

# Open Hands

Vol. 15 No. 4  
Spring 2000

*Shaping An Inclusive Church*



## For All the Saints

The Welcoming Movement,  
From Sodom to Salvation



*Whoever welcomes YOU welcomes me,  
and whoever welcomes ME  
welcomes THE ONE who sent me.  
—Jesus of Nazareth*



**INCLUSIVE**



**Affirming Congregation Programme**  
**More Light Presbyterians**  
**Open & Affirming Ministries**  
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*Open Hands* is the quarterly magazine of the welcoming movement, a consortium of programs that support individuals and congregations in efforts to welcome lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgenders in all areas of church life. *Open Hands* was founded and is published by the Reconciling Congregation Program, Inc. (United Methodist), in cooperation with the six ecumenical partners listed above. Each program is a national network of local congregations and ministries that publicly affirm their welcome of LGBT people, their families and friends. These seven programs, along with Supportive Congregations (Brethren/Mennonite [www.webcom.com/bmc], Oasis Congregations (Episcopal), Welcoming Congregations (Unitarian Universalist), and INCLUSIVE Congregations (United Kingdom)—offer hope that the church can be a more inclusive community.

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.


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www.rcp.org/openhands/index.html  
 Member, The Associated Church Press  
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ISSN 0888-8833

 Printed on recycled paper.

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*"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."*

*Jesus in Matthew 10:40-42*

### Next Issue: THE GOD OF VIOLENCE

#### Call for articles, children's artwork, and columns for *Open Hands* Winter 2001

### WHAT ABOUT US KIDS?

#### *Affirming and Welcoming Children and Youth*

**Theme Section:** A gay uncle, a lesbian mom, emerging sexual identity, unwelcoming churches, an antigay putdown at school, societal controversy over same-gender marital rights—one way or another children and youth inside and outside of our congregations are dealing with human sexuality and homosexuality in particular. How do we reach out to them with age-appropriate information about matters of faith and homosexuality? How do we provide support for them as they discover the diversity of human sexuality? What do they have to teach us? We are looking for articles and relevant artwork from children and youth, as well as from parents (biological, adoptive, foster, etc.) and other family members of traditional and nontraditional families, teachers, Christian education directors, and anyone who can offer pertinent experience and insight. *1000-2500 words per article.*

**Ministries Section:** Columns may include: Welcoming Process, Connections (with other justice issues), Worship, Spirituality, Outreach, Leadership, Health, Youth, Campus, Children, and Parents. These brief articles may or may not have to do with the theme of the issue. *750-1000 words.*

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Manuscript deadline: September 30, 2000

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# For All the Saints

## The Welcoming Movement, From Sodom to Salvation

### The Stories of Open Hands' Welcoming Programs

#### In the Beginning, Sodom...

The great irony is that a scripture oft-used to condemn lesbian, gay, bisexual, and even transgendered people is the story of Sodom, which is a story of inhospitality rather than sexuality. Lot is the welcoming congregation, who faces the wrath of his denomination by offering hospitality to two strangers, not just "to be nice" but adamantly *insisting* they enjoy the sanctuary he opens to them rather than spend the night in the public square, where they are likely to be bashed by Sodom's citizens.

One rabbinical tradition claims Sodom's sin was not simply its inhospitality—wanting to humiliate the strangers by gang rape—but that Sodom had *codified* its inhospitality by making it illegal by city polity and amendments to the city's *Book of Order or Book of Discipline* for those like Lot to welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, let alone be affirming of their ministries and marriages.

Providentially for our modern-day Sodom, the church, which has too often *Sodified* its inhospitality, there are, within its boundaries, ten righteous persons, or welcoming movements, to save it from destruction and offer more light rather than brimstone. Seven of them formally advise and financially support this magazine. Two of them informally advise it. All of them want their churches to welcome with *Open Hands* lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender souls as well as their families, friends, and advocates. Several of them do their work with the encouragement and blessings of their denominations. But most of them do their pastoral work while serving as prophets to their denominations, risking the vocational and ecclesiastical lives of their members in the face of a "brood of vipers" who would figuratively kill them between the sanctuary they offer to LGBT people and the altar of a gracious and reconciling God (Matthew 24:33, 35).

One such welcoming program, More Light Presbyterians, became the first of these righteous programs out of necessity.

#### *From the Shadows, More Light...*

When Bill Silver became the first openly-gay, happily-homosexual candidate for the ministry in the former United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. in 1976, that denomination didn't know what to do with him. The issue was not addressed in the Book of Order, the part of its constitution that addresses qualifications for ordained office. The 1970 General Assembly (the denomination's annual legislative body) had added an antigay addendum to a comprehensive *Sexuality and the Human Community* report, even while taking a stand for gay civil rights, and the 1974 G.A. had rejected a report of the Presbyterian Gay Caucus, organized by the Rev. David Bailey Sindt of Chicago.

So a timid and fearful Presbytery of New York City, where Bill Silver was "under care" as a candidate for the ministry, overtured (Presbyterian for "requested") the general assembly for "definitive guidance" on this matter. The 1976 General Assembly didn't know what to do either, so they set up a task force to study homosexuality, which included only one openly-gay member, Chris Glaser, himself an openly gay candidate for ordination. Two years later, the majority of that task force declared that homosexuality, *per se*, was no bar to ordination to the offices of the Presbyterian Church: deacon, elder, and minister. "May a self-affirming, practicing homosexual Christian be ordained? We believe so, if the person manifests such gifts as are required for ordination. ... Spiritual maturity or the absence thereof is an attribute pertaining not to any *class* of people but only to *individual* persons. Thus, it must be distinctively identified and separately evaluated in each individual candidate for ordination as the church, led by the Spirit and guided by God's Word, seeks to discern and verify that particular candidate's gifts for ministry."

But this recommendation was entirely too much for the 1978 General Assembly. Instead they declared homosexuality to be sin—"We conclude that homosexuality is not God's



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Jim Anderson, Mark Bowman, Ann B. Day, Morris Floyd, Bob Gibeling, Chris Glaser, Allen Harris, Alyson Huntly, Jim Locken, Brenda Moulton, Janet Webber, and others.

Special thanks to:

Jim Anderson (Presbyterians) and Morris Floyd (United Methodists) for original material; and to Alyson Huntly (United Church of Canada) for assistance and permission in using excerpts from her book, *Daring to Be United*.

wish for humanity”—and that therefore, “unrepentant homosexual practice does not accord with the requirements for ordination.” These conclusions were based not on fact or knowledge, but belief: “...it appears that what is really important is not what homosexuality is but what we believe about it.” Even the dramatic, poignant, and eloquent coming out of lesbian Princeton Seminary Advisory Delegate Sandra Brawders on the floor of the Assembly could not dissuade them. Yet the denomination again called for the end of criminalization, discrimination, and stereotyping in the public sector.

### *Spiritual Apartheid*

For the first time since women were finally accepted as full participants and members, this new policy, still in effect, created two classes of members, with very different rules for the two classes—a kind of ecclesiastical apartheid. “Uncle Tom” gays and lesbians can gain access to the majority rules only if they hide their status (pass) or if they repudiate their status (“repent”) and promise life-long celibacy or choose to enter into a sanctioned heterosexual relationship. Happy, openly lesbian and gay Presbyterians, especially those in relationships, must abide by a set of separate laws, designed only for them.

As in the South African model of political apartheid, this ecclesiastical apartheid has led in recent years, with one court decision after another, to more and more detailed separate and unequal rules: gay and lesbian Presbyterians may not be ordained, but if they are (at least as deacons), their ordinations cannot be annulled; gay and lesbian Presbyterian ministers who were ordained prior to 1978 may keep their ordinations, but they may not receive calls for service; fully qualified candidates for ministry cannot be so certified if they are openly lesbian and gay, unless they promise celibacy; congregations, presbyteries, and synods may make “welcoming” statements advocating full membership and participation for lesbian and gay Presbyterians, but they may not promise to act on them.

### *The Nativity of the Welcoming Movement*

The More Light Church movement began soon after the close of the 1978 General Assembly. Several congregations adopted policies explicitly welcoming lesbian and gay members and guaranteeing their full participation, including ordination to offices of deacon and elder if elected by the congregation and found qualified by the session. These churches became known as “More Light” churches because the 1976 Assembly, in establishing its homosexuality task force, had quoted Pastor John Robinson’s advice to the Pilgrims of 1620 in search of religious freedom: “God hath yet more light to break forth from [God’s] word.” As editor, Chris Glaser had earlier renamed the newsletter of Presbyterians for Lesbian & Gay Concerns *More Light*.

The More Light movement spawned similar movements in the United Methodist Church (Reconciling Congregations), the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Reconciling in Christ Congregations), and the United Church of Christ (Open and Affirming Congregations). Later, the movement spread to additional denominations, such as (in alphabetical order) the American Baptist Churches (Welcoming & Affirming), Brethren and Mennonite churches (Supportive Congregations Network), the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ (Open & Affirming), the Episcopal Church (Oasis), the United Church of Canada (Affirming), and the Unitarian Universalist Association (Welcoming). (The Society of Friends [Quakers] have been welcoming without a formal program.) Last year, a consortium of Roman Catholic, Church of England, and United Reformed Church people in the United Kingdom ecumenically initiated an INCLUSIVE Congregations movement.

But there is a big difference between the More Light Churches in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and their counterparts in other denominations. In none of these other denominations is it illegal, under church law, to permit full participation by lesbian and gay Christians at the congregational level in such

## More Light Presbyterians

Jim Anderson



Bill Silver

David Bailey Sindt



Presbyterians for Lesbian & Gay Concerns

Chris Glaser

Sandra Brawders

## More Light Church Network

Westminster Church

West Hollywood Presbyterian

Lazarus Project



St. Luke Presbyterian

Mt. Auburn Presbyterian



Central Presbyterian

roles as member of a governing council or in special ministries to those in need. But it is illegal under Presbyterian law, which prohibits the ordination of any open, self-affirming, "non-repentant" homosexual as deacon or elder by the session of a local congregation. Unlike most other denominations, local leaders in the Presbyterian Church—deacons and elders—are ordained under the same standards (apart from education and training) as ministers. This makes the apartheid policies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) the most restrictive of any major mainline denomination.

### *Law vs. Grace*

Here we speak of legalities, and the Presbyterian Church is a very "legalistic" church, with a well developed system of law and of courts to handle legal challenges and complaints. The years 1984 and 1985 saw the first national ecclesiastical court case in the Presbyterian Church against a More Light Church. Several congregations in the Presbytery of Western New York brought Westminster Church of Buffalo to trial over their More Light Statement, which promised full participation, including ordination as deacons and elders, to lesbian and gay members. Westminster hadn't *done* anything but make a statement! The complaining churches were not satisfied by the "discipline" offered by the presbytery, so they appealed to the Synod of the Northeast. The Synod Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC) ruled that the ban on ordination of lesbian and gay Christians was clearly unconstitutional: "By its action in 1978, the General Assembly violated the constitutional power of each congregation to control the selection of its own officers for ordination. The Church is committed to inclusiveness, and segments of the membership cannot be excluded except by constitutional amendment" to the *Book of Order* (a foreshadowing of things to come).

In February of 1985, the Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly reversed this lower level decision, declaring the "definitive guidance" of 1978 to be the law of the church and binding on every session and presbytery. All the male members of that commission except one voted to take away from lesbian and gay Christians the rights guaranteed to all members in the Church's constitution. All the female commissioners except one voted to uphold the rights of lesbian and gay members. Since the commission was heavily dominated by males, the traditional male fear, ignorance, and hatred of homosexual persons easily prevailed.

A minority report by five dissenting members declared: "This is the kind of discriminatory treatment we have been taught to abhor." "The decision...contravenes constitutional guarantees related to inclusiveness...: 'No persons shall be denied membership because of race, ethnic origins, worldly condition, or any other reason not related to profession of faith.'" "Such denial of access to church office is in direct opposition to an unequivocal provision of the current *Book of Order*, which states: 'An active member is entitled to all the rights and privileges of the church, including the right... to vote and hold office.'"

This serious challenge to the very existence of More Light congregations led to the first More Light Churches conference in 1985, called and hosted by the West Hollywood Presbyterian Church and its ministry of reconciliation between the church and the LGBT community, the Lazarus Project, which had been founded in 1977. This gathering resulted in a national network of congregations that met annually and published a newsletter.

### *Hiding More Light Under a Judicial Basket*

Ecclesiastical court cases attacking individuals, More Light congregations, and supportive presbyteries began popping up all over the church after the rejection of another gay-positive General Assembly report in 1991, this time on the broader concern of human sexuality. Up to this time, the only court case to reach the national level and to receive national attention was the earlier challenge to the More Light congregation in Buffalo, New York. Now, in quick succession, there were challenges against St. Luke Presbyterian Church in the Twin Cities Area Presbytery and Mt. Auburn Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati Presbytery simply for declaring themselves "More Light." St. Luke was barred from ordaining a gay elder who had been elected and certified eligible, so the position was kept vacant and he served on the session as a "non"-elder. Mt. Auburn not only declared "More Light," but preceded to ordain a gay elder.

Another complaint was lodged against Central Presbyterian Church in Eugene, Oregon, for installing a previously-ordained gay deacon and ordaining a lesbian deacon. The court of the Presbytery of the Cascades ruled the ordinations "irregular" but refused to annul them as demanded by Hope [sic!] Presbyterian Church of Portland, Oregon. The court of the Synod of the Pacific ruled that

there was no constitutional or biblical basis for the ban on the ordination of gay and lesbian Presbyterians and that the Presbytery was out of order in ruling the ordinations “irregular.” On October 31, 1993, the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission—the highest court—split the difference, saying, yes, the ordinations were “irregular,” but, no, they did not constitute “a rebellion against the Word and will of God,” and no, they should not (could not?) be annulled.

### ***The Trouble With Happy Lesbians***

The most famous of the recent court cases involved Lisa Larges and the Rev. Jane Adams Spahr. Larges, a lesbian seminarian, had been certified by the Presbytery of Twin Cities Area as ready for a call and ordination. The presbytery reasoned that the ban was on ordination, not on certifying that all requirements had been met. Spahr, ordained to the ministry in 1974 before she realized she was lesbian, had been called to serve as co-pastor of the Downtown United Presbyterian Church in Rochester, New York. She was a minister member in good standing of the Presbytery of the Redwoods, and for the past ten years had been founding director of The Ministry of Light (now Spectrum), an outreach and support ministry with lesbian, gay and bisexual people, their families, and friends in Marin County, California. Since she had been ordained prior to the 1978 ban, she was protected, most people believed, by the “grandparent” clause of that policy (Paragraph 14) which declared that “these actions shall not be used to affect negatively the ordination rights of any United Presbyterian deacon, elder, or minister who has been ordained prior to this date.”

The PJC of the General Assembly ruled, in the case of Larges, that an “unrepentant” lesbian (or gay) person had no right to certification, since it was impossible for them to meet the requirements for ordination, which demanded repentance and celibacy of gay and lesbian Presbyterians. In the case of Spahr, the PJC ruled that no call was valid for an “unrepentant” non-celibate lesbian (or gay) person, and that the famous “grandparent clause” of the 1978 policy was null and void, at least in the clear sense that most people understood it. Instead, its scope was sharply narrowed to “acts” committed prior to 1978: “Paragraph 14...provides protection from the removal of ordination for homosexual practices which occurred prior to its adoption.

Paragraph 14 provides amnesty for past acts but not license for present or future acts.” The sin of both these candidates was that both were happily and proudly lesbian. Both Larges and Spahr initiated their own ministries to tell our stories and serve as evangelists to the church, Witness for Reconciliation and That All May Freely Serve. In honor of all those denied their ministries, Martha Juillerat and Tammy Lindahl began the Shower of Stoles Project, a collection of stoles representing LGBT people who have served, are serving, or wished to serve the church in ordained ministry.

### ***Chastity and Fidelity***

Recognizing in the votes on LGBT issues at General Assembly and its Permanent Judicial Commission shifts in our favor, reactionary forces in the church chose the strategy of codifying in the *Book of Order* the denomination’s anti-gay posture in 1996. The so-called Amendment B, ratified by a simple majority of presbyteries in 1997, limited ordination to those who practiced “chastity in singleness” and “fidelity in marriage between a man and a woman.” Amendment A, passed by the following assembly in an attempt to soften the hardcore stance, failed to be ratified. Already, Amendment B has led to complicated legal battles. It is expected to choke the church courts as protestors to the amendment “self-accuse,” since the amendment also rejects ordination of those guilty of sins listed in the Confessions of the church, which include working on Sunday, gluttony, and displaying pictures of Jesus.

In the struggle over these amendments, yet another powerful network of churches has formed called The Covenant Network, which wants to reclaim the church from the far right and remove these new requirements of ordination. Though some are also More Light churches, most are churches which claim to represent the moderate middle of the church, reluctant to break church law, but resistant to those who hold the denomination captive to an intolerant agenda of injustice.

In 1999, Presbyterians for Lesbian & Gay Concerns and the More Light Churches Network merged, hiring a full-time “field coordinator” for the first time to organize members and member churches at the grass roots, Michael Adee. ▼

**Lisa Larges**



**Janie Spahr**

**Ministry of Light**

**Witness for Reconciliation**

**That All May Freely Serve**



**Martha Juillerat**

**Tammy Lindahl**

**Shower of Stoles**

**Michael Adee**

## A Ministry and Movement of Reconciliation

"Do not press me to leave you... your God shall be my God." Ruth proclaimed to Naomi out of love and loyalty. The modern-day Ruths are feminists, racial minorities, and LGBT people and our allies who say this to our denominations no matter how male and patriarchal and white and straight and gendered they *think* they want to be! The psalmist has the right vision of God's community: "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies... and I shall dwell in the house of God my whole life long." Henri Nouwen used to quip that community was inevitably the place where the person you'd least like to be with *always* lives! How can our opposition, as wealthy and vicious and uncompromising as they are, remove us from God's house and our place at God's table? It's time for them to "get over it," just as we have had to coexist with those who question our sacred worth. A true test of Christ's reconciling Spirit is to identify *who's* trying to kick *who* out of the church. And look who's the vulnerable party as we offer ourselves as "living sacrifices" to be reconciling!

Gay and lesbian United Methodists began to identify themselves about the same time "the gay issue" came into the consciousness of the broader U.S. culture. Among them were clergy like Earnest Reaugh of upstate New York, Richard Huskey of Minnesota, and Texan Gene Leggett. Coming out cost Huskey and Leggett their annual conference relationships. Reaugh and Leggett, among others, came to Atlanta in the spring of 1972 to make their witness at a General Conference that would be giving structure to the merged United Methodist Church and enacting a statement of Social Principles drafted to say:

Homosexuals no less than heterosexuals are persons of sacred worth, who need the ministry and guidance of the church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship which enables reconciling relationships with God, with others and with self. Further we insist that all persons are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured.

The Atlanta gathering had many of the signs of a progressive event. Delegations of youth, young adults, and seminary students were given voice, though they would complain bitterly about the difficulty of getting recognized from their places in the back rows. Leggett, Reaugh, and their small group were not the only gays or lesbians present. Others who would become leaders in what eventually became Affirmation: United Methodists for Les-

bian/Gay Concerns were there in the seminarian, youth, and young adult caucuses.

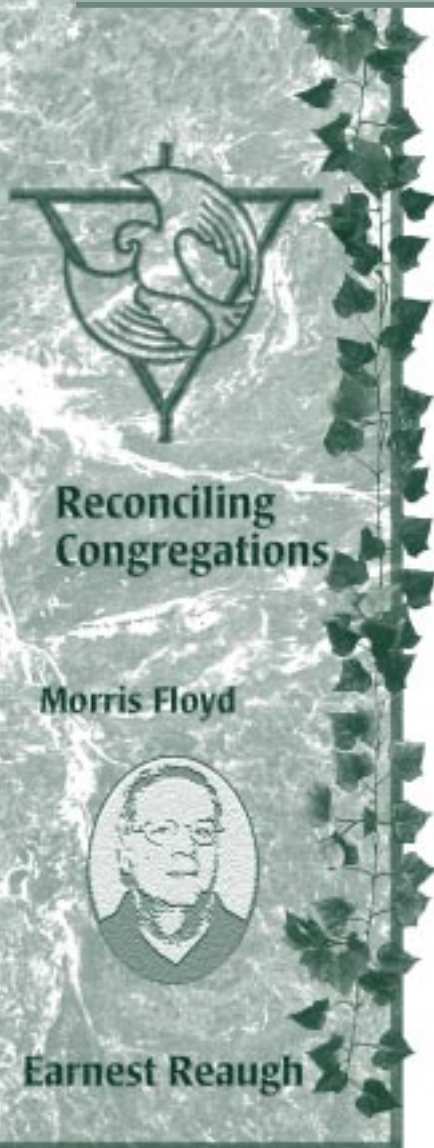
Conservative leadership from the southeast and south central jurisdictions of the church were unable to defeat the creation of commissions addressing religion and race and the status and role of women. But, aided by parliamentary process "errors" of presiding Texas bishop Eugene Slater, they were able to add a negative clause to the draft statement about homosexuality: "...though we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching." The 1972 Social Principles statement also said, "We do not recommend marriage between two persons of the same sex."

### Questioning Motives

While the General Conference held a negative posture toward LGBT people for at least the ensuing generation, a collective of lesbians and a separate group of gay men were at work on the last two issues of *motive* magazine. Founded in 1941 by the Methodist Student Movement, *motive* had been published for thirty years by the denomination's Board of Education. According to an editorial in the lesbian/feminist issue, "radical dissension within limits had been tolerated with a few slaps on the wrist" until "the church fathers really squirmed" following a special issue on women in the spring of 1969. Because the magazine could not survive without church funding, the staff and editorial board closed the magazine. A new organization, MOTIVE, Inc., published the last two issues using its remaining resources.

There was little directly church-related content in the gay and lesbian issues of *motive*. The writers reflected a critique of contemporary culture that went beyond sexual liberation to address racism, classism and misogyny. For example, in a manifesto entitled "What Every Lesbian Should Know," Rita Mae Brown and Charlotte Bunch wrote that the lesbian "has little vested interest in maintaining the present political system since all of its institutions—church, state, media, health, schools—work to keep her down." Still, many of those who became early leaders in United Methodism's Reconciling movement might have written, as did a former seminarian in the gay men's issue:

Luckily for me, a year of radical organizing in a working class neighborhood in Chicago put me in touch with my roots and forced me to be honest with



myself. It gave me the courage I needed to walk into a GLF [Gay Liberation Front] meeting (half-drunk but making it!) in August 1970. "Hello, my name is Dan, and this is my first time here and I'm scared." There were many of us there for the first time. Very much like myself. Alone. Frightened. But we'd had enough.

### ***The United Methodist Gay Caucus***

Following the 1972 General Conference, "had enough," already described the feelings of some gay and lesbian United Methodists. They began organizing themselves, in the San Francisco Bay Area, Kansas City, Texas, and elsewhere. In July of 1975, Wheadon UMC in Evanston, IL, hosted the organizing meeting of the United Methodist Gay Caucus (UMGC). In addition to Leggett, Reaugh and Huskey, the key leaders included Peggy Harmon (Dallas), Keith Spare (Kansas City), and Steve Webster (Madison, WI), who had been denied admission to Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary because of his sexual orientation. Dick Cash, a student at Northwestern University who was an active youth/young adult member of several United Methodist agency boards, was a key behind-the-scenes organizer and strategist. To the horror of some denominational leaders, they received a sympathetic hearing from the United Methodist Council on Youth Ministries (UMCYM), among other official bodies. By early the next year, UMGC had linked with caucuses in the Bay Area and southern California and was planning for a presence at the 1976 General Conference in Portland.

### ***Constraint on "Condemn," but Prohibition of "Promote"***

In the spring of 1975, with a fury echoed 25 years later, conservatives in the denomination were whispering about potential schism if the *Discipline* were to be changed. The *United Methodist Reporter* published a series of articles by the Rev. Harvey Chinn, then pastor of Faith United Methodist Church in Sacramento, California. Relying on a handful of medical psychoanalysts whose views had already been repudiated by the American Psychiatric Association, Chinn promoted the mental illness view of homosexuality as one basis for maintaining the "incompatibility" clause.

The result was a barrage of both affirmative and negative legislation in 1976. That

conference resisted an effort to toughen the language "we do not condone the practice of homosexuality" to "we condemn the practice...." It also softened the position about marriage to a statement saying that relationships between persons of the same sex would not be recognized as marriage. Delegates struggled through considerable parliamentary confusion to approve a footnote intended to restrict ordination of gays and lesbians. A human sexuality study was defeated, and the famous ban on the use of general church funds "to promote the acceptance of homosexuality" was imposed.

Keith Spare, speaking to the conference on behalf of UMGC prior to debate about the Social Principles statement, called on the body to act in a way that would "reflect a willingness of our church to continue in dialogue." In response, professor Albert Outler of Perkins School of Theology, argued against a proposed explicit welcome of "all persons regardless of sexual orientation into the fellowship and membership of the United Methodist Church." He attacked GLBT people for their promiscuity (After all, he said, "we stipulate against homosexual marriage.") In addition, he held that such a welcome would constitute an "irreversible disaster in the United Methodist Church" of "antinomian" support for "moral decadence." The welcoming language was defeated by a wide margin.

Despite the regrettable legislation, UMGC joined with the Women's Caucus, the Young Adult Caucus, and the Methodist Federation for Social Action to offer a variety of more user-friendly experiences at the conference. Among these was a worship service at which Bishop Jesse DeWitt, Theresa Hoover, Jeanne Audrey Powers, and Hazel Decker were speakers. One attendee, an executive of a denominational agency, wrote to organizers to thank them for "the single most uplifting experience of this General Conference."

### ***Anti-Gay Backlash***

Officially sanctioned church discrimination against GLBT people worsened following the 1976 conference. Garrett seminary denied graduation to two gay students solely because of their sexual orientation. Support for the UM Council on Youth Ministries declined because officials saw it as subversive. Nevertheless, the UM Gay Caucus remained strong, hosting at least a hundred participants in a spring 1978 meeting at Broadway Church in Chicago, and renaming itself Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian/Gay Concerns. In the Fall of

Richard Huskey

Gene Leggett



Affirmation

motive

Rita Mae Brown

Charlotte Bunch



Wheadon UMC

Peggy Harmon



Keith Spare

Steve Webster

Dick Cash

UM Council on Youth Ministries

Bishop Jesse DeWitt

Theresa Hoover



Jeanne Audrey Powers

Hazel Decker

Broadway Church

that year Affirmation adopted a plan to support two staff people at subsistence level to travel the church until the 1980 General Conference. It was perhaps the most ambitious effort the group has ever undertaken, and in many ways the most important in terms of the larger reconciling movement. Peggy Harmon and Michael Collins traveled around the country through those months. Their efforts spawned local groups of Affirmation across the country and enabled many new leaders to emerge.

In April of 1979, deaconess Joan Clark was fired by the Women's Division of the Board of Global Ministries after seven years working for the agency because she affirmed her lesbian identity in the report of her study leave. As Joan wrote in the June 11, 1979, issue of *Christianity and Crisis*, the event gave the Women's Division an opportunity to feel "the impact of what happens to lesbian/gay persons when well-meaning folks who want survival at any price refuse to speak out for justice." This event, which enabled Joan Clark to become a more visible strategic leader, helped catalyze an even greater presence by Affirmation and other progressive groups in the church at the General Conference of 1980, yet the final result was no change for better or worse. The impact on those in Affirmation and elsewhere who had believed in the likelihood of positive change was devastating. Perhaps it was no coincidence that the next two meetings of Affirmation nearly brought an end to the national organization.

### ***Our Divisions Parallel the Church's***

A meeting in Texas surfaced an ideological difference between two groups of men. On one side were those—mostly with seminary backgrounds and some kind of experience at the church's national level—who did a radical social analysis focusing on the systemic issues of race, class, and (to a lesser degree) gender. On the other side were those—mostly in the hosting group and/or newcomers to national church "politics" and to Affirmation—whose social analysis was seen as inadequate by the first group. The conflict surfaced during a lavish party that included a drag act and was held in the home of a wealthy gay man. The latter group saw themselves as simply offering good old-fashioned Texas hospitality and considered the others to be boors who did not observe basic conventions of polite society.

Gender-based conflict erupted at a meeting the following spring, ostensibly because a

group of gay men wanted to leave the site 40 miles from San Francisco to go to bars in The City. Affirmation has in some senses never recovered from the loss of participants such as Joan Clark and Peggy Harmon that followed the painful breach. Attendance at Affirmation's next national meeting, in the Fall of 1981, was the lowest it had been since well before the 1980 General Conference. This series of events prompted for some a serious reconsideration of the role of Affirmation, as shown in a journal note Michael Collins wrote in 1982:

All in all, we have reflected the same style and struggles as the UMC as a whole: a floundering and unsure leadership, a scatteredness in focus, soul-searching, anger, and finally a commitment to continue wandering, journeying on—with the hope that it will get much better but a fear that what is ahead may be nothing but another dose of the same.

Following the 1980 General Conference and subsequent events in Affirmation, Michael became increasingly critical of himself and others. He questioned the integrity of closeted church leaders who looked for sexual adventures with people of their own gender but were silent or lukewarm when it came to advocacy for lesbian and gay concerns. He did not understand staff members at the General Board of Global Ministries who advocated strongly for organized labor and racial justice outside the church but worked to defeat union organizing among clerical workers at the Board of Global Ministries, who were mostly people of color. Thus it is not surprising that he would assess Affirmation's work, and therefore his own ministry of ten years, all in the same breath.

The assessment reminded Michael that Affirmation should not judge its success solely or even primarily on legislative results at a General Conference. He called on the group to recognize the much greater value of its role as a broader ministry to a church struggling to be true to its own calling, an element that had already been explicit in the early mission statement of the UMGC. He also urged that organizing prior to the 1984 General Conference include a focus on what Affirmation would do *after* that conference so that what he saw as the inevitable legislative defeats would not once again be so devastating to the group. The illness that claimed Michael's life in October of 1984 soon made it impossible for him to travel and participate in the

work of Affirmation. Nevertheless these two key perspectives informed the development of the Reconciling Congregation program and its eventual announcement at the Baltimore General Conference on the day after the delegates voted an explicit prohibition of the ordination or appointment of "self-avowed practicing homosexuals."

### ***Reconciling Work Begins***

On the day after that vote, members of Affirmation gathered outside the conference center to pass out brochures to delegates and visitors inviting their congregations to become "reconciling." Within two weeks two congregations had voted to become Reconciling Congregations. Symbolically, they spanned the country: Washington Square United Methodist Church in New York City and Wesley United Methodist Church in Fresno, California.

What preceded the invitation and response was a decision at the September 1982 meeting of Affirmation to develop "a program in which local churches will declare their support for the concerns of lesbians and gay men." Mark Bowman, D. J. Porter, and Perry Wiggins agreed to develop a plan. The model of the Presbyterian More Light Program begun in 1978 in which a local church adopted a statement affirming lesbians and gay men and inviting their full participation in the life of the local church was adapted for United Methodist congregations. Discussion about the need for "reconciliation" between the United Methodist Church and lesbians/gay men at a November 1982 meeting of Affirmation's General Conference Task Force inspired the name "Reconciling Churches," later modified to "Reconciling Congregations" in order to emphasize that this will be a local church network. (The second choice was "Self-Avowed, Practicing Churches"!)

The three appointed planners presented a design for the program to the September 1983 Affirmation meeting that was remarkably similar to what the program has become. Beth Richardson and Mark Bowman served as volunteer co-coordinators in the developmental state of the Reconciling Congregation Program (RCP), eventually conducting training sessions for "RC Enablers" and Reconciling Congregations.

In 1985, Richardson and Bowman began a quarterly magazine, *Manna for the Journey*, as a resource for the Reconciling Congregation movement. Renamed *Open Hands*, and celebrating its fifteenth year, it now serves as

an ecumenical resource to the entire welcoming movement within denominations in Canada and the United States.

By March 1987, twenty-two churches had become Reconciling Congregations. They sent 125 representatives to a nationwide convocation in Chicago for a weekend of worship, training, sharing, and celebration. Additional gatherings followed. By July 1990, the Reconciling Congregation Program became a non-profit organization with its own board of directors, subsequently establishing a national office in Chicago in 1992 with Mark Bowman as full-time coordinator, a position he held until 1999. Marilyn Alexander, co-author of *We Were Baptized Too*, now serves as interim coordinator. United Methodist church courts have recently ruled against churches and conferences using designations such as "Reconciling." It is yet unknown what effect, if any, this will have on the program.

Despite a Homosexuality Study Report received by the UMC's General Conference in 1992, the 1992 and 1996 gatherings have not reversed the denomination's unwelcoming policies, and the latter added a ban on same-gender unions to the *Social Principles*, leading to recent church trials of clergy who perform them.

### ***"Be Reconciling..."***

What lessons are there for our welcoming work from the United Methodist experience to date?

1. *A solid theological foundation for the work is not simply an "option."* The founders and early leaders of Affirmation sought to articulate a broadly based theology that expressed their understanding of the Gospel and of the church beyond biblical and theological "justification" for homosexuality and "homosexual practice." Among the important contributions of Peggy Harmon, apart from her work as a field organizer prior to the 1980 General Conference, was her role as a co-convener (with Richard Huskey) of the UMGC's task force on theology. The caucus saw itself also as a community of faith whose self-understanding was driven not by the sexual orientation of its members but by their faith commitments. They affirmed in early conversations and documents their intention to live their lives as lesbian and gay people in the context of an underlying commitment to Christian discipleship, not the reverse.

Michael Collins

Joan Clark

Washington  
Square UMC

Wesley UMC

Beth Richardson



Mark Bowman

Manna  
for the  
Journey

Open  
Hands

Marilyn Alexander



Mary Gaddis

Gil Caldwell

D. J. Porter

Perry Wiggins

2. *With a theological foundation, the work of system and issue advocacy is seen as a ministry, not merely a political agenda.* The call to the organizing meeting of UMGC included a specific reference to going “beyond political organizing to become a group in mission.” The mission, like all effective ministry, was to be based on an understanding of the divinely-gifted nature of the prodigal church, recalling the institution to itself, so to speak, not manipulating it into something unrecognizable to its Creator. This does not mean that political understandings and tactics were or are “unclean” tools that should not be used. It means rather that they should be evaluated and used in light of the Gospel mandates. There are profound implications in this assertion, for example, regarding the way opponents should be characterized or treated.
3. *If the work is a ministry in the name of Christ, it must be done with an explicit commitment to address systemic injustice tied to race, gender, and class, as well as homophobia/heterosexism.* Many of the early leaders of Affirmation had also been involved in social struggles related to racial and economic justice and the Vietnam War. In addition, women leaders such as Joan Clark, Peggy Harmon, and later Mary Gaddis, among others, understood and articulated the con-

nection between their feminist understandings and issues related to gay and lesbian people in the church. It is also true that the welcoming movement has faced the challenge of racism, with a limited expression of solidarity with people of color. Fortunately for the Reconciling movement, the continuing leadership in the arena of homophobia and heterosexism by African-Americans like the Rev. Gil Caldwell in New Haven, Connecticut has not been contingent on being recognized and thanked for it. The whole welcoming movement should increase its attention to the pervasive impact of racism.

4. *The welcoming movement should include and benefit from the diversities of a faith community incorporating the multiple “styles” people bring to their lives, as well as various leadership styles and attitudes toward issues.* Among the denominations that have welcoming groups, the United Methodist Church may well be the most heterogeneous. The people of Affirmation used to enjoy dancing and prancing around the room while singing “All God’s children got a place in the choir.” The Reconciling Congregation Program has been better than Affirmation in bridging these gaps, but there is work to be done all around. ▼

## Turning the Tables

“Jesus entered the temple and... overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.” Not enough has been said about the fact that the money changers and dove sellers were only helping the people meet their ritual obligations of not defiling the temple with Roman currency and having a sacrificial dove handy. But purveyors of ritual purity were taking up space in the Court of the Gentiles, the closest that women, eunuchs, and converted Gentiles could come to Yahweh, veiled within the Holy of Holies walled within the court of sacrifice where Israelite men could gather to offer sacrifice.

Many of the welcoming movements have played Jesus’ role overturning the tables of church gatherings where church purity has been placed ahead of welcoming the stranger. How refreshing it is, therefore, to have one denomination which turned the tables themselves, inviting congregations to be open and affirming of lesbian and gay people! In 1983, the United Church of Christ echoed Jesus echoing Isaiah, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples,” and began the ingathering of the church’s outcasts who are gay and lesbian, and subsequently, those who are bisexual and transgendered.

The Open and Affirming program in the United Church of Christ (UCC) began at the 1983 General Synod, which also voted to address institutional homophobia, support non-traditional as well as traditional families, encourage AIDS ministries, and include openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual members of Church & Ministry Committees. The Rev. Raymond Bradley, Jr. introduced a resolution urging local churches to welcome gay and lesbian people. This resolution was debated and sent to the Executive Council for referral to national bodies of the denomination for study and further action. Several months later, members of the (then-named) United Church Coalition for Lesbian/Gay Concerns in Massachusetts gathered to revise the 1983 resolution. Their document was submitted to the Massachusetts Conference Annual Meeting, which adopted it in June 1984 and forwarded it for consideration at the General Synod in 1985.

In the spring of 1985, the resolution encountered a roadblock. A new rule stated that resolutions which had been debated at General Synod in prior years could not be resubmitted. After much negotiation, the Resolutions Committee agreed to place the "Open and Affirming" resolution on the agenda. The 1985 General Synod resolution, "Calling on United Church of Christ Congregations to Declare Themselves as Open and Affirming," encouraged congregations to "adopt a non-discrimination policy and a Covenant of Openness and Affirmation of persons of lesbian, gay, and bisexual orientation within the community of faith." The resolution was passed by ninety-five percent of the voting delegates on July 3, 1985. Today local churches, conferences and associations (within conferences) may officially become "ONA" by endorsing a statement of welcome after a period of study, reflection, and prayer on the subjects of sexual orientation, homophobia, and biblical messages about sexuality and inclusiveness. The Rev. Ann B. Day administers the program.

But what paved the way to that hot, historic day in Ames, Iowa?

### ***It Only Takes A Spark...***

In 1970, a gay seminarian at the Pacific School of Religion came out publicly and announced his intention to seek ordination within the United Church of Christ. The Rev. William R. Johnson became the first openly gay person to be ordained to ministry in a historic mainstream Christian church in the United States. He was ordained in 1972 by the Golden Gate Association, a regional grouping of UCC congregations in northern California, after serious study and debate. His ordination was widely reported in the media, giving hope not only to those who wanted to reconcile their sexuality and their Christianity of various denominations and traditions, but also to those already serving in ministry and those who wished to serve who were gay or lesbian. He would later serve as executive director of the Council on Religion & the Homosexual, the first attempt to bridge the chasm between gays and religion which had been founded in 1964 at the Glide Urban Center (Glide Memorial United Methodist Church) of San Francisco.

The UCC Executive Council, the main deliberative body of the church between biennial meetings of the General Synods, recommended in 1973 to regional UCC associations that "as they continue to clarify their under-

standing of the theology of ordination, they give serious consideration to the position of the Council for Church and Ministry in the matter of human sexuality: In the instance of considering a stated homosexual's candidacy for ordination, the issue should not be his/her homosexuality as such, but rather, the candidate's total view of human sexuality and his/her understanding of the morality of its (expression)." Within a few years, open lesbians joined the ranks of ordained UCC clergy, including the Rev. Anne Holmes of Virginia in 1977.

Shortly after his ordination, the Rev. Bill Johnson founded the UCC Gay Caucus in December 1972, which was given Special Interest Group status during the 1973 UCC General Synod. By 1975, the group was able to shepherd through a pronouncement favoring gay and lesbian civil liberties, with logistical support from the Unitarian Universalist Gay Caucus and the Friends Gay Caucus, both from denominations already welcoming of gay men and lesbians. A human sexuality study was also commissioned, with an emphasis on discerning a Christian ethic regarding sexuality.

### ***Loaves and Fishes***

When Anita Bryant launched her successful campaign against a civil rights ordinance in Dade County, Florida in 1977, the UCC Gay Caucus introduced a resolution to that year's General Synod deploring the use of scripture to generate hatred of gays and lesbians, and reaffirming the 1975 pronouncement on civil liberties. This was passed by a 90 per cent majority. The same year, the report of the human sexuality report, with 17 recommendations, was endorsed by a two-thirds majority.

The caucus became the United Church Coalition for Gay Concerns in 1979, and subsequently added "lesbian," "bisexual," and "transgender" along the way. Always present at General Synods, the Coalition began holding annual gatherings preceding the synods in 1981. The United Church of Christ Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns (The Coalition), considered the heart of the ONA movement and program, enjoys "voice without vote" at meetings of the UCC General Synod.

The Rev. Diane Darling became the first openly lesbian woman called to parish ministry in the UCC in 1984, as a pastor of College Avenue United Church of Christ in Modesto, California. Previously, lesbians had been ordained to specialized ministries. The 1983 General Synod had passed a resolution rec-



**Open and Affirming**

**1983 UCC  
General Synod**

**Raymond Bradley**

**Massachusetts  
Conference**



**Ann B. Day**



**Bill Johnson**

**Golden Gate  
Association**

**Anne Holmes**

**UC Coalition  
for L/G/B/T Concerns**





Diane Darling

College Ave. UCC

University  
Congregational

Peter Ilgenfritz

David Shull

ommending to associations that “in considering a candidate’s qualifications for ministry, the candidate’s sexual orientation should not be grounds for denying the request for ordination.” By 1991, the General Synod went further, resolving the UCC “boldly affirms, celebrates, and embraces the gifts for ministry of lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons” and “calls upon local churches, associations, and conferences to extend their welcome and support to

openly lesbian, gay, and bisexual students in-care, and to facilitate the ordination and placement of qualified lesbian, gay, and bisexual candidates.”

University Congregational Church, a UCC church in Seattle, became the first church of a mainline U.S. denomination to extend a call to an openly gay clergy couple in 1994. A three-fourths majority of the church endorsed the ministries the Rev. Peter Ilgenfritz and the Rev. David Shull.

“But [Jesus said to his disciples], ‘You give them something to eat.’” And so, from a humble beginning of a few loaves and fishes, there was enough food to feed the 5000-plus souls gathered to hear the gospel. A seminarian’s faith-full decision in 1970 to be openly gay and an association’s faith-full willingness to ordain him proved enough to bring the United Church of Christ a harvest that has so far culminated in the largest number of churches associated with any welcoming program to date—well over 300! ▼

## Revisiting Sodom

“But whenever you enter a [church] and they do not welcome you, go out into its [vestibule] and say, ‘Even the dust of your [church] that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that [church].” It was just such an experience of inhospitality that led to the establishment of the Reconciling in Christ movement within Lutheran denominations. Former president of Lutherans Concerned/North America, John Ballew had once been ejected from a Lutheran Church/Missouri Synod when the pastor learned he was gay. While on the board of Lutherans Concerned, Ballew introduced the welcoming concept in 1984, drafting the original affirmation of welcome language which is the basis for the whole program. [See Ballew’s current thoughts on the program on p. 27.]

**B**egun under the name “Reconciled in Christ,” the program was designed to encourage, recognize, and connect Lutheran congregations that publicly welcome lesbian and gay believers to their communities of faith. The program intent has always included Lutheran congregations of all affiliations. The Reconciling in Christ roster contains independent Lutheran churches, as well as churches from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. One congregation is jointly ELCA and Missouri Synod (very conservative!).

The program, administered by Bob Gibeling and Jan Bussert, has grown to include 14 ELCA synods representing over 20 per cent of that denomination’s geographical synods and 25 per cent of its 5.2 million memberships. Lutheran organizations, such as the Lutheran Student Movement-USA and the Urban Servants Corps, have also become “reconciling in Christ.” In the past year alone, growth has doubled to 180 congregations.

In 1997 the Board of Directors of Lutherans Concerned approved using the language, “people of all sexual orientations” in the affirmation of welcome. In 1998 the name was altered slightly to become “Reconciling in Christ” to reflect the ongoing nature of the welcoming movement. The first North



Reconciling  
in Christ

America gathering of RIC communities will be held in San Francisco in 2001, and is anticipated to expand the network and ministry.

### ***Roots of Reconciliation***

Before the merger that formed the ELCA, Jim Siefkes, director of developing ministries in the American Lutheran Church's Division for Service and Mission in America in 1974, decided that since every other denomination had a gay caucus, Lutherans should have one too. He gathered six Lutherans and three advisors (which included John Preston, then of SIECUS, and Louise Rose of the American Baptist Gay Caucus) and helped form and fund Lutherans Concerned for Gay People (the final three words were later dropped). Allen Blaich was the first national spokesperson; Diane Fraser became the first openly gay faculty member at a Lutheran College by her public association as one of those early organizers. A professional journalist, Howard Erickson, edited the excellent newsletter, *The Gay Lutheran*, the very name of which "boggled the minds of many church bureaucrats," according to Jim Lokken, the only clergy member of that first group.

In the late 70's Lutherans Concerned played a significant role in the revision of a 1966 ALC sexuality statement. As Lokken explained recently, "The 1980 ALC statement which resulted was not all that we hoped it might be, but it was very much better than the first draft. For example, while the 1966 ALC statement had regarded homosexuality as, in effect, a sin, a crime, and a disease, the 1980 statement only regarded it as a sin."

Lutherans Concerned published an outstanding resource in 1985 entitled *A Call for Dialog*, the result of a two-year process of drafting, discussion, and revision in which every LC chapter participated and for which respected theologians gave feedback. Fifteen-thousand copies were printed and distributed. An ALC study that followed in 1986 concluded that the church can "neither absolutely condemn nor ignore nor praise and affirm homosexuality," but that "many more of our congregations can extend a welcome, withhold judgment, and offer pastoral support" to gay men and lesbians.

### ***Ecclesiastical Disobedience in Luther's Footsteps***

Lutherans Concerned and the Reconciling in Christ Program are contemporary expressions of Martin Luther's famous quote facing down

the church of his time: "Here I stand, I can do no other." Celibacy was required of gay and lesbian clergy by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in 1989. Just as More Light congregations have done in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), two churches decided in 1990 to challenge this requirement by an act of ecclesiastical disobedience—the equivalent of the civil disobedience practiced by the Civil Rights Movement. Saint Francis Lutheran and First United Lutheran, both in San Francisco, ordained non-celibate pastors: Jeff Johnson, Ruth Frost, and Phyllis Zillhart. A church trial found the congregations in violation of ELCA policy but did not specify exclusion until 1995, when the unrepentant churches were expelled.

In 1991, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, seeming to contradict itself, declared "Gay and Lesbian people, as individuals created by God, are welcome to participate fully in the life of the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America." The 1993 Assembly expressed strong opposition to all forms of verbal or physical harassment or assault of persons because of their sexual orientation, and supported civil rights for all regardless of sexual orientation. But that same year, the press coverage of a draft of a Social Statement on Human Sexuality outraged conservatives within the ELCA, and the document was never adopted.

Since then, however, positive steps have been taken. An Open Letter from the ELCA Bishops in March of 1996 set a tone of welcome for gay and lesbian people and their families. In 1997, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly passed by an 80 per cent vote a "memorial" from the Southeastern Synod endorsing the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) before the U.S. Congress. "Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Working Together Week" at the denomination's offices in Chicago, approved by Presiding Bishop H. George Anderson, surpassed in attendance any previous diversity week.

The ELCA Division for Outreach completed a formal research project in the fall of 1998 on how congregations can become more welcoming to gay men and lesbians, entitled "Congregational Ministry with Gay and Lesbian People." The report was presented to the Conference of Bishops and the ELCA Church Council in the spring of 1999, and now resource materials for congregations have been made available through the Division of Outreach. ▼

John Ballew

Lutherans Concerned/  
North America



Bob Gibeling

Jan Bussert

Lutheran  
Student Movement

Urban Servants Corps

Lutherans Concerned

Jim Siefkes

John Preston

Louise Rose

Allen Blaich

Diane Fraser

Howard Erickson

The Gay Lutheran

Jim Lokken

A Call for Dialog

Martin Luther

Jeff Johnson

Ruth Frost  
Phyllis Zillhart

H. George Anderson

ELCA Division  
of Outreach

## BEFORE *OPEN HANDS*

### The Publishing Context of *Open Hands*

Though not listed here, most newsletters of organizations and programs in the Ministries of Welcome timeline preceded the establishment of *Open Hands*.

*(Publisher is indicated when associated with a denomination.)*

**1955**

*Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*  
Derrick Sherwin Bailey

**1967**

*Social Action* (UCC) and *Social Progress* (Presbyterian)  
Joint issue on lesbian and gay civil rights.

**1972**

*motive* magazine (United Methodist)  
Two issues highlight gay men and lesbians.  
Controversy ends magazine.

*Is Gay Good?*

Dwight Oberholtzer, ed. (Westminster Press [Presbyterian])

*The Lord Is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay*  
Troy Perry

**1973**

*Trends* magazine (Presbyterian)  
Features homosexuality. Controversy ends magazine.

**1974**

*Loving Women/Loving Men—Gay Liberation and the Church*  
Sally Gearhart and William R. Johnson

**1976**

*The Church and the Homosexual*  
John J. McNeill

*Insight* is founded.

A journal of gay Catholic opinion, becomes ecumenical in 1981.

**1977**

*Church & Society* (Presbyterian)  
First issue devoted to homosexuality.

*Christianity & Crisis* (Ecumenical)  
First issue devoted to homosexuality.

**1978**

*Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?*  
Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott

*Jonathan Loved David*  
Tom Horner (Westminster Press [Presbyterian])

*Take Off the Masks*  
Malcolm Boyd's coming out book.

**1980**

*Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*  
John Boswell

# The Nativity and Naiveté of *Open Hands*

## Memories from the Founders

The gift of naiveté is its release from worldly limits and conveniences. Beth Richardson and I were novices at magazine publishing back in 1985 when we began thinking about an ongoing resource for Reconciling Congregations. Had we known that most new magazines fold within their first year and that it takes a large amount of capital to start a magazine, we might not have taken such a foolhardy step.

The initial act of faith was to call on United Methodist churches to become "Reconciling Congregations" at the General Conference in May of 1984. Ten churches responded to the call within a few months. In this euphoria, anything seemed possible.

Realizing that some kind of ongoing resource would be essential to nurturing such congregations and cultivating the collective welcoming movement, Beth and I knew a magazine was the ideal answer. So, one year after launching the Reconciling Congregation Program, we took the next risk of publishing the first issue of *Manna for the Journey*.

Publishing the first issue ("Be Ye Reconciled") was truly a labor of love and innocence. Beth edited the articles. I typed the text into an unfriendly word processor. Graphic artist **Brenda Roth** created titles, drew illustrations, and pasted up the copy. Two Affirmation friends raised the funds to print 1,000 copies. —**Mark Bowman**

Soon after we began publishing *Manna for the Journey*, we received a letter from the United Methodist Renewal Services Fellowship, a charismatic group in the United Methodist Church. This organization, in its letter to Morris Floyd and Affirmation, charged that our publication's title was an infringement on the federal trademark they held on the title of their newsletter *MANNA*. We were informed that if we did not change the name of our publication, we would be subject to legal action.

A few months later, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office denied our trademark application for the title, *Manna for the*

*Journey*. Rather than pursue an appeal, we made the difficult decision to change the name to *Open Hands*, which had been the title of Affirmation's daily newsletter at the 1984 General Conference. The idea and image of *Open Hands* came from John Wesley's sermon, "The Catholic Spirit," which was based on 2 Kings 10:15, "Is your heart true to my heart as mine is to yours? ... If it is, give me your hand" (RSV).

Wesley's interpretation of this passage states first that Jehu is not inquiring if he and Jehonadab are of the same opinion or worship in a similar fashion. Instead, says Wesley, the question simply is, "Is thy heart right with God? ... Dost thou believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? ... Is thy faith filled with the energy of love? ... Is thy heart right toward thy neighbor?" Second, according to Wesley, the statement "give me your hand" is a bond of faith and love and does not convey a unity of belief and thinking. Wesley concludes by saying that a person of "catholic spirit" is one whose "heart is enlarged toward all mankind, those he knows and those he does not; he embraces with strong and cordial affection neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies."

In the summer of 1986, beginning with Volume 2, *Manna for the Journey* became *Open Hands*, noting that "Hands joined together span divisions and brokenness, even if they do not erase them." —**Beth Richardson**

The first few issues of the magazine, along with some recognition in the church media and other circles, brought a steadily growing number of readers. It also brought overtures to publish it with welcoming groups in other mainline denominations. While the early magazine readers were predominately United Methodist, a significant number were from other traditions. Since a similar magazine did not exist in other denominations, a joint venture was appealing. A year of discussion and negotiations led to the publication of the first ecumenical issue of *Open Hands* in January, 1993. —**Mark Bowman**

**1981**

*A Disturbed Peace*  
*Reflections of an Irish Catholic Homosexual*  
Brian McNaught

**1984**

*The Other Side* (Ecumenical)  
Special issue on homosexuality.

**1985**

*Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence*  
Rosemary Curb & Nancy Manahan



## OPEN HANDS HISTORY

**1985**

*Manna for the Journey* first appears as a quarterly resource for Reconciling Congregations.

**1986**

*Manna for the Journey* becomes *Open Hands*  
Melany Burrill and Bradley Rymph, Coeditors.

**1988**

Accepted as a member of the Associated Church Press.

**1989**

Honored with two Associated Church Press honors,  
one for general excellence and the other  
for in-depth coverage of a current issue (AIDS).

**1991**

Melany Burrill retires as coeditor.  
Ann Thompson Cook serves as interim until Betsy Halsey is hired.

**1992**

Receives Award for Merit for General Excellence  
for smaller magazines from the Associated Church Press.

Publication process changed to one editor and an  
ecumenical advisory committee.

Mary Jo Osterman is hired as editor, and Jan Graves as designer.

**1993**

First ecumenical issue published with *More Light*,  
*Open and Affirming*, and *Reconciling in Christ* programs.

**1996**

Welcome & Affirming Baptists join the cooperative publication.

Mary Jo Osterman leads year-long ecumenical process of  
creating new Bible study curriculum *Claiming the Promise*,  
published in January of 1997 to widespread acclaim.

**1998**

Chris Glaser succeeds Mary Jo Osterman as interim and then editor.  
Jan Graves continues as designer.

Open & Affirming Ministries of the Christian Church  
(Disciples of Christ) and the Affirming Congregation Programme  
of the United Church of Canada join as ecumenical partners.

**1999**

*Open Hands* Advisory Committee and publisher, the Reconciling  
Congregation Program, begin planning spinoff of magazine  
as an independent publication as early as 2001.

Executive publisher Mark Bowman is succeeded  
by interim Marilyn Alexander.

## GLAD to Go Into God's House

"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord!'" Thus begins Psalm 122, and here the King James Version speaks more clearly to the welcoming movement than other translations. It is not enough to "go to" the house of God as the RSV and NRSV have it; we must be enabled and empowered to enter, to "go into" the church. This means to be welcomed into the life and ministry of a congregation or denomination. It has been GLAD Alliance and its Open & Affirming Ministries Program that has welcomed LGBT people into the life and ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

The Kansas City General Assembly of 1977 defeated a resolution opposing homosexuality as a viable lifestyle for Christians, simply referred a resolution calling on regions and congregations to deny ordination to gays and lesbians, and approved a study document on the issue. A riveting moment occurred when Carol Blakely of Caldwell, Idaho, stood at the microphone to read a coming out letter from her son. As she read she was ruled out order because her time had expired; the person waiting to speak (Rev. James Stockdale) yielded his time to her so that she could finish reading the letter.

The 1979 Assembly in St. Louis left the question of ordination to the discretion of regions, but approved a resolution that "the ordination of persons who engage in homosexual practices does not accord with God's will... If the Church ever comes to a conclusion concerning homosexuality which differs from those now held, the change will be the result of the transformation of insight through prayer, informed study and discussion rather than the result of votes on resolutions." It was at this Assembly that people began to organize what became Gay, Lesbian and Affirming Disciples (GLAD) Alliance.

"I was at the first secret meeting for GLAD," recalls Debra Peevey. "We met off site and gave only our first names. We were trying to simply find each other." She was already out to her ordination committee in the Northern California Region, which adopted the policy, "We affirm that no one human condition can be an absolute barrier to ordination." She was ordained by Lafayette (CA) Christian Church in 1981, just a month after the first openly gay or lesbian Disciples minister had been ordained: Christine Leslie by University Christian Church, Berkeley, California.

Judith Hoch Wray remembered: "We gathered in a home somewhere in the suburbs of St. Louis. Clandestine, fearful, and yet ener-

gized by the sheer numbers, so many that chairs and floor were filled with Disciples, clergy and laity. Aware that others had not heard the cautiously passed message to meet. Concerned that among us would be one who would betray us."

GLAD Alliance, Inc. became an organization at its first pre-assembly gathering in Louisville in 1987. Laurie Rudel described the gathering: "I remember the pre-assembly gathering...It was by invitation only held in a local church. Judith Hoch Wray led us in a Bible study. She made the scripture sing with grace. I believe we were studying one of the letters of Paul. Her understanding of and compassion for Paul, her love of the church, startled and surprised me. As part of a closing ritual we told our stories and placed candles in the sand. By the end of the event the candlelight shone brightly on our faces. It seemed to light the path ahead that would lead from the informal to the formal organization of GLAD. I remember Holly Beaumont, Candy Cox, Debra Peevey, and myself sitting in our hotel room and dreaming up names for this fledgling organization." At this particular Assembly, delegates rejected a resolution that homosexuality was an unacceptable lifestyle for Christians.

### *Three Churches Lead the Way*

The first Disciples of Christ congregation to publicly name itself as a welcoming community was First Christian Church in Alameda, California when, in December of 1987 it declared itself a "Welcoming Faith Community." This was in direct response to the ostracism many persons who were affected by AIDS were experiencing in society and in the church.

Findlay Street Christian Church in Seattle, Washington concurrently was seeking to understand the place that lesbian and gay Christians have in the life of that congregation. In response to a request by an elder to preach about homosexuality, the Reverend Debra Peevey preached a sermon on March 15, 1987 which catapulted the congregation into a period of discussion and prayer. The process culminated in the winter of 1987-1988 when it developed a Vision Statement inclusive of persons of "all sexual orientations, races, cultures and economic circumstances."

In April of 1988 University Church in Chicago, Illinois, affiliated with both the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ, released a similar statement of "Openness and Affirmation,"

O&A  
Ministries

Open &  
Affirming  
Ministries



GLAD Alliance

Carol Blakely

James Stockdale

Debra Peevey

Northern California  
Region

that said in part, "We welcome gay and lesbian persons into University Church membership and all of its privileges and responsibilities, including full opportunities for positions of leadership and ministry."

These three congregations and the diverse ways in which they approached the possibilities and concerns of homosexuality in the church formed the basis for the structure of the Open & Affirming Ministries Program.

In the fall of 1988 the GLAD Alliance met for its annual event in the facilities of University Church. It was there that the leadership of the Alliance was urged to formulate a structure which would recognize and develop Open And Affirming Congregations. An initial coalition of pastors and laypersons was formed to organize informative and inspirational activities at the 1989 General Assembly of the Christian Church, meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana. At that gathering an "Interact Group" was offered to all Assembly participants entitled "Ministry With Gay and Lesbian People: Open And Affirming Congregations." Additionally, a booth was provided in the exhibit hall to provide resources for congregations interested in the Open and Affirming Program. Under a banner that read, "The Body of Christ is Living with AIDS," GLAD held an AIDS prayer service. The Assembly called the Church and its members to treat persons with AIDS as children of God and to "act as instruments of God's compassionate love and tender care where the seeds of fear, prejudice and alienation have been sown."

### **Expanding Ministry**

With seven Open and Affirming Congregations and one Open and Affirming Campus Ministry dedicated to the process, the Coordinating Committee (now called the Alliance Council) of the GLAD Alliance, at its January 1991 meeting, reorganized the program and appointed two persons, the Rev. Laurie Rudel of Seattle, and the Rev. Allen V. Harris, of New York City, as official Co-Developers of the Open And Affirming Congregation Program. The Rev. Roger Wedell of Dallas later replaced Laurie Rudel following her resignation in 1995 as Co-Developer.

During 1991 the GLAD Alliance and the United Church Coalition for Lesbian/Gay Concerns agreed to explore the possibilities of cooperation between the GLAD Alliance Open and Affirming Congregation Program and the Open and Affirming Congregation Program of the United Church of Christ. This

was grounded in the Ecumenical Partnership the two denominations have been in since the 1970's. While recognizing the unique aspects of each of the two programs, both organizations endorsed the mutual use of the title "Open and Affirming Congregations," agreed to use different shorthand to easily distinguish the programs, with the UCC using "ONA" and the Disciples using "O&A," and reaffirmed similar goals for the two programs.

The purpose and structure of the Program continue to be defined. At its meeting in conjunction with the 1991 General Assembly in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the Alliance formally adopted a document which established procedures for becoming an Open & Affirming Ministry. This Assembly is remembered as the one in which Michael Kinnamon was not elected as General Minister and President because of his support of gays and lesbians. GLAD's membership increased by 200 percent in the aftermath, according to Liz Lang. By 1993, gay-supportive Richard L. Hamm was elected to serve a six-year term as General Minister and President.

In January of 1993 the Alliance Council updated the name of the Program to be more in line with its purpose. It became, and remains, the Open & Affirming (O&A) Ministries Program of the Gay, Lesbian and Affirming Disciples Alliance. The first issue of *CrossLinks*, the newsletter of the O&A Ministries Program, debuted in October of 1993.

In 1997 a Provisional Advisory Board for O&A Ministries was formed in order to begin to envision the future direction of the program. Five members of the Advisory Board were selected at the 1997 GLAD Alliance Event prior to the General Assembly in Denver, Colorado, an Assembly that voted to name homosexuality as a topic for discernment by the whole church. In January of 2000, at the Alliance Council meeting in Dallas, Texas, a fully constituted Advisory Board was formed to oversee the work and future of O&A Ministries. Allen Harris resigned as Developer of Open & Affirming Ministries in November of 1998. In 1999 the Rev. John Wade Payne, recently retired Sr. Pastor of Park Avenue Christian Church in New York City, agreed to serve as Interim Developer of the O&A Ministries Program from his home in Alva, Florida. ▼

University Christian

Judith Hoch Wray

Laurie Rudel

Holly Beaumont

Candy Cox

First Christian Alameda

Findlay Street  
Christian

University Church



Allen V. Harris

Roger Wedell



Michael Kinnamon



Liz Lang

Richard L. Hamm

CrossLinks

John Wade Payne

Park Avenue Christian

## Baptized Into One Family

"Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." Thus Jesus welcomed family regardless of biology or marriage. The new family would be the family of faith. "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors...invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed..." In other words, welcome those in need, those who might not be able to return the favor. "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Because God desires mercy, not sacrifice, Jesus replied. God desires welcome, not scapegoating. Jesus is the founder of the welcoming movement. "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body..." Christ's Body is by definition welcoming.

In May of 1972, during the American Baptist Convention in Denver, what became American Baptists Concerned for Sexual Minorities reminded Baptists that gays and lesbians were also baptized into their body. During the Charleston Biennial in 1991, the Rev. Michael Easterling, pastor of Madison Avenue Baptist Church in New York City, led a meeting of fifty persons to establish a network of American Baptist Churches that would be open and affirming of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people during the Charleston Biennial in 1991. American Baptists Concerned was authorized to administer the network based on the principle of association and to begin recruiting member congregations. Meanwhile, the delegates to the Biennial approved both an anti-gay "Statement of Concern" and one calling for a study on human sexuality.

University Baptist Church of Minneapolis called Nadean Bishop as the first openly lesbian pastor of an American Baptist Church in January of the following year, 1992. By March, Binkley Memorial Baptist Church of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, granted a pre-ordination license to an openly gay man, John Blevins, and Pullen Memorial Baptist of Raleigh voted to bless same-sex unions after a careful study process. In June, ABCConcerned approved the organization of "The Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists." The first churches listed as W&A appeared in the fall issue of the ABCConcerned newsletter, *The Voice of the Turtle*. Through a never-before-used referendum process, the General Board of the American Baptist Church/USA (ABC/USA) passed a resolution in October, saying, "We affirm that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching."

The first W&A Association Coordinator, Brenda Moulton, was appointed in February

of 1993. Four months later, the General Board of the ABC/USA voted in favor of a "Resolution for Dialogue on Issues of Human Sexuality." The same month, the W&A Association held its first biennial meeting with twenty congregations and three groups as charter members.

### "Dissin" the Welcoming Movement

Mark Crosby, an openly gay pastoral counselor, was denied an ecclesiastical endorsement by the ABC/USA Committee on Chaplaincy and Pastoral Counselors in March of 1994. In May, W&A congregations were asked to retract their welcome of gays and lesbians; those in the west were threatened with disfellowshipping. In August, a process began to disfellowship First Baptist Church of Granville, Ohio, for its welcome. The church was disfellowshipped from the Columbus Baptist Association in 1995. Since then, one American Baptist church in Alaska and four in California have been disfellowshipped from regional associations. The general board of the denomination since voted to remove the four California churches from the denomination, but this decision has been stayed pending adjudication requests of eight American Baptist regions that allege due process and church autonomy have been violated. (Two Southern Baptist churches in Atlanta and adjacent Decatur were disfellowshipped by the Georgia Baptist Convention last fall for welcoming lesbians and gay men.)

In September, the Pacific Southwest region revoked the ordination standing of Susan Vanderburgh, a lesbian pastoral counselor. Her church rescinded her ordination and the denomination withdrew its endorsement of her as a pastoral counselor. By December, openly gay candidate Randle (Rick) Mixon's third attempt to be ordained in twenty years was rebuffed by the Ordination Commission of the ABC/USA of the West. [For a happier Baptist story, read Jacki Belile's article on p. 28.] ▼



W&A  
Welcoming  
and Affirming

American Baptists  
Concerned

Michael Easterling

Nadean Bishop

John Blevins



Brenda Moulton

Mark Crosby

San Leandro

Susan Vanderburgh

Rick Mixon

## MINISTRIES OF WELCOME

### 1964

Council on Religion and the Homosexual (CRH) organized at Glide Urban Center, San Francisco.

### 1968

The Rev. Troy Perry founds first congregation of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC).

### 1969

Father Pat Nidorf founds Dignity in San Diego, California.

### 1970

Rev. Richard Nash of Los Angeles and Elgin Blair of Toronto organize Unitarian Universalist Gay Caucus.

### 1971

Rev. Ron Mattson of Minneapolis founds the Committee of Concern, American and Canadian Friends, to deal with lesbian and gay concerns. Name changed to Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns in 1978.

Sister Jeannine Gramick organizes weekly masses for gay Catholics in Maryland.

### 1972

Metropolitan Community Temple, first lesbian/gay synagogue founded in Los Angeles.

Rev. Bill Johnson founds the UCC Gay Caucus, later renamed the United Church Coalition for Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Concerns.

American Baptists Concerned for Sexual Minorities organized (under another name).

### 1974

Rev. David B. Sindt begins the Presbyterian Gay Caucus, which becomes Presbyterians for Lesbian & Gay Concerns.

Living in rural Georgia, professor Louie Crew organizes Integrity.

Gay United Methodist Caucus, later called Affirmation, is founded in Evanston, Illinois.

### 1976

Dr. Ralph Blair organizes Evangelicals Concerned in New York.

Ben Pickell begins organizing lesbian and gay Seventh Day Adventists in southern California.

### 1977

Jeannine Gramick, a nun, and Robert Nugent, a priest, form New Ways Ministry, a ministry for LGBT Roman Catholics and their families, based in Mount Ranier, Maryland.

Chris Glaser begins Lazarus Project at the West Hollywood Presbyterian Church, the first fully funded ministry of reconciliation between the church and the LGBT community in any denomination.

Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons founded in Salt Lake City, initiated by Steve Zakharias.

### 1978

Presbyterian churches opposed to the antigay denominational policy designate themselves "More Light Congregations." The welcoming movement begins.

Rev. Bill Johnson organizes Maranatha, Riversiders for Lesbian/Gay Concerns at New York's famed Riverside Church.

Circle of Light organized for LGBT folk at West Park Presbyterian Church, New York City.

### 1979

First national gathering of gay and lesbian seminarians held at Union Theological Seminary in New York.

GLAD Alliance forms in the Disciples of Christ (The Christian Church).

Martin Rock begins the Brethren/Mennonite Council for Gay Concerns.

The Diocese of California begins the Parsonage, a ministry in the Castro in San Francisco.

### 1980

National Gay Pentecostal Alliance is founded in Schenectady, New York, by William H. Carey and Judy M. Schwarz, as a welcoming denomination.

### 1981

Evangelicals Together (emerging from Evangelicals Concerned) organized in Southern California by the Rev. Steve Preston as a ministry with a focus on Bible studies in members' homes.

### 1982

Affirm: Gays and Lesbians of the United Church of Canada is founded in Montreal.

Reconciling Congregations initiated in the United Methodist Church by Affirmation. First such congregations in 1984.

Wingspan Ministry with LGBT folk begun by St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church in St. Paul, Minnesota led by Anita Hill and Leo Treadway.

Rev. Janie Spahr begins Ministry of Light, a ministry with LGBT persons and their families based in three Presbyterian churches in Redwoods Presbytery, California.

### 1983

United Church of Christ General Synod calls for churches to become Open and Affirming.

Gay People in Christian Science / Chicago organize first national gathering. The national group Emergence emerges in 1985.

### 1984

Lutherans Concerned begins Reconciling in Christ program. First RIC: St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church.

### 1987

Open and Affirming churches movement begins in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

### 1989

Bishop John Spong ordains and commissions Robert Williams as chief missionary for the Oasis, a diocesan ministry with lesbians and gay men. Oasis becomes the name of the welcoming movement in the Episcopal Church.

### 1990

Christian Lesbians Out Together (CLOUT) grows out of an invitation extended by Revs. Carter Heyward, Jan Griesinger, Melanie Morrison, and Cathy Ann Beaty.

### 1991

Supportive Congregations Network formed for congregations from Mennonite, Church of the Brethren, and other Anabaptist faith traditions.

That All May Freely Serve, founded in Rochester, New York, with Rev. Janie Spahr as a national "lesbian evangelist," now has ministries in Baltimore, Chicago, and New York City, and is organizing others.

### 1992

Welcoming and Affirming church program started by American Baptists Concerned.

Affirming Congregation Programme begun in the United Church of Canada. First church in 1995.

Other Sheep: Multicultural Ministries with Sexual Minorities begun by missionary Tom Hanks as an international and intercultural ministry, largely focused on Latin America.

### 1995

Shower of Stoles of LGBT people in ministry begun by Martha Juillerat and Tammy Lindahl.

### 1999

INCLUSIVE Congregations movement begins among Roman Catholic, Church of England, and United Reformed churches in the United Kingdom. ▼

## Salvation is Salvation

“Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?” Thus Jesus, in the parable of the laborers paid equally though some had been there longer, illustrated the egalitarian nature of the commonwealth of God, and the church as its reflection. Salvation is salvation—one cannot be “saved” more than another. Yet many Christians are envious that God’s generosity, God’s grace, should extend to LGBT people. When the United Church of Canada recognized that God’s grace did, in fact, extend to lesbian and gay people, many of the “first laborers grumbled” that God “made them equal to us...”

**I**n God’s Image...Male and Female,” was one of a series of reports and study documents prepared by the United Church of Canada (an ecumenical union of several mainstream Protestant denominations) dealing with issues of human sexuality. It wasn’t primarily about sexual orientation or about ministry. In 1972, the General Council agreed to carry out a comprehensive study of human sexuality, but for various reasons it wasn’t until 1978 that a task group met to prepare a report. The document they wrote, “In God’s Image,” was approved as a study document by the 1980 General Council and circulated to the wider church for discussion and reflection. It focused broadly on issues of sexuality, marriage, and family. The impetus for this focus on sexuality was a growing concern about marriage and family breakdown, changing roles of women and men in society, feminism, inclusive language, gender roles, and growing awareness of injustice and violence against women. The issue of homosexuality and eligibility for ministry had not yet begun to surface as a major discussion in the church. It was in many ways only a minor comment in a much larger document.

Rev. Pierre Goldberger, Principal of the United Theological College in Montreal, has noted that the issue of homosexuality and ministry was really only a subset of a much broader discussion about roles and relationships. “In God’s Image...Male and Female” was a telling title,” he said. “We were addressing a whole range of issues—theology, the Bible, and of course sexuality. And one of the footnotes of the debate was discussion of the variety of sexual orientations that exist.” An issue that was initially quite peripheral to the conversation took on a life of its

own. This “by the way” took on a whole new dimension, and became the focus for a whole lot of unresolved issues within the United Church. It wasn’t an issue that most people would have chosen as a focus for the church’s energy and life for more than a decade. But it came to be the focal point around which the United Church was forced to make decisions, and to decide who it was, and who it was to become as the United Church of Canada.

Affirm: Gays and Lesbians of the United Church of Canada was founded in Montreal in 1982 as a national network of regional groups. At the same time, Affirm established “Friends of Affirm” for others who supported their goals. Affirm held its first national conference in Vancouver in 1983.

In February 1984, the Division of Ministry, Personnel and Education studied a task-group report entitled “Sexual Orientation and Eligibility for the Order of Ministry” and approved its principal recommendation that “in and of itself sexual orientation should not be a factor in determining membership in the order of ministry of the United Church of Canada.” The full report was to be acted on by the upcoming General Council in Morden, Manitoba later that summer. It was circulated to every member of the United Church, as an insert in the *United Church Observer*. Some 800,000 households across the country received a report that recommended ordination for gay and lesbian people. There was an immediate furor. The media had a heyday.

The 1984 General Council adopted recommendations from the report that urged an end to discrimination against homosexual persons, “towards full civil and human rights in society.” The Council also acknowledged that, throughout its history, the church had condoned and even encouraged the rejection and persecution of homosexual persons. But the



**Affirming  
Congregation  
Programme**



**Alyson Huntly**

**Pierre Goldberger**

**Division  
of  
Ministry,  
Personnel  
and  
Education**

**Affirm**

**Friends of Affirm**

**1988  
General Council  
of the  
United Church  
of Canada**



**Ron Coughlin**

**Augustine  
United Church**

**Bethan Theunissen**



issue of ministry, particularly ordained ministry, remained unresolved. The Council concluded that further study was needed, and postponed the decision for another four years.

Yet another task-group was formed to prepare a church-wide study, collate congregational responses, and prepare a report for the 1988 General Council in Victoria. It wrote a document called "Towards a Christian Understanding of Sexual Orientation, Lifestyles and Ministry." By the time the task-group released its report in preparation for General Council there were petitions flooding in from all across the church. There had been non-stop media coverage, most of it tending to pick up the loudest and most polarized voices in the debate. The church had not experienced such a crisis since the decision to ordain women in 1936. That had taken ten years of rancorous study and debate; some people had threatened to leave the church if women were ordained. And some people did.

The 1988 General Council of the United Church of Canada made a historic decision. The irony is that it was in many ways a non-decision. The Council in essence voted not to change existing policy, that is, not to erect a barrier that had not previously existed. "All people, regardless of their sexual orientation, who profess Jesus Christ and obedience to him are welcome to be or become full members of the Church," said the final statement. Nothing had changed. There never had been criteria for excluding any groups of persons from membership.

And as for ordination, the question that was at the heart of this whole debate, the final resolution stated that "all members are eligible to be considered for ordered ministry." Again, nothing changed. That had been policy since The United Church came into being. All existing procedures for discerning and approving candidates for ministry were reaffirmed, from the congregation's role in putting forward candidates to the role of a conference in final recommendation for ordination and commissioning. Nothing changed. Everything changed.

### ***Affirming Congregations Begin***

Affirming Congregations in the United Church are local churches that welcome bisexuals, lesbians, gay men, and their families in all aspects of church life. They are congregations that promote reconciliation of gay, lesbian and bisexual people within the church and also in the larger society. And they are congregations

that minister both to and with people of all sexual orientations.

The Affirming Congregation Programme, initiated in 1992, modeled on similar ones in other denominations, was created to give greater visibility to those United Churches that offer a ministry of inclusion and welcome to gays and lesbians, but also to encourage all congregations to find ways to be more open in their welcome. A congregation that declares explicitly that it is welcoming can create a safer place for gays and lesbians to share who they are. The congregation takes on more of the risk, because there's no doubt the decision sometimes creates conflict and controversy. But congregations often find they gain new members and a renewed sense of ministry as a result of the experience.

Congregations joining the program, now led by the Rev. Ron Coughlin, agree to undertake a process of study and discussion. They consider what it means for them to be inclusive and welcoming; they look at the barriers and ways in which they might become more inclusive; they consider what ministry and outreach they can offer to and with gay and lesbian people, and they prepare an official congregational statement that declares their intention to be welcoming of all. Then, there's a celebration!

Augustine United, in downtown Winnipeg, is no stranger to diversity. As an inner city congregation, it encounters people from all walks of life. Bethan Theunissen, a South African, a lesbian, a lay woman with Methodist background and Baptist and Mennonite theological training, is Augustine's full-time minister. Sunday morning worship reflects considerable diversity as well. The beautiful polished wood and stained glass reveal its distinguished Presbyterian origins. There is a visible presence of gay and lesbian people, people from the neighborhood, and people whose roots go deep into Augustine's 100 or so years of history.

Augustine made history in 1995, when it became the first Affirming Congregation in the United Church of Canada. Although the congregation had studied and reflected on issues of sexual orientation for over twenty years, it undertook four years of intense study and debate before its public statement and celebration as an affirming congregation. The first motion was rejected in 1993, not because people disagreed with the vision of inclusion, but because many people felt the congregation needed to do more work to become a

truly safe and welcoming place for lesbians and gays. A statement in its Sunday worship bulletin reads, "Augustine is a community that welcomes, recognizes and accepts lesbian, gay and bisexual people in our midst as full and equal participants in all aspects of our life, work and worship."

### ***"Behold, I Am Doing a New Thing..."***

The United Church has changed since its decision, in its policy, its attitudes, its theology, and its practice. Inevitably, other denominations around the world have been forced to face their own Issue Years. Many of them look to The United Church for models and ways to get through. They look at how far it has come, and they ask how.

The process of change in The United Church of Canada is not over, nor would anyone say it has "arrived," but there are many signs the church is a very different place than it was in 1988. At that time, most people believed it would be a decade or more before even one congregation would accept an openly lesbian or gay minister. There have been at least 10 out lesbian or gay candidates since then. Many more clergy have been called as openly gay or lesbian, or have subsequently come out to their congregations. A dozen or more congregations have made public statements declaring themselves to be affirming and welcoming of lesbians and gays in all aspects of their congregational life, including ministry. Many more are reflecting more quietly on ways their congregation might offer a more inclusive welcome to all regardless of sexual orientation.

Like all major denominations in Canada, the United Church still struggles with declining membership and increasingly limited finances. But there are many signs that it is still a strong, healthy church, offering spiritual nurture to the nearly two million Canadians within the bounds of its pastoral care, and a life-giving and caring presence in four thousand communities across the country. There is no question that the United Church lost members because of the issue—some estimate the losses to be as high as 3.5 percent—but it gained members as well. In some places it also acquired a new sense of its mission and a whole new vitality.

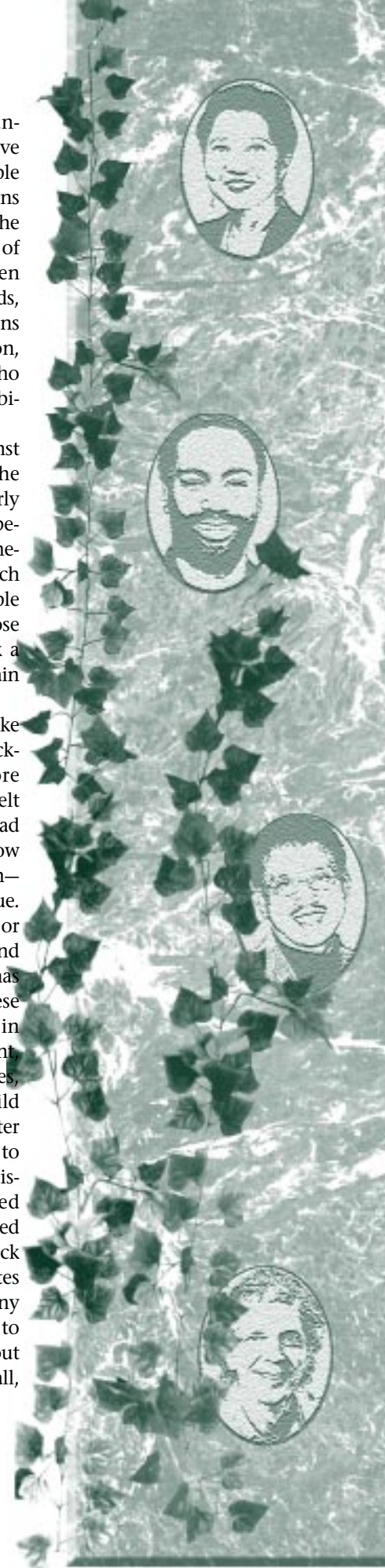
The real costs and gains of the United Church's 1988 decision are in many ways immeasurable. There was no way the United Church could have faced the issue of minis-

try and homosexuality and come out unscathed. Whatever it decided, it would have lost members. If it had chosen, as some people thought it should, to completely bar lesbians and gays from ministry, it might have lost the skills and resources of at least 10 percent of its clergy (some say the numbers are even higher) and members, as well as many friends, family members, and supporters of lesbians and gays. Even in its compromise decision, the Church lost people from both sides who were unwilling to live with its uneasy ambiguity.

There are some who fought bitterly against any inclusion of lesbians and gays in the church, and some who fought just as bitterly against putting up barriers—not always because they approved of homosexuality, sometimes just because it's not very United Church to shut people out, *any* people. Many people were very angry. Some left. Sometimes those confrontations left a bitter legacy. It took a long time for people to start feeling good again about being the United Church.

Generally, United Church people don't like extremism, and they don't like people attacking one another personally. As the more vitriolic feelings died down, many people felt sad and a bit disappointed that the church had slipped into such a morass. That wasn't how they wanted to be as a community of faith—whatever their position on this particular issue.

The United Church is no stranger to risk or controversy. It was born out of a difficult and painful union. Through all of its history it has spoken and acted on social issues—Japanese internment in World War II, apartheid in South Africa, abortion, capital punishment, rights for women, human rights, refugees, native land claims, economic justice, child poverty, homosexuality. It often runs counter to popular opinion, and constantly strives to live with integrity with its own internal disagreements. That's just who the United Church is. It's not a denomination insulated from the world around it, and it refuses to stick its head in the sand. It changes, and it creates change. It is very far from perfect, as any United Church person would be the first to tell you. Yet it continues to risk talking about and living out what it believes, and, above all, it dares to be the church in the world. ▼



## Dancing At the Walls of Injustice

"You have turned my mourning into dancing," the Psalmist wrote (30:11). Think of Miriam dancing with a tambourine after the Israelites' deliverance from Egyptian oppression, or David dancing virtually naked as the Ark of the Covenant was brought to the new capital city of Jerusalem. Think of the walls of Jericho tumbling down because the Israelites marched around the city. Think of the dividing walls of hostility between Jew and Gentile in the church of Ephesus broken down by the Lord of the Dance. And consider the man "lame from birth" in Acts who was able to enter the temple gate "walking and leaping and praising God," the very temple he was unwelcome to enter because his disability made him spiritually "impure."

Rather than remaining victims, the Supportive Congregations Network redirected its energy from banging heads against church walls to "dancing" at the walls of the church. The "dancing" conferences that have resulted have proven to be inspiring sacred places for telling congregational stories, developing new paradigms for dialogue, and participating in poignant worship experiences. The first of five dancing conferences, *Dancing at the Wall of Fear, Bigotry, and Oppression* took place in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1995. Most recently, *Leading the Dance: Living the Church Re-Imagined* Conference was held in Milwaukee last summer.

The Supportive Congregations Network was formed in 1991 as a grassroots organization comprised of people and congregations from Mennonite, Church of the Brethren, and other related Anabaptist faith traditions. SCN is committed to offering support, resources and opportunities for dialogue among congregations which welcome gay, lesbian and bisexual members; encouraging meaningful dialogue at the denominational level; and offering support and resources for individuals who are working toward welcome. Focusing on these goals, SCN builds closer links between congregations which are discussing issues of homosexuality and direct a network of welcoming congregations.

The Supportive Congregations Network offers something unique among welcoming programs: three distinct categories of participation. *Exploring Congregations* are those in conversation about welcoming gay, lesbian, and bisexual members. *Accepting Congregations* welcome gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons as full members. *Publicly Affirming Congregations* have adopted a written and public statement of welcome and agree to have their name

listed with other welcoming congregations. The Network is now identifying individuals who are also supportive of its work under the "Friends of SCN" program.

The Supportive Congregations Network was the progeny of the Brethren/Mennonite Council for Lesbian and Gay Concerns (BMC), begun by Martin Rock in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania in 1976. Shortly after founding BMC, Martin Rock lost his job with the Mennonite Central Committee and moved to Washington, D.C., where BMC gained strength, momentum, and additional supporters. BMC's founding mission statement was "to educate and dialogue with the church, and support gay men and lesbians." In 1978 early BMC pioneers published its first edition of *Dialogue*, which provided a forum for BMC to initiate conversations about homosexuality with Mennonite and Church of the Brethren folks.

In 1983, the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church established a Listening Committee for Homosexuality Concerns, while the Church of the Brethren narrowly approved an amendment prohibiting same-sex covenantal relationships to a statement on sexuality. The General Conference Mennonite Church prohibited sexual relations outside of heterosexual marriage in 1986, and the Mennonite Church followed suit the following year.

The first welcoming congregation punished for its stance was the Ames Mennonite Church, expelled in 1987 from the Iowa/Nebraska Conference of the Mennonite Church. Germantown Mennonite Church, the oldest Mennonite congregation in North America, was expelled from the Franconia conference in 1997. ▼



Supportive  
Congregations  
Network

Brethren/Mennonite  
Council for  
Lesbian and Gay  
Concerns

Martin Rock

Ames Mennonite  
Church

Germantown  
Mennonite Church

Friends of SCN

## Being Inclusive as God Is

"Therefore be inclusive, evenly as your heavenly Parent is inclusive." The word *inclusive* is usually translated as *perfect*, but the word so translated means *mature*. If maturity is *integrity*, a bringing together, a reconciliation, then surely *inclusive* might also be used. After all, the verse follows the one about God sending rain and sunshine on everybody and thus we are to include everybody in our love.

One-hundred forty people have attended various workshops, and 50 discussion packs developed by the Lesbian Gay Christian Movement (LGCM) have been sold, on the concept of INCLUSIVE Congregations, a new movement put together by Roman Catholic, Church of England, and United Reformed Church people in the United Kingdom. Four congregations to date have produced inclusive statements and are living up to some of the criteria for being registered as INCLUSIVE, according to Janet Webber, retiring volunteer administrator of the program. These criteria include a period of study, an agreed statement of inclusiveness with clear evidence of the congregation's support, an annual renewal of the statement and an annual contribution to the movement's administration, publicity of the congregation's stand internally and externally, a consideration of blessing same-gender relationships, and availability of church buildings for gay and lesbian groups.

Because of the ecumenical nature of the work, precision is impossible and there is a need to be flexible in interpreting the above criteria and accepting various responses in fulfillment of the requirements. The designation of *INCLUSIVE* represents a theological understanding of the nature of God, as compared with words *Welcoming* or *Affirming* which tend to suggest human activity.

It is fair to say quick results were not expected. Conversations with Open and Affirming congregations in the USA suggested that it usually takes years rather than months for firm commitments to be made, and while there are already a considerable number of congregations where LGBT people are genuinely included and affirmed, it perhaps takes even longer than in the USA to overcome natural British reserve and make a public stand. The British are rather good at keeping quiet even about their good points! ▼

## God's Open Hands Are Our Own

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me." In the day of reckoning, those who enjoy the commonwealth of God are those who welcome the stranger. "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking... Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches." The stranger outside knocking on the church's door is Christ; the stranger knocking on the church's closet door inside is a part of the Body of Christ. "Who was I that I could hinder God?" Peter rhetorically asked the early church about his decision to baptize those whom God had already baptized with the Spirit. Who are we, as the church, that we can hinder God's work welcoming lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people in the church and into the church?

Even if there were a kind of divine intervention to effect *metanoia*, a positive about-face conversion of the church in which LGBT people would be welcomed wholeheartedly, the work of reconciliation, affirmation, welcoming, openness, and more light would need to continue for decades. As conclusion, it is helpful to review our needs as a movement from Morris Floyd's analysis of the United Methodist experience:

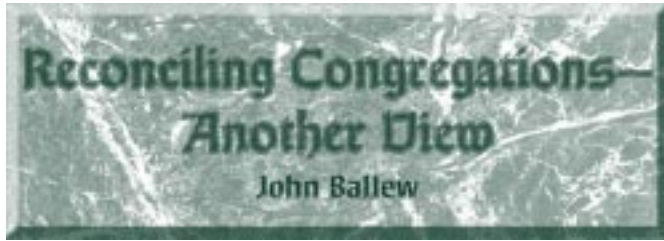
1. A solid theological foundation for the work is a necessity.
2. With a theological foundation, the work of systemic change and issue advocacy is seen as a ministry, not merely a political agenda.
3. If the work is a ministry in the name of Christ, it must be done with an explicit commitment to address systemic exclusion and injustice tied to race, gender, and class, as well as homophobia/heterosexism.
4. The welcoming movement should include and benefit from the diversities of a faith community incorporating the multiple "styles" people bring to their lives, as well as various leadership styles, strategies, and attitudes toward issues.

It has become much clearer in the last few years than it was in the early days of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered movement that the controversy about homosexuality in the churches is a symptom of deeper divisions over biblical interpretation, ecclesiology and, ultimately the meaning of the Gospel. It is unclear when and how—or whether—these wounds can be healed. But we can support with our prayers and presence those with the faith, hope, and courage to keep at it in the welcoming movement. ▼

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by  
SO GREAT A CLOUD OF WITNESSES,  
let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely,  
and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,  
LOOKING TO JESUS the pioneer and perfecter of our faith  
who for the sake of the JOY that was set before him endured the cross,  
disregarding its SHAME,  
and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.* Hebrews 12:1-2



## Outreach



In 1981 I was the member of an unremarkable Lutheran congregation in rural Illinois. In response to an article in the *Lutheran Standard*, the church-wide publication of the American Lutheran Church, I wrote a letter to the editor in which I came out as a gay man. Ironically, the article that prompted my letter described a Metropolitan Community Church in Ohio that ministered to gay and lesbian Christians who felt unwelcome in other churches.

Members of St. Paul's were appalled to read that they had an unrepentant gay man among their members. Some expressed the fear that homosexuals would flock to their small town and that they would become known as a "gay church" if they took no action. The president of the church council thought beating me up might be a good way to make their displeasure known. Fortunately, the pastor declined his offer. They held a church trial instead, and in 1982 they expelled me from the congregation.

I became the president of the Board of Directors of Lutherans Concerned/North America later in 1982. Hoping to identify congregations that would provide a safe haven for lesbians and gay men, I helped establish the Reconciled In Christ Program (now *Reconciling In Christ*). It was my hope that doing so would help others avoid the spiritual trauma I had experienced.

We intentionally set the threshold for membership in the program very low. Congregations were not asked to take a stand on any issue related to homosexuality other than membership in the parish, and then only to state that gay and lesbian folks were welcome on the same terms as all other people. Queer folk were encouraged and expected to participate in the general and sacramental life of the congregation. This was not intended as a program for radical congregations committed to social justice. The intention was only to identify places where lesbian and gay Lutherans might worship in peace.

In 1982 I also moved to Atlanta and joined the large downtown church to which several of my Lutheran friends belonged. One friend commented that the congregation (which will remain nameless) was a good choice for gay people because it was "so big you can just get lost here, and nobody cares who you are." For better or worse, I found this to be true. The pastor was supportive when I spoke with him about joining. I had no membership to transfer, having been disfellowshipped by St. Paul's Church. I joined without difficulty or controversy.

When I talked to him later about our congregation joining the RIC program, he was adamant in his opposition. His church would never join the program; it was not the congregation's place to welcome or refuse to welcome anyone. "Everyone" was welcome in the church, and there would be no "special" welcome to anyone. What about my previous experience, I asked? That was unfortunate, he told me, but an anomaly. There was no need for a special welcome for lesbians and gays. To this day the congregation remains a place where gay folk are welcome to sing in the choir and to give their tithes...and where they remain largely invisible.

Eighteen years later, 180 congregations have joined the RIC program—about one percent of the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. At last count, 14 synods (out of 65) have also affirmed the principles of welcome.

The glass is half-full or half-empty, depending on your perspective. The principles remain largely the same—minimal in what they ask of congregations. They continue to affirm membership for queer folk, not our ordination or even the blessing of our relationships. There is no expectation that congregations will become advocates for justice on our behalf, either in secular society or within the church.

I find myself ambivalent. It is hard to know what it means when a synod—the Lutheran equivalent of a district or a diocese—joins the RIC program. It feels like an accomplishment to have that sort of affirmation. Does it mean that the congregations within the synod all welcome lesbians and gay men as members? I wonder. Would these synods take action should a congregation be hostile to gay or lesbian people? I doubt it.

If these principles of inclusion were rather conservative in the early 1980's, they seem even more so now. It is true that explicitly welcoming gay members would still be a large step for many Christian congregations. Within the context of the gay community, such programs seem overtaken by events.

A block away from the Lutheran congregation which has—still—refused to become explicit in its welcome of gay folk, a Methodist congregation has shamelessly thrown open its doors and shouted its welcome from the rooftops. Gay folk are included not only in membership and in the choir, but find their lives included in sermons. They are a vital part of every aspect of congregational life. The result is that a declining congregation has been reinvigorated by hundreds of lesbians and gay men who have found a genuine spiritual home.

Gay women and men make tremendous contributions to the congregations and parishes of which they are members. For congregations to simply welcome these gifts is no longer enough. Churches that want to be relevant to the lives of queer folk and their families need to find their voices and their courage, to speak up and put their welcome into action. ▼

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## Welcoming Process



Ten years ago this month my partner Carla and I were in a crucible of life-changing decisions. Seniors at Taylor University, a conservative evangelical institution in Indiana, we had just begun the journey toward joy and self-acceptance as a lesbian couple. Only a few months before, we had journeyed for the first time to visit Grace Baptist Church in Chicago. Grace was a fairly new congregation, and still an independent Baptist evangelical community. Founded as an independent welcoming Baptist church, it was one of the earliest Midwestern witnesses of welcome. Supported with Grace's love and prayer, we survived our senior year at Taylor and sought refuge at Grace upon graduation. The story of our salvation is just one of countless stories which the walls of Grace could shout.

We moved to Chicago in 1990 to become a part of the Grace community. We have been sustained by our loving congregation as we have declared our story in the face of condemnation and rejection by loved ones. We have grown in our understanding of the Gospel, and I have grown in my understanding of and call to leadership in ministry.

After more than a year of discernment, Grace sought affiliation with the American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago in 1991. There was no small amount of fear on the part of the congregation. Why risk this affiliation? Wouldn't we be abused and rejected, ultimately? Considered second class citizens? After much discussion, strong consensus led us forward: We wanted to proclaim our witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in partnership with others. We were clear that our motives were focused on the desire to do common mission in a Baptist context of theological diversity. Several meetings occurred with the regional investigating committee and any significant doubts which they had were, if not dismissed, bracketed. With NO consensus about the nature or appropriateness of homosexuality, the committee recommended that we be approved for affiliation. Testimony to our life was clear, and they responded with faithfulness in recognizing it. We were voted into fellowship in March of 1992.

In the months that followed there were numerous attempts led by individuals and churches to remove us, or to qualify the region's acceptance of us with disclaimers about acceptance of homosexuality. At every turn, brothers and sisters who are liberal, moderate or conservative on the issue of homosexuality held the "center" and resisted such moves. For these people, the testimony of our congregation to the redeeming and healing power of Jesus, which called us into mission, was sufficient. If they had not already encountered our story, they were nevertheless committed to preserving the possibility of such encounter within the context of formal partnership in ministry. Those who would "put the disease out of the camp" (an

exact quote) had no way of entering into such encounter and have, in fact, missed out on the complete joy of fellowship.

Over the years several congregations have withdrawn their fellowship from our region, citing their opposition to our presence as "the" reason. Grace's witness has continued within our region as we consistently model commitment to regional events, involvement in committee responsibilities, financial commitments and mission commitments. Between 1996 and 1999 we ordained three individuals from Grace, each with the region's recognition and affirmation of our candidate preparation process.

The Metro Chicago region has responded, again and again, with an openness to actual encounter. Has it been perfect? No! But a consistent witness remains. Those early resistances to our exorcism were key. A tone of sanity and study was forged. In 1993, when we put forth our first two candidates for regional recognition of ordination, neither were then approved. One disclosed nothing about her sexual orientation, but the Ordination Commission, operating in a context of fear in a highly politicized climate did not provide a safe and affirming context for the exploration of call. In response to the other candidate, who identified himself as a gay man, they froze the application process for any openly gay, lesbian or bisexual candidate and entered into a "study process" in order to adopt a policy on openly homosexual candidates.

Of course, many regions in ours and other denominations have entered into such study processes. They often become embittered battles over the nature of homosexuality and/or who is the legitimate reader of scripture. They seem constructed to identify winners or losers. By contrast, the leaders in Chicago were intentional about selecting a culturally and theologically diverse Task Force for the study process, on which I was privileged to serve. We all committed in the first meeting that we would only produce a document which we could all sign, and that we would, above all, model the kind of discernment and community which we desired for our region.

From the first discussion, we approached our task from a desire to identify its implications for ministry. What do we really believe about Who calls people to ministry? In what context do Baptists historically believe this is best discerned? What are the gifts and challenges in relating to external bodies (ordination commissions) who share a role in such discernment? The process was one of the most amazing, Spirit-led processes I have experienced. In the end, our group produced a clarifying document, rather than a simple one-dimensional recommendation. In it we highlighted the theological ground of our work and the implications for proceeding in several ways. Two committees and two years later, in March of 1997, the region adopted an ordination policy which affirms the local church's role in the initial assessment of a candidate's call to ministry. Our policy clearly states that homosexual persons will not be barred for this sole reason from entering the regional interview process. By adopting this policy, the region affirmed both the local church and the standing Ordination Commissions as sites of discernment in the affirmation of one's call. We clarified the relationship between these two sites as it relates to any controversial issue.

In 1998 I became the first openly gay or lesbian candidate to enter our regional process. My two interviews, nearly a year apart, were intense discussions of my call, my "lifestyle" and my theology. I entered the discussions with a spirit of peace which, indeed, passes understanding. I engaged people with respect and boldness because there was an invisible cloud of witnesses in the room with me, and because a number of people present were people whom I trusted in the discernment process. I had clarity and joy as I testified to my call because I was well-prepared by Grace's ministry and my studies at Chicago Theological Seminary.

They approved me for recognized ordination in March 1999. In June 2000, an interfaith gathering of 180 people proclaimed a blessing on my ordination, laid hands on me (one-by-one) and committed to supporting my leadership in ministry. It was a lavish, sensual, joyful proclamation of Gospel—known with such certainty to those who have been cut off from its proclamation. What a wonder it was to have people bless my leadership who are outside of the institutional church! It was sacred ground of connection and hope for the future of the church.

Nearly ten years ago, my friend and mentor Tim Phillips (founding pastor of Grace) said to me "We'll never change anyone's mind about homosexuality with mere discussion. It takes the testimonies of our lives; our lives are the parables which speak God's gospel." This truth has been borne out over and over again in my relationships with family and friends, at Grace, in our Region and denomination and throughout the welcoming movements. At the heart, his words were about incarnational witness. Maybe its the latent evangelical in me, but I absolutely believe that our lives are essential witnesses in the process of transformation. The transformations which we seek can not be reduced to the helpful strategies of political organizing, or the naivete of quietism and caution. As our lives are lived, as we mature in and bear out the fruits of the spirit, we become the parables which open up new possibilities of Gospel. It was the contagious (yes, perhaps we ARE contagious!) evangelistic nature of our witness that he was talking about.

Why has Chicago, admittedly not perfect, been fertile ground for American Baptists? I believe it's because there has been a consensus among those who have remained active in regional life that the Gospel is revealed in unexpected places. They have stood by historical theological principles which preserve not only the liberty of individuals (soul liberty) but the liberty of God. It must be reiterated: There is no consensus in our region about the nature or appropriateness of homosexuality. This disappoints some of my beloved activist-oriented friends. What we do have is a consensus about the ground of our relationships in shared ministry. Grace has led the way in incarnational witness, and the region has responded with a renewed vision and witness of grace itself. ▼



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## Introduction to Shining Like the Sun A Sanctoral Cycle for ALL the Saints

David Kerr Park

The writer of the book of Hebrews wrote eloquently of the meaning of faith, and of those who set an example for us to follow, including Abraham, Moses, and primarily, Jesus: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (*Hebrews 12:1-2*).

William How expressed the same idea in that hymn set to the stirring music of Vaughn Williams:

For all the saints, who from their labors rest,  
who thee by faith before the world confessed,  
thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest. Alleluia, Alleluia!

This great **cloud of witnesses** surrounds us like a sports stadium full of cheering fans. We are on the field of life and they are there encouraging us to faithfully run *our* race. They point beyond themselves to Jesus as our great example. This is why it is important to remember them.

Robert Ellsberg, in *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses For Our Time*, explained in his Introduction: "No, the saints are not perfect human beings. But in their own individual fashion, they became authentic human beings, endowed with the capacity to awaken that vocation in others. Dorothy Day, as I have noted, did not like to be called a saint: 'When they call you a saint, basically it means you are not to be taken seriously.' This book offers a different argument: that to call someone a saint means that his or her life should be taken with the utmost seriousness. It is a proof that the gospel can be lived."

Remembering the examples of those who have gone before us gives us role models for what it means to live the gospel. Thomas Merton said, "There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun." We are the only saints most people will ever see. Like the saints, we are walking around shining like the sun. They give us an idea of what that looks like.

One part of the Church Year that is unfamiliar to most Protestants is the ongoing remembrance of the saints on the anniversaries of their deaths. While the Reformation omitted most of this ancient Christian tradition, many Protestant denominations today have begun to recover its practice. The ecumenical movement has rediscovered the value of looking to our common past to find our identity as God's people today.

This list is called the **Sanctoral Cycle**, and there are many versions. When most people think of saints they think of white, European, Catholic, male, presumably heterosexual clergy from ancient history. Little wonder. The official lists in the *Book of Common Prayer* and Catholic prayer books are pretty much just that. When was the last time you were inspired by Wulfstan, Bishop of Worcester, who died in 1095?

Not many modern people can identify with most of the names in the historic Sanctoral Cycle. Some of them are so significant they transcend the distance of time. Some may have meant something in a particular place and time, but aren't as

important now. For this ancient Christian idea to have any purpose, a new list is needed that speaks to us and our time.

I have developed a Sanctoral Cycle for use in my congregation, which includes people from very diverse backgrounds. On any given Sunday nearly 500 people will gather, with over half coming from Catholic or Episcopal backgrounds. We affirm spiritual diversity as a positive value, so we also welcome a significant number of people from non-Christian faith traditions. We are a Eucharistic church with an odd mix of Anglo-Catholic liturgy and Protestant music, flavored with New Thought and Liberation theology.

The list we are now using is more reflective of the faith and contributions of **women** (Fanny Crosby, Julian of Norwich), **lay persons** (Dorothy Day, Thoreau), **ethnic minorities** (Sojourner Truth, Seattle), **non-Europeans** (Oscar Romero), **Protestants** (Luther, Kierkegaard), and especially modern examples we can better relate to (Mother Teresa, Ann Frank). The objective has been to create an **inclusive, contemporary Sanctoral Cycle** that can be used in practical ways, especially in a gay and lesbian context. It is a work in progress, and will be updated.

I have retained only a core of **historical and biblical names** that are still meaningful today (Mary the Mother of Jesus, St. Francis of Assisi). Then I added others not usually represented, such as **persons of other faith traditions** through whom the light of Truth has also shown (Rabbi Abraham Heschel, Gandhi), or **artists and musicians** (Michaelangelo, Bach).

In selecting contemporary examples I have emphasized persons who stood for **inclusiveness, justice, and spiritual diversity** (Martin Luther King, Clarence Jordan). I've also included **gay and lesbian saints** (Dag Hammarskjold, St. Aelred, Sts. Sergius and Bacchus) and martyrs (Matthew Shepherd, Harvey Milk) because it is critical for us to reclaim our own heritage as spiritual leaders and people of faith.

Beyond the Sanctoral Cycle itself, some days in the **Cycle of Commemorations** are not saints' days. Some are other days in liturgical calendars (Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity). There are many days on the **civil calendar** (Thanksgiving, Mother's Day) which, while not part of the liturgical calendar, are still important in people's lives. It is important, in the United States, at least, to keep American Civil Religion (Independence Day, Memorial Day) from taking an inappropriate place in our worship. That is not to say these cannot be occasions for prayer and awareness. There are civil recognitions which can have spiritual significance for a congregation, such as Black History Month, Earth Day, Peoples of the Americas, and others. Even those Hallmark holidays can present pastoral opportunities, like a Blessing of Relationships on the Sunday nearest Valentine's Day.

In some congregations it may be appropriate to remember the **celebrations of other faith traditions**, especially those of our spiritual parents, the Jewish people. In our congregation we have a significant number of mixed faith couples. We do not cease to be a Christian church, but we are sensitive to find some ways of recognizing the passing of days like Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, Passover, Hanukkah, and Yom HaSho-ah (Holocaust remembrance).

For a congregation that affirms the experience and pastoral needs of **gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered**

persons, there are several days that should be included, such as National Coming Out Day, World AIDS Day, and GLBT Pride Month. Depending on the particular congregation, the founding dates of Dignity, Integrity, the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, or the various reconciling and affirming organizations represented in *Open Hands* could be celebrated and remembered in the prayers.

My hope is that this Cycle of Commemorations can be used creatively in a number of practical ways. A contemporary calendar that is sensitive to the spirituality of sexual minorities (among others) could well form a core of spiritual models for use in preaching, teaching, and prayer.

This list is not suited for each church. We all have different denominational and local factors that must be taken into consideration. I encourage each church to develop their *own* list that speaks to their *own* people; but don't be afraid to expand people's awareness of other traditions, races, nations, and religions. How better to emphasize our common humanity? Those selected should be persons whose lives are prayable, as a United Methodist cycle suggests.

Each week in the **Communion liturgy** at my church we remember persons who have recently died, as well as loved ones on the anniversary of their deaths. To this is added those names from the Sanctoral Cycle. Some of these go by the traditional designation of saint, while others don't. Here is the closing portion of our Great Thanksgiving:

We honor our ancestors of family and of faith  
affirming our inheritance as daughters and sons of God  
to manifest wholeness, abundance, health and peace  
in our lives, our communities, our Earth-home and the Cosmos.  
We commemorate this Eucharist to those who have recently died:  
[names inserted here]  
We commemorate this Eucharist, on the anniversary of their death  
to our loved ones who live in the dimension called Eternity:  
[names inserted here]  
Together with your servants, [names from Sanctoral Cycle inserted here]  
all this we ask in the name of our Master, Jesus the Anointed:  
By Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ...

One of the more popular special services we hold each year is on **All Soul's Day**. A large cross is formed with tables in the center of the sanctuary, on which are placed hundreds of small votive candles. Following the sermon there is a solemn Time of Remembrance which brings many to tears. A song is sung, such as Charles Wesley's "Come, Let Us Join Our Friends Above," or others written within our congregation. While the song is sung several large candles on the tables are lit from the Paschal Candle, which stands at the top of the cross. The cross is blessed with incense on all sides. Verses of Scripture are read, such as portions of Rev. 7:9-17 or 14:13. People are invited to come to the tables informally and light a candle in memory of a loved one as they speak the name aloud. Also included are the names of those from the Sanctoral Cycle that people find personally meaningful. It is a very moving experience. The ceremony closes with a prayer that concludes with the traditional prayer: "Rest eternal grant to them, O God,

and let light perpetual shine upon them. May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace."

Each month we publish a short biography of those from the Sanctoral Cycle being remembered, and the significance of each day to our lives and faith today. Our web site will soon include this information for the entire year's cycle. (And I am certainly open to suggestions and additions!) Not all the names in the Sanctoral Cycle are familiar. They were selected not because they were perfect—far from it—but rather because they really made a difference in our world (Florence Nightingale, Albert Schweitzer). In the Christian Scriptures, of course, the saints are the entire company of the baptized. One is called a saint, not for *being* holy, in the sense of exhibiting some special sanctity unobtainable by the rest of us, but for *doing* something holy for God.

Oskar Schindler did not live an especially virtuous or religious life, but he is remembered because he was used by God to *do* something holy. Those whom God has chosen for special tasks have always been flawed persons. Moses was a murderer. Peter denied even knowing Jesus. Paul was sexist (and maybe closeted!). Luther had a terrible temper. In spite of these failings, God used them to *do* something holy. Just like Jesus, these saints embody what God calls us to do and be. May *their* witness of faith inspire *us* to share our light!

In the words of the contemporary hymn writer Fred Pratt Green:

Rejoice in God's saints, today and all days;  
a world without saints forgets how to praise.  
In loving, in living, they prove it is true:  
the way of self-giving, Lord, leads us to you.

**David Kerr Park** is the Associate Pastor of Sunshine Cathedral MCC ([www.sunshinecathedral.org](http://www.sunshinecathedral.org)), and a former United Methodist clergyperson. His M.Div. is from the Methodist Theological School in Ohio and D.Min. from South Florida Center for Theological Studies. His primary work has been in the liturgical and psychosocial dynamics of ritual in the gay and lesbian community. He lives in Ft. Lauderdale, FL, where he is raising his two sons. He can be contacted at [DKPark@aol.com](mailto:DKPark@aol.com).

*For further information see:*

Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints: Daily Reflections On Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses For Our Time* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1997).

Clifton F. Guthrie, ed., *For All The Saints: A Calendar of Commemorations for United Methodists* (Akron, OH: Order of St. Luke Publications, 1995).

*The Proper for the Lesser Feasts and Fasts together with The Fixed Holy Days* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1980).

A wonderful collection of icons is offered by Bridge Building Images ([www.bridgebuilding.com](http://www.bridgebuilding.com)). They make both traditional and contemporary icons, including several of interest to our community: Sts. Sergius and Bacchus, David and Jonathan, St. Aelred, Sts. Perpetua and Felicity, Christ the Bridegroom (with the Beloved Disciple's head on Jesus' breast), St. Joan of Arc, We who (a Zuni berdache), and even Harvey Milk!





# Shining Like the Sun

## The Cycle of Commemorations

compiled by David Kerr Park

### JANUARY

- 1: Holy Name of Jesus
- 3: Takashi Nagai (1908-1951) mystic of Nagasaki
- 5: Lanza del Vasto (1901-1981) founder of the Community of the Ark and Catholic follower of Gandhi
- 6: The Epiphany of Jesus
- 7: Felix and Mary Barreda (d.1983) Lay apostles and martyrs in Nicaragua
- 13: George Fox (1624-1691) Renewer of society and founder of the Society of Friends
- 14: Martin Niemoeller (1892-1984) Confessing pastor
- 21: St. Agnes (d. 304) Free woman and martyr
- 22: Alexander Men (1935-1990) Russian Orthodox priest and martyr
- 24: St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622) Bishop of Geneva
- 25: The Conversion of St. Paul
- 26: Timothy and Titus Companions of Paul
- 28: St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) Theologian and Doctor of the Church
- 30: Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948) Apostle of non-violence

### FEBRUARY

- 2: Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (Candlemas)
- 3: St. Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167) Cistercian abbot and patron saint of Integrity
- 4: Cornelius the Centurion
- 8: Martin Buber (1878-1965) Jewish philosopher and theologian
- 11: Fanny Jane Crosby (1820-1915) Blind hymn writer and musician
- 14: St. Valentine (d. 269) Martyr
- 16: Janani Luwum (1924-1977) Anglican Archbishop of Uganda and martyr
- 18: Martin Luther (1483-1546) Reformer of the Church
- 20: Frederick Douglass (1818-1895) Abolitionist
- 25: Felix Varela (1788-1853) Cuban priest and theologian

### MARCH

- 2: John and Charles Wesley (1703-1791, 1788) Anglican priests and founders of Methodism
- 5: Karl Rahner (1904-1984) Theologian
- 7: Sts. Perpetua and Felicity (d. 203) martyrs
- 10: Harriet Tubman (1820?-1913) Abolitionist
- 14: Fannie Lou Hamer (1917-1977) Prophet of freedom
- 17: St. Patrick (389-461) Bishop and missionary of Ireland
- 19: St. Joseph Temporal father of Jesus
- 21: Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) Composer of sacred music
- 24: Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero (1917-1980) martyr of El Salvador
- 25: The Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary
- 26: Bishop Richard Allen (1760-1831) Founder of African Methodist Episcopal Church
- 27: Meister Eckhart (1260-1329) Dominican theologian and mystic
- 30: Sister Thea Bowman (1937-1990) African-American Franciscan

### APRIL

- 4: Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) Apostle of freedom and renewer of society
- 9: Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) Theologian and martyr
- 10: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) Mystic and scientist
- 23: Cesar Chavez (1927-1993) Farmworker organizer
- 25: St. Mark Apostle and Evangelist
- 28: Oskar Schindler (1908-1974) Righteous Gentile
- 29: St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) Doctor of the church

### MAY

- 1: St. Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471) Spiritual master and priest
- 6: Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) Naturalist and social critic
- 8: Beatified Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) Mystic
- 17: Beatified Josephine Bakhita (1869-1947) Ex-slave and nun
- 22: Rabbi Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760) Founder of Hasidism
- 27: John Calvin (d. 1564) Founder of Reformed movement
- 30: St. Joan of Arc (1412?-1431) Maid of Orleans and martyr
- 31: Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

### JUNE

- 1: St. Justin of Rome (c. 167) martyr
- 3: Pope John XXIII (1881-1963) Reformer of the church
- 7: Seattle (1786?-1866) Chief of the Suquamish
- 12: Anne Frank (1929-1945) Witness of the Holocaust
- 25: Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889-1929) Indian Christian mystic
- 27: Anniversary of Stonewall Riots
- 29: St. Peter and St. Paul Apostles

### JULY

- 6: Hus (1372-1415) Czech reformer and martyr
- 9: Augustus Tolton (1854-1897) First African-American priest
- 21: Albert Luthuli (1898-1967) Zulu chief and Nobel laureate
- 22: St. Mary Magdalene
- 29: William Wilberforce (1759-1833) Abolitionist
- 30: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus of Bethany—Jesus' family of choice
- 31: St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) Founder of the Society of Jesus

### AUGUST

- 7: John Mason Neale (1818-1866) Liturgical reformer and hymn writer
- 11: St. Clare (1193-1253) Abbess at Assisi
- 13: Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) Nurse and health care reformer
- 14: St. Maximilian Kolbe (1894-1941) Polish Franciscan priest and martyr
- 15: St. Mary, Mother of Jesus
- 21: Georgia Harkness (1891-1974) Theologian and social critic
- 24: Simone Weil (1909-1943) Philosopher and mystic
- 28: St. Augustine (354-430) Bishop of Hippo and Doctor of the Church
- 31: John Bunyan (1628-1688) Puritan preacher and writer

### SEPTEMBER

- 3: Samuel Checote (d. 1884) Creek Native-American Chief and preacher
- 4: Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) Missionary doctor and Nobel laureate
- 5: Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997) Founder of the Missionaries of Charity
- 15: Martyrs of Birmingham (d. 1963) Four young girls
- 17: St. Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) Abbess and visionary
- 18: Dag Hammarskjold (1905-1961) Secretary General of the UN
- 20: Henri Nouwen (1932-1996) Priest and spiritual guide
- 21: St. Matthew Apostle and Evangelist
- 27: St. Vincent de Paul (1580-1660) Apostle to the poor
- 29: St. Michael and All Angels

### OCTOBER

- 4: St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) Friar and founder of Franciscan order
- 6: Founding of Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (1968) Anniversary of first service held by Troy Perry
- 7: Sts. Sergius and Bacchus (d. 290) martyrs in death and lovers in life
- 11: National Coming Out Day—Anniversary of National March on Washington for Gay Rights
- 12: Matthew Shepherd (1976-1998) Victim of hate crime
- 15: St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) Mystic and doctor of the church
- 16: Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (d. 1556) Creator of the *Book of Common Prayer*
- 18: St. Luke Apostle and Evangelist
- 22: Maura O'Halloran 1955-1982 Christian Zen monk
- 23: St. James of Jerusalem (c. 62) Brother of Jesus and martyr
- 29: Clarence Jordan (1912-1969) Founder of Koinonia Farm
- 31: Reformation Day

### NOVEMBER

- 1: Feast of All Saints
- 2: Commemoration of All Faithful Departed (All Soul's)
- 9: Martyrs of Kristallnacht (1938) Victims of anti-Semitism
- 11: Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) Philosopher
- 12: Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz (1651-1694) Poet and scholar
- 16: St. Margaret (1046-1093) Queen and patron of Scotland
- 26: Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) Abolitionist preacher
- 27: Harvey Milk (1931-1978) First openly gay elected official (USA)
- 29: Dorothy Day (1897-1980) Co-founder of the Catholic Worker

### DECEMBER

- 1: World AIDS Day
- 3: St. Francis Xavier (1506-1552) Jesuit missionary to Japan
- 9: Blessed Juan Diego (16th century) Witness to Our Lady of Guadalupe
- 10: Thomas Merton (1915-1968) Trappist monk
- 12: Sister Alicia Doman (d.1977) French nun and martyr of Argentina
- 23: Rabbi Abraham Heschel (1907-1972) Teacher and prophet
- 25: Nativity of Jesus (c. 4 bce)
- 26: St. Stephen (c. 34) First deacon and martyr
- 27: St. John Apostle and Evangelist
- 28: The Holy Innocents Children of Bethlehem
- 29: St. Thomas Becket (1118-1170) Archbishop and martyr