

Anti-gay activist slips into Pride

Bill Whatcott uses fake name to hand out leaflets disguised as condoms

PRIDE NEWS
NATHANIEL CHRISTOPHER

With his revealing shorts, bright pink hair and a shirt that read “The Flying Spaghetti Monster Is Gay,” anti-gay activist Bill Whatcott successfully slipped into Vancouver’s Pride parade on Aug 3.

Whatcott and four of his conservative evangelical Christian supporters marched in the parade under the banner of the fictitious Calgary Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster to distribute anti-gay leaflets disguised as condoms.

“I want homosexuals to turn to Jesus, and I believe that people can leave that lifestyle behind,” Whatcott says. “I made this Pride parade way more diverse. It’s not all leather men and naked dudes. Now it includes Christian people with diverse messages on homosexuality. True diversity.”

In the “gospel condom” that he distributed to parade-goers, Whatcott claims that everyone is “anatomically heterosexual” and that gay people “suffer grievously because of their sin.”

Rather than protest openly at the parade, Whatcott and his party deliberately posed as gay and gay-friendly partici-

pants and invented a fake ministry under whose name they applied to participate. Whatcott signed the parade application using a pseudonym, Matthew Davidson.

“They pulled a very well-orchestrated con, and that’s how I look at it in my books,” says Vancouver Pride Society (VPS) general manager Ray Lam. “They were very friendly people and hugged parade marshals and volunteers and seemed very excited to be there posing for pictures with people along the way. On the surface, if you didn’t see the package or associate the package with this entry, you wouldn’t be able to identify which organization did it just by how they were acting in the parade.”

Whatcott tells *Xtra* that he and several volunteers across Canada spent a year preparing for the operation. In total, he says, it cost more than \$4,000 to pay for gas, gospel condom production, the banner and T-shirts.

“A number of Christians across the country donated small amounts of money,” he says. “Even though I live well below the poverty line and I got court judgments up my yin yang unpaid, I am still willing to use some of my money for this. I chipped in about



Bill Whatcott posted a detailed account and photos of his participation in the Pride parade Aug 3 on his Free North America blog. Above, Whatcott gets a hug from a parade volunteer on Denman Street. FREENORTHAMERICA.CA

\$1,000 of my own money.”

In 2013 the Supreme Court of Canada upheld part of a 2005 Saskatchewan Human Rights Tribunal ruling against Whatcott for distributing anti-gay flyers. The high court ruled unanimously that two of the four flyers that Whatcott published and distributed violated the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code by promoting hatred and discrimination against gays and lesbians.

Lam says the VPS was taken completely off guard because a legitimate branch of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, a parody religion that opposes the teaching of intelligent design and creationism in public schools, had participated in the parade in previous years.

“When the application came in, a lot of our team members were excited because we were familiar with the organization,” Lam says. “They have a

reputation for being fun and animated, and we were very excited to have them — and then this happened.”

Whatcott set up a fake phone number and website to support his ruse.

Lam says all parade applicants undergo a very rigorous screening process to determine whether they’re legitimate organizations that support the LGBT community.

“It’s a bit difficult to prevent something like this when people go to such elaborate lengths to hide their identity,” he says. “There was nothing we, as organizers, could do to catch them, other than contacting head office asking if they had a Calgary section. But this isn’t something someone would reasonably do when you receive an application with a website, phone number and credentials that don’t raise any red flags.”

Whatcott says that his participation in the parade was part of a larger battle and that deception was necessary to get his message across. “The Supreme Court found me guilty of hate speech and I have been breaking that ruling ever since, and this is part of it,” he explains. “I’m still out there. I’m loud and not ashamed of my moral and theological protest. This is spiritual warfare. This is a war against the Supreme Court of Canada and the homosexual agenda. Using deception to get there is okay as long as it’s not malicious.” X

Trans March draws several hundred

Participants note progress but say more needs to be done

PRIDE
NATHANIEL CHRISTOPHER

Approximately 350 people took to Commercial Drive Aug 1 for the fifth annual Trans, Two-Spirit and Genderqueer Liberation and Celebration March to help kick off Pride weekend in Vancouver.

The event began at Clark Park, where participants created their own signs. “Penis! Maybe he’s born with it, maybe it’s none of your business,” 16-year-old Alilesaander Jacobsen’s sign read.

“I am here because I’m a proud trans guy who wants to march somewhere,” he said. “I’m tired of trans teens not being accepted because people think they are too young to know what’s happening.”

Danielle Cowan’s sign identified her as a proud parent of a non-binary teen. “We are here to support everyone who is

perhaps not comfortable in the universe that has only two boxes for their gender, and sometimes you can’t always check male or female. Sometimes you want to check both or neither,” she said.

Participants marched up the northbound lanes of Commercial Drive to Victoria Park. Tara Chee, who is a member of the grassroots collective that organizes the event, describes it as both a celebration and a protest.

“We purposefully call it a celebration and liberation march because it’s somewhat in conjunction with Pride and it’s a celebration of our identity and community,” she says. “It’s also a protest because of the many issues that trans people face, such as high unemployment, homelessness, gender policing and other forms of discrimination.”

Vancouver Pride Society president



“Penis! Maybe he’s born with it, maybe it’s none of your business,” reads Alilesaander Jacobsen’s sign (centre, with Candy Fine, left, and Soy Wock). NATHANIEL CHRISTOPHER

Tim Richards, who has attended the Trans March three years in a row, says this year’s event follows notable gains for trans equality in Vancouver. “Look at the progress last year with the parks board and, more recently, progress with the school board,” he says.

In April, the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation unanimously approved a plan to make the city’s parks and community centres more inclusive of transgender people. Two months later, the Vancouver School Board updated its existing sexual orientation and gender identity policy to be more supportive of transgender students. However, Marie Little, chair of the Trans Alliance Society, points out that gender identity is still protected by neither the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms nor the BC Human Rights Code.

Shantel Ivits, who is co-organizing the BC Trans Advocacy Day this fall, notes that transgender British Columbians also face numerous barriers to healthcare. X

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