

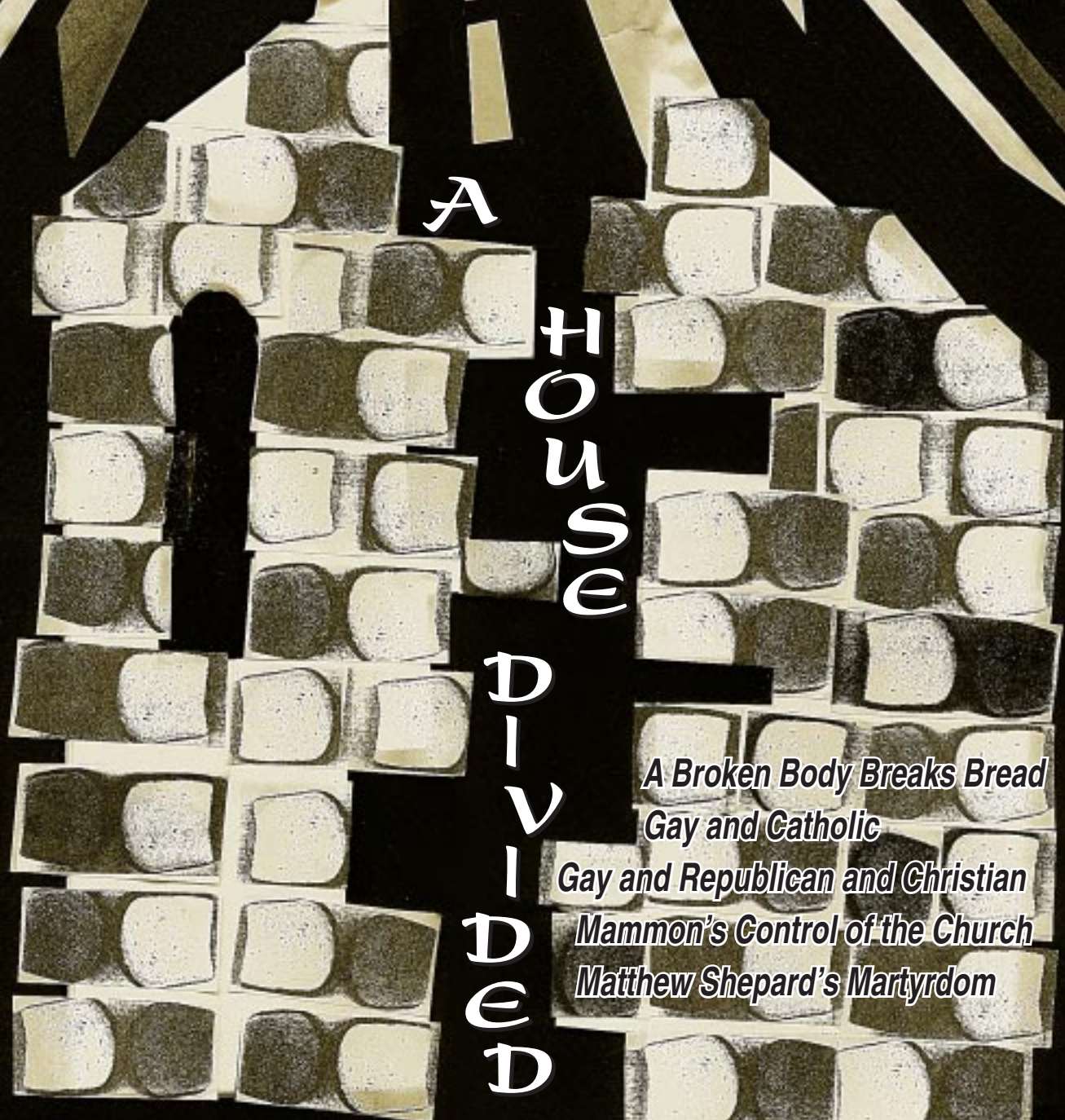
# Open Hands

Vol. 14, No. 2  
Fall 1998

Affirming Congregation Programme  
More Light Churches Network  
Open & Affirming Ministries  
Open and Affirming Program  
Reconciling in Christ Program  
Reconciling Congregation Program  
Welcoming & Affirming Baptists

\$6.00

Resources for Ministries Affirming  
the Diversity of Human Sexuality



A  
H  
O  
U  
S  
E  
S  
D  
I  
V  
I  
D  
E  
D

*A Broken Body Breaks Bread  
Gay and Catholic  
Gay and Republican and Christian  
Mammon's Control of the Church  
Matthew Shepard's Martyrdom*

Irreconcilable Differences?

**Publisher**  
Mark Bowman

**Interim Editor**  
Chris Glaser

**Designer**  
In Print—Jan Graves

With this issue, we warmly welcome the Affirming Congregation Programme of the United Church of Canada as a full ecumenical partner of *Open Hands*.

*Open Hands* is a resource for congregations and individuals seeking to be in ministry with lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons. Each issue focuses on a specific area of concern within the church.

*Open Hands* is published quarterly by the Reconciling Congregation Program, Inc. (United Methodist) in cooperation with the Affirming Congregation Programme (United Church of Canada), the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists (American), the More Light Churches Network (Presbyterian), the Open & Affirming Ministries (Disciples of Christ), the Open and Affirming Program (United Church of Christ), and the Reconciling in Christ Program (Lutheran). Each of these programs is a national network of local churches that publicly affirm their ministry with the whole family of God and welcome lesbian and gay persons and their families into their community of faith. These seven programs—along with Supportive Congregations (Brethren/Mennonite), and Welcoming Congregations (Unitarian Universalist)—offer hope that the church can be a reconciled community.

*Open Hands* is published quarterly. Subscription is \$20 for four issues (\$25 outside the U.S.). Single copies and back issues are \$6. Quantities of 10 or more, \$4 each.


Subscriptions, requests for advertising rates, and other business correspondence should be sent to:

*Open Hands*  
3801 N. Keeler Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60641  
Phone: 773 / 736-5526  
Fax: 773 / 736-5475

Member, The Associated Church Press

© 1998  
Reconciling Congregation Program, Inc.  
*Open Hands* is a registered trademark.

ISSN 0888-8833

 Printed on recycled paper.

# Open Hands

Vol. 14 No. 2 Fall 1998

Resources for Ministries Affirming  
the Diversity of Human Sexuality

## A HOUSE DIVIDED *Irreconcilable Differences?*

---

### A House Divided 4

CHRIS GLASER

*So what's new? Where the lines should be drawn.*

---

### One Loaf, One Cup, One Body—While a Church Divided 5

AGNES NORFLEET

*Common meal as common ground.*

---

### A Soul Divided—Rejecting a Gay Identity 8

JEFF MURPHY-HOLT

*Meeting "WasGay" on line.*

---

### Can My Son Be Gay and Catholic? Reconciling Teachings with Experience 9

CASEY LOPATA

*A family undivided while practicing what the church preaches.*

---

### Can You Be Gay and Republican? 11

RICH TAFEL

*As easily as being gay and Christian.*

---

### 'War of Ideas'—An Imbalance of Power 13

LEON HOWELL

*The moneyed interests we're up against in the Body of Christ and the Body Politic.*

---

### Purchasing Power of the Press—An Example 14

EUGENE TESSELLE

*The long shadow cast by one churchman with money.*

---

## Call for Articles for *Open Hands* Summer 1999

### CREATIVE CHAOS

**Theme section:** "Those who have turned the world upside down have come here also," the religious authorities told the political authorities regarding Christians (Acts 17). How has the welcoming movement turned things upside down? What traditional constructs of the church have we questioned or "undone"? How may the soil that we have tilled—chaos—become fertile ground for creative thought and action?

**Ministries section:** We are seeking columns describing practical experience and suggestions in the following areas: Welcoming Process, Connections (with other justice issues), Worship, Outreach, Leadership, Health (those related to lesbians and gay men, such as breast cancer and AIDS), Youth, Campus, Children. These brief articles may or may not have to do with the theme.

Contact with idea by April 15, 1999

Manuscript deadline: June 15, 1999

Chris Glaser, Phone/Fax 404/622-4222 or e-mail at [ChrsGlaser@aol.com](mailto:ChrsGlaser@aol.com)  
991 Berne St. SE, Atlanta, GA 30316

---

**A Public Apology** 15

GIL ALEXANDER-MOEGERLE  
*Co-founder of Focus on the Family confesses complicity.*

---

**Ecumenical Politeness Reconsidered** 17**Transcending Denominational Divisions to Address Concerns of Justice**

MARY E. HUNT  
*Miss Manners meets Ms. Justice.*

---

**A Soulforce Response** 20

MEL WHITE  
*Responding non-violently to our opponents.*

---

**Thoughts on the L/G/B/T Religious Movement** 21

MARK BOWMAN  
*Increasing our power and lift to overcome inertia and gravity.*

---

**Walking in the Moonlight** 23

RITA NAKASHIMA BROCK  
*The challenge of faith: to live with ambiguity.*

---

**MINISTRIES****Outreach****In Memory of Matthew Shepard (1976-1998)** 25**The Need to Pray Always and Not Lose Heart**

CHRIS GLASER

---

**Health****Discerning the Nearness of God** 26**Lectio Divina and AIDS**

PATRICIA HOFFMAN

---

**Campus****From Jeffrey to Angels** 27**Education for Gay/Lesbian Advocacy in a Theological Seminary**

J. CY ROWELL

---

**Connections****Homosexuality, European Churches, the Ecumenical Movement, and the WCC Meeting in Harare** 27

ROBERT C. LODWICK

---

**SUSTAINING THE SPIRIT****Believers, Here We Gather** 29

A NEW HYMN BY THOMAS J. RITTER

---

**Movement News** ..... 30

**Welcoming Communities** ..... 30

**Selected Resources** ..... 32

**Next Issue:**  
**Why Be Specific In Our Welcome?**

*The artist-in-residence for this issue is Mary Callaway Logan, a United Methodist minister in Atlanta, who uses art in spiritual direction in her Seeds of Light Studio by encouraging individuals to visually express their spiritual autobiographies. For more information, contact her at 443 Sterling St. NE, Atlanta, GA 30307; 404/524-1427, ext. 4.*

**Program Coordinators**

Mark Bowman  
Reconciling Congregation  
Program, Inc. (UMC)  
3801 N. Keeler Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60641  
773/736-5526  
www.rcp.org

Ron Coughlin  
Affirming Congregation  
Programme  
(United Church of Canada)  
P.O. Box 333, Station Q  
Toronto, Ontario  
CANADA M4T 2M5  
416/466-1489  
acpucc@aol.com



Ann B. Day  
Open and Affirming  
Program (UCC)  
P.O. Box 403  
Holden, MA 01520  
508/856-9316  
www.coalition.simplenet.com



Bob Gibeling  
Reconciling in Christ  
Program (Lutheran)  
2466 Sharondale Drive  
Atlanta, GA 30305  
404/266-9615  
www.lcna.org



Dick Lundy  
More Light Churches  
Network (PCUSA)  
5525 Timber Lane  
Excelsior, MN 55331  
612/470-0093  
http://www.mlcn.org



Brenda J. Moulton  
Welcoming & Affirming  
Baptists (ABC/USA)  
P.O. Box 2596  
Attleboro Falls, MA 02763  
508/226-1945  
http://users.aol.com/  
wabaptists



Open & Affirming Ministries  
(Disciples of Christ)  
P.O. Box 44400  
Indianapolis, IN 46244  
http://pilot.msu.edu/user/  
laceyj/

**Editorial Advisory Committee**

Vaughn Beckman, O&A  
Howard Bess, W&A  
Ann Marie Coleman, ONA  
Bobbi Hargleroad, MLCN  
Allen V. Harris, O&A  
Tom Harshman, O&A  
Dick Hasbany, MLCN  
Alyson Huntly, ACP  
Bonnie Kelly, ACP  
Susan Laurie, RCP  
Samuel E. Loliger, ONA  
Tim Phillips, W&A  
Lisa Ann Pierce, SCN  
Caroline Presnell, RCP  
Paul Santillán, RCP  
Margarita Suárez, ONA  
Judith Hoch Wray, O&A  
Stuart Wright, RIC



“And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand,” Jesus told his detractors (Mk 3:25). He said it in reply to an accusation that he had cast out demonic spirits by the power of Satan, and he then condemned such blasphemy against the Holy Spirit’s work (3:28-30).

Yet Jesus would later say of the disagreement his gospel would bring to households, “Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three...” (Lk 12:51-52).

The church has been divided against itself since the early days when Jewish and Gentile Christians wrangled over circumcision. One could say that divisions of the church have served as much as a sign of strength as of weakness. For one thing, it offered a vitality of dialogue required of any true religion, as opposed to a cult that demands complete conformity. For another, it offered a collective and communal expression of faith that, while shaped by Jesus’ and the disciples’ teachings, took on its own life that was more than the sum of its parts, past or present. And for that reason, it was capable of adapting to new situations and new information just as any living being might be, thus better able to embrace more and more people, even if that occurred within differing Christian traditions.

In the present time, there seems no more divisive issue than homosexuality in the church, though bisexuality and transgendered issues are surfacing more and more as “cutting edge” issues, as the cliché with sacrificial overtones goes. I believe, as do some of the contributors to this issue of *Open Hands*, that homosexuality serves as a kind of Rorschach test of the true divisions that our various denominations have lived with more or less successfully in the

past: disagreements of theological understanding, biblical interpretation, the meaning of church membership and of ordination.

Of course, in the past, often the way the church survived was to divide up into various traditions and denominations and even sects. And though we may lament such divisions of the Body of Christ, “decentralizing” the church allowed for still more people to remain Christian. Many Christians today may be wondering if we must divide again. Of course, divisions are already in place, with the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches embracing l/g/b/t people whom other denominations have abandoned or rejected. And *Open Hands* represents more than 850 welcoming congregations and ministries that would collectively represent an even larger church body than UFMCC.

Yet the welcoming programs that sponsor *Open Hands* have never been about schism. We have always been about dialogue and inclusiveness. The term *dialogue* comes from root words meaning literally “through the word,” and implies finding a common ground of belief and practice of the faith through words and, for us, common ground for people along the spectrums of sexuality and gender within the church. Our understanding of inclusiveness has meant we have never required the expulsion of our opponents in the church in the way that they have sometimes demanded our excommunication or simply invited us to leave, blaspheming against the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

Dialogue, however, requires equity. Whether our churches simply “agree to disagree” or to carry on further “dialogue,” l/g/b/t people remain second class citizens, disabled by antigay policies from equal access to the policy-making or policy-interpreting church

courts. We remain “out” while others are “in,” and, without equal opportunity to communicate, effectively “excommunicated.”

Church historian Martin Marty has said that churches are being skewed more and more to the right, because, when liberals come to power, they encourage the continued participation of conservatives; but when conservatives come to power, they try to purge the church of progressives (see Mary Hunt’s article). That, plus the church’s basic inertia (the tendency to keep doing things the same old way) and the money behind our opponents (see the articles by Leon Howell and Gene TeSelle), make our work feel like that of Sisyphus, who perpetually rolled a stone to the top of a hill only to have it roll down again.

I once worked in a church that prided itself on being inclusive. Then one day a person began attending who literally and persistently threatened individuals in the congregation, causing some to avoid church to avoid him. Violence was feared, and when it came, the elders accepted his offer not to return. We lost three other members, friends of his, because they felt we were behaving in a noninclusive fashion. But to be inclusive, we believed we had to exclude this angry man.

In all my years as a gay activist in the church, I’ve never disputed the church’s right to define its boundaries in terms of belief and behavior. What I have disputed is where those boundaries should be drawn. Does the church really want to include someone who is



intolerant of l/g/b/t people at the expense of excluding l/g/b/t people? Or wouldn’t it be more Christ-like to be intolerant of intolerance? ▼



*This sermon was delivered during the opening Communion service of a meeting of Greater Atlanta Presbytery, February 28, 1998, that was to vote on whether to relax the denomination's policy that essentially prohibits ordination of lesbians and gay men. A few specific references have been removed to universalize this article.*

**W**e are a church in great pain and conflict, and everyone here today knows it. We are a church divided, in Greater Atlanta Presbytery, and in our denomination. During the course of this meeting we will take a vote that will show how divided we are. On the surface of things the division appears to be about human sexuality, particularly homosexuality, and church leadership. But below the surface the division is even deeper than that. We are divided by different understandings of biblical interpretation, and Reformed theology; and by how we understand human sin and God's grace. We are a church divided and the pain of our division runs deep. No matter how the vote goes today, not one person will go home a winner, because about half of us will go home feeling defeated, and when one part of the body suffers, we all suffer together.

### *Parallels with Corinth*

**T**he similarities between the church in Corinth and the church today are surprisingly real. Corinth was, like Atlanta, an international city. It was a large commercial port and trading center between East and West, a big city with big city benefits and problems—renown for its commerce, industry, wealth, luxury and immorality. Many came to the city for work with the military, in government service, and because of business with foreign traders. Business was dominated by an upper class of mostly Italians, and there was an influx of Greeks, Asians, and Jews who comprised a lower, working class.

The eighteen months that Paul was in Corinth was sufficient time to begin several house churches, but not time enough to provide stability for such a diverse community of believers. All this diversity gave rise to conflict and tension which is evident in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth.

There were differing opinions about matters of human sexuality. Some had quit sleeping with their own spouses because of their commitment to Christ, while another was living with his father's wife. Some thought they should break completely with the past, refusing meat that had been offered to idols, but others had no problem with that, after all, meat is meat. There were divisions about displaying the gifts of the Spirit in worship, about the role of women in the church, about freedom and communal responsibility, about the meaning of the resurrection.<sup>1</sup> No wonder they wrote to Paul and said, "Help!"

come together, there are divisions among you, and this is not the Lord's Supper which you eat."

The central problem that Paul is addressing at Corinth is not a problem of sacramental theology. Rather it is a problem of social relations within a divided community. Remember the church met in people's homes. Archaeological study of houses from this period has shown that the dining room of a typical villa could accommodate about nine or ten persons who would recline at table for the meal. Other guests would have to sit or stand in the atrium which might have provided space for thirty to forty people. The host of such a gathering would invite a small elite group to dine in the dining room, while lower-status members of the church would be placed in the larger space outside. The higher-status guests in the dining room would be served better food and wine than the others.

*We are a church in great pain and conflict,  
and everyone here today knows it.  
We are a church divided...*

### *A Division of the House*

**P**aul wrote back, and in the center of the letter he gets to the heart of the matter (see 1 Cor 11:17-34). The Words of Institution of the Lord's Supper are usually lifted out of this biblical context, and we lose sight of their impact. Paul is saying to a church he founded and a people he loved, "When you

A number of surviving writings from this period testify to this custom. Roman scholar Pliny the Younger, describes his experience of dining as a guest in someone's home saying: "The best dishes were set in front of the host himself and a select few, and cheap scraps of food before the rest of the company. He had even put the wine into tiny little flasks, divided into three

categories. One lot was intended for himself and for us, another for his lesser friends (all his friends were graded) and the third for his and our freedmen.”<sup>2</sup>

This was the sort of hospitality that was being provided to the church by the wealthier Corinthian Christians. As patrons of the community hosting the gatherings, they were continuing to observe these class distinctions even when the Lord’s Supper was being served. Paul regards such practices—however “normal” in respectable Corinthian culture—as an outrage. He does not deny the right of the more prosperous to eat and drink however they like in their own homes, but he insists that the church’s common meal should symbolize the unity of the community through equitable sharing of food and drink.

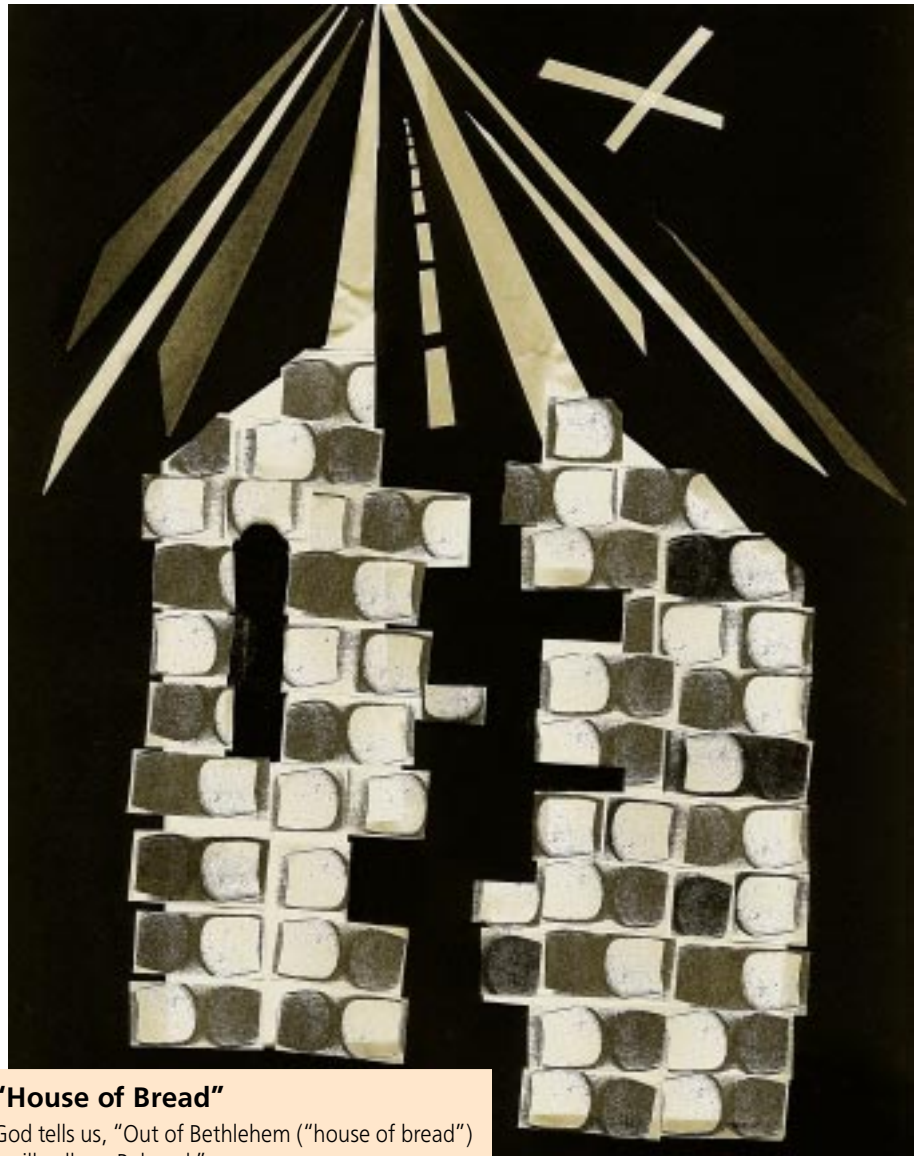
*You who are rich are coming early and eating all the food, and getting drunk. The poor, who are day laborers and have less control over their time, arrive late from work and when they arrive—there is no food left; they are going away hungry!*

*You are not making room for one another at the table,* Paul is saying to the church. This kind of meal is hardly communal, much less the Lord’s Supper! In the church there is no hierarchy of status.

The solemnity of the Words of Institution handed down from Jesus to Paul to us is a sharp contrast to the first-come-first-served, me-in-you-out, kind of revelry described as characteristic of the Corinthian church. It was while he was being betrayed that our Lord Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it. In the divisiveness of the Corinthian church, the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper affirms a new covenant, and invites a new kind of community.

### ***A Surplus of Scholars and a Deficit of Peacemakers***

Garrison Keillor, one of America’s great storytellers, once told about two brothers who live in Lake Wobegon. They were members of a tiny fundamentalist bunch known as the Sanctified Brethren. There was in this group a spirit of self-righteousness among certain elders that defied peace-



#### **“House of Bread”**

God tells us, “Out of Bethlehem (“house of bread”) I will call my Beloved.”

“We are all God’s bread, and the church is a community of bread of all kinds and shapes. When I began to make the steeple ‘splitting,’ my husband said, ‘It looks like a highway.’ I wonder, where will all of us go, on that highway?”

*Mary Callaway Logan*

making. They were, Keillor tells, “Given to disputing small points of doctrine that to them seemed the very fulcrum of the faith. We were cursed with a surplus of scholars and a deficit of peacemakers, and so we tended to be split into factions.”

When he was a boy, a dispute arose between two men: Brother William Miller and Brother James Johnson, but of course they dragged others into it, too. Uncle Al had family and friends on both sides, and it broke Al’s heart to see these brothers become enemies. So one

fine August day, Uncle Al tried to make peace between them, to restore the love that had been lost. He arranged for them to meet at his and Aunt Flo’s house one Sunday, a few Millers and a few Johnsons, not to discuss their difference in doctrine, but simply to enjoy a dinner of Aunt Flo’s famous fried chicken.

It took weeks to arrange, but finally the two groups of brothers arrived—in separate cars, of course. Gaunt, flinty-eyed, thin-lipped men in dark suits came into the house and sat in awesome silence until the call to dinner. They trooped into the dining room around the long table that had been extended with two leaves so they wouldn’t have to sit close.

*With their eyes closed, the smell of fried chicken and gravy  
made those men into boys again.  
It was years ago, they were fighting, and a mother's voice from on high said,  
'You boys stop it and get in here and have your dinners. Now. I mean it.'*

Now, prayer was a delicate matter. Brethren were known to use even prayer before a meal as a platform, and so Uncle Al, the peacemaker, concerned lest one brother take prayer and beat the others over the head with it, said, "Let us bow our heads in silent prayer, giving thanks for the meal." They bowed their heads and closed their eyes and—a long time passed. The old clock ticked on the bureau. A cat walked in and meowed and left. A child snickered. Cars went by. There were dry sniffs and clearings.

Soon it was clear that neither side wanted to stop before the other. They were seeing who could pray the longest. Brother Miller peeked through his fingers at Brother Johnson, who was earnestly engaged in silent communion with the Lord, who agreed with him on so many things. So Brother Miller dove back into prayer, too. Uncle Al finally said, "AMEN" to offer them a way out of the deadlock. He even said it again, "AMEN," but it was no use. It was becoming the longest table grace in history.

*A meal awaits us all this morning.  
It will not deaden the pain we are experiencing as a  
church divided, but it has the power to melt our stony hearts.*

Then Aunt Flo slid her chair back, rose, went into the kitchen, and brought out the food they were competing to see who could be more thankful for. She set the hot dishes before them. In that moment, a kind of pointed, poignant truth settled among them and they could hardly bear it. Tears ran down Brother Johnson's face. His eyes were clamped shut, and tears streamed down.

And so was Brother Miller weeping.

Keillor observes, "It's true what they say, that smell is the key that unlocks our deepest memories. With their eyes closed, the smell of fried chicken and gravy made those men into boys again. It was years ago, they were fighting, and a mother's voice from on high said, 'You boys stop it and get in here and have your dinners. Now. I mean it.' The blessed cornmeal crust and rapturous gravy brought the memory to mind. And the stony hearts of two giants melted. They raised their heads and filled their plates and slowly peace was made over that glorious meal."<sup>3</sup>

### *A Meal to Meld Our Hearts*

I am a part of a group of ministers in this presbytery who share a meal together once a month. This group was convened just over a year ago before we had a similar vote. There are ten of us in it now. We serve different churches, large and small, urban, suburban, small town. What brought us together in the first place was our differences. We were, a year ago, evenly

divided on the issues before us again today. Each month we gather in one of our churches, we have lunch, we talk, we laugh, we cry, we pray together. We call ourselves Common Ground.

Part of me can't stand these lunches because of our divisions. Sometimes when I go it takes me about a week to get over. My husband has reminded me that many evenings after one of these

meetings I come home exasperated and exclaim, "I don't understand why they don't think like I do!" But we keep getting back together. Out of our understanding of scripture and deep convictions, some of our group come to this vote feeling very strongly that homosexual persons should not hold leadership positions in the church. Some of us, including myself, count among our richest blessings the colleagues we have in ministry, ministers, elders, deacons, friends, who are homosexual. In over a year of meetings, we have not changed our minds. We are still divided on this issue. But something important has happened. In the midst of our conflict and painful division, we have, by the grace of God, made room for one another at the table.

A meal awaits us all this morning. It will not deaden the pain we are experiencing as a church divided, but it has the power to melt our stony hearts. When the tops are taken off those trays a fragrance is going to fill the air. And for a moment, by Christ's body broken for us, we will share one loaf, one cup, and become one body. ▼

*Agnes W. Norfleet is the pastor of North Decatur Presbyterian Church.*



### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup>Fred B. Craddock, "Preaching to Corinthians," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, April, 1990, p. 160.

<sup>2</sup>Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians, Interpretation Commentary*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997, p. 192 ff.

<sup>3</sup>Garrison Keillor, "Brethren", *Leaving Home*, p 161.



Not long ago, I had a discussion with a young man in an Internet chatroom named Ron (not his real name). His sign-on name, “WasGay,” captured my attention, and I could not resist the urge to talk with him about it. By using this name, he was proclaiming to have once been “sexually broken”—or, homosexual—but had been “repaired by the grace of God through Jesus.” While he was claiming to have been saved from eternal damnation, I sensed a sad and solitary soul deeply buried under an elaborate pretense. He struck me as perhaps the loneliest person I had ever encountered.

Ron did not divulge much about his family history, but it was obvious that he came from a family with strong fundamentalist roots. Clearly he had been abused emotionally, which is not uncommon among fundamentalists. He had been asked to die to his true self.

Because I was not Ron’s counselor, I did not have to be impartial and unbiased. I took great pains to treat him respectfully, but I was angry at what had been done to him, and what he had done to himself: Ron had been robbed of his spirit and told that it had no value. He had allowed himself to be convinced that God’s love is conditional, and he was certain that he had to somehow “change” in order to receive eternal salvation. He was so sure of this, in fact, that he was eager to prove to everyone that he *had* changed and was now “worthy.” He was suppressing and trying to leave behind the very soul of who he was, seeing it as something not only detachable, but evil.

By pretending to be something he is not, Ron was buying what he thinks salvation is, not from God, but from those around him. Unfortunately, their God is one of retribution and fear, nothing like the loving God whose help we

ask to “accept the things we cannot change, and the wisdom to know the difference.” Saying one “doesn’t agree” with homosexuality is like saying one doesn’t agree with rain. According to both the American Psychological Association and American Medical Association, it is now considered an ethical violation to try to change a person’s sexual orientation through counseling.

Many people, who cannot conform to society’s biases, resort to pretending that they do—in effect, ceasing to exist as themselves. Ron effectively chose to cease to exist as one who is free to think and feel and reason and come to his own conclusions, thereby having his own unique relationship with God. And what is suicide, but choosing not to live under the circumstances with which you have been given? What else is it called but suicide when he feels he cannot go on living the way he is? Is it living when one believes that he is unworthy of love and acceptance from God and others unless he can somehow be something other than what he is, and if he can’t, pretend to be? Jesus came to give life, not take it away.

When a fellow “chatroomer” asked me what I thought of WasGay’s proclamation of being “sexually healed” and if I thought I could learn from his “courageous” example, I responded that since gay people have pretended to be “straight” almost from the beginning of time I could see nothing miraculous about it. While talking with Ron, in fact, I realized that indeed I had been there myself, posturing myself as an “ex-gay,” or at least, a “non-gay.” I would daresay anyone who is lesbian or gay is an “ex-ex-gay” in this regard; we have all come from a period of denial in our lives when we felt we had to pretend and tried to be something other than our true selves, something that society

would find more acceptable. While denying ourselves, we tried to be “just like everyone else”—to be what we were expected to be, regardless of the truth.

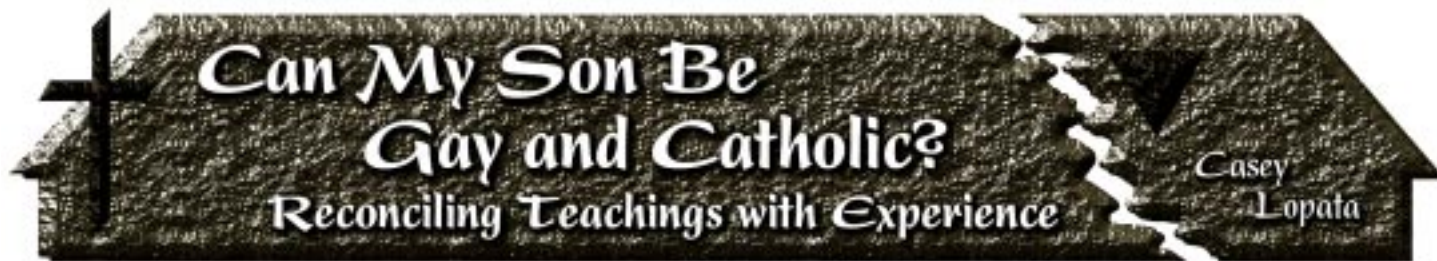
Ron may have fooled many of those he spoke to that night. I was not among them. Having been there myself, I could see only too clearly his loneliness and longing for approval and validation. It was as if he was trying to say, “See? I have done this wonderful thing. Aren’t you proud of me now?” Unable to love himself, he was looking for someone to love him, still. In spite of the fact that Ron had made this major and miraculous conversion in his life for the sake of those around him, he still felt unloved and unworthy. Ironically, Ron showed up later in a gay and lesbian chatroom instead of one of the Christian chatrooms where we had met.

My discussion with Ron ended when I spoke ironically of the good fortune of knowing God’s “requirements” about sexuality. Isn’t it fortunate, I asked him, that Christians can be so confident that they are not wrong about any of this?

He did not respond. ▼

*Jeff Murphy-Holt (left) is a graduate student completing a master’s degree in counseling psychology. He and his partner, Michael, are active members of Kairos United Methodist Church in Kansas City, the first Reconciling Congregation in Missouri.*





Can Jim be gay *and* Catholic? That became the big question for me after I got over the initial shock and confusion of learning our son is gay. While Mary Ellen (my wife and Jim's mother) rode the emotional guilt/doubt/grief roller coaster typified in many stories about parents' journeys, I logically stepped my way through the theological mine field. That's what you do when you're a theology junkie (Vatican documents are beach reading) and nearly fall off the thinker side of those thinker-versus-feeler scales.

"Dad, I'm gay." Those words from Jim were unthinkable for me. All I could say was, "Are you sure?" I didn't know any gay people (so I thought). I knew virtually nothing about homosexuality. And my vague understanding of church teaching was: homosexuality was wrong. Period. So wrong—you couldn't even talk about it. Like osmosis, this silence surrounding homosexuality seeped into my consciousness and left me with the notion that no sin was worse than homosexuality. As a thinker, I was forced to bring some rationality to this irrational belief, and to the feelings that were there, though unacknowledged. I had to know: Can Jim be gay and be Catholic?

My first logical step was to think back to the day when I decided whether I was going to be homosexual or heterosexual. I never made such a decision, nor did Jim, nor anyone else I've talked with about this. And I discovered that church documents support the unchosen, fixed nature of sexual orientation. The U.S. Bishops refer to "those persons for whom homosexuality is a permanent, seemingly irreversible sexual orientation,"<sup>1</sup> and their Committee on Marriage and Family says, "Generally, homosexual orientation is experienced as a given, not as something freely chosen."<sup>2</sup>

Learning that Jim didn't choose his homosexuality was a giant first step for me. But, I wondered, "Why does Jim

have this orientation?" I readily dismissed a 19th century theory that said homosexuality was caused by the habitual drinking of English tea and the pernicious influence of Italian opera! How ill-informed we've been! Yet that's understandable, considering that scientists didn't start studying this concept until the mid 1800's, and the Catholic church didn't officially acknowledge sexual orientation until 1975.

"OK, that helps," I thought. But I was sure my next step was going to be into quicksand! Is homosexuality a sin? Surprise! The Vatican unequivocally states: "The particular inclination of a homosexual person is not a sin."<sup>3</sup> Of course! A homosexual orientation can't be a sin if it's not a choice. In fact, church teaching says sexuality is a gift, and "Sexual identity helps to define the unique persons we are, and one component of our sexual identity is sexual orientation."<sup>4</sup>

But what about what these feelings might lead to? What about homogenital acts? As I expected, the Vatican says: "It is only in the marital relationship that the use of the sexual faculty can be morally good."<sup>5</sup> And the U.S. Bishops say: "Homosexual activity...as distinguished from homosexual orientation, is morally wrong." But, they continue: "Like heterosexual persons, homosexuals are called to give witness to chastity, avoiding, with God's grace, behavior which is wrong for them, just as nonmarital sexual relations are wrong for heterosexuals."<sup>6</sup> Whoa! What hit me, probably because I'm heterosexual, is the part that says: "just as nonmarital sexual relations are wrong for heterosexuals."

This tells me if Jim has sexual relations outside of marriage, he violates church-established moral norms; just like my heterosexual son Andy, if he has sexual relations outside of marriage; just like my married daughter, Linda, if she uses artificial birth control; and just like me if I masturbate.

OK, but logically I thought: "Since church law restricts marriage to a man and woman, doesn't this mean homogenital behavior is always a sin?" Well, the Vatican says: "In fact, circumstances may exist, or may have existed in the past, which would reduce or remove the culpability of the individual [engaged in homosexual activity]...in a given instance."<sup>7</sup> Wow! The Vatican says homogenital acts are not necessarily always a sin! I recalled the old Baltimore Catechism—three things are necessary for mortal sin: 1) the thought, desire, word, action or omission must be seriously wrong 2) the person must know it's seriously wrong, and 3) the person must fully consent to it. And only God knows how knowledgeable and how free we really are.

Along with all this I learned the church recommends a pastoral approach. For example, a Vatican theologian and author of one of its documents, in a newspaper interview, said: "When one is dealing with people who are so predominately homosexual that they will be in serious personal and perhaps social trouble unless they attain a steady partnership within their homosexual lives, one can recommend them to seek such a partnership and one accepts this relationship as the best they can do in their present situation."<sup>8</sup> I later learned this is based on the moral principle that no one is obliged to do what is impossible for them to do.

During my journey, I read that Catholic church teaching says six biblical texts clearly say homosexual behavior is immoral. But my journey also led me to Scroggs, Furnish, and other biblical scholars, who convincingly argue the Bible is not really so clear on this.

So at this point in my journey—and it was a meandering 14-year process, not the series of logical steps I've presented here—I'd learned that it is not a sin for Jim to have a homosexual orientation, and that Jim can be gay and a faithful Catholic, just like any other faithful

Catholic who struggles with objective moral norms established by the church. The U.S. Bishops say it well: *“Homosexual [persons], like everyone else, should not suffer from prejudice against their basic human rights. They have a right to respect, friendship, and justice. They should have an active role in the Christian community.”*<sup>9</sup>

Through this process, I also learned a thinker has feelings too! Since my son is gay, I’m personally affected by these teachings, and I would like some of them to change. I learned that’s OK too. Because none of this teaching is infallible...which means, of course, it can change. But will it? Change springs from unresolved tensions. Here are three:

1. The Catholic church says it’s OK for gay people to be gay as long as they’re celibate, yet the church also teaches that celibacy is a gift. Are all gay people gifted with the ability to live a celibate lifestyle?
2. Catholic church teaching considers homosexual orientation to be a sexual *deviation*, a “disorder.” The church also teaches there can be no conflict between faith and reason, yet the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association consider homosexual orientation to be a natural sexual *variation*.
3. Not only was church teaching formulated without the participation of openly gay and lesbian people, but the teaching doesn’t take into account the lived experience of many faithful, gay and lesbian Catholics—real people—made in the image and likeness of God, who, like all of us, struggle to do what God calls us to do.

Change in church teaching is possible, but the official church tends to move very, very slowly. So, what do I do today? Well, that brought me to another teaching that surprises many Catholics—the primacy of conscience. The Catechism puts it very simply: *“A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his [or her] conscience.”* [My emphasis]<sup>10</sup> “Wow!”, I thought, “That’s pretty clear!” Does that mean we can do anything we want? Theolo-

gian Charles Curran answered that for me—quite concisely: We *must* obey our conscience, but our conscience might be wrong.

This led me to the concept of moral discernment in the Catholic moral tradition. The church suggests looking at experience, reason (including the sciences), tradition (church teaching), and scripture. Why all four? Because each has been wrong. Consider the flatness of earth (experience), the theory that babies came only from the man (reason), the excommunication of Galileo (tradition), or slavery (scripture). But what if church teaching and our conscience do not agree? Church teaching itself says we should start with the presumption that church teaching is right. Then, consider scripture, reason, and our experience, and return to the ultimate question: Are we responding to the God revealed in Jesus Christ?

Bishop Thomas Gumbleton gave me an example of how to balance church teaching and conscience when he said, *“I don’t make judgments about a gay person’s conscience any more than about the military man at a SAC air base or on a Trident submarine who would fire a nuclear weapon if ordered to. I think in some ways the church teaching on that is clearer than on homosexuality...Anybody who has the intention of using such weapons is, in my judgment, in a situation that is drastically evil. And yet I cannot judge another person’s conscience. If that person comes to communion, I cannot refuse.”*<sup>11</sup>

Church teaching, personal sin, conscience, discernment. Intellectually, I found Jim can certainly be gay and Catholic. But this discovery was still in my thinker’s world of theology and homosexuality until I heard Bishop Kenneth Untener. Speaking to a largely gay and lesbian audience, he said: *“When we die, and as a moral theologian I don’t say this lightly, the only thing that will matter is how we treated each other.”*<sup>12</sup> That’s when I realized the final step of my journey was getting to know and love many faithful Catholic gay people who like our son, Jim, are made in the image of God and are loved by God, who love God and love their neighbors as themselves. That’s how I really know Jim can be gay and Catholic. ▼



**Casey Lopata**, shown here with his son, Jim, is cofounder of Catholic Gay & Lesbian Family Ministry which advocates for and facilitates pastoral care for Catholic g/l persons and their families/households on behalf of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester. A member of St. Mary’s Church, PFLAG, the Catholic Parents Network and the National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian and Gay Ministries, he gives presentations with Mary Ellen, his wife, in parishes, high schools, and conferences.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*, U.S. Catholic Conference, 1991, 54-55.

<sup>2</sup>National Council of Catholic Bishops, Committee on Marriage and Family, *Always Our Children*, 3rd printing, revised June 1998, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, 1986, #3.

<sup>4</sup>*Always Our Children*, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>*Letter to the Bishops*, #7.

<sup>6</sup>National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *To Live in Christ Jesus: A Pastoral Reflection on the Moral Life*, 1976, #52.

<sup>7</sup>*Letter to the Bishops*, #11.

<sup>8</sup>Jan Visser, in *The Clergy Review* (London), 1976, v. 61, p. 233.

<sup>9</sup>*To Live in Christ Jesus*, op. cit. #52, and *Human Sexuality*, op. cit. 55.

<sup>10</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, U.S. Catholic Conference, 1994, #1790.

<sup>11</sup>Tom Roberts, *He’s Not Disordered, He’s My Brother*, National Catholic Reporter, Nov. 4, 1994, 6.

<sup>12</sup>Bishop Kenneth E. Untener, “Hallmarks of the Church” [Address delivered at a New Ways Ministry Symposium, March 28, 1992], in *Voices of Hope*, Eds. Jeannine Gramick & Robert Nugent, (New York: Center for Homophobia Education, 1995), 151.



**H**ow can you be gay and Republican?" It's the question I'm most often asked about my job as the head of Log Cabin Republicans. Many gays and straight liberals ask it with the sense that I'm some sort of a traitor. Republicans wonder because I don't fit their caricature of what a gay person is. Since there isn't much of a wall between church and state these days, as these same people find out I'm an ordained American Baptist minister, they always follow up: "How can you be gay and Christian?"

Like the questioners of Jesus in Mark, chapter three, those on both sides see me as being, in today's therapeutic language, a "self-hater" or "kidding myself." In the language of Galilee in the time of Jesus, they might say I'm possessed by Satan. But a house divided against itself cannot stand, Jesus points out. Yet standing against conventional wisdom of who you must be looks to the world as a personal house divided, when in fact, it may be exactly the place that Christ calls us to be.

The reality of politics today is that one in three gays vote Republican, a statistic both gay Democrats and the religious right would like to keep hidden. In issues of faith, I would suggest that a much larger percentage of gays are actively spiritual.

But what's exciting about today's gay movement is that it's maturing beyond its adolescence, where the gay establishment held power over the newly forming community. With a fear of outside attacks from political figures and religious figures in the culture wars, gay leaders who called for tolerance and trumpeted diversity ironically established a rigorous conformity within the community.

Republicans, the church and even our families were at times posited as

enemies. Gays were told where we must live, where we should shop, how we should dress, where we should eat, how we should vote and how we could liberate ourselves from our pasts. Too often this "liberation" included throwing off the yoke of patriarchal churches and families.

A movement founded in opposition to the religious right found little room within itself to say there were good religious people and bad religious people, or that there were good Republicans and bad Republicans, good families and bad families. In its fear of attack, it painted an uncomplicated world of black and white. It was deliberately the mirror opposite of the world painted by the growing religious right, but equally black and white.

The anti-faith bias within the gay community has taken its toll. And I believe that the next phase of the gay movement will be a return to faith and spirituality. The rejection of faith has allowed for a pervasive moral relativism to permeate our side in the political debate. I believe that underlying this ethic is a deep-seated feeling among many gays that yes, in fact, in their quiet moments, they believe that being gay is bad and shameful. So the ethic evolved into the belief that whatever I do is my business and no one else's. There is no right or wrong in any objective sense, just whatever feels good.

Meanwhile, American society increasingly believes that the moral relativism it embraced a generation ago has not held up over time. We see kids killing kids, children having children, intensifying poverty, and new diseases unimagined in earlier times. In record numbers, the baby boomers are going back to church today. And at the same time, mainstream Protestant denominations that embraced therapeutic, moral

relativism are watching their numbers drop, while fundamentalists churches grow dramatically.

In the midst of America's culture wars, the religious right has brilliantly and dishonestly become the loudest and most-quoted voice of concern for family ethics and morals. They have an increasingly appealing message to society. Their call for a return to an old-fashioned sense of right and wrong is tied to a nostalgic, mythical view of America of the 1950s. Their message sells because of the vacuum that has been left by the mainstream churches, and they have clear culprits for this chaos: homosexuals and feminists are at the top of the list.

The gay community finds itself in the middle of today's culture war. We are defended by liberals who, increasingly, find themselves on the margins of the cultural debate. We are attacked and demonized by a religious right that grows in size and sophistication and political clout.

This is a crucial moment for gay people of faith. I believe that we must define our movement for what it is—a moral movement. Instead of talking about rights that we want or demand, we need to tell the American public that our movement is about a need to be honest, to not bear false witness. We are not only about sex, we are about people who want to love each other.

We are not about shoving our agenda down people's throat, but we do speak for many who remain silently in the closet. We are not about recruiting children, but are about saving kids' lives. The gay movement, through its spiritual leaders, must articulate a message of morality, though it will not be the morality defined by those who have to date capitalized on this discussion.

*I no longer saw my opponent as some jerk who threatened me. ...My political instincts were overridden by my Christian instincts. I asked the audience to respect his opinion and refrain from attacking him personally.*

This is the most strategically important thing the gay movement can do right now. It doesn't require us to pretend to be what we are not, simply to open the door of closeted people of faith within our community. The country needs to hear their story.

The next step is where the Holy Spirit comes in. I believe that by employing the love of Jesus, we can change people's hearts. This is not some-sophisticated, focus-grouped political strategy—it is simple faith in the power of God. Two examples come to mind. At a debate with a leader of the religious right at a leading American university, my opponent started to falter in getting his message across. The audience, mostly sympathetic to my argument, began to pounce on my opponent with sarcastic, demeaning comments. Suddenly, I no longer saw my opponent as some jerk who threatened me. Instead, I saw a fellow human being who was under a vicious attack. My political instincts were overridden by my Christian

instincts. I asked the audience to respect his opinion and refrain from attacking him personally. I got a perplexed look from the audience and an even more perplexed look from my debate partner. When it came to be his time to speak again, he gave a rousing endorsement of me and agreed there could be some common ground on this issue, maybe domestic partnerships. After it was over, he reached over and gave me a hug and thanked me. Following the presentation, one politico in the audience observed to me, "You had him in your sites, but you couldn't pull the trigger." While this was intended as an insult, I realized it was actually a compliment in disguise. I do believe that the culture war over homosexuality will be won when we approach it from the perspective of Jesus, not politics as usual.

Common ground can't always be found, but we are called to love our enemy no matter what. I spoke at a rally in Ft. Worth, Texas, in opposition to the homophobic policies of the Texas GOP.

Just as we began, a large band of counter protesters arrived. These men, in the name of Jesus, proceeded to call us every evil gay epithet I'd ever heard, and a few I hadn't. Tensions grew high in the one hundred degree heat, but we managed to keep our cool. What disgusted me most about the opposition was that they cloaked all of their arguments in the name of God. As far as I was concerned, they were blaspheming God. At one point, I was encircled by the protesters, and I said: "I love you. I love you because God loves me, and only through His love can I love you." One of the protestors responded: "God does not love you. He hates you. And you're going to burn in hell if you don't change." Fortunately, we caught that moment on videotape. While I wasn't effective in changing his mind that day, I've shown this tape to many Christians who are currently opposed to gay rights, and all have seen the dangers of the church's rhetoric and they're embarrassed by that manifestation of it.

Slowly but surely through the power of God there will be change. As a gay Christian, I knew that it was nearly impossible for me to fulfill my call through work in a traditional parish. But I believe that my position as a gay Christian Republican, which has put me at the center of one of the most important civil rights battles facing the church and this country, is a call of its own. These are exciting times to be openly gay in America, and there has never been a more important time to be an out gay Christian. This is no time for us to hide any part of who we really are under a bushel, and the possibility to be part of God's plan for change is tremendous. 🍌

For information on the Log Cabin Republicans, write to 1633 Q Street N.W. #210, Washington, DC 20009, phone 202/347-5306, fax 202/ 347-5224, or e-mail: [info@lcr.org](mailto:info@lcr.org) Visit the group's website at <http://www.lcr.org>



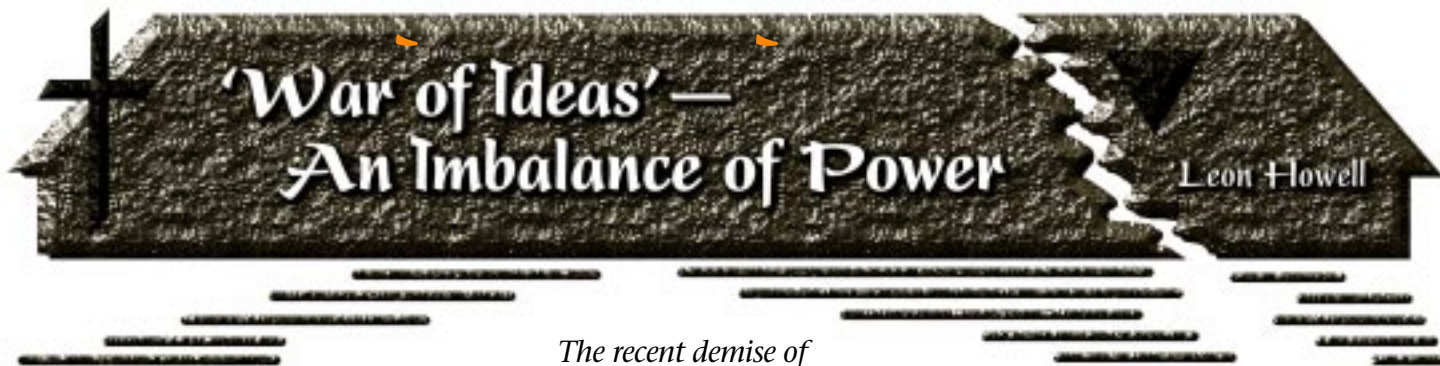
### **"The House of Daily Bread"**

"When we ask for 'our daily bread' in the Lord's Prayer, we could be asking for just enough 'understanding' for today. Life gives us countless experiences of dissonance, as the Psalms record. And yet we ask in return for some bread, some understanding to nourish us for this day."

*Mary Callaway Logan*



*Rich Tafel, a graduate of Harvard Divinity School, is an ordained American Baptist minister and the executive director of Log Cabin Republicans. He is the author of an as-yet-untitled book, due next spring from Simon and Schuster.*



*The recent demise of Second Stone (see Movement News) for lack of adequate financial support and the need for additional economic solutions to maintain Open Hands makes this article by the editor of the no-longer-published Christianity and Crisis all the more timely.*

*Ed. Note: The term “culture wars” used today by the religious right originated in Nazi Germany, when it was used to support “purifying” German culture.*

The idea of a culture war has been imbedded in our consciousness since James Davison Hunter’s 1991 *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* and Pat Buchanan’s speech about “a religious war, a culture war” at the 1992 Republican convention.

James Dobson, head of the powerful religious right group called “Focus on the Family,” wrote in his 1992 book (co-edited with Gary Bauer), *Children at Risk*: Nothing short of a great Civil War of Values rages today throughout North America. Two sides with vastly different and incompatible worldviews are locked in a bitter conflict that permeates every level of society. Instead of fighting for territory or military conquest, however, the struggle now is for the hearts and minds of people. It is a war over ideas.

Paul Weyrich, a key creator of institutions on the right, has said:

It’s a war of ideology, it’s a war of ideas, and it’s a war about our way of life. It has to be fought with the same intensity and dedication as you would fight a shooting war.

And Peter Steinfels, who writes a column on religion for the *New York Times*, wrote in *Christianity and Crisis* in 1982 about the:

growth of a network of intellectual institutions that function to

dampen outbreaks of fundamental social criticism. The theory behind this movement is by now well known: that a new class of educated and disaffected “brain workers,” infected with the “adversary culture” they imbibed in college courses or absorbed from a hundred toxic residues of the New Left and the counterculture, will sap the foundations of American foreign policy and domestic economy—unless, that is, this new class can be isolated, browbeaten, discredited, lured, or taught its true interest in a well-financed “war of ideas.” The effective strategists of such a war, or so Irving Kristol advised his business readers in the *Wall Street Journal*, would be dissident members of the new class—to begin with, former leftists like Kristol.

George Weigel are associated with them. Many were Democrats. Many were involved in the civil rights movement. Many opposed the Vietnam War but by the 1970s were on a move to the right; they often were defined as hawks on foreign policy, New Deal on social issues.

Part of the structure on the right for the war of ideas came from a traditional conservative, Paul Weyrich, founder of the Free Congress Foundation and its cable television arm, National Empowerment Television. Weyrich told me in some detail about how he, as a Senate aide, attended a meeting of liberals early in the Nixon administration. He was stunned at how well coordinated their attack on Nixon’s housing program was. And he departed determined to create similar coherence on the right.

Soon he established the Heritage Foundation (where he stayed only a

*Over the past 25 years corporate sources have funded a proliferation of think tanks and institutions to wage a war of ideas.*

Part of the intellectual framework for this activity has been provided by a band of intellectuals called the “neo-conservatives.” They emerged from the New York intellectual debates of the 1930s and gained momentum after the Vietnam War. Such names as Jeane Kirkpatrick, Michael Novak, William Bennett, Richard John Neuhaus, Norman Podhoretz, Midge Decter, and

short time) and is given credit for helping to talk Jerry Falwell into heading an organization called the Moral Majority, which Weyrich named. At Heritage and then his own Free Congress Foundation he has raked in money from the Coors family and Scaife and many other corporations and foundations (the Brady Foundation has given \$2 million to National Empowerment Tele-

vision, part of Weyrich's operation, which does cable television nationally featuring such people as Gingrich, Robert Novak, the NRA, and the Christian Coalition.).

### Using 'Wedge Issues' to Polarize People

Both the neoconservatives and the conservatives have practiced a style of attack that often depends on wedge issues to polarize people. Michael Bauman said it bluntly at an Ethics and Public Policy seminar:

The comments that are most successful today are those that are pointed, that are sharp, that are memorable, and that might make your opponent something of a laughingstock...Logical arguments don't very often win the day...It takes rhetorical power and aggressiveness to mobilize people around your cause.

Irving Kristol told his corporate readers to attack the integrity of critical journalists, not to argue with them. Listen to Weyrich use a wedge issue:

Abortion is the symbol for a cultural cleavage between those with a sense of community and responsibility and the votaries of imperial individualism, between those whose sons fought in Vietnam and those whose sons chanted mantras for the victories of Ho Chi Minh; between those who worship in churches and those who desecrate them; between those who accept our culture and those who seek to tear it down.

Soon feminism and homosexuality joined abortion on the list of wedge issues that divide people politically, religiously, and personally.

The conservatives' pleas for funding were heeded. Over the past 25 years corporate sources have funded a proliferation of think tanks and institutions to wage a war of ideas. The DeVos family of Amway has provided extensive funds for organizations on the right. The powerful Tele-Communications cable television company may start a Christian channel and has talked of supporting National Empowerment Tele-

### Purchasing Power of the Press An Example

Eugene TeSelle

Several conservative Christian publications collectively are the lengthened shadow of one disgruntled Presbyterian, J. Howard Pew. According to the official biographical sketch of him (*Faith and Freedom*, published by Grove City College in 1975), he was the chief funder of three journals in succession.

1. *Christian Economics*, founded in 1950, championed the free market, limited government, and moral constraints on business activities. Already during the 1950s Pew was objecting to the social pronouncements of the Presbyterian Church, trying to limit the church's interest in public affairs, and spreading the word that many members were withholding contributions to the General Assembly until it stopped meddling in secular affairs. This drew forth the famous riposte, "We trust that Mr. Pew will tell these friends in unmistakable terms that The United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and its General Assembly are not for sale" (*Presbyterian Life*, May 15, 1960).
2. *Christianity Today* was founded in 1956, with Pew as chief financial backer. But he criticized its board in 1964 when the periodical seemed to take too soft a stance against the economic, social, and political statements of the Presbyterian General Assembly in Oklahoma City (this was the Assembly that elected its first black Moderator, Edler Hawkins, and responded to issues ranging from nuclear weapons to civil disobedience and the Civil Rights Act of 1964).
3. In 1967 the *Presbyterian Layman* was launched. Its first goal was to fight the Confession of 1967 with its theme of reconciliation and the theology behind it. The Presbyterian Lay Committee continues to receive money from the Pew estate. The reports of the Pew Charitable Trusts indicate that it was given \$325,000 over two years in 1990, and \$375,000 over two years in 1992.

It is said of the intensely congregational Churches of Christ, that "they don't have bishops, they have editors." You get influence and power when enough people read your periodical. That seems to be what has happened in the PC(USA). Until the denomination decided last year to send out a new "every home" periodical, the *Layman* was the only channel of information about the church for many people.



*Eugene TeSelle, a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary and Yale University, is Professor of Church History and Theology at Vanderbilt Divinity School. He is president of the Witherspoon Society, "Presbyterians working for peace and justice, caring for our earth, and helping our Presbyterian Church become more open and inclusive."*

vision which so far has a weak group of cable stations. Domino Pizza's Thomas S. Monaghan heads a foundation that gives away millions to right wing and charismatic Catholic groups. And several foundations have played a crucial part in this funding.

### The 'Four Sisters'

I have spent some time recently looking especially into the "four sisters," as they are called in the industry. These four industrial foundations—Bradley, Olin, Scaife, and Smith Richardson—have played a major and largely unknown role in the war of ideas.

The four foundations have worked together to fund a variety of institutions and together created a new Philanthropic Roundtable that monitors the giving of other foundations and encourages cooperation among conservative foundations. Examples of their joint giving in 1993: \$3.7 million to the American Enterprise Institute; more than \$1 million to Weyrich's Free Congress Foundation; \$995,000 to the Center for the Study of Popular Culture (headed by erstwhile *Ramparts* editors, David Horowitz and Peter Collier, who spend most of their time attacking public broadcasting and progressive college curricula); the Manhattan Institute

for Policy Research—Mayor Rudolph Giuliani’s most helpful think tank—got \$515,000. The National Association of Scholars, conservative faculty, received \$840,000.

By now you must be thinking that I’m either bitter—in spite of hard work the most the late lamented (I hate the word defunct) *Christianity and Crisis* ever got in one year from foundations was \$50,000—or a conspiracy theorist. So let me quote from the *Wall Street Journal* (Oct. 12, 1995), which was concentrating on Richard Mellon Scaife but its comments could be extended to the four foundations:

(Scaife) is nothing less than the financial archangel for the (conservative) movement’s intellectual underpinnings...Current GOP proposals to restrict government regulations, set term limits, revamp welfare and limit civil liability awards all have some roots in Scaife-funded groups.

### *Infiltrating the Church*

As Peter Steinfels put it in the 1982 article quoted above, it took some time for the sponsors of the “war of ideas” to locate their *condottieri*—hired guns—in the field of religion. But they did. And these four foundations—who unlike foundations such as the Lilly Endowment and the Pew Charitable Trusts had never shown any funding interest in matters religious—began to support agencies created to fight the war of ideas within the mainline churches.

One of the first indications of this new development arrived with the publication in 1979 of a tendentious tract called *From Amsterdam to Nairobi: The World Council of Churches and the Third World*. It accused the WCC, among other things, of arming communist terrorists by its humanitarian gifts to the African National Congress in South Africa and the Southwest Africa Peoples Organization in Namibia. (History has since validated the WCC involvement.)

The tract was written by Ernest Lefever, a former staff member at the National Council of Churches who had started the Ethics and Public Policy Center (EPPC) two years earlier. Lefever later ran into trouble in 1981 when President

Reagan nominated him to head the State Department’s Human Rights office. He was not confirmed because it turned out that the Nestle corporation, fighting the boycott of its formula, had given considerably more money to Lefever’s center—which it considered an ally—than he had made public. The EPPC adopted a broader agenda under George Weigel. It received \$760,390 from the four sisters in 1993. The current president is Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state for Latin America affairs during the Reagan administration who was convicted of lying to Congress on the Iran-Contra matter.

Two years later a new bolt. A sensational article in *Reader’s Digest* and two pieces on CBS’s *60 Minutes* red-baited the WCC and the NCC. A new organization, with 89 percent of its funding from three of the four sisters, called In-

stitute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) got credit for provoking the attack. The IRD’s creators featured Roman Catholic Michael Novak, then Lutheran now Catholic Richard John Neuhaus, new Methodist David Jessup and his former SDS colleague, Penn Kemble, not a church member. These Washington insiders made Edmund Robb, a United Methodist evangelist from Texas, president.

### *Finding a New Wedge Issue: ‘Radical Feminism’*

Until communism disappeared as a wedge issue, the IRD pounded away at the churches for their “leftist” tendencies and created denominational variations within the Presbyterian, Episcopal, and United Methodist denominations. IRD has never really been a mem-

### **A Public Apology**

Gil Alexander-Moegerle

Co-Founder of Focus on the Family

I recently heard the Jewish philosopher Dennis Prager say, “Civility requires that responsible members of the various groups that make up a culture have the courage to apologize to the rest of society for bad people within their group.”

I have come to issue such an apology for certain actions and attitudes on the part of the Christian right in general and James Dobson and Focus on the Family in particular:

First, I apologize to the women of America for the sexist attitudes all-too-often displayed by James Dobson and the organization I helped found.

I apologize to African Americans and other ethnic minorities who are concerned by the continuing vestiges of intolerance in the land and by the dangerous role James Dobson, a wealthy, powerful, white, heterosexual male, plays in promoting intolerance.

I apologize to lesbian and gay Americans who are demeaned and dehumanized on a regular basis by the false, irresponsible, and inflammatory rhetoric of James Dobson’s anti-gay radio and print materials.

I apologize to Jewish Americans as well as Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and atheist Americans who are also victims of the dangerous words and divisive political actions of James Dobson, who claims quite falsely that this is a “Christian nation” that should be “ruled” by fundamentalist Christians and their doctrines.

I apologize to the American media, specifically to radio, television, and print reporters, who have been ridiculed and demonized by Dobson and his staff and guests.

I am ashamed of my former colleagues for their attacks on you and for their pattern of slamming the doors of reasonable access in your face. And I encourage you to bang those doors down, to investigate, and to report the truth about the threat James Dobson and other religious extremists pose to the American tradition of tolerance, inclusivity, and the separation of church and state.

And I apologize to my fellow Christian Americans, many of whom have been misled by a man I once loved and trusted. ...I apologize to any American who has felt the sting of James Dobson and the Christian right wagging their holier-than-thou fingers in your face, shrieking that because your views differ from theirs, you are ungodly, evil, and unworthy of the rights of full citizenship.

Please don’t let extremists confuse you about the life and teaching of Jesus. He spoke in love. I regret that Jim [Dobson] and Focus [on the Family] do not.

*From a statement to the press on August 15, 1997, at the Gay and Lesbian Pride Center of Colorado Springs, Colorado.*

bership organization; it has continued to receive most of its funding from the four sisters and a few other foundations, \$448,000—80 percent—in 1994. It continues to follow a strategy of media assaults on the mainline churches. And it appears to have bumped into its new wedge issue, “radical feminism,” with the advent of the Re-Imagining women’s conference in Minneapolis in late 1993. (For a detailed account of the origins of IRD, see my article, “Old Wine, New Bottles: The Institute on Religion and Democracy,” *Christianity and Crisis*, March 21, 1983, reprinted in *Ethics in the Present Tense* [Friendship Press, 1991]).

A third organization, the Institute on Religion and Public Life (RPL), is headed by Neuhaus, now a Roman Catholic priest and longtime protagonist in the church’s war of ideas. His RPL is based in New York and publishes a neo-conservative journal, *First Things*. In it he engages in lively polemics against more liberal religious expressions. RPL got \$690,000 of its \$893,500 budget in foundation grants in 1993 from the four sisters. Together with Michael Novak and George Weigel, Neuhaus forms a sort of Catholic triad that engages in a variety of matters, including personal visits to the Christian Coalition annual gathering to urge moderation and cooperation. All three have been on the IRD board for its lifetime.

Two other organizations deserve brief mention here. One is *Good News*, a bi-monthly magazine published out of Asbury College in Kentucky. It criticizes its own United Methodist Church primarily, but will use material generated by IRD. Most of its money appears to come from individual donations. About 65,000 people receive the magazine free-of-charge, a tactic learned from the Presbyterian Lay Committee (PLC), with its primary office just outside Philadelphia. PLC publishes the bi-monthly *Presbyterian Layman* which goes to an estimated 500,000 readers free. It is noted for its harshly slanted journalism. It is particularly strident on gay and lesbian issues.

The PLC was formed in 1965 by several Presbyterian businessmen unhappy with the Confession of 1967 adopted by the then northern branch of the Pres-

byterian Church. Key among them was J. Howard Pew, for almost 50 years the dominating figure of Sun Oil. Long after his death, the PLC gets an average of \$187,500 a year from the J. Howard Pew part of the Pew Charitable Trusts as a “historic family interest.” It received \$3.758 million from Pew from 1968-1984. Note that IRD, *Good News*, and the *Presbyterian Layman* were the primary purveyors of a negative reading of the Re-Imagining Conference. Once the story reached the major media months after the conference, the issue had already been framed by these three.

### **Neither Illegal nor Immoral, but Imbalanced**

This final thought: none of the above support for groups involved in the war of ideas, including within the churches, is illegal or immoral. But IRD, EPPC, and RPL would not exist without the foundation money. And it is important that we know what is at stake.

An estimable organization called the Churches Center for Theology and

Public Affairs housed at Wesley Theological Seminary struggled in 1994 to fund a budget of \$115,000. The Institute on Policy Studies, clearly on the left of the political debate, has a budget of no more than \$1.5 million. Compare that with Heritage’s \$23 million in 1993 and American Enterprise Institute’s \$13 million.

Never mind corporations. Foundations on the more moderate or progressive side have never made the commitment to funding liberal think-tanks that the conservatives have. The reasons are several. But until they do, the war of ideas—cockamamie as some of them are—will go to those on the right by default. And unchallenged, the agencies created to roil the churches will continue to exact their toll. ▼

*Leon Howell was the editor of the “late lamented” Christianity and Crisis, and currently is a free-lance writer based in Washington, D.C. This article is excerpted from a presentation at the National Cathedral, February 20, 1996.*

## **A gay Roman Catholic priest speaks out for what he believes—**

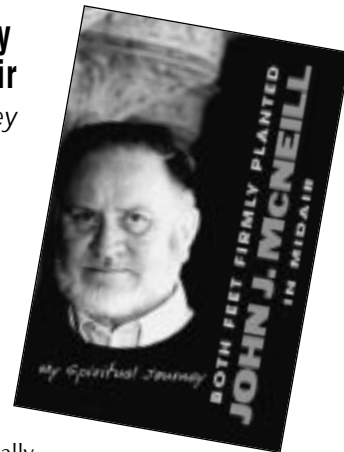
### **Both Feet Firmly Planted in Midair**

*My Spiritual Journey*

**John J. McNeill**

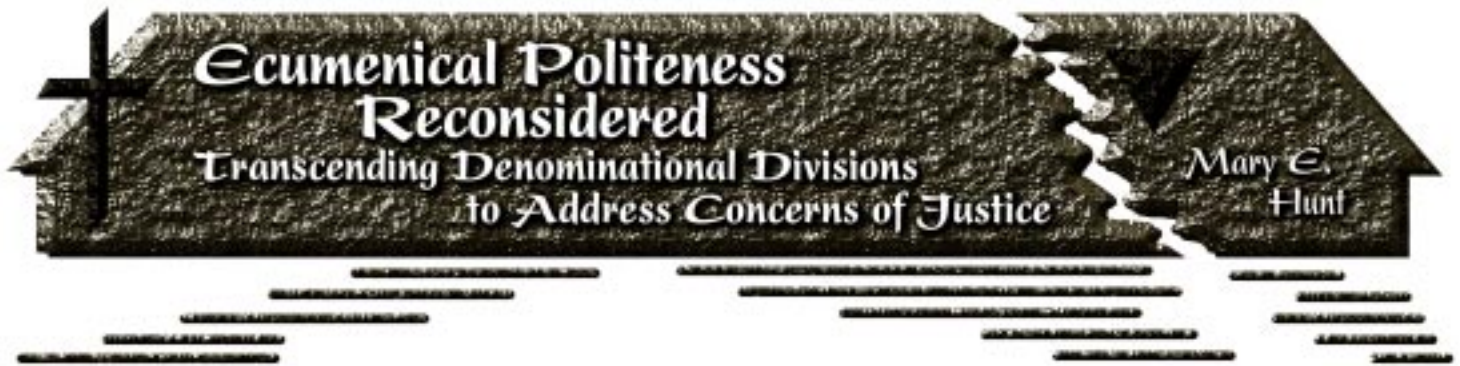
Paper \$18.00

“John McNeill is one of my heroes. He will be remembered as the gay saint in the twentieth century who initiated a Catholic Stonewall while the Church in fear tried to closet him and finally expelled him because he believed that Christianity is fundamentally about kindness and inclusion.”  
—Rev. Dr. Robert Goss, author of *Jesus Acted Up* and co-chairman of the *Gay Men Studies in Religion Group of the American Academy of Religion*



**WESTMINSTER  
JOHN KNOX PRESS**

At your bookstore,  
your Cokesbury bookstore or  
call (800) 227-2872 • [www.wjk.org](http://www.wjk.org)



**E**cumenical politeness is a hallmark of contemporary Christianity. It is a virtue or a vice, depending on your perspective, that keeps denominational lines intact and boundaries clear. The phrase covers a multitude of sins: for example, when and whether to receive the Eucharist in a church other than one's own (a quaint theological notion or an oxymoron, again, depending on one's point of view), whether and how to comment on the inner workings of a denomination other than one's own. Such matters require a certain theological delicacy, what I think of as the etiquette of theology.

Etiquette is clearly socially constructed—customs differ dramatically in regions, cultures, language groups and traditions. Hence, it can and must be deconstructed. Like all etiquette in the late twentieth century, theological manners are changing because the presuppositions on which they were predicated have changed already. Like most manners, ecumenical politeness is taught early, ingrained deeply, and hard to change. It is relied on to keep the theological peace and to keep the Christian community in pieces. A wholesale rethinking is in order as the increasingly globalized, pluralistic religious scene takes shape. Otherwise, ecumenical politeness runs the risk of devolving into irrelevancy.

My attention is drawn to this matter when I, a Roman Catholic feminist theologian, watch from the sidelines as my Protestant sisters and brothers engage in exercises that remind me of the Coliseum. Ecumenical politeness, not to mention time and energy, constrain me from writing to church officials, attending denominational meetings and otherwise joining the fray. Progressive

and conservative forces in the Presbyterian and United Methodist churches, for example, do battle (the bellicose image is unfortunate but warranted) over the ordination of out and proud homosexuals, an issue dear to my heart. Yet I reserve my theological opinions, though they are obvious and well known in some circles, because somehow I reason the struggle is for "them," not for me. Entering into someone else's matters is simply not done, at least not by people with my upbringing, or so I have thought. However, I am reconsidering my previous assumptions and invite others to do the same. A concrete case prompted this reconsideration, a case so obviously egregious that it reminded me of my own repressive denomination.

### "Be Opened"

Mary Callaway Logan

Jesus' command to open the ears of the one who could not hear applies equally to the church, which turns a deaf ear to the radical claim of the gospel to "Be Open."



### A Case in Point: The Termination of Eunice Poethig

**T**he Rev. Dr. Eunice B. Poethig served as the first director of the newly created Congregational Ministries Division (CMD) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). In the fall of 1997, toward the end of her first term, the CMD Committee voted not to renew her contract based on the recommendation of the General Assembly Council's End-of-Term Review Committee. Personnel decisions are made every day in churches, but this one caught my eye because the Rev. Poethig is more than a Presbyterian official, indeed she has been an active participant in ecumenical, academic and social change circles. Despite the fact that the last Presbyterian in my family was my maternal grandfather,

Archibald L. Campbell, I realized that she had not only been dismissed from her parochial post. Rather, she had been effectively removed as a church official with portfolio from a much larger arena, that of feminist Christian women, in which her presence spoke loudly the support of at least some officials of at least one mainline church.

Eunice Poethig, like so many dedicated, competent, savvy women who work as church bureaucrats, was able to straddle the wide divides between and among church members and still get the job done. So many such women labor quietly to “do it all”—fulfill the heavy demands of their jobs, thread their way through the minefields of denominational politics, and still find ways to support the fledgling efforts of progressive women to make change. My experience is that such women do not agree with all that progressive groups would urge, an irony when they pay high prices for their support, but that they are supportive in principle because they know that it is such efforts “out there” that help to make change within structures.

Of course this was the problem—Rev. Poethig attended, and I daresay probably enjoyed, the first Re-imagining Conference in 1993. It was, after all—as history will record against the shrill shrieks of its opponents—a quite respectable, serious conference. Having a Ph.D. in Old Testament from Union Theological Seminary, she participates in the annual American Academy of Religion/Society for Biblical Literature meeting. She has been clear about her personal position in favor of lesbian/gay/bisexual and transgendered people as full members of church and society. She is a supporter of the rights of women to minister in all Christian denominations. In essence, Eunice Poethig embodies all that conservatives worry about in church circles, and she does so with a style and grace that make her, like most powerful and sensitive women, unmanageable. That she got a new Division off the ground, that she is a well qualified church bureaucrat with eight years of experience as the Executive Presbyter of the Presbytery of Western New York, all seem to amount to little in an environment in which ideology is all. So much for common

*Why have we found it necessary to set up every discussion in binary terms, every panel in a pre-constructed, bean-counted fashion, every debate in a win-lose format? What about looking for the strengths in all arguments, paying special attention to those with which we disagree to ferret out their merits?*

courtesy, not to mention justice.

Ecumenical politeness of old would dictate that I send an appropriate note to Eunice bemoaning her fate and wishing her luck. But I think that the ecumenical linkages that bond us permit more now, indeed require more. First, the intricacies of individual church workings need to be mastered by those beyond its limits. While I can tick off the Catholic cardinals and the cardinal sins with ease, I am only now coming to an appreciation of the intricacies of the General Assembly Council (GAC) and CMD, the ways in which Presbyterians conduct their business and the fact that they, like Rome, err on occasion.

This time the procedures were violated, certainly in spirit if not in letter. The GAC Manual of Operations calls for a two to three hour discussion of the matters at hand. Ms. Poethig reports that her twenty-minute interview began with the announcement that the End-of-Term Committee would not recommend a second term. It is not clear that three hours of dialogue would have changed anyone’s mind, but it is important to note that when such violations of due process occur one can suspect that other violations lurk. Most major corporations do better by their long-term employees than that. They are under legal constraints to follow contractual obligations. It is also simply common sense, read: manners.

Second, in such cases of injustice the response must be broader than the individual group affected. Justice for Women, a Presbyterian group that launched a petition drive on Eunice Poethig’s behalf, found that its efforts backfired. On appeal, Rev. Poethig’s request for reinstatement was denied, and her option to have her term extended for several months was revoked, thus making her termination effective immediately. Here the church takes its dubious cue from the business world

in which conventional wisdom has it that one gets a fired employee out of the office as quickly as possible so as to minimize disruption. In this instance, the petitions were disruptive so out she had to go. There was seemingly no effort to conceal the stunning backlash, a chilling reality for those still working in the denomination. For those outside the Presbyterian Church, to steer clear of the whole matter for the sake of ecumenical turf is to be complicit in it.

A larger interdenominational response would not necessarily have changed the decision. However, it would have put Presbyterian Church officials on notice that such behaviors reflect badly on them, perhaps a concern in an era when membership numbers are wavering. Then again, perhaps not. But at least the ecumenical chorus would have sung in full voice that justice within our ranks is as important as the justice we call for outside, and without it our credibility is nil.

Third, in the present theo-political climate it is hard to separate the wheat from the chaff. I do not have inside information from either side in this dispute so as to evaluate the merits of the decision on the basis of the competency of the person involved. But I would argue that, unless and until there is some new consensus on what constitutes a credible job, ideological considerations notwithstanding, this firing will simply be one in a long line. Indeed the Presbyterian line is growing. The Rev. Mary Anne Lundy was removed from her position on the heels of her leadership in the Re-Imagining movement. Where will it end?


### *Working Together Amid Differences*

Universities have been through this for decades, with academic freedom now a respected if sometimes shaky given. Many campuses have suf-

ferred through the agonies of tenure battles, first on the left, then on the right. Happily, they often discover that there is usually a way to live with colleagues with whom one disagrees. We need to develop an ecclesiastical equivalent in these troubled times. It is not simply for the sake of assuring that progressive voices will be heard. It is also against a time when the shoe will be on the other foot and the same justice requirement will apply to conservatives. Intellectual opinions are held with no less fervor than faith, but somehow people manage, albeit not without struggles, to develop ways to live and work together across wide differences, recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of each other as persons and as thinkers. The alternative, of course, is the development of narrow, intellectually closed schools that produce equally narrow, closed students. The religious equivalent of this in any denomination is a nightmare.

Deborah Tannen's book, *The Argument Culture*, might help here. She queries why we have found it necessary to set up every discussion in binary terms, every panel in a pre-constructed, bean-counted fashion, every debate in a win-lose format. What about looking for the strengths in all arguments, paying special attention to those with which we disagree to ferret out their merits? I suggest some elements of this sort of thinking could help us in church circles to ease up a bit on the ideology and realize that we are all in this work because we share some similar goals that grow out of root values. After all, matters of faith are even less certain than matters of science, so surely we could all lighten up some. I do not mean to sell out key issues on which good people disagree.

Taking a page from Tannen, I suggest we give more careful attention to the way in which arguments are constructed so as to see merit even where we disagree. For example, I can appreciate the arguments of anti-choice/pro-life Catholics even though I come down on the other side of the issue. Respecting their rigor and commitment in no way allies me with their point of view. But it does humanize the process and relativizes my claims. How refreshing to think we might all do it!



***WATER -- The Women's Alliance for  
Theology, Ethics, and Ritual***

A feminist educational center and network of justice-seekers, **WATER** brings 15 years of experience to programs, projects, publications, workshops, retreats, counseling and liturgical planning which have helped thousands of people to be part of an inclusive church and society. **WATER** offers fresh insight, abundant opportunities for anyone thirsting to engage in meaningful theological, ethical and liturgical work developed by women.

**WATER**, 8035 13<sup>th</sup> Street, Silver Spring MD  
 Phone: 301-589-2509; Fax: 301-589-3150  
 E:mail: [WATER@hers.com](mailto:WATER@hers.com)  
 Internet: <http://www.hers.com/water>

Join us with a \$35 contribution and receive our newsletter, **WATERwheel**, and be part of the Alliance.

Finally, the puzzling problem of politeness is that it is designed to even the playing field, to put people ahead of ideas, what Professor Krister Stendahl claimed Paul taught, the triumph of love even over integrity. There is a slash and burn mentality in the air on controversial matters—claims to have rooted out the troublesome people with x number gone and so many left to be expelled. It is a language set that has no place, in my judgment, in communities that claim their origin, authority and inspiration in what Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza has called a “discipleship of equals.” Such a community, like the Jesus movement that inspired it, requires more.

Ecumenical politeness remains a useful convention. But as our interdenominational bonds grow, so too do our responsibilities, individual and collective, to shift boundaries and behaviors. It is always dicey to offer an opinion from outside of a community of faith. But

this is a dimension of ecumenism that has seldom been addressed, namely, just how we can be supportive without being disrespectful. I hope Protestant feminists will not hesitate to address Catholic injustices, though clearly they cannot do so with the same vigor and insider information that I employ. If we cannot do this in our own small ponds here at home, I shudder to think of the ecumenical faux pas ahead in a globalized church. ▼

**Mary E. Hunt** is Co-director of **WATER**, the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (see ad, this page). She writes regularly for **WATERwheel**, a quarterly publication. This previously unpublished article is concurrently being published in the Network News of the Witherspoon Society.



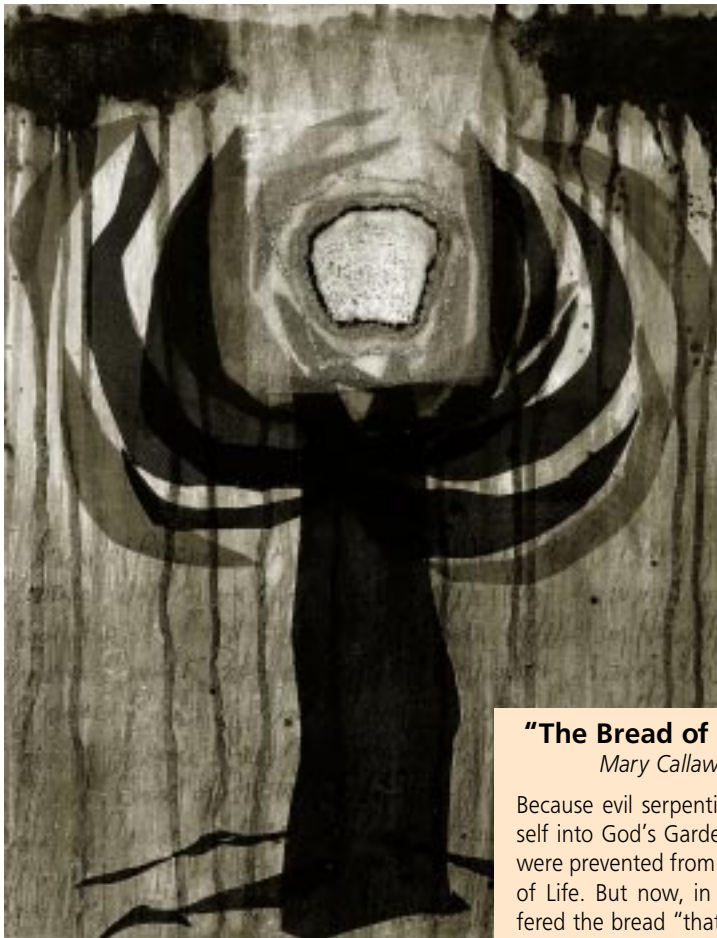
# A Soulforce Response

Mel White

*"That they all may be One; as Thou art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be One in us: that the world may believe that Thou has sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are One." John 17:21-22, KJV*

## *Satyagraha:*

*Truth-force or soul-force (sat, truth; agraha, firmness); non-violent direct action; passive resistance; civil disobedience; non-violent non-cooperation.*



### **"The Bread of Eternal Life"**

*Mary Callaway Logan*

Because evil serpentine insinuated itself into God's Garden, Adam and Eve were prevented from eating of the Tree of Life. But now, in Jesus, we are offered the bread "that endures for eternal life" (Jn 6:27). We are given an eternal perspective that makes the evil of the cross (a tree of death) finite and the good of resurrecting love infinite.

During the summer, fundamentalist Christian organizations escalated their attacks on lesbian and gay Americans, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on ads in major newspapers to convince the nation that we are "sick" and "sinful," that we can and should be "cured," that our rights and protections should be denied. At the same time, mainstream denominations seemed to echo the fundamentalist call for jihad against God's gay and lesbian children. The July decision by the United Methodist Judicial Council giving legal, coercive force to the Social Principle prohibiting "homosexual unions" means, in the words of Jimmy Creech, "...the Church of John Wesley, founded upon principles of social justice and piety, will now be prosecuting pastors for praying God's blessings upon same-sex couples who make covenants of love and fidelity." And in August, more than 500 Anglican bishops meeting at the Lambeth world conference voted to condemn homosexual practice as "incompatible with Scripture," prohibiting the "legitimizing or blessing" of same-sex unions and the "ordination of those involved in such unions."

We are tempted to answer these misinforming voices with equally colorful soundbites of our own; however, rushing to do battle with angry words and clenched fists will not help our cause, let alone bring One-ness to the Body of Christ. Doubting the integrity or debating the motives of our adversaries is another dead end. We must not react, but we must respond. The anti-homosexual rhetoric divides and bloodies

Christ's body and leads to intolerance, suffering, and death for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered Americans. It must be confronted and the Soulforce principles of relentless nonviolent resistance as taught by Jesus, Gandhi and King show us how.

**First, we must see our adversaries as children of the same loving God who created us, our brothers and sisters in Christ, members of our own family.**

Neither Pat Robertson and his fundamentalist colleagues nor the Anglican bishops meeting in Canterbury are evil. They are victims of misinformation (as we have been). Our goal is not to triumph over them but to be reconciled with them. Ending segregation was not Martin Luther King's primary goal. His goal was to help bring in the "beloved community" where he and the late Governor George Wallace could live as neighbors. Our goal is not to overwhelm, censor, coerce or even be victorious over our adversaries. Our goal is to be reconciled with them. No one wins until we are One again.

**Second, when untruth threatens, we respond with truth.**

There is a positive side to this new round of anti-homosexual propaganda. One of my non-religious, heterosexual friends was enraged by the summer's avalanche of blatant untruth. "How can they say these things?" he asked. In fact, they've been saying these things for years but saying them virtually in secret on their TV and radio programs, in their direct mail campaigns and fund-raising appeals.

Now, the untruth is out there where our friends and neighbors can read it for themselves, and though the untruth confuses many it will also win allies to our cause. We have one task only: respond to the untruth with truth. Before we respond to the anti-homosexual propaganda, we must hear it carefully. Find the statements that are clearly untrue, and answer them with truth. And where they speak the truth, even if painful, we must acknowledge it. Inadvertently, they have invited us to "a new national discussion of homosexuality." Let's accept!

## Thoughts on the L/G/B/T Religious Movement

Mark Bowman

In physics we learn that every action produces what?

*An equal and opposite reaction.*

When you try to drive a car forward or change the direction of a moving car, what creates resistance?

*Inertia.*

When a plane tries to take off, what force resists?

*Gravity.*

Are inertia and gravity unusual phenomena?

*No, they are natural phenomena.*

In social change, where do you find resistance to change?

*In religious institutions.*

In the conflict over homosexuality, where is the most resistance?

*The so-called religious right.*

Is the religious right an unusual phenomenon?

*No, it's the natural resistance to change.*

As the car tries to move faster, what is the effect of inertia?

*It appears stronger.*

As the plane tries to fly higher, what is the effect of gravity?

*It appears stronger.*

Now, if you are trying to make the car go faster, what do you do?

Attack inertia?

*No, you give the car more forward power.*

If you're trying to make the plane fly higher, do you attack gravity?

*No, you give the plane more lift power.*

What we should be doing now is increasing power and lift—cultivating allies, creating networks, and building a movement that will overcome the church's resistance to change. We must engage in positive, forward-looking movement, inviting folks to join us on the plane that is soaring up.

**Mark Bowman** is the publisher of *Open Hands* and director of the *Reconciling Congregation Program* within the United Methodist Church. This is excerpted from a presentation to the *Religious Leaders Roundtable of the national l/g/b/t movement* on July 23, 1998, in Washington, D.C.



**Third, when untruth threatens, we respond with truth in love.**

A Christian version of Soulforce finds its basis in Jesus' words: "Love your enemies." Gandhi defines that love as refusing violent actions, violent words, even violent thoughts against our adversaries. King said love must control fist, tongue, and heart. To win the minds and hearts of the nation, and to bring hope and healing to Christ's body, our g/l/b/t community must take the moral high ground. We must learn to out-love those who caricature and condemn us. We should consider giv-

ing up our angry chants and nasty gestures, our mean-spirited banners and inflammatory T-shirts, our belligerent marches and fiery speeches. These are acts of violence and meeting untruth with violence only escalates the war.

I know the men and women behind this new war against us—Pat Robertson, James Dobson, Gary Bauer, D. James Kennedy, Beverly LaHaye. Whatever their motives, they truly believe that we are sick, sinful, and a threat to the nation, that we can and should be "cured." They have not taken seriously the scientific, historical, and biblical research that demonstrates clearly that God

created us and loves us exactly as we are. It is our job to help them discover this new truth.

Just decades ago, many of our current adversaries were misusing the Bible to support segregation. The folks behind these anti-homosexual ads are as ignorant about homosexuals as Governor Wallace and Sheriff "Bull" Conner were ignorant about African-Americans. King didn't yell back at his enemies. He didn't call them bigots or liars. He didn't waste time hating them or plotting their destruction. Dr. King demonstrated the truth about African-Americans by his loving response to the untruth. We must demonstrate the truth about homosexuals by the way we respond to the war of words being waged against us. We must not hate or fear those who misunderstand us. We must lovingly liberate them from the untruth that holds them hostage.

#### **Fourth, when untruth threatens, we respond with truth in love relentlessly.**

We will not confront the untruth effectively until we have responded with relentless determination. For too long it's been a war of words. They launch their missives. We counterstrike. They take out ads. We respond with ads of our own or we hold a rally, a demonstration, a benefit, or a one-day march—then thinking we have advanced the cause, we all go out to party.

*Soulforce calls us to a far more difficult and demanding task.*

First, we make a list of their dangerous and deadly untruths. Second, we do our homework, preparing our answers to each untruth with carefully researched truth. Third, we accept their offer of "a new national discussion of homosexuality" and ask them to join us at the table in a mutual search for truth. Fourth, if they refuse to join us at the table; or if, when there, they refuse to negotiate seriously an end to their anti-homosexual campaign, we take direct nonviolent actions that will convince them (and the nation) of our sincerity and compel them to join us at the table.

Look at the fifteen organizations listed at the bottom of the summer's anti-homosexual ads. These are the

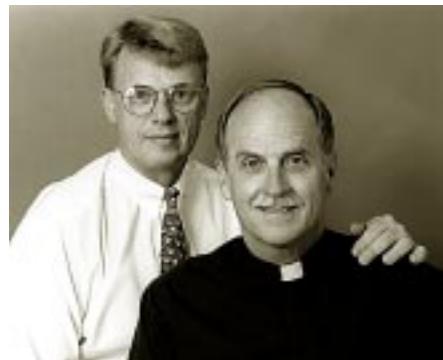
nation's primary sources of misinformation, not just about homofolk but about other minorities, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the separation of church and state. In the name of "saving it," our Christian brothers and sisters have become not just opponents of God's lesbian and gay children, but opponents of the nation, a very real threat to democracy.

We must surround these Christian organizations with truth in love relentlessly, not just for our sake but for the future of the country. One day protests will not do it. Ad campaigns will fail. No one cares if *our* one-day march is bigger than *their* march. In South Africa and India, Gandhi led his people in relentless direct actions to demonstrate their sincerity and to win friends to their cause. Refusing to give up until their truth prevailed, King's "children" faced water hoses, police dogs, beatings, jail terms, and lynchings. Our time has come. We are second class citizens in our own country. Our freedom is at stake. Our lives are on the line. The nation is in peril. It is time for a new strategy of relentless nonviolent resistance.


#### ***The Way of Non-Violence***

Gandhi and King both began their civil rights campaigns by training their allies in nonviolence. Marchers signed vows that carefully proscribed behavior or they weren't allowed to march. Direct actions, once begun, were not ended until the goal was accomplished even if it meant imprisonment, suffering and death.

We must re-discover and apply their Soulforce rules. I don't know what will happen to us and to our allies when we take nonviolence seriously. Gandhi says "Just take the first step and the rest will follow." It is time to try. Thinking ourselves safe in our closets, we are sleeping through a revolution. The Soulforce guidelines are clear. Truth cannot prevail until those who hold that truth are willing to live and die for it. The Body of Christ will be One again when we learn to outlove our enemies whatever the cost. ▼



*Mel White, pictured with his partner in life and in ministry, Gary Nixon (L.), is the author of Stranger at the Gate: To Be Gay and Christian in America, describing his experience working with and writing for the most conservative Christian leaders in the U.S. while struggling with his homosexuality. He is last year's recipient of the national ACLU's Civil Liberties Award for his application of Soulforce principles to our struggle, and is Justice Minister of the UFMCC. He may be contacted at P.O. Box 4467, Laguna Beach, CA 92652 or via e-mail at RevMel@aol.com or visit his website: [www.soulforce.org](http://www.soulforce.org)*

  
The "picket, pray and play" place  
with ecumenicity at its heart.

**Resting and Reveling in  
God: The Spirit of Play**  
(For gay and bisexual men)  
John McNeill  
and Chris Glaser  
**January 7 - 10, 1999**

**Peacemaker Training  
Institute**  
(For young adults 17 - 25)  
**January 11 - 19**

**Keeping the Faith:  
Religious Issues and  
Sexual Assault**  
Marie M. Fortune  
**April 12 - 13**

Located on the beautiful Kittatinny Ridge of  
eastern PA, 85 miles from New York City and  
Philadelphia. Facilities for group/personal  
retreats available. For information contact:  
**Kirkridge**  
2495 Fox Gap Rd., Bangor, PA 18013  
Tel.(610) 588-1793 [www.kirkridge.org](http://www.kirkridge.org)



*"Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us."*

Mark 9:38-40

Every August from the time I was seven until I was twelve, my stepfather piled our family into his old Chrysler and drove us from Ft. Riley, Kansas, to his family home in Amory, Mississippi, to pick cotton. I have to confess that my cousins and I picked little cotton, but we had a great time raiding the watermelon patch and avoiding work. We stayed in my Aunt Pearl and Uncle Opal's farmhouse, which had no indoor plumbing. On my first visit, I did not know about the chamber pot under the beds, so, one night, when I had to relieve myself, I headed for the outhouse in the field out back. It was a moonless night, and in that opaque darkness, even little squirrels sounded like giant bears.

How do we navigate in the world when our familiar methods of finding our way dissolve?

We often set faith at odds with the night, as if faith always illuminated life like the sun and gave us clear choices: good or evil, us or them. We need our faith most, however, when old ways of knowing fail us—when we face confusing and anguishing choices. In these moments we need faith that sustains us through our human limits, through the edges of our knowing and understanding—where our fears lurk. Such sustaining faith is like a sliver of moonlight, just enough glow to help us keep going, even when we are uncertain about our footing.

The Christian tradition has tragic moments when our obsession with cer-

tainty of faith inflicted great harm and destroyed many lives. The obsession with certainty leads to the oversimplification of people's lives and the lean toward self-righteousness.

Linda Petrocelli, who directs the global sharing of resources for the United Church of Christ, once told a story of an experience in Catholic grammar school. Sister Mary Robert Cecilia gave a lesson on the importance of Catholic faith by concluding that *everyone*, EVERYONE, even Lutherans and Episco-

*How do we navigate in the world when our familiar methods of finding our way dissolve?*

pals, were going to hell because they were NOT Catholic. When she got home from school that evening, Linda's mom asked her, "Linda, what are you grateful for today?" a question she often asked her. Linda replied, "I am grateful that Sister Mary Robert Cecilia is not God."

Reducing the world to clear polarized choices is born of the need to control; it is not born of love. Faith in God's grace is not a guarantee of certainty; it is a promise that whatever we face, God is with us—no matter how terrifying the night. And sometimes, the night full of terrors can be exceedingly long.

We need each other, even as we stumble together in the night. We cannot avoid forever going out into the

night if we live in this world, but Jesus reminds us that the stranger, all those who speak the truth, can expel our demons of denial, self-righteousness, and control. Venturing into the night teaches us the limits of our control. Courage to venture out leads us to divine mystery, and we learn to trust that power which transcends our limits. In that mystery, we find a sliver of moonlight lighting our way.

For as we find the courage to go out into the night, we journey in the confidence that our salvation is promised by God and sealed in the life of Jesus Christ, who said to us that anyone who is not against us is for us, even those we do not know or understand.

The church has too often depended on certainty to decide who is in our community and who is out. We have been preoccupied with who is authorized to act in the name of Christ and who is not, rather than on the quality of works we ourselves do in Christ's name. We cannot purge violence and hate by counting police arrests and convictions, and building more prisons. We cannot take care of families by figuring out how much we can cut from our social welfare policies, rather than by asking what mothers and children need to thrive in our society. The survivors of sexual abuse and domestic violence who have faced their own long nights are unauthorized exorcists forcing us to face demons that possess our families. We cannot under-

stand loving faithfully by lauding heterosexual marriage and condemning homosexual relationships, instead of asking what we might learn from seeing how love is made manifest in any relationship. We need to know how life is enhanced, pain and suffering healed, creativity encouraged, promises kept, and each person able to flourish. Under the lens of those criteria, many marriages would fail and many same-sex relationships would stand as examples to us all.

Gay and lesbian Christians are the unauthorized exorcists who have revealed how broken our tradition has been about sexuality. We must purge the demons of shame, guilt, control, and abuse from our sexuality by making space for all to speak honestly about how we love and fail to love. The promise of our faith is that, somehow, as we stumble along together, God is with us, like the moonlight. For to work in Christ's name is, finally, to trust the moon to rise in the night. We will never know certainty, but the moonlight is more than enough.

The moonlight reveals to us the unexpected, what we ordinarily cannot see. The moonlight supports our courage to make new discoveries; and with new discoveries come joy, generosity, and great curiosity. When we find the mystery and joy in the night, we have found the full moon, the light that shows us the unauthorized exorcists and the open spaces where still new discoveries await us. Let us be on our adventurous, perilous, and life-giving journey in the night.

Let us walk in the moonlight together. ▼

*Rita Nakashima Brock is Director of the Bunting Institute at Radcliffe College in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She is a feminist theologian (and served as a leader at the first Re-Imagining Conference) and member of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This article was excerpted from a sermon delivered October 23, 1995, during the Disciples' General Assembly in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.*



### **"Exiled in the House of Love"**

"As so many of my collages come together with unexpected images, this spinning figure is whirling between light and darkness, between the inside and the outside of the house of love—simply between. This is God's Beloved, as we all are, yet a feeling of exile may interfere with the experience of God's love."

Mary Callaway Logan



## Outreach

In Memory of Matthew Shepard (1976-1998)

### The Need to Pray Always and Not Lose Heart

Chris Glaser

“Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart” Luke 18:1.

If ever we needed a parable to keep us from losing heart, it is now.

We were confronted with a modern crucifixion this fall. A twenty-one-year-old gay University of Wyoming student was severely beaten as he begged for his life and hung on a post, exposed to the nearly freezing elements for eighteen hours before discovered by passersby. This is what they do to unwanted coyotes in Wyoming, kill one and put it on a post as a warning to other coyotes that they are not welcome. This is what the Romans did to activists of Jesus’ day, hung them on crosses where they died of exposure along the road to warn passersby that those who would change the status quo were not welcome. This is what the ancient Hebrews used to do to a goat, projecting their sins onto the goat and excommunicating it into the wilderness to die from exposure to the elements.

We feel helpless hearing of Matthew Shepard’s suffering. With the vulnerable but relentless widow seeking justice at the hands of an arrogant judge in the parable that Jesus told about our need to pray always and not to lose heart (Lk 18:18-8), we cry to God and to anyone who will listen, “Grant us justice against our opponents.”

University and state officials in Wyoming kept describing Michael’s death as “an isolated incident.” But the feeling I had in my gut as if someone’s fist had hit it with full force told me this gay-bashing was not an isolated incident. The whole message of spirituality is that there are no isolated incidents. Everything that happens is part of a fabric, and this incident is part of a shroud of prejudice that would bury us all.

This summer we saw ads from the religious right that would portray their Nazi-like movement to extinguish homosexuality as if it were a healing rather than a killing ministry, and even dare to claim themselves as victims of those who would deny them their rights to administer hate in the form of repressive legislation.

The religious right has resurrected a term used in Nazi Germany against those who would taint the German race, “culture wars.” The religious right has launched what they call a culture war against gay people, against women who make their own reproductive choices, against those who believe in the separation of church and state. Disguising themselves as victims, they are the wolves in sheep’s clothing that Jesus warned about in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15).

These ravenous wolves arrayed against us are not healthy people. They are gaybashers trying to prove their holiness at the expense of others, namely us. Their weapons are not clubs nor guns, but the Bible and church politics.

“God, grant us justice against our opponents.”

But it’s too easy to point to the extremists who want to do us in, such as the religious right and sick personalities. Just as there are no isolated incidents, there are no isolated extremists. No gay-basher—whether on the street or in a pulpit or in office—would be able to do their violent deeds were it not for the support of the mainstream. Virtually every gay-basher cites religious reasons for their behavior, whether it is to take away our lives, our livelihoods in the church, our loving marriages, or our rights to live under protection of law.

In polls, most Americans say they support gay civil rights. At the same time, most Americans say they believe homosexuality is a sin. Thus the church plays the culprit behind both the votes of legislators and electorates and the violence of gay-bashers. As Matthew Shepard grew up and became aware of his sexual identity, our churches repeatedly sent the message to him that he was unacceptable to God in their various pronouncements against homosexuality. More fatally, they sent the same hostile message to his assailants.

“O God,” we pray, “Grant us justice against our opponents.”

Much of what I have done in my own ministry has been for the sake of young people like Matthew Shepard. I never wanted to see another young gay person go through what I had to as a child and adolescent, lonely and afraid, questioning my worth and my belovedness in the sight of God and family and the family of faith. The welcoming congregations movement has shared the same burden. What we have done, we have done for the sake of our posterity, our unknown lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered children.

I remember one young man brought into my office by his foster father when I was Director of the Lazarus Project of West Hollywood Presbyterian Church. First I met with the father, then I met with his teenage son. Years later, when I was on a panel at the Los Angeles Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center, a young man in his twenties came up to me and said, “You probably don’t remember me, but my Dad brought me in to see you when I first became aware that I was gay. You have no idea what that meeting meant to me. You were the first gay person I ever met, and you became a role model for me.” He made my day.

Three weeks before Shepard’s brutal death, after I preached at MCC L.A., a man came up and began, “You probably don’t remember me, but many years ago I brought my foster son in to meet you when you were still at West Hollywood Presbyterian Church.” I told him of running into his son at the Center and how glad I had been to hear from him again. A little apprehensive because of AIDS, I asked after the son. “Oh, he’s doing fine,” the father said, “He lives in Mexico now. You made a difference. You kept him from going the route of his brother who got onto the street and into drugs.”

This story serves as a parable about our need to pray always and not to lose heart.

WE have made a difference. *Open Hands* and the welcoming congregations movement have made a difference. If there are no “isolated incidents” when it comes to tragedies such as a young gay man’s death this fall, there are no “isolated incidents” when it comes to resurrections such as this foster son’s life as a result of our ministry. At times you may feel isolated,

but you are a thread in the fabric of a rainbow flag that will liberate us all. Together we serve the church and the l/g/b/t community as a living parable about our need to pray always and not to lose heart. ▼

*Chris Glaser served as the founding director of the Lazarus Project, a ministry of reconciliation between the church and the l/g/b/t community. This is excerpted and adapted from a sermon delivered to West Hollywood Presbyterian Church in California, Oct. 18, 1998, in celebration of more than 20 years of ministry of the Lazarus Project.*



## Health

### Discerning the Nearness of God

#### *Lectio Divina and AIDS*

Patricia Hoffman

“There was always this big chasm between God and everyone else,” Art said, reflecting on his past experiences in the church. “The message was, ‘You’re broken and God isn’t.’ In Spiritual Questing I’ve discovered our unity in God that transcends whether we’re broken or not. In this group the focus is off of the brokenness and on the wholeness. We’re on a path toward wholeness.”

It was deeply gratifying to me as the chaplain at AIDS Care to hear Art’s observation after three years of participation in Spiritual Questing groups. From the first group, which was eight gay men, I could see that alienation was a major issue—alienation from self, God, and others. During our weekly meetings some expressed difficulty accepting their own feelings as good and trustworthy. Others struggled with images of a distant and judgmental God. Most, if not all, have told painful stories of familial and social abuse.

The idea for the Spiritual Questing group began to hatch seven years ago. I had just moved from Los Angeles up the coast to the quiet city of Ventura. That summer my husband and I spent a week on retreat in the desert at St. Andrew’s, a Benedictine Abbey, where we were introduced to a group *lectio divina* process. At the end of the week, as we drove out of the Abbey grounds, I said, *lectio divina* could be a wonderful gift in the gay community. I thought of myself offering it, but could not imagine a setting. I was a lay woman who had worked in ecumenical social change ministries. Leading spiritual support groups had not been part of my life history. But a year of volunteering for AIDS Project Los Angeles as a hospital visitor had opened me to new possibilities. A year after that retreat at St. Andrew’s, I was in my first extended unit of Clinical Pastoral Education, training to be a Chaplain in AIDS ministry.

In the group practice of *lectio divina*, participants hear a brief passage from Scripture or some other reflective reading and notice a word or phrase that attracts them. They stay with that word or phrase, repeating it silently. Each person is invited to share their word or phrase. The passage is read again and participants are invited to notice how the word or phrase touches them. After three minutes of silence, people in the circle are invited to share how the passage as a whole touches

them. There is a third reading in which they are asked to be open to an invitation that may come to them. Following the silence, participants are invited to share what came to them. The session concludes with each person praying—silently or aloud—for the person next to them, with special reference to what that person shared.

*Lectio divina* delivers back to a wounded community the authority to hear God’s word to them. The spoken word from written scripture that meets a person’s heart becomes the voice of the Sacred brought near. As it says in Deuteronomy 30:14, “The word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.”

More than ninety percent of the men and women who have been part of Spiritual Questing during the past three years have been unrelated to a religious community, though raised in ones as varied as Roman Catholic to Southern Baptist to Reform Judaism. Spiritual Questing has, as one man told me, “Given me permission to be spiritual.” He and all the others who have come are people of spirit. Always were. Spiritual Questing offers people who have been wounded in so many ways a welcoming setting that suggests, this spiritual questing is for you. It is your right. It is your inheritance if you wish to take it.

Luke has an account of Jesus and a woman who had hemorrhaged for 12 years. She was considered unclean because of the bleeding. When Jesus stopped in the midst of the crowd to ask who had touched his garment, she had bravely said that it was her. He then addressed her as “daughter of Abraham.” Calling her a daughter of Abraham delivered the woman back to her status as a member of the community.

What have I wanted as week after week I showed up to form the chairs in a circle, set out the candles, and find yet another good *lectio* passage? I have wanted to deliver men and women in the AIDS-affected community back to their status as sons and daughters of Abraham. ▼

*Patricia Hoffman serves as Chaplain with AIDS Care in Ventura County. She wrote AIDS and the Sleeping Church: A Journal, published by Eerdmans in 1995. She also wrote AIDS Ministry: A Practical Guide for Pastors, for the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries. She offers consultations and trainings in Spiritual Questing groups and retreats for inclusivity. She can be reached at 805/643-0446, or by e-mail at [choffman@compuserve.com](mailto:choffman@compuserve.com)*



Chaplain Pat Hoffman (second from left) leads Spiritual Questing group at AIDS Care in Ventura, California.



## Campus

### From "Jeffrey" to "Angels"

#### Education for Gay/Lesbian Advocacy in a Theological Seminary

J. Cy Rowell

Immediately before the start of my 1998 spring semester religious education seminar on human sexuality, Paul Rudnick's "Jeffrey" was produced by a local theater. After the seminar had concluded another theater produced Tony Kushner's "Angels in America-Part I." Those two plays served as the unintended but useful contextual brackets for the seminar. This was the third time since 1993 that this course had been offered, and the first one coinciding with relevant stage productions.

Six of the ten general sessions focused on issues in basic human sexuality: creation theology, issues in feminism and the men's movement, sexuality education for churches, etc. Four of the sessions were devoted to gay/lesbian issues. My challenge here was to be an advocate for gay and lesbian persons in the midst of the so-called "objective" nature of higher education. The solution was to be open in the course syllabus about my goals, one of which was that "all of us will have opportunity to deal with our understandings of and feelings about gay and lesbian persons."

I added: "How and to what purposes a minister gives leadership to her/his congregation with regard to understanding and accepting gay/lesbian persons will be as much, if not more, a function of one's feelings and commitments than it will be a function of one's theology and intellectual understandings." Another approach to the advocacy focus was to ask students to sign a learning covenant in which we promised to be open with one another and to treat each other with respect.

The "Jeffrey" play, seen by half the students at the theater or in video at my urging before the start of the course, raised their awareness of their own feelings. "I felt uncomfortable seeing a man in his underwear," a young man noted with some surprise, while at the same time commenting that slick ads of women in lingerie were commonly accepted. And the long kiss between two men at the end of the play made many students uncomfortable.

One issue in doing education for advocacy is the risk implicit in the "advocate" presuming she/he can speak for "others." The key is to have those "other" voices actually present in the class. Throughout the semester, the one openly gay student in the class helped us to be honest and to hear a different voice. The highlight for all the students was the session in which we heard the life stories of three invited guests: a gay artistic director (whose has a liberal minister father) of a live theater, a gay caterer who has been in a partnership for twelve years, and the lesbian founder of a gay/lesbian employee support group of a large corporation, who brought along her young adult son and the current gay president of the support group. Their responses to two questions—"What is your life

story?" and "What role, if any, did church/religion play in that story?"—provided untold insights for the seminary students.

Toward the end of the course students planned and led presentations on topics related to either human sexuality in general or particular homosexual themes. Of the ten presentations, six examined gay issues, including the coming out process, when parents come out, holy union rituals, ordination, and congregational educational programs. In addition there were two presentations on AIDS, one on sexuality for the single person, and one on sexuality education in the church.

The seminar's final session began with an ordained gay minister telling his story, describing the gifts and graces of being a gay minister, and making suggestions for straight ministers about their ministry to gays and lesbians. The concluding worship included a litany of thanks to God for "our new friends, those gay and lesbian persons who have shared their lives with us." It ended with "We thank you and commit ourselves to being your witnesses of love and mercy in this world."

Though the semester had ended officially, most of the students voluntarily attended the stage production of "Angels in America" as a way to wrap up the course. Their response to "Angels" (as to "Jeffrey") was positive, though there was general consensus that before the seminar they most likely would not have gone to "Angels" (or "Jeffrey"), but now that they had been through the course, they were ready to "hear" the play and in fact, were able to critique it with appreciation.

What happened to these students? The one openly gay man found more acceptance and support in this course than at any time in his seminary experience. The other students found their boundaries being pushed open. They all dealt in some way with their own sexuality and its impact on their perceptions of gay and lesbian persons. Some were moved to a public commitment to affirming gay/lesbian persons.

My conclusion? The theological seminary is an appropriate context for exploring issues in gay/lesbian understanding and fostering advocacy for gay and lesbian persons. ▼



J. Cy Rowell is professor of Religious Education at Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas



## Connections

### Homosexuality, European Churches, the Ecumenical Movement, and the WCC Meeting in Harare

Robert C. Lodwick

In Europe, disparity characterizes the way various churches view homosexuality. Protestant churches range from full acceptance (e.g. Remonstrant Brotherhood, Netherlands) to rejection (e.g. Greek Evangelical Church). The majority of

churches, however, are in the discussion stage, particularly where there is an active gay Christian group pressing the issue. The (Anglican) Church of England faces sharp controversy, whereas the (Lutheran) Church of Sweden is positive. In many European countries, a civil marriage ceremony is required and a religious blessing is optional. In a number of churches individual pastors are blessing Holy Unions.

Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches deny the issue, even opposing legislation for the civil rights of homosexuals and viewing the issue as part of the “western Protestant agenda.” Roman Catholic congregations follow the Vatican position, although some individual priests and parishes are reaching out to the gay and lesbian community as in the United States. Bisexuality and transgender issues are not part of the current discussion in most churches in Europe.

In Geneva, Switzerland, I was part of C+H (Christian + Homosexual), an ecumenical group that meets monthly. *Homosexual* or *homophile* is the preferred word rather than *gay*. C+H has published a statement dealing with homosexuality from biblical, social, and church perspectives, and is now preparing a contemporary Confession of Faith for the group.

Geneva is home to many ecumenical bodies, such as the World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation, and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. At present, the World Council of Churches (WCC) is struggling with the issue of homosexuality at its 8th Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe in December. In his public declarations, Zimbabwe President Mugabe is exceedingly homophobic, and local gays and lesbians have been hounded and harassed. The two largest Dutch Protestant churches have launched a campaign to support the rights of Zimbabwe homosexuals, while three smaller Dutch denominations have expressed solidarity with Zimbabwe gays and lesbians through a letter-writing campaign. President Mugabe’s statements have prompted two Dutch Churches not to take part in the WCC Assembly. Some USA member churches have also questioned holding the Assembly in Zimbabwe.

In the Assembly program, there will be a *Padare*, a market place of ideas, where groups can share their stories, activities, and concerns, such as environmental issues, debt repayment, racial justice, women’s role in church and society, and other vital issues. Gay and lesbian groups have been accepted for the *Padare*. The UFMCC plans to offer a seminar telling its story and describing its remarkable ministry. Several member churches will staff a bookstand with publications about human rights and homosexuality. Unfortunately, many Zimbabwean Christians see this as an affront to their cultural sensitivities. Orthodox Churches are equally upset that these groups have been approved for the *Padare*. No doubt there will be lively discussion!

This Assembly will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first World Council Assembly and, hopefully, the 50th anniversary of the UN Charter on Human Rights—a golden opportunity to speak against the discrimination of homosexuals. Many of us believe, however, that the most important task of ecumenical assemblies regarding the issues of sexual orientation is to strengthen the climate in which ongoing debates can take place. While individual churches have their own

traditions and experiences and determine their own life, the ecumenical movement’s task is to provide a forum for sharing of insights and searching for a common mission in response to our calling from Jesus Christ.

Many of those preparing the WCC assembly realize that, given the wide divergence of opinion, the primary task will be to encourage dialogue and find common words to enable us to discuss these issues with sensitivity among fellow Christians with different opinions. This debate may represent a moment of testing for the ecumenical movement—whether we do indeed acknowledge that the fellowship is not only to encourage us in the things on which we agree but to wrestle with those things about which we have differences of opinion and to hear each other with respect.

The time has not come for votes in plenary sessions, as this could give a negative judgment, effectively shutting a door. The only possible ecumenical action is to promote continuing dialogue—to keep the door open. Even that may be difficult in Harare. ▼



*Robert C. Lodwick is an ordained Presbyterian minister and most recently served the PCUSA as Area Associate for Europe with offices in the Ecumenical Center in Geneva. Bob and his wife, Hedy, have long been active members of More Light Presbyterians.*

### Coming Out as Sacrament

Chris Glaser  
Paper \$14.00

Chris Glaser proposes that coming out has biblical precedence and sacramental dimensions. Using personal and biblical illustrations, he discusses coming out as an act of vulnerability, much like the sacrificial offerings of ancient Israel, that invokes God’s presence and effects reconciliation. Includes original liturgical material and a ritual for coming out.



### Unleashed

The Wit and Wisdom of Calvin the Dog  
*Calvin T. Dog with Chris Glaser*  
Cloth \$12.00

Calvin’s wit and honest observations help us recognize our human plight. Calvin offers a philosophy of life that has universal applications, and speaks to many of the social and cultural issues of our day.

Also by Glaser: **Uncommon Calling**, Paper, \$20.00  
**Coming Out to God**, Paper, \$12.00



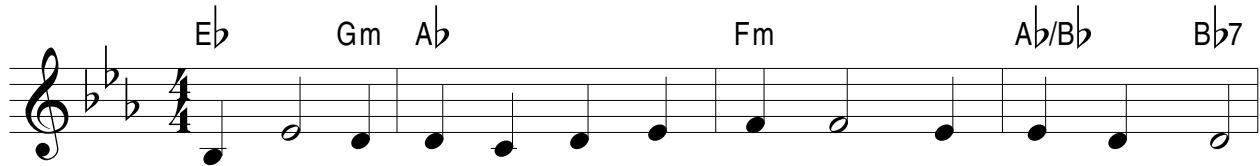
At your bookstore, your Cokesbury bookstore or call (800) 227-2872 • [www.wjk.org](http://www.wjk.org)

# Sustaining the Spirit

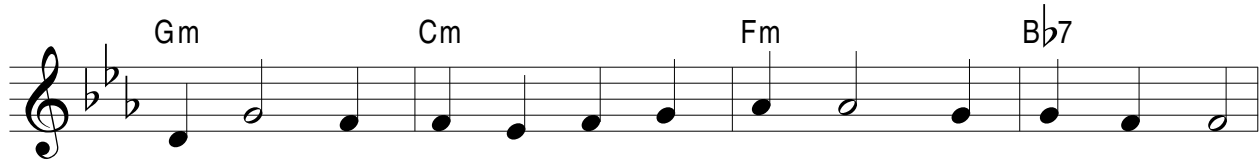
# Believers, Here We Gather

Thomas J. Ritter, 1993

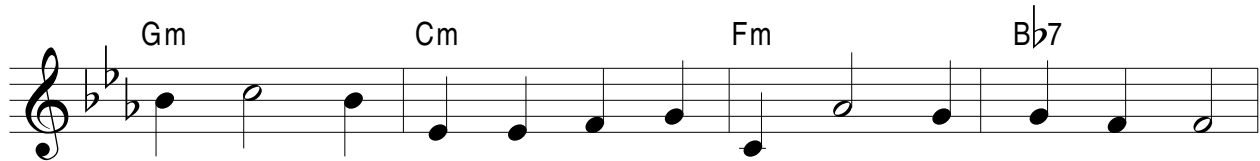
Thomas J. Ritter, 1994



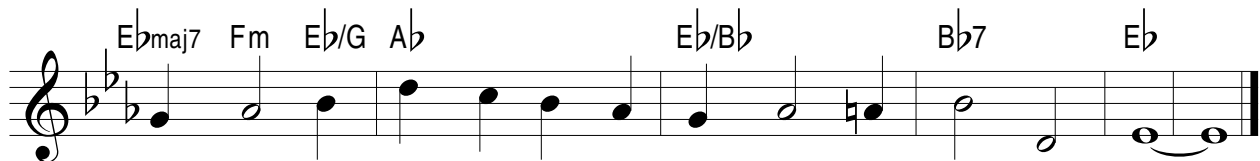
1. Be - liev - ers, here we gath - er, u - nit - ed by God's grace;  
 2. Once out - cast and re - ject - ed, some lives were filled with shame,  
 3. For bring - ing us sal - va - tion, we lift our Sav - ior's name,  
 4. So now, in joy - ful wor - ship, our hearts we join in song,



A Cho - sen gen - er - a - tion, re - deemed from ev - 'ry race.  
 But here are words of mer - cy that we, in faith, would claim:  
 And now, as God's own Chil - dren, our birth - right we pro - claim,  
 Once for - eign - ers and stran - gers, to God we now be - long,



Re - born through Je - sus' dy - ing and ris - ing from the dead,  
 \*"Come, ev - 'ry - one with bur - dens, and I will give you rest."  
 As heirs of the Al - migh - ty, we fol - low this com - mand:  
 Each day we are re - joic - ing and, through the Spir - it, live



With this new light we're liv - ing, by God's own Pres - ence led. —  
 In Christ we are ac - cept - ed, for - giv - en, loved, and blest. —  
 †"Love God and one an - oth - er." on Christ we take our stand. —  
 A life made up of ser - vice, the sac - ri - fice we give. —

\*Matthew 11:28 †Matthew 22:36-40

Text and Music ©1998 Thomas J. Ritter Used by permission.  
 Text may also be used with Lancashire, Webb or any 7676 D tune.



# Movement News

## Fifteen Conservative Religious Groups Run Anti-Gay Ad Campaign

In what critics call a follow-up to a summer of attacks by Republican leaders against gay people, 15 religious groups invested \$200,000 in full-page ads in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today* in July, promoting so-called “reparative” therapy for homosexuals, and planned for more ads before the November elections. In an op-ed piece in *The New York Times* (July 26), gay conservative commentator Andrew Sullivan reflected on their strategy supporting fair treatment of “former” homosexuals. “In a strange and beautiful way, then, the religious right may have finally stumbled onto the true moral ground,” wrote Sullivan. “The more you think about it, the rights of former homosexuals are truly indistinguishable from the rights of gay men and women.”

## “Reconciling” Designation and Same-Gender Ceremonies Prohibited by United Methodists

In early November, the United Methodist Judicial Council struck a blow against the Reconciling movement within that church by ruling that “such identification...is divisive” and forbidden. At the same time, it ruled constitutional the sentence in the denomination’s Social Principles earlier interpreted as legally binding on United Methodist clergy, prohibiting them from conducting same-gender union ceremonies.

The first action responded to the decision of the Northwest Texas Annual Conference to name itself a “confessing conference,” in compliance with United Methodism. The Council cited an earlier decision that stated, “A vote to approve implies the power to disapprove, and is therefore not permissible.” Thus an annual conference also may not identify itself either as a Reconciling Conference (seeking reconciliation between l/g/b/t and the church) or as a Transforming Conference (seeking transformation of homosexual persons), reversing two earlier court opinions. The implications for Reconciling Congregations were not specified, but there is fear the ruling may be applied against such churches. In response to the question of divisiveness, the Reconciling Congregations Program reminded the church that “current policies and practices of [the church] fracture the Body of Christ by excluding lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons and their families...” [emphasis added].

The second action resulted from an appeal from the Oregon-Idaho and California-Nevada annual conferences, questioning a prohibition added to the Social Principles in 1996. The prohibition of clergy performing same-gender marriages served as a basis for the trial of the Rev. Jimmy Creech, acquitted by one vote last March in Nebraska. The Judicial Council ruled last August that the restriction was enforceable as church law, an interpretation questioned by the opposition, who claim that the Social Principles simply offer guidance. The Reconciling Congregation Program affirmed at that time, “The...Social

Principles...reflect a realization that Christ’s message of inclusiveness and justice is an essential component of our mission. The decision of the Judicial Council to single out this one exclusionary statement to be legally binding is deplorable and theologically unsound.”

In related developments, Chicago Bishop Joseph Sprague filed a complaint in October against the Rev. Gregory Dell for performing a same-gender union. And nearly 70 United Methodist clergy in the California-Nevada Annual Conference plan—in what organizer Rev. Don Fado calls an act of “ecclesial disobedience”—to celebrate in early 1999 the holy union of two women: the conference’s lay leader and a member of its board of trustees.

## Second Stone Mails Final Issue

The first and only national gay/lesbian Christian newspaper, *Second Stone*, ceased publication with its July/August issue due to lack of support, having suffered a \$14,000 loss in the first half of this year. Founding editor and publisher Jim Bailey, in a letter to subscribers outlining potential reasons for a recent decline in subscriptions, wrote, “We have lost our niche...As I worked on the July/Aug issue, my tears have freely flown. I have always seen *Second Stone* as a lifetime work. And even more anguishing, the Nov/Dec issue would have been the 10th anniversary issue.” Subscribers will be compensated with a full year subscription to *The Other Side* magazine. While thanking subscribers and those who wrote and published the paper, Bailey added, “I rejoice in and celebrate the work you have empowered me to do...I believe God has honored this work.”



# Welcoming Communities



## MORE LIGHT CHURCHES

### Govans Presbyterian Church Baltimore, Maryland

Govans is a 500-member urban congregation which is the product of a 1992 merger with Waverly Presbyterian Church, a More Light congregation prior to the merger. It is a racially integrated congregation with a long history of ministry with persons of special needs. It provides housing for both mentally ill and mentally disabled persons and has organized a group of congregations committed to providing housing for 33 homeless families.

### Immanuel Presbyterian Church Anchorage, Alaska

Immanuel is a small congregation in a middle-class section of Anchorage, drawing its members from throughout the city and surrounding area. In the process of redeveloping its life and mission, the congregation is committed to being a church that is safe for discussion of any issue, including matters of human sexuality and leadership. It makes space available to the Lamb of God Metropolitan Community Church, and is developing a supportive relationship with the neighborhood elementary school.



## OPEN AND AFFIRMING

### Memorial Congregational Church, UCC Sudbury, Massachusetts

This suburban church of 300 members has a long history of commitment to mission and justice. Its current focus is planning a capital campaign which will be part of the wider "Gift and the Promise" campaign of the Massachusetts Conference, UCC. As a result of its ONA process, the congregation has a support group for anyone with a concern about ONA issues. Most members were active in the church's ONA process, and two members find the group helpful to themselves and their gay/lesbian children. The church is also involved in an exciting, growing, interfaith group of congregations involved in ONA-type activities. This group meets twice a year for mutual support and strategy around gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues.

### Fellowship Congregational Church, UCC Tulsa, Oklahoma

Located in the heart of the Bible Belt, this 226-member, mid-city congregation is "an alternative church for inquisitive people," seeking to be a "bridge" between traditional and progressive thought. It is a faith community which seeks to address the religious right, while providing intellectual and spiritual tools to people who wish to better connect their faith, biblical teachings, and the issues of life. Over the first weekend in October, the church hosted presentations by fellows of the "Jesus Seminar." Fellowship supports g/l/b activities in the community and is home to the local P-FLAG chapter.



## RECONCILING IN CHRIST

### Lutheran Church of Christ the Redeemer Minneapolis, Minnesota

A congregation of just over one hundred households, Christ the Redeemer gathers weekly around the word and meal of Christ, the center of our common life and the source of spiritual renewal for our daily lives. Opportunities to grow and serve include, among others, learning for all ages, small groups, refugee resettlements, serving meals at Loaves and Fishes, and partnership with other congregations at home and abroad. On June 28, 1998, the church became a Reconciling in Christ congregation. The church invites every person to the bread and cup of Christ and to ministry in his name.

### St. Paul Lutheran Church Wheaton, Illinois

This ELCA congregation of 800 baptized members, established in 1927, is located in a suburb of Chicago in the county of Du Page. Its members are committed to becoming an inclusive and welcoming congregation. It is a congregation with a strong outreach ministry, an outstanding musical program, and a worship service with weekly Eucharist, that uses lay assisting ministers and blends both traditional and contemporary liturgies and music. Although the congregation lost both of its pastors, it was able to institute and complete its study toward

becoming a Reconciling in Christ congregation under strong lay leadership and the support and guidance of its interim pastor, Michelle Miller. The affirming statement and a banner inviting all to share in worship, ministry, and fellowship are prominently displayed.



## RECONCILING CONGREGATIONS

### People's United Methodist Church Newburyport, Massachusetts

People's UMC is truly aware of what it means to be a church in mission. This active congregation, with an average Sunday attendance of 50, has many members who perform volunteer work in community food pantries and who collect food donations for Link House, a treatment facility for alcoholics. The church is very open to people of all backgrounds, ages, and sexual orientations, and is extremely proud of its active Sunday School and Children's programs.

### Praxis

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Praxis, a new church start in downtown Minneapolis, is aimed at young adults in their 20s and 30s who have typically not attended church or who have been left out of the church in the past. As part of its "Open Table" mission, the Praxis design team decided to join the family of Reconciling Congregations even before the church opened its doors for the first time. The church, which started holding Sunday evening services in March, has adopted an unusual form of worship which includes no formal preaching, but centers on round table discussions focusing on scripture lessons. With attendance currently averaging between 10 and 30, Praxis has a diverse mix of gay and straight members. More information about Praxis can be found at its web site: [www.mumac.org/newthing](http://www.mumac.org/newthing)

### St. Matthew's United Methodist Church Acton, Massachusetts

St. Matthew's, a church of 350 members, began examining the issue of becoming a Reconciling Congregation in the summer of 1996 when a church member preached on a book about a parent's grief following the suicide of a homosexual child. Throughout 1997, the church conducted four Sunday School classes using the Cokesbury curriculum on the General Conference Commission's Report on Homosexuality (1992). Following additional discussions and information sessions with PFLAG members and persons from the local gay and lesbian speaker's bureau, the church became a Reconciling Congregation by consensus on November 9, 1997. St. Matthew's, which was founded 36 years ago and recently celebrated the first anniversary of its new sanctuary, has a very active outreach program. Current missions include its involvement with Rosie's Place, a Boston women's shelter, the Maine Economic Mission, and a youth program involving home building in Barrier Island, South Carolina. The church will be hosting a workshop for current and prospective Reconciling Congregations within its Annual Conference at the end of October.

# Open Hands

## A Unique Resource on Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Concerns in the Church for

Christian Education • Personal Reading  
Research Projects • Worship Resources  
Ministry & Outreach

Published by the Reconciling  
Congregation Program in conjunc-  
tion with Affirming Congregation  
Programme, More Light, Open and  
Affirming Ministries, Open and Af-  
firming Program, Reconciling in  
Christ, and Welcoming & Affirming  
Baptist programs.

- Please send me the back issues indicated (\$6 each; 10+ @ \$4).
- Send me **Open Hands** each quarter (\$20/year; outside U.S.A. @ \$25).
- Send **Open Hands** gift subscription(s) to name(s) attached.

Enclosed is my payment of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ OR

Charge \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to my VISA MASTERCARD (Circle one)

# \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_.

Name on Card \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

My Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Phone (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Local Church \_\_\_\_\_

Denomination \_\_\_\_\_

### Send to:

Open Hands, 3801 N. Keeler Avenue, Chicago, IL 60641  
Phone: 773/736-5526 Fax: 773/736-5475

### QTY BACK ISSUES AVAILABLE

- \_\_\_ Be Ye Reconciled (Summer 1985)
- \_\_\_ A Matter of Justice (Winter 1986)
- \_\_\_ Our Families (Spring 1986)
- \_\_\_ Our Churches' Policies (Summer 1986)
- \_\_\_ Images of Healing (Fall 1986)
- \_\_\_ Minorities within a Minority (Spring 1987)
- \_\_\_ Sexual Violence (Fall 1987)
- \_\_\_ Building Reconciling Ministries (Spring 1988)
- \_\_\_ Living and Loving with AIDS (Summer 1988)
- \_\_\_ Lesbian & Gay Men in the Religious Arts (Spring 1989)
- \_\_\_ The Closet Dilemma (Summer 1989)
- \_\_\_ Images of Family (Fall 1989)
- \_\_\_ Journeys toward Recovery and Wholeness (Spring 1990)
- \_\_\_ The "Holy Union" Controversy (Fall 1990)
- \_\_\_ Youth and Sexual Identity (Winter 1991)
- \_\_\_ Lesbian/Gay Reflections on Theology (Spring 1991)
- \_\_\_ The Lesbian Spirit (Summer 1991)
- \_\_\_ Our Spirituality: How Sexual Expression and Oppression  
Shape It (Summer 1992)
- \_\_\_ Aging and Integrity (Fall 1992)
- \_\_\_ Reclaiming Pride (Summer 1994)
- \_\_\_ The God to Whom We Pray (Spring 1995)
- \_\_\_ Remembering...10th Anniversary (Summer 1995)
- \_\_\_ Untangling Prejudice and Privilege (Fall 1995)
- \_\_\_ Same-Sex Unions (Spring 1997)
- \_\_\_ Creating Sanctuary: All Youth Welcome Here! (Summer 1997)
- \_\_\_ From One Womb at One Table (Fall 1997)
- \_\_\_ We're Welcoming, Now What? (Winter 1998)
- \_\_\_ Treasure in Earthen Vessels—Sexual Ethics (Spring 1998)
- \_\_\_ Bisexuality: Both/And Rather Than Either/Or (Summer 1998)



# Selected Resources

*The Argument Culture—Moving from Debate to Dialogue* by Deborah Tannen. New York: Random House, 1998.

*Caught in the Crossfire—Helping Christians Debate Homosexuality*, ed. by Sally B. Geis & Donald E. Messer. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.

*Coming Out as Sacrament* by Chris Glaser. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.

*The Culture of Disbelief—How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* by Stephen L. Carter. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

*The Good Book—Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart* by Peter J. Gomes. New York: William Morrow Co., 1996.

*Homosexuality in the Church—Both Sides of the Debate*, ed. by Jeffrey S. Siker. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.

*The Political Meaning of Christianity—The Prophetic Stance* by Glenn Tinder. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.

*Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism—A Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture* by John Shelby Spong. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.

*Stealing Jesus—How Fundamentalism Betrays Christianity* by Bruce Bawer. New York: Crown Publishers, 1997.

*Stranger at the Gate—To Be Gay and Christian in America* by Mel White. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994.

*Why Christianity Must Change or Die: A Bishop Speaks to Believers in Exile* by John Shelby Spong. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998.

**Add *Open Hands* to your holiday gift list this year—  
either by a donation, or as a gift subscription  
(\$20 per year; \$25 outside U.S.)  
to an individual or congregation.**

Send to  
**Open Hands**  
3801 N. Keeler Ave  
Chicago, IL 60641

Thank you!

### WELCOMING CHURCH LISTS AVAILABLE

The complete ecumenical list of welcoming churches is printed in the winter issue of *Open Hands* each year. For a more up-to-date list of your particular denomination, contact the appropriate program listed on page 3.