT loved ones in Chapel Hill NC.

November: Fortunate Families Western KY/Catholics Embracing All God's Children facilitate a Parents Gathering. Talks by a pastor, gay theologian, and deacon inspire nurturing dialogue.

2017

April: Fortunate Families Board members participate in the New Ways Ministry Symposium in Chicago. Fortunate Families hosts an evening parent gathering, including former Board chairs Mary Ellen & Casey Lopata, and Linda Karle Nelson.

October: Stanley Francis "JR" Zerkowski is hired as first Fortunate Families Executive Director. ♦ ADG management company services begin to be phased out.

November: Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv., serves as Episcopal Advisor ♦ At the collaborative ecumenical Rolling the Stone Away Conference in St. Louis, Casey Lopata was on a panel discussing welcoming churches. He shares how Fortunate Families and other Catholic LGBT-related ministries encouraged parishes to be more welcoming despite the lack of a formal welcoming parishes movement in the U.S. Catholic Church.

2018

February: Board Weekend held in Lexington KY, where formal headquarters of Fortunate Families is relocated. Board votes to amend mission statement, begin actively working toward Ministry Sites, change tag in Fortunate Families to "Catholic Family, Friends & Allies supporting the LGBTQ+ Community" broadening the scope from parents to family, friends and allies. Listening Parents Network is renamed "Accompanying Friends, Family & Allies." ♦ Following Fortunate Families Detroit, Fortunate Families Lexington is formed as 2nd Ministry Site.

April: Fortunate Families Lexington, in partnership with Lexington Catholic LGBT Ministry and the University of Kentucky LGBTQ* Resource Center, hosts Fr. Bryan Massingale who spoke about "LGBT Persons in the Age of Pope Francis & Social Justice." ♦ Fortunate Families announces it is withdrawing from the Equally Blessed coalition as of June 30, 2018, and that it is restructuring with a specific focus on our mission: "to support LGBTQ+ sisters and brothers by facilitating respectful conversation and sharing personal stories within dioceses, parishes and communities, especially with bishops, pastors and Church leadership. By accompaniment and bridge building we seek to uphold and safeguard the dignity of LGBTQ+ daughters and sons of God."