

Open Hands

Vol. 17 No. 4
Spring 2002

Shaping an Inclusive Church



How I Changed My Mind

Profiles in Grace and Courage

If Jerry Falwell Could See Me Now!

Changing Strategies to Change Minds

Transforming Relationships

A Denominational Conversion

plus a new column, "How I Do Sex"

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Call for articles for *Open Hands* Winter 2003
Monogamy to Polyamory
The Range of Relationships

Theme section: Both freedom and oppression have influenced how we imagine and create our relationships. In the past and still today, GLBT people could enjoy discrete casual relationships with less fear of reprisal from the church and society than when forming visible, ongoing same-gender marriages. For straight and gay alike, serial monogamy rather than "till death do us part" has become common practice. The bisexual, or the gay partner in a heterosexual marriage, may want a relationship in addition to a primary partner. Now the "cool" word among academics and sexual theorists is "polyamory," relationships that involve more than two people. It represents a "shift in the paradigm" in thinking about sexuality within narrow, confined expressions. Sexuality, especially when unrelated to procreation, is freer to come out and play, so to speak. But then, what about right-relation, mutuality, Christian ethics? What about the strategy of seeking same-gender marriage rights? Should we emphasize our acceptance over experimentation? Is it legitimate to "think outside the box" of the traditional "couple"? **Give us your thoughts in letters, personal stories, analysis, and so on. Are you involved in a polyamorous relationship? A monogamous relationship? An open relationship? Are you angry that we would even entertain such notions on the pages of *Open Hands*? 50-1500 words. See below for further instructions.**

Columns: My Turning Point (how you changed your mind on the issue), How I Do Sex (how you reconcile or integrate sexuality and spirituality), My Church (an extended profile of your welcoming congregation), In Solidarity (with other justice issues), You're Welcome (how to be welcoming), Worship, Spirituality, Retreats, Resources (books and videos), Outreach, Leadership, Marriage, Health, Youth, Campus, Children, and Family. These brief articles may or may not have to do with the theme of the issue. **750 words.**

Contact with ideas as far before deadline as possible.
Manuscript deadline: September 30, 2002

An article should be accompanied by the author's two to three sentence self-description, a photo (snapshot okay—we can crop to face), contact information including e-mail, plus any other photos helpful to the article. E-mail article as a file attached to an e-mail explaining its contents, or paste in e-mail. E-mail digital photos separately.

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NEXT ISSUE:
RACISM: OUR INCOMPLETE RAINBOW

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How I Changed

Chris Glaser

editor's word

This issue's theme of changing minds and hearts may remind us of the internet joke series circulated endlessly (confirming Nietzsche's myth of eternal return) about how many people of various faiths it requires to change a lightbulb. The answer of one group may fit *all* Christians: "Change? You want us to change?" Inertia may be a greater culprit than ignorance and homophobia in church resistance to the change required to fully welcome the membership, ministries, and marriages of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Christians.

I once had a phobia and prejudice about a segment of the population. It was based in personal knowledge and experience, thus the more deeply rooted. I'd been bitten just too many times by this particular minority to welcome them into my life. No matter their personal stories nor public celebrities. I respected those who stood up for their rights, and believed they deserved them. And yes, I believed some could be good and loyal friends, but I wouldn't want one as a neighbor or a friend, let alone a family member. Even the Bible spoke of them derisively, lumping them with degradation, sin, and heresy.

Slowly, however, I changed. First I learned how to keep them at bay, so that my phobia decreased. Then, in college, I came into my liberal phase of acceptance. I lived with one in a household, even took him to church and introduced him to friends, rather proud of myself for how accepting I was. We'd play ball together, and I grew to respect his skills. But I was not ready to generalize my experience to "his people."

Then I met one who would radically transform me. I met him in a shelter for the homeless, asleep on the hard, cold concrete floor. Another nameless statistic till that moment, we brought him home with us to live. Now he was part of the family. I watched him grow up, learned how to view things from his perspective. He ate with us, worked with us, slept with us. Today I thoroughly enjoy and love him. Now I am a "dog person" forever.

Though I was an avid watcher of Lassie and Rin Tin Tin, those celebrities could not touch me deeply enough to change me. My brother's dog had bitten me too many times. Though I read dog literature through the years, positive, firsthand experiences were necessary to transform my mind and heart. Animal rights activists could persuade me that dogs deserved to be treated justly, but I could not enthusiastically welcome dogs into my home or church until I met Smokey in college. I learned that biblical writers wrote of dogs metaphorically and were culturally inclined to disapprove of them. And though I came to believe humans could develop deep attachments with dogs, I did not know such was personally possible until I fell in love

with Calvin, and then Hobbes, a dog Calvin and I found lost or abandoned in the local park.

If I could overcome my dogphobia, Christians can overcome our homophobia. If I can keep working on my humanonarcissism, Christians can keep working on our heterosexism (and all the other "isms" that divide us).

We have an array of very fine articles describing how individuals (including several evangelicals) as well as a denomination (the United Church of Canada) changed their minds. And Peggy Campolo explains how her mind has never changed, but Jesus gave her the power to speak her mind! As editor, I confirmed two writers' decisions to capitalize Evangelical when referring to evangelicals who as a group tend to oppose us to differentiate them from evangelicals generally, into which category even we fall.

At least one article analyzes our strategies for change. Amanda Udis-Kessler's research findings should give all denominational strategists pause, though her case study is of United Methodists. Are we politicizing our movement in detrimental ways? Are we creating our own marginalization toward the periphery of our denominations? Are we sacrificing our welcome and the possibility of changing the structure from within (subversion)?

On the other end of the spectrum, queer theorist Erwin Barron challenges us to think way outside the church box in a new column introduced in this issue, "How I Do Sex."

Hopefully this issue of *Open Hands* will disturb the waters of our movement as well as the church. Remember the pool of Beth-zatha of John 5:1-9: whenever an angel disturbed its waters, healing was possible! 📌



Hobbes, Chris, Calvin. Calvin's most recent book is entitled, *Unleashed: The Wit and Wisdom of Calvin the Dog*, by Calvin T. Dog, translation by Chris Glaser (Westminster John Knox Press, 1998). Mrs. Hobbes is an aerobics instructor for squirrels. Chris is their servant.

"Would I Want This Person as My Minister?"

An Evangelical Change of Heart and Mind

Earl B. Stewart

I have discovered to my surprise (perhaps even shock) that there is more than one kind of experience of "coming out." That reality has resulted in a fundamental change in my thinking as it relates to the ordination of gay and lesbian Christians to the Gospel ministry. That difficult change within me has taken place in the context of a question I have not been able to ignore. "How can I withhold my love and support from anyone whom God loves and for whom Jesus died?" I cannot and I will not. That is my conclusion now. But, it hasn't always been that way.

First, An Issue

My journey began in 1969 in my first year of seminary. During that year *Time* magazine published a major article on homosexuality and the struggle of gays and lesbians to gain acceptance. Reading that article convinced me that this issue would be one that we seminarians would have to face and struggle with once we became ordained. I spoke about this issue before a seminary class which required each of us to speak on a topic we believed important to the church. In doing so, we were asked to give our own view on the topic.

Homosexuality was a difficult topic for me to speak on. It was not an issue I wanted to deal with. I wanted to deal with evangelism, a topic I loved and still do. For me, homosexuality was a distraction that would stir up deep emotions and divisions. But, it was also an issue that would not go away and I knew that I would need to prepare myself to address it. So would my peers. So would the Church. That is what I said before my peers and professor on that day in 1969.

During the 1970's the Presbyterian Church (both north and south) began to wrestle with the request of gay and lesbian Christians to be ordained to the Gospel ministry. At that time I was convinced that homosexuality was a sin

that barred gays and lesbians from ordination. I said so from the pulpit. I said so on the floor of presbytery. I read literature on both sides of the issue. I studied Scripture pertaining to it. I examined my heart and mind to see if I was fearful of gays and lesbians and to discern if I hated them. I did not. Whatever view I held I wanted it to be an honest conviction, not an irrational reaction.

I asked my session and church to include funds in the budget for me to attend the Presbyterian General Assembly each year so that I could become better informed on both sides of this and other issues. They agreed and I began attending each year that I could. At these gatherings I spent many hours listening to both sides plead their case. I began to appreciate the General Assembly process of debate.

Then, the Families

In the late 1970's I found out that two families in the church I was serving had sons who were gay. I sensed a deep hurt within those parents who felt isolated and alone. I understood that they needed my love and support. They did not need words of judgment from their pastor. I realized that my words could either offer healing or deeper pain for those families. I decided to do what I could to help. I loved them that much.

I brought these families together for a time of sharing and mutual support. The tone of my attitude softened and I found a part of me that wanted to be a presence of healing and support to these families. I had lunch with one of their sons and discovered myself wanting to reach out to him with genuine love and support instead of words of judgment.

Yet, my views about the issue did not change. I became aware that my convictions about an issue and my genuine feelings toward people whom I knew and loved were at odds with each other. I hoped that time would resolve

that dilemma within me. I began realizing that there was a battle between two paradigms within me struggling for dominance. One dealt with my honest convictions about issues. The other one focused on my genuine love for people. My dilemma was that I could not reconcile these two paradigms within me. I discovered that when I study an issue (such as homosexuality) I can come to an honest conviction about that issue as I understand it from Scripture. However, when I relate to people across the "table of life," I often come to a different conclusion.

During the 1980's I went through some major and difficult changes in the way I understood issues related to life and faith. It started with a two-year program in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). That experientially-focused learning program enabled (forced) me to look within myself, deep within. As I began to learn more about my unexplored self, I found myself backing off from the dogmatic mindset I had developed. Working as a hospital chaplain in Houston, Texas enabled me to experience a side of myself that was more interested in people than dogma. My interest in pastoral counseling led me to a program in ego psychology and object relations. It was during that time that I was elected a commissioner to the General Assembly that met in Wichita, Kansas in 1994.

My Motion Against Gay Marriages

At that G.A., I was assigned to the committee that addressed an overture from the Presbytery of Southern New England. The overture dealt with the question of pastors conducting commitment services that blessed same gender relationships. The only people who showed up to address the committee were those who were in favor of the overture. Most of those who spoke told the committee that the ceremony be-

ing debated was the only “wedding” ceremony they would have and that they considered it the same as a wedding ceremony.

The committee was divided on the issue and sent a majority report to the G.A. favoring same gender-blessing ceremonies. I felt that the Assembly would be as ambivalent on the issue as it had been for many years, with no side winning a convincing vote. I decided that I wanted us to settle the issue by a clear vote. I was against pastors performing same-gender blessing ceremonies because it was considered a wedding ceremony by those who spoke for it.

During the debate on the Assembly floor, I made a motion that “ministers are not permitted to perform same sex ceremonies” for the reason I have indicated. I told the commissioners I would like them to vote on a motion that was unambiguous. My motion passed and, when there was a call on the floor to reconsider the motion, it passed again.

But while people on the floor were applauding the passing of my motion to forbid pastors from conducting same sex ceremonies, I suddenly became aware of a deep and ominous feeling within me that caused me to utter the words, “My God, what have I done?” Though the presbyteries would later fail to ratify the prohibition, my motion has haunted me ever since. My action has been the cause of a lot of regret within me. That surprised me.

Meeting My Better Self

Shortly after I returned from G.A., I began training in Jungian psychology. As part of that training, I saw a Jungian analyst twice a week for three years. That journey led me further into my inner being, where I was able to meet the shadow side of myself. I learned about the meaning of my dreams. I also encountered the entrenched thinking that had become my paradigm for thinking and believing. I did not like that part of me. I wanted to free myself of the entrenched thinking and faith understanding that hindered my devel-

opment, but feared it was an impossible goal.

In the mid 1990’s, the hospitals in the University of Texas Medical Center began to downsize. Our department would have to let a couple of chaplains go. At that time I was certified as a pastoral counselor and served in that capacity at the hospital where I worked. I was also serving as a part-time interim in churches going through transition. I noticed that my counseling background and interest was influencing the way that I related to people, the way that I preached, and the way that I was changing in my understanding of faith.

Simply put, my interest in helping people grow spiritually and to move away from self-judgment was more important than whatever theological understanding I had developed. I became aware that people’s experience of God often mirrors their experience of self,

I became aware that people’s experience of God often mirrors their experience of self; and people’s experience of self is often projected on how they experience God.

and people’s experience of self is often projected on how they experience God. In fact, I recognized that my theological understanding was growing because of the counseling training I had received.

In July 1995 I became the Director of the Career Development Center of the Southeast, a Presbyterian counseling center started by Columbia Theological Seminary, the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta, and the Synod of South Atlantic. One-half of our clients are ministry candidates going through an assessment program at the Center as well as clergy seeking greater effectiveness in ministry. It was while ministering at the Center that I met my better self.

There are times when ministry candidates and clergy, who are either gay or who are trying to come to terms with their sexuality, come through our Center. Our clients range from conservative Southern Baptist to very liberal Unitarian Universalists. In ministering to them

in our programs of assessment, I made an unexpected discovery. At the end of their assessment programs, I ask myself the same questions: “Would I vote to ordain this candidate? Would I be willing to serve alongside this minister? Would I want this person as my minister?”

What I discovered was that I have always said “yes” to those who are gay, not because they are gay, but because they have been both psychologically and spiritually suited for ministry. I began to realize that I would not vote to refuse ordination to someone who was gay and who had a genuine call from God to the ordained ministry. I recognized that one paradigm was winning over the other: that God calls people to ministry, not entrenched attitudes.

In January 2002, Greater Atlanta Presbytery met to vote on Amendment

A. A “yes” vote would allow presbyteries to determine whom to ordain as was the case prior to 1978. As the day approached to vote on the issue, I experienced a lot of ambivalence within me. I also knew

that I needed to vote my conscience. Prior to the motion being voted on, there was time for people to share their views. For the first time, I shared my change in thinking on this issue with the presbytery. I told them that my experience at the Center, where I conduct assessment programs for ministry candidates, convinced me that my thinking was wrong and that I was willing to change the way I voted. I also indicated that doing so would not eliminate the ambivalence and ambiguity and sometime contradictions that I was aware of within me about this issue.

But, as I shared with them, I was no longer willing to say “no” to Chris Glaser, whom I remember praying at the 1978 G.A. of the former United Presbyterian Church. I was impressed with the depth of commitment and love that Chris and Janie Spahr and a whole host of other gays and lesbians have for the Presbyterian Church and their genuine love for Jesus as Savior and Lord. There are times when my commitment and

faith pale in comparison to theirs. I wish I had their courage. In speaking to them I have found them to be full of grace and love.

Will I Change More?

I wish that I had come to this understanding before now. It has taken me thirty years to change what had been an honest conviction. That which I once was against, I now am for. I still have problems related to this issue. I still believe that sexual relationships should be restricted to marriage between a man and a woman. I do not endorse same gender marriages. Yet, I do not believe that someone should be rejected for ordination because they are gay, especially when they love Jesus and are answering a call to ministry. If God truly calls persons to the ordained ministry, and if they are both psychologically healthy and spiritually suited for ministry, who am I to say “no” to them, even with my ambivalence, ambiguity, and sometime contradictions?

Will I change my thinking further on the subject? Will I someday support gay marriages? The question intrigues me. It even bothers me. I confess to wanting it to go away. However, I know that it will not. In the same way that I know that, when the Holy Spirit moves in God’s direction, it is an impossible movement to ultimately defeat. I will leave the future in God’s hands. I will trust my journey to God’s care. I will also pray that I will be open to change whatever thinking within me that hinders God’s movement among the people of God. I can do no less. ▼



Earl B. Stewart, a graduate of Baylor University and Dubuque Theological Seminary, has a D.Min. in pastoral counseling and a Ph.D. in pastoral psychology from Graduate Theological Founda-

tion of Indiana. He has served as a church pastor, a missionary in Taiwan, a hospital chaplain, and has recently retired as director of the Career Development Center of the Southeast in Decatur, Georgia. He is married and has one son.

Changed Through Solidarity

Fran Nyce

During a Church of the Brethren Annual Conference in Indianapolis, psychologist Martin Rock led what I believe must have been the first public meeting at an annual conference on the issue of homosexuality and the church. I remember walking out of that evening Insight Session when it was barely begun because I was so upset with the hostile responses to Martin. Now I wish I had had the words and the courage to stay and speak up in his support.

It was primarily the Womæn’s Caucus in the Church of the Brethren that was the catalyst for my growing sensitivity about various oppressions in the church, not just in relation to women but also in relation to non-heterosexual persons.

Even my awareness of oppressive attitudes toward women evolved slowly. I am grateful for the influence of the Brethren feminists of the 60’s and 70’s who nurtured my sensitivity toward injustice. But what propelled me headlong into active involvement in the women’s movement in the church was a dramatic personal experience during the Dayton Annual Conference, where, for the first time, I strongly felt discriminated against as a woman, in the church that I had loved from early childhood.

At Dayton, I became aware of the inappropriateness of all-male leadership on the platform. I heard the maleness of the words of the hymns, the prayers, the scripture readings, the sermons. I sensed exclusion as a woman at a painful emotional level during that entire Conference week, and I resolved to work actively to help restore women to our rightful place in the church.

Sometime later, Womæn’s Caucus leaders began embracing the emerging movement for acceptance of lesbians and gays in the church. Even though I was sympathetic, I was at first reluctant for the Caucus to become advocates because I feared our feminist cause would suffer as a result.

I don’t remember what changed my mind. It was not as dramatic a conversion as the one around the advocacy for women. But the Spirit was working. It became personal when I saw how my non-heterosexual friends were being excluded and oppressed by the church, with even more blatant injustice and cruelty than that demonstrated against women. I wonder if change can only occur when personal relationships or experiences affect the heart as well as the mind?

Now I am coming to see a relationship between sexism and homophobia, along with racism, as symptoms of a shared disease. The illusion of straight, white male supremacy has been with us a long time, and it is still hurting and weakening the Body of Christ.

But I have been encouraged by signs of hope. During my tenure as a board member of On Earth Peace, I was happy to participate in the decision of that board to partner with both the Womæn’s Caucus and the Brethren Mennonite Council (for GLBT concerns). It was clear to me that we needed to offer this support to such sister agencies to be consistent with our position of working for justice, even though we understood that it might mean a loss of some financial support.

I celebrate the decision of BMC leadership to claim the rightful place of all Christian GLBT persons in the church, and the continuing mission of dissolving the walls of separation. My own growth in understanding and acceptance has been nurtured by BMC’s events for education and celebration. There I have felt a welcome at-home-ness, as well as a sense of the healing presence of the hospitable Spirit that I hope may someday permeate the entire church. ▼

Fran Nyce is a church volunteer who previously served on the training staff of the Brethren Volunteer Service, and is currently a member of the Westminster Church of the Brethren. A water color painter, she lives in Westminster, Maryland.



Changed by Love and Knowledge

A Parent's Story

Marilynn G. Miller

In January of 1999, my then 20-year-old son told my husband and me that he was gay.

That moment, and the days and weeks which followed, propelled me into a sea of anguish and searching. As my son told us of his years of solitary agony, his pleas to God to “change” him, his terror of discovery, his hurt, anger, and the temptation of suicide, my heart broke and bled.

His utter aloneness as a gay adolescent with no one to whom he could turn for understanding, encouragement, or compassion, was reminiscent of the landscape of desolation I had visited several times in my own wars with clinical depression. I, too, had experienced a terror and aloneness that enveloped me in the blackness of emotional devastation. But in that existential bleakness, I was surrounded by the unconditional love of family and friends. My son was not. I was not there for him. That knowledge was my greatest source of grief.

My deep love for my son, coupled with the knowledge that my then current theological position in regard to same-sex orientation demanded celibacy, compelled the beginning of my search to learn, understand, and find answers. I grieved the loss of the future I had envisioned for my son: mind-pictures of him surrounded by his own children blurred into blank grayness stamped with question marks. A father with his young son toddling along beside him unleashed such hurt that I often found myself sobbing.

I asked myself so many questions! My mind debated endlessly with itself. So often I fondly remembered a dear friend I had had in high school and college who revealed his gayness to me when we were in our late twenties. He was and is gifted, loving, generous, compassionate, well-adjusted—one of the loveliest and least judgmental people I have ever known. I had never understood the fear, disdain, and loathing directed toward GLBT people that I had often witnessed revealed in the words and attitudes of various people in the church and denomination I attended. As I heard my gay friend repeatedly grouped with reprobates, child molesters, and amoral deviants by laypersons, clergy, and church leaders alike, I found myself rejecting the validity of their convictions because I knew this did not represent my friend but rather the fear and ignorance reflected by the people who held them. And yet I still believed any type of erotic homosexual love was immoral: the feelings were fine; acting on them was not.

Thus, in my search to come to terms with my love for my son, the biblical imperatives that I had previously accepted as unquestionable, and my understanding of who God is and what the love of Christ compels us to do, I began the process of seeking God’s peace and coupling it with Christ’s compassion while also wrestling with my own doubts and fears.

I read. First, Mel White’s *Stranger at the Gate*, which my son had given to my husband and me. I read the decades-old Kinsey Report. I read all the biological and other scientific information I could gather about GLBT people. I read the opinions of

psychologists and psychiatrists. I called Ralph Blair of Evangelicals Concerned and spoke with him personally. I searched for biblical perspectives different from those taught by my own church denomination in regard to passages used to revile homoerotic love, and thought and prayed about the possibility of their verity. I read and re-read the passages themselves and did the same with the gospels. The most moving and beautiful book and the greatest influence on my life was Virginia Ramey Mollenkott’s original edition of *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* I began to see the contradictions in what the church taught and what it actually practiced.

I read life stories written by GLBT Christians and marveled at the strength of faith revealed by people who were battered, rejected, cast out, and reviled by “righteous” believers, yet continued to cling to Christ and their faith. I sought and talked to other parents of gay and lesbian children and listened to them as they shared their journeys with me. I heard the suffering in their words and saw it in the tears of the GLBT people themselves. I talked to Christian advocates for GLBT brothers and sisters and was encouraged and given hope through our conversations, especially when they honestly and openly told me how they, too, struggled to arrive at a place of peace where they trusted and believed that God called them to be advocates for inclusion. I found that GLBT people were from all walks of life and learned that many were an unrevealed presence in my church conference.

Finally, for me, the most powerful witness to the call of compassion, welcome, and inclusion was and is the Spirit of God. Months after my son told me he was gay, I attended a service at a local Metropolitan Community Church. Here I experienced the undeniable presence of the Holy Spirit. Among the men and women of this congregation, my husband and I, who attended as a couple, were welcomed and embraced without question, without suspicion, without bitterness. As one lesbian woman, weeping, held me, a stranger, in her arms after we had shared Communion, she said, “You don’t know what it means to me that you and your husband are here.” As a representative of the “straight” majority, I was received in fellowship, welcomed, embraced, appreciated, and loved, in a congregation that would have been justified in feeling suspicion at the very least, and I knew, at last, that God was telling me, “I am here. You are among my own.” ▼

Marilynn Miller grew up a Roman Catholic in Buffalo, New York, but has been a member of the Mennonite Church (Lancaster Conference) for 26 years. She and her husband have lived in southeastern Pennsylvania since 1973, and have four sons and two daughters. (Shown with her newborn grandson.)



Defecting in Place

A Spouse's Change

Hedy Lodwick

I have considered myself Christian from a very early age when my grandmother told us Bible stories. My family's background was Swiss Reformed, Salvation Army, and Quaker. But the Riverdale Presbyterian Church was nearby when we moved in 1941 and it was there I went to Sunday School and was welcomed into Westminster Youth Fellowship. There I was baptized and joined the Presbyterian Church at age 13. It was the pastor of this church who took those young people whose parents allowed it, and many did not, to an interracial youth dinner in Washington, D.C. in 1943 or 44. Early I learned about challenging the status quo because of Christian convictions.

This church, through its scholarship fund, saw to it that I was able to earn my college and seminary degrees. I was fortunate to have had college and seminary professors who encouraged questioning and thinking outside the box. Very likely, it is this background that helped me affirm the majority report that went to the 1978 General Assembly permitting ordination of openly gay ministerial candidates, only to be replaced by the minority report which opposed such ordination. I was sad, but at that time, I did not feel too involved. I didn't *know* any gay or lesbian persons and told this to Bob, my husband, when he returned from General Assembly, shaken to the core by what had happened there.

"Oh yes you do," he said, naming a neighbor, a young man of whom we were both very fond. Then he added, "And some of them are married." Silently, I gasped, and wondered, "Are you?" But we were getting ready to move to Europe, one daughter was planning her wedding, the other was getting ready to move across the country with a boyfriend. I had no time to entertain such thoughts. The truth came out shortly thereafter, however, and the world I thought was ours came crashing down around us.

I was shaken, scared, angry—but, surprisingly, and unlike other straight wives I have come to know, I was not so much angry at Bob but at our church: for treating sexuality as something not to be discussed, for being so secretive that I had no idea to whom to turn for help throughout this upheaval, for having made Bob feel sick and evil, a Dr. Jekyll, Mr. Hyde, for so many years. He was one who had learned such negative ideas about who homosexual persons were that he did not even recognize his own orientation until well after we married. How he was able to serve the church so well during all this time is still mystifying to me—and to be a caring husband and father too!

We did realize that our marriage was built on much more than sexual attraction. When the truth was known, we decided that family, our history, deep caring, shared friendships, and service to our church as a team in ministry, were too important to end. Since that time we have learned more about ourselves and about a host of others struggling with the same issues. And we have tried in various ways to help the church come to new understanding.

While in Europe, it was my good fortune to find feminist friends. When reading Mary Daly together, I became fascinated with her image of the bound feet of Chinese women. When this custom became outlawed, those formerly bound feet could no longer grow to normal size. Have not minds been bound in like manner, making it hard to open them to new thinking?

When I made my discovery about Bob's and my situation, the two persons with whom I could share told me, "We hear your pain, but don't know what to say." It was then that everything I heard, read, thought, and sang began to have messages for me. Somehow God was there "in the deep waters" and was not going to let us drown in

"the rivers of sorrow." I believe God is with the church now in these deep waters.

Once I heard a missionary from China tell us that we need to be careful what we sing, for if we make promises, we need to keep them. When we sing "Oh Jesus, I have promised, to serve Thee to the end"—we had better mean it! We should also remember the words that follow: "I shall not fear the battle if Thou art by my side, nor wander from the pathway, if Thou wilt be my guide."

It does seem like too long a time for our lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender friends to be truly welcomed in an inclusive church, but progress has been made in the past 25 years. I believe that those of us whose minds and hearts have been opened need to keep on working—until all churches everywhere move beyond this fixation on sex, until a person's sexual orientation is as much a non-issue as left-handedness is today, until we can focus on what our God requires, "to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God."

I believe we must stay in our church, on our own terms, as agents of transformation, and, like my feminist friends, I intend to stay, but will "defect—in place." ▼

Hedwig (Hedy) Lodwick graduated from McCormick Seminary in 1951. She served as a Director of Christian Education in Hammond, Indiana before being commissioned with her husband, Robert, by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Together they served in the North of France, Egypt, and finally, 15 years in Europe, based in Switzerland. There Hedy worked extensively with the Ecumenical Women's Group in Geneva, the Swiss Federation of Protestant Women, and the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women. Retired in California, Hedy and Bob are still very active in the church.



Changing Strategies to Change Minds

What we can learn from United Methodists

Amanda Udis-Kessler

The greatest vulnerability of Christian activism is that it is enmeshed in organizations dedicated to Christian worship. Conservative rhetoric of “God,” “salvation,” and “faith” has more currency in such places than talk of “human values,” “justice” and “service,” which occupies the high ground of secular discourse. (Warner 1988: 268)

At the halfway point between General Conference 2000 and General Conference 2004, LGBT United Methodists and supporters find ourselves caught between hope and fear. Despite the courageous witness shown in 2000, the legislative prognosis for 2004 doesn't look very good for inclusion-minded Methodists. What should we inclusionists¹ be doing now to change hearts and minds? Perhaps more importantly, what shouldn't we be doing?

While not a United Methodist, I have had the opportunity to delve into this question for the past several years as the result of writing my doctoral dissertation on the inclusion struggle in the United Methodist Church. I watched caucuses on both sides at work at General Conference 2000, observed committee and plenary debates and votes, ate with the Evangelicals and prayed with the inclusionists. I also interviewed a number of delegates, including Evangelicals and moderates. Finally, I read literally thousands of pages, from de-

Editor's Note: As a good sociologist, the author focuses on one denomination for this article, the basis of research for a doctoral dissertation. Yet it is not to single out United Methodists for criticism, because what is described is essentially the same for most of our denominational LGBT groups as we approach our legislative bodies. In addition, the Reconciling Ministries Network has historically approached the United Methodist Church with multiple strategies that have included ministries of presence, education, and reconciliation, especially in local congregations and districts. The suggested shift of strategy may be one of emphasis rather than kind.

nominal history to caucus websites, including every possible position on the issue. This article discusses some of my findings about resistance to full LGBT inclusion in the denomination, and offers suggestions for what we should do next.² The analysis and suggestions presented here will be painful and politically problematic for many of us. They will force us to confront, individually and communally, whether our priorities should be gaining access or bringing about a revolution in the denomination, and will offer different prognoses depending on these priorities.

Our first impulse when we think about resistance to inclusion is to think that the Evangelicals, led by such cau-

be focused on what the sexuality conflict has to do with the denomination as an institution: with the kind of language and logic³ that most United Methodists find appropriate to the institution, and with the need of most United Methodists to support the institution as it currently exists.

Institutional Priorities: Ours and Theirs

We can start with the obvious point that our language and logic is dramatically different from that of the Evangelicals. We talk about inclusion at the heart of the Gospel, second-class citizenship in the Kingdom of God, institutionalized homophobia and heterosexism, full participation in the life of the church, singling out a class of people as ineligible, being welcome or unwelcome, discrimination and oppression, and the protection of pastors' rights. We sing, “We Shall Overcome” and compare heterosexism within the church to

We should be stepping back and trying to assess how the United Methodist middle feels, how the people in the pews can best be reached.

cuses as Good News, are engaging in a power play. My research certainly supported this way of thinking about the problem, but it directed me to another way that I think is powerful and largely undiscussed, and that (if correct) has important implications for how we should work to win over the people in the pews. Put simply, it is that we should

racism within the church. We define the condemnation and exclusion of LGBT people as a justice issue, as a matter of fairness and equality.

Even when (frequently) we use religious justifications, these justifications tend to be politicized and to have an anti-institutional feel to them. Jesus is brought into the picture as one who

Footnotes:

¹ I use this term to denote LGBT United Methodists, heterosexual allies, and LGBT supporters outside of Methodism (such as myself).

² While my research focused exclusively on United Methodists, some of the ideas presented here may be relevant for inclusionists in other mainline denominations.

³ By “logic,” I mean values, experiences and priorities. The idea behind this section is that there is a logic that most Methodists take as basic to their connection to the faith tradition, and that inclusionists challenge this logic by “bringing politics into it.”

focused on the oppressed, broke down barriers, and held up love over against the law. Moreover, we make use of rallies and civil disobedience, support the work of Soulforce and indeed join that group, and in some cases perform holy unions in part as a matter of protesting the denominational prohibitions.

In contrast, both Evangelicals and those moderate delegates I spoke with who voted against inclusion appealed to what would be considered more classically Christian moral claims. They focused on the Bible and on tradition as authoritative. They spoke at length of Wesleyanism, holiness, perfection, morality, and doctrine. They were very concerned about sustaining the church, and about the importance of maintaining a distinctive denominational identity. Consider the following quotes from post-General Conference interviews with delegates:

There are times when I think people are confusing the constitution and the Bill of Rights with holiness. It's as though there's not a right or a wrong, but only a matter of discrimination. I get a feeling that we're confusing civil rights issues with theological issues.

—“Dennis,” a conservative delegate

My role as a General Conference delegate is to do what is in the church's best interest...to preserve, protect and defend the United Methodist Church. And I do not think that it is in the best interests of the United Methodist Church right now to [remove the prohibitions]...I know the church back home here. I know what the church is like in other places... where the Methodist Church is at its strongest, and I do not think I'm being a good steward of the church if...I vote to change what's in there...[To] the lives of the people whom our stance affects, I know that it's crucially and critically important. I'm not trying to sell that short. But our main role in the world is to call people to Christ and to help them be formed in His image and that's what we're here for and everything else that detracts us from that is to our detriment.

—“Karl,” a moderate delegate

It's not about civil rights, it's about holiness.

—“Clarence,” a moderate delegate

For these delegates and many others with whom I spoke, the political framework of the inclusionists was simply unconvincing. These are not people who generally oppose LGBT civil rights in the public square. Nonetheless, they

Inclusionists who want to keep up the good fight in the most strategically useful way should deprioritize working at the legislative level of General Conference and focus instead on local churches and grassroots networks.

experience the church as being an institution where there are different rules about what's right and what's acceptable. For them, not only is homosexuality not acceptable in the church, the politicized nature of the inclusion struggle is not appropriate for the church.

Now no one, including us, would deny that our inclusionist work is political in nature. And how could it not be? How else could we possibly interpret the prohibitions in the Book of Discipline except through an inequality lens? The LGBT identity developed in a context of oppression, devaluation, and violence, and the post-Stonewall LGBT movement based its strategy on 1960's civil rights activism. We still face opposition—cultural, structural, and interpersonal. Our movement and our identity are both inherently politicized. What should we be doing if not witnessing, demonstrating, disrupting business as usual to hold the church accountable?

The People in the Pews

One possible answer to the question is that we should be stepping back and trying to assess how the United Methodist middle feels, how the people in the pews can best be reached. Consider, for example, the different language and logics described above. Which imagery, which priorities, which values are likely

to appeal to the majority of United Methodists?

Another doctoral dissertation, carried out by sociologist Dawne Moon (2000), helps answer this question. Moon, studying inclusion issues in local Methodist congregations, found that her respondents tended to have an understanding of church in which “church” and “politics” were opposites.

Moon's respondents appeared to construct marriage and the church as unmarked “zones of innocence” standing not just apart from, but in contrast to, issues of politics and inequality. Just as the home has been understood to be a “haven in a heartless world,” the church was a haven from the secular world for the Methodists Moon interviewed. The relevance of Moon's work for us is heartbreakingly clear in the following quote:

A major stumbling block for gay people in the church is that homosexuality is equated with politics, fallenness, and secularity—in short, things most churchgoers consider to be the opposite of church...When [LGBT] members begin to demand “rights” in the church, they bring in a language of political struggle, of civil rights. In other words, they import a language that many believe pertains to the world rather than God, to bodies rather than spirits, to politics rather than innocence. (Moon 2000: 110, 116)

Moon's work, and my own, suggest that the United Methodist middle is likely to prefer the Evangelical approach over ours. Because of the institutional meaning that Methodism has come to have for many moderates, the Evangelicals simply seem like better Methodists than the inclusionists. The inclusionists seem “extreme,” “radical,” and “unreasonable.” The Evangelicals seem normal, temperate, and reasonable.

Loyal to the Church As It Is

The following claims and points should be familiar to most inclusionists:

- Legalism should be rejected since Jesus put people above the law.
- Business as usual has no right to go on if it is destroying the dignity of children of God.
- This is a matter of lives, not issues; it's personal, not abstract.
- Since the church has not given inclusionists any legitimate way to seek access, they should feel free to be irritating to those who refuse to acknowledge them.
- Jesus was an indiscriminate lover, a boundary-breaker, and a destroyer of walls between people.
- Methodism should be a community without laws, boundaries, defenses or outsiders, where everyone is welcome and to which everyone belongs regardless of how others feel.
- Faithful Christians do disagree on this issue, therefore the church ought to be able to be honest and say so.

However much we might agree with the above statements and find them moving, they all involve at least some degree of anti-institutionalism. They may be true, but they put personal experience above institutional survival.

They may capture powerful images of Jesus, but they miss basic sociological wisdom about the need of institutions for boundaries in order to remain secure. My research suggests that inclusionists could become a lot more attentive to how troubling many Methodists find arguments such as those above. Inclusionists are not winning over the middle with such approaches, and we may be driving them into the open arms of the Evangelicals. Consider the following quote:

A lot of us in the middle...do trust the Discipline, do trust the process...maybe people in the middle are voting the way they're voting because of their loyalty to the Discipline.

—“Reggie,” a moderate delegate

To the extent that Reggie is typical (and his quote was certainly representative), the most heartfelt witnessing of the inclusionists may be failing because we fail to grasp how we are coming across to those we wish to influence.

The degree of Methodist loyalty to the denomination as an institution, and resistance to (real or perceived) attacks on it, leads to one last point. Inclusionist strategies at General Conference 2000 may have had the unintended consequence of suggesting that inclusionists are cultivating or exacerbating their outsider status in the denomination. For

example, voting on petitions is as political an action as demonstrating. However, at General Conference 2000, the politics of voting was rendered invisible before the politics of demonstrating, probably because voting is institutionalized in the denomination whereas demonstrations represent disruptions and challenges to the institution.

Similarly, because of the way that “average” delegates dressed, the suits and ties of the conservatives were normalized when compared to the plethora of LGBT symbols (again, emphasizing gay politics outside the church) exhibited by the inclusionists. The rainbow gear marked off the inclusionists as different, even as the suits and ties of the Evangelicals suggested continuity with traditions of dressing respectfully for an event that is at the heart of the denomination and therefore worthy of respect. I own more than my share of rainbow iconography and wear it proudly, but if my goal were to assure a moderate that I was more like her than different from her, I would probably do well to leave the rainbows home for the day and dress like the moderate in question.

What, then, should we do now to win hearts and minds? How can we honor the truths we know, yet meet the goal of changing the denomination from within?

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A Matter of Priorities

What we do next may depend on whether acceptance within the denomination or radical change is more important, and this decision may differ among inclusionists. We need, however, to be very clear about one thing: given the conservative lock-hold at the legislative level, our best hope now rests closer to home.

Practically speaking, this means that those of us for whom a radically, structurally inclusive church is the priority, and for whom activism is a central strategy, face exceptionally hard choices. It may be time to ask whether political activism is as strategically useful as we want it to be. As already suggested, witnessing and protesting firmly link the idea of full LGBT participation in the life of the church with a logic that “the church,” rightly or wrongly, sees as different from its own.

If the Methodist middle conceives of politics and church as opposites, the inclusionist movement may do better to distance itself from politics and to identify more closely with spiritual transcendence in order to raise its chances of being seen as worthy of inclusion. Given how politicized homosexuality is, any political action on behalf of inclusion has the unintended effect of amplifying LGBT difference from “normal,” “reasonable” Methodism in the same way that a fun house mirror simultaneously magnifies and distorts the image of the person in front of the mirror. A final problem on this front: when moderates feel pushed they “hold the line,” and my interviews suggest that they feel far more pushed by us than by Good News, the conservative faction.

I’m not suggesting that any of us forget who we are or where we came from, that we deny the existence of homophobia and heterosexism, that we suppress our pain or our rage. I am suggesting, however, that the expression of our pain and our rage as a form of witness to the denomination is currently strategically problematic, and seems likely to remain so in the near future. When we offer up what we know to be true by demonstrating, we alienate enough moderate United Methodists to hinder our efforts, at least at the legis-

Changed About “Changed” Homosexuals

Lila Frazier

Her name, Darlene. We met at a week-long writing camp in 1978. She told us of her struggle. For years she lived as a promiscuous, homosexual thief. Then God found her, but in a setting which told her the sin of thievery was mild compared to her sin of homosexuality. She and those around her prayed for change. Through hypnosis and healing services, she was transformed.

I had never thought much about homosexuality. Intrigued by her story, I decided if Darlene wasn’t happy as a homosexual, and if she could change under God’s direction, then others could, too. I spoke out about the church needing to listen to “former” homosexuals. In my mind I labeled two outspoken homosexuals from our conference as “the enemy.”

More than ten years later, in the processing room of the library where I worked, a book crossed my desk: *Stranger at the Gate: to be Gay and Christian in America*, by Mel White. I knew him! Mel, a keynote speaker at one of our writing camps, is a strong Christian and a good writing teacher—and a homosexual? I read the book immediately (a perk of working in a library!). Mel told of his years of struggle to *not* be a homosexual. But Darlene and others I’d met had changed. I wrote Darlene asking if some homosexuality was physical and some psychological. She wrote back saying she didn’t think so, with no explanation.

Later she wrote to tell me she’d met and fallen in love with a woman. She now believes her “transformation” was wishful thinking. However, her acceptance of God did bring about transformation in her life. She stopped being a thief! She made restitution for what she’d embezzled from her employer. She knows God loves her. She and her partner are in a church which loves them as they are. ▼

Lila Frazier describes herself as a seventies-something, single, free-lance writer, and member of Citrus Heights United Methodist Church in Sacramento. An active Reconciling United Methodist, she proudly wears her rainbow ribbon at her regional annual conferences and when she lobbied for inclusion at the 2000 General Conference. She counts lesbians and gay men among her friends, and contributes to our movement through diversity workshops, letters to the editor, and opinion pieces.



lative level. If demonstrating is not the best way of changing hearts and minds, we need to make a decision about priorities: is activist witnessing more important, or is change more important?

Some will answer that there can be no compromise, and that telling the truth Soulforce-style is the only way to maintain dignity and integrity. Those who fall into this category must face the heartbreaking truth that in the current climate, the kind of witnessing done at General Conference 2000 is not productive and may be counterproductive. The issue is not whether demonstrating lacks moral valor and spiritual value, but only whether it is efficacious in terms of meeting the basic inclusionist

goal of gaining access. As this article and the research on which it is based suggests, I fear that political activism within the church will not change enough hearts and minds in the short-term to effect positive legislative change.

If the primary goal is changing hearts and minds, the following strategies should be on the discussion table.

Strategies

Focus on the grassroots: One self-identified moderate told me that, “stateways don’t change folkways.” Behind this sociological jargon is the idea that inclusionists who want to keep up the good fight in the most strategically useful way should deprioritize working

at the legislative level of General Conference and focus instead on local churches and grassroots networks. I agree wholeheartedly. We should be directing much of our energy toward making individual congregations welcoming and empowering for LGBT Methodists. As the experience of the last 30 years suggests, it is possible to have individually prophetic churches, even with antigay rules on the books. Sociologist Stephen Warner (1995:94) notes the conclusion of many gay Christian activists that the struggle for LGBT recognition must move to the congregational level. Similarly, UCC pastor and sociologist Gary Comstock's (1996:77) study of LGBT United Methodists indicates that, "local congregations can resist and neutralize somewhat denominational policy." This is taking place in U.S. Methodism, and should be supported with all possible vigor.

Change the nature of witnessing: James Wood, a United Methodist pastor and sociologist, argues (2000:83-84) that minds are changed about homosexuality through the enlarging of personal circles. This argument is supported by research showing that heterosexuals who know LGBT people are more likely to be accepting. Perhaps the most important thing that can be done to make local congregations welcoming on this front is for LGBT Methodists to simply be present and engage in church life while being as open—yet relaxed—as possible about their sexuality. Consider this quote from "Marty," a conservative delegate:

I don't think [LGBT Methodists] should stand on the corner and say I'm an avowed gay homosexual and wave the flag, because I think in a lot of people's thinking that closes a lot of doors. I know within my own church we have several people who I know are gay. They're in leadership roles. They don't go 'round carrying that chip on their shoulder.

Marty's suggestion and language may be infuriating to many of us, but sociologically speaking, he has a point. If the goal of most inclusionists is a safe and meaningful local worship experience, Marty may be providing a sense of how to meet that goal. As politically

unsatisfying as it may be, finding ways to maintain one's dignity without formally seeking access could potentially be the solution for at least some LGBT Methodists.

Accentuate the normal: LGBT United Methodists should continue to demonstrate, both in word and action, that they are as tired of this struggle as the Evangelicals are, and that their local church priorities are those of "normal, reasonable" Methodists: worship, Sunday School, evangelism and so on. Indeed, my research suggests that many LGBT Methodists already feel this way, even as they remain committed to political change strategies. Minimizing the political language and logic could only help: the more the average heterosexual Methodist in the pew sees that the average LGBT Methodist has "normal" Methodist feelings about the church, the more likely the heterosexual Methodist is to treat the LGBT Methodist "reasonably," as a brother or sister in Christ.

Evangelize: If inclusionists want to change the way the United Methodist Church views homosexuality, one key strategy is to engage in major evangelizing projects among heterosexual progressives and LGBT people, whether churched or unchurched. The denomination's inclusionist element is not going to grow proportional to the denomination as a whole without bringing in more inclusionists from outside the church.

Grieve: The denomination's refusal to repent of its homophobia and heterosexism is heartbreaking, and we should allow our hearts to be broken over it as often as necessary. Most United Methodists don't have "hearts of stone," as was said by some after General Conference 2000, but most Methodists also have not had the experiences we have, and they don't see what we see. Until we fully and deeply grasp this fact and mourn it, we will not be able to forgive those who seem bent on misunderstanding us. Until we forgive them, I fear that we will not be able to meet them where they are, rather than where we want and need them to be. Until we can meet them where they are, we run the risk of making strategically problematic decisions.

A Word of Hope

Following a discussion about my research, some Presbyterian inclusionists asked how, given this information, they could offer a word of hope to other inclusionists. As I have mulled over this question, I have been strangely comforted by the idea that God's realm is simultaneously now and not yet. Sociologically, the news may be bad (though it may also be more complicated than the story I've told here). Nonetheless, Jesus says that all things are possible with God. One of my inclusionist interviewees, a pastor, talked about a professor in seminary who walked into class on the first day, tore the back cover off a Bible, and told the class that the story wasn't over yet. The inclusionist story isn't over yet either. I'd say it's only just beginning. ♥

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writing bisexual history and theory to composing sacred choral music, and from training speakers for Boston's LGBT speakers bureau to music directing Godspell. Her work on Jesus as holy leper has appeared in *Open Hands* (Summer, 1998; Vol. 14, No. 1), as have two songs (including an "open the doors" song written for General Conference 1996) and a column on class justice and queerness.

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Because I Came to Know Jesus, I Found the Courage to Speak

Peggy Campolo

Because I am an Evangelical Christian *and* an activist who works for justice for my GLBT sisters and brothers, I am often asked questions like, “What changed your mind about homosexual people?” or “When did you decide that being gay wasn’t bad?”

My answer is that I never had to change my mind because I never thought that being gay or lesbian was bad. Later in my life, when I learned that some people were bisexual or transgender, I didn’t think there was anything wrong with that either. For me, having a different sexual orientation was just that: different, not bad. I liked some gay people and did not care as much for some others, but found all of those people whose sexuality was different from mine interesting. I also found it curious that so many people I knew didn’t like them. This always made me feel sad and sometimes very angry.

It has been good for me to reflect back and look for the reasons why I never embraced the homophobia so rampant in the Evangelical Christian circles where I grew up. One reason was the parents I was blessed to have. My mother and father worked as hard not to prejudice people as any two people I have ever known. For them, neither race, nor religion, nor anything else was reason to judge a person before you really got to know him or her.

It was not that my parents were particularly enlightened on the subject of homosexuality. Few people were, back in the 1940’s when I was growing up. The gift Mother and Daddy gave to me was not in any enlightening words I can remember from them on the subject of homosexuality, but rather in the way they showed grace and love, even to those they did not understand. You did not “bad mouth” people at our house, and especially not whole groups of people.

Bill, Eugene, and Tom

Then there was my brother’s friend’s older brother Bill. At the age of 30, Bill still lived at home with their widowed mother. He was a gentle man, kind to us children, and I liked him. One day when I asked Mother why Bill was not married, I was surprised to see her eyes fill with tears. “Bill is one of those men who is not attracted to women,” she said. “He is very lonely and his life is sad. You should always be especially kind to Bill.” I learned from the other kids that, not only was Bill not attracted to women, but that he liked men. And I wondered why he did not seem to have any nice men like himself as his special friends. Bill was so very, very lonely.

I heard other people say unkind things and tell jokes about Bill, and I was horrified that some of them didn’t seem to care if he heard them. Bill’s tormentors made me very angry and I felt guilty because I didn’t have the courage to tell them to stop. But courage was something I didn’t have in those days

During WWII, my father was a chaplain in the Army Air Corps. I remember coming home from kindergarten one day to find Daddy sitting at the kitchen table with Mother talking about something very serious. That was the only time I ever saw my father cry. My mother explained to me later that Daddy had been crying because the young man who was his chaplain’s assistant had come to him with a problem and my father did not know how to help him. Eugene, whom I knew and liked, had told Daddy he was attracted to men, not women, and that, even though he had given his heart to Jesus, promised God that he would work in the church for the rest of his life, and prayed as hard as he could, his feelings had not changed. And my father had cried because he knew of no way to

“fix” either the young man whom he loved and respected or the people he knew would ruin Eugene’s life if they found out who he really was.

It was in high school that I more personally felt the sting of the injustices heaped upon those who are not “straight.” Tom was a dear friend of mine long before I knew that he was gay. We were buddies. We talked every day. Tom was bright, he was fun, and he gave me the great gift of making me feel understood. I understood something about Tom too. He was different. The way I would have said it then, and would still say it now, was that Tom was “special.”

So I didn’t like it when some of the boys started to make fun of Tom. The names they called him, “fag,” “queer,” and “fairy,” were words I really did not understand. I only knew that those words hurt my friend. I watched, as though in a nightmare, as the boys who harassed Tom used those words so carelessly, and then went on to whatever else they were doing, leaving my dear friend terribly, terribly wounded. I was sure that those boys did not even think about Tom after they had passed him by, but it became increasingly clear to me that Tom thought about them all the time. He feared them, even though their only weapons were words, and I felt his fear every day.

As I watched the joy go out of Tom’s life, I had questions for my parents. They did not have all of the answers I needed. Indeed, they had very few answers. But it was made clear to me that Tom’s tormentors were wrong, that what they were doing to him was evil, and that the right thing for me to do was to go on being Tom’s friend. But I already knew that. I knew too that I should stand up for Tom and speak out in defense of my friend. But I could not. I did not have the courage to do it. All that I seemed to have was a share of

Tom's great pain and a sense that something was very, very wrong. It was not until years later that I found what I needed to give me the courage to name that wrong.

I learned from my parents that the way homosexual people were treated was not right. And something within me knew that what was really wrong had nothing to do with who these people were.

Accepting Jesus and Rejecting Injustice

When my pastor father talked to my Sunday School class of nine-year-old girls about publicly accepting Jesus and joining the church, I struggled with what to do. I did not have any spiritual feelings. God was not anything real to me and I certainly did not feel "Jesus in my heart." But everybody in my world, everybody I loved was a Christian, so it was easier just to "go along" when all the other little girls decided to be baptized. God wasn't part of the picture for me, but I loved my father and didn't want to embarrass him. So I pretended to become a Christian—for Daddy and for everybody else I loved.

But I couldn't always pretend for myself. I simply learned to let other people think I was different than I re-

ally was because I feared that they would not love the *real* me as much as they would the Christian person I was pretending to be. I have never forgotten what that felt like, and these days it helps me to understand why some of my dear GLBT friends remain in their closets. At the same time, I told myself how good it was that I could admit to myself that I didn't believe in God. At least I was honest with myself!

But sadly, what I liked to think was "the integrity of my thinking" did not translate either into my speaking out on behalf of unfairly maligned GLBT people or my asking honest questions about Jesus of those who loved me and would have tried to answer them. I may have had convictions, but the courage of those convictions was sadly lacking in me.

The story of how I encountered the Holy Spirit and met Jesus at the bedside of a dying friend has been told in more detail elsewhere. Suffice it to say here that, in my desperation to help my friend Helen, I cried out to the God in whom I was not at all sure I believed. And that day, I found not only what I needed to help Helen in her dying, but all that I myself needed for a life with Jesus Christ, a life far richer and better than I had known before.

Now I not only had a hand to hold when I walked in difficult places; I found something I had longed for all of my life—the courage to speak out about what I did and did not believe. The last time I lacked that courage was shortly after Helen died. Its importance to me now is that it was the last time.

My husband and I were riding in the back seat of a car on the way to one of his speaking engagements. The couple in the front seat were Evangelical Christians. I am sure that is what they would have called themselves. They wanted to talk to Tony about what they thought was wrong with this world, and guess who was first on their list? As they began to talk about "these people," I wanted very much to be somewhere else. They were wrong, wrong, wrong, these seemingly nice but terribly misguided people. I sat in silent misery and anger, doing what I had always done in such situations: nothing! I had never said anything to upset anyone when I was with Tony on one of his speaking trips. Indeed, never upsetting anyone was part of the "pretend" religion I used to have before I found the real thing!

Tony did his best to explain why they were wrong, but my own silence was so loud in my ears that I cannot remember what he said. I thought about Tom and others I knew who were victims of the words I was hearing. That ride seemed interminable, but it ended too soon, and I was left with the guilt of my silence. That night, miserable and ashamed of myself, I asked God for forgiveness and for another chance to speak out for my GLBT brothers and sisters.

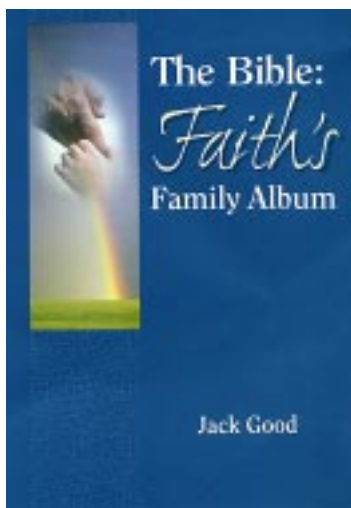
God answered that prayer and I found myself not only able to speak up for God's GLBT children, but quite unable to be silent in the face of any untruths spoken about them. Advocating for understanding and justice for these brothers and sisters was the first thing that changed for me after Jesus Christ became part of my life.

Welcoming Myself by Welcoming Others

Then, very soon, I discovered that you can't learn to stand up for other people without also gaining the cour-

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age to stand up for yourself. That was new for me, and it felt good. I am sure that part of the reason for my deep affection for God's GLBT children is because it was through them that I found out who God had created me to be.

Some of my most precious worship experiences have been in so-called "gay churches." Nowhere is God more real than among those who have been told that God does not want them, but who have persevered to find that, not only does God want them, but Jesus died for them, and the Holy Spirit stands ready to walk anywhere with them.

"Witnessing" used to be a term I found "icky." I thought that "witnessing" meant that I had to tell people they were going to hell unless they said, in exactly the right words, that they believed in Jesus. So it was a very happy thing for me to find out that "witnessing" was something I really loved, something I already was doing. "Witnessing" was simply telling other people about the hand that held mine as I walked through life, about how it was easier for me to show grace and understanding to other people now that I was happily aware of the grace that God had shown to me in Jesus Christ.

I started to seriously read the Bible for the first time in my life, and I confess that one of the big reasons for doing that was because some of those who were hardest on my GLBT friends said that the Bible was the reason for their words and actions. I didn't see how this could be true, and after much reading and studying, I found that it was not true!

Volumes have been written on both sides of the argument about the Bible and homosexuality by scholars far more learned on the subject than I am. I have a modicum of sympathy for those misguided people who honestly believe that the Bible says we should shut out God's GLBT children, but am angry with that larger group in the church who speak the truth in private but lack the courage to stand up publicly for their excluded and persecuted sisters and brothers. One of the joys of my life is to belong to a Welcoming and Affirming church where nobody has to wear a "costume" to be part of us.

I think of the story Jesus told about the ninety and nine sheep when I am

Virginia, My Soul-Sister

Malcolm Boyd



I was so scared...so alone, so unattractive...in high school. All I had were my books...and the opera broadcasts Saturday mornings...and my fantasies, and my dreams of the beautiful world that awaited me—somewhere.

Virginia was my friend. She was sophisticated, beautiful, sure of herself; had a theatrical cigarette voice and drove a red convertible. Virginia was outrageous...went to bars, had black friends, said clever things that were quoted.

She'd pick me up and take me to the Pencol drugstore for a coke. The Pencol was where the beautiful people went for a coke. Virginia wasn't ashamed to be seen with me. I was so unattractive in high school.

Virginia was in med school. Sometimes I'd visit here at home. She wore pants, and her shirttail out. Virginia had lots of records. I played "The Man I Love."

She got married in a big wedding. It was a scandal. Three weeks later, when her husband left, I heard he was, well, a homosexual. She got kicked out of med school. They said she was a lesbian.

I grew up, went away to school, never came back.

But once I paid a visit. Virginia was older, of course, but still so beautiful, so sophisticated, so kind. She still loved me. I was still alone and scared, but not so unattractive. She took my hand in hers, held it, said my hand was a lovely hand, the loveliest hand. She knew a man who would love to know me, would love me. The three of us could go away together for a while. I was scared. I said no, but wanted to say yes.

Years later I returned for my last visit. Virginia's old family home had once been aristocratic and in the best part of town. Now it was in a slum, a dangerous neighborhood...the paper left on the porch was stolen unless picked up right away.

On that porch, on my last night, Virginia gave a dinner party for me. She had an old card table. A fancy, faded tablecloth. The old, good silver. There was Virginia. Me. A dyke nurse, an old lover of hers. A dyke army sergeant, an old lover of hers. We ate on the porch in the slum. Candlelight flooded the scene. Virginia had suffered a stroke, spoke with difficulty, used a cane.

It was a glorious dinner. We laughed, cried. Tennessee Williams would have loved it. Geraldine Page could have played it. The next morning I left. Heard the next year that Virginia had died.

I was so scared, so alone, so unattractive, in high school. Virginia took me to the Pencol drugstore for a coke. Virginia was my soul-sister. ▼

Malcolm Boyd, has just published *Simple Grace: A Mentor's Guide to Growing Older* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2001). An Episcopal priest, poet, spiritual director, and author of 25 books, he writes regularly for *Modern Maturity*.



asked whether or not anyone has left my beloved home church, Central Baptist in Wayne, Pennsylvania, because we have GLBT members and bless their committed partnerships. And I am at peace in the knowledge that any of the "ninety and nine" who have left us can find hundreds of churches to welcome and affirm them, while some of those whom these people would allow to remain excluded have found a home with us. What is not right is that anyone should have to drive as far as some of

our GLBT members to find the place in God's Church on earth that Jesus died for them to have.

I have no words that can fully express the great joy that my ministry of advocacy has brought and continues to bring me every day of my life. It is a gift to me to be able to say to a mother who wants to love and fully accept a lesbian daughter that she is right and that the Bible says nothing to the contrary, to affirm a young gay Christian by telling him that he should not, indeed must

not do as his pastor has suggested and seek to “marry the right woman” in order to try to change the sexuality God has given him, to see the joy in the eyes of a man or woman who has been in a committed relationship for many years when I refer as “spouse” or “partner” to that dear one whom he or she has never dared to refer to publicly other than as “friend,” and to write and speak about how real family values, like monogamy and commitment, are for *all* of God’s children.

When I sit in my living room with a college student who is struggling to accept his gay sexuality, I so appreciate being able to share my library of books written and videos made by those good men and women who have themselves been where he finds himself and have taken the time to set down their own journeys toward those places where God intended them to be. To see hope and possibility bloom in the heart of one who thought he would die of pain is a privilege I would not trade for the world. And what a blessing it is to turn to the church list that *Open Hands* publishes annually when a frightened person who wants to come out of the closet wants to worship in a safe place.

Of all my speaking opportunities, my favorite ones are when I meet with parents of GLBT children. Some of them may be confused and upset, but most

of those I meet are actively seeking ways to understand and support their children. One of my best memories is of a strong-looking Mennonite farmer standing with his arm around his gay son as our group sang the old hymn, “Come, Come Ye Saints.” Each verse ends with the refrain, “All is well, all is well.” That father had had a long and difficult journey to this place of understanding. And now he sang with reverence, yet his body language said in no uncertain terms that things would be as well for his son as he could make them no matter what anybody else said or did.

Evangelism

How could anyone not love taking good news to people? I thank God every day for giving me a ministry wherein I can give the good news of God’s love, acceptance and grace to people all the time. And our GLBT brothers and sisters have good news for the rest of the church too. They know in ways that most of us cannot, that Jesus really is all you need, because many of them have lived through times when Jesus was all they had. They have lost their jobs, been evicted from their homes, been asked to leave the colleges they attended, and even been told they were no longer welcome in their own families. There is a spirituality in the Chris-

tian gay community that runs deep. My most wonderful worship experiences have been with them.

It was because I came to know Jesus that I found the courage to speak what my mind and heart already knew about these special children of God. I never did have to change my mind about how I felt about my GLBT sisters and brothers, but my ministry with them has certainly opened my mind to the wonder and the power of the grace of Jesus Christ. ▼

Peggy Campolo was born in Salem, New Jersey, where her father was pastor of the American Baptist Church. She taught first grade prior to spending a number of years as a full-time wife and mother. A writer and editor, she has spoken at churches, colleges, and conferences throughout the United States. She serves as an active member of PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), Evangelicals Concerned, the Council of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists, Soulforce, and Central Baptist Church of Wayne, Pennsylvania, a Welcoming and Affirming congregation. She and her husband Tony live in St. Davids, Pennsylvania, and have two grown children and four grandchildren with whom they spend as much time as possible.



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CTS faculty contributors to this volume include:

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CTS celebrates scholarship that counters homophobia and encourages inclusive communities of faith.

Amazing Courage

Irene Monroe

On Palm Sunday, April 16, 2000, history was made at Union United Methodist Church, a predominately black mainline church in Boston's South End. On that day, the bishop of the Boston Area of the United Methodist Church (UMC), the Rt. Rev. Susan Hassinger, and the superintendent of the Metro Boston South District of the UMC, the Rev. Dr. Jerome King Del Pino, celebrated with Union United Methodist Church its becoming a Reconciling and inclusive congregation.

Why is this significant?

No mainline black church or predominately black church in this country had previously made such a bold step to include its lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender population into its fold.

And the reason is because sexuality has never been a comfortable topic of discussion in the African American community—largely due to slavery first, and then, after slavery, to what we African Americans appropriated from the dominant culture about sexual behavior in order to deem ourselves human in the eyes of our oppressors.

First bred as cattle during slavery, only to be later touted either as sexual sirens or sexual predators, black sexuality has never had a chance to evolve in a milieu free of abuse, violence, and stereotypes. The raping of black women and the lynching of black men in this country by white men also diminished a sense of control over our own bodies. Many African Americans have carved out an essentialist racial identity at the expense of leaving our bodies and sexualities behind. Often embracing a fundamentalist Christianity that fosters an asexual theology, African American bodies and sexualities that were once systematically usurped by white slave masters may now be ritually harnessed by the black church.

However, Union United Methodist Church, located in one of Boston's heavily gay-populated areas, began to ask questions about its LGBT population, especially in this era of AIDS. And it all began in late 1996 when Hilda Evans, a retired registered nurse and a member at Union for over 50 years asked the now retired Rev. Theodore L. Lockhart during a membership class, "Where does the United Methodist Church stand on the issue of homosexuality?"

Within both the larger lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender population and the larger black population, African American LGBT people are the most under-served and least understood population. What is known is more anecdotal than analytical. And what we see of this segment is seldom viewed through the understanding lenses of how white queer racism and black compulsory heterosexism exact a toll on our lives.

As a fractured group politically, socially, and religiously, African American LGBT people live as resident aliens enduring bifurcated existences in these respective communities. While our black skin ostensibly gives us residence in our black communities, our sexual orientation most times evicts us from

them. And while our sexual orientation gives us residence in the larger LGBT community, racism constantly thwarts efforts at coalition-building, weakening the larger movement for sexual equality.

With the black church's theological qualifier to love the sinner—us, but to hate the sin—our sexual orientation, we are permanent souls of the black church, but we are never fully welcomed. To be only tangentially aligned to these communities dangles our lives precariously by a thin thread, having the nagging feeling of marginalization if not complete dispossession.

The marginalization of African American LGBT people became a concern for Hilda Evans. In the spring of 1997, a task force was formed to explore her question, and every Wednesday evening for two years a Bible study class convened on the theme, "Just what does the Bible really say about homosexuality?"

In the fall of 1999, the task force drafted and circulated a statement to the entire church body for discussion on becoming a Reconciling and inclusive congregation. The following January, the task force sent their resolution to the church council for vote. "When we took this issue to the church body for a vote, it was not unanimously yes," Evans told *The Washington Blade*. "There were some reservations. But we are Christians and Christ did not refuse anyone. This is the stand we're taking."

During Black History Month, on February 15, the church council of Union voted to become a Reconciling and inclusive church body. The statement affirms, "Union United Methodist Church is a predominately African-American congregation within the church universal, The Body of Christ... We seek to address and advocate the rights, needs and concerns of gay men and lesbians in our church and society... Given their particular invisibility within the African-American community, we further affirm the full participation of all Black lesbians and gay men, and all other homosexual persons who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, in all aspects of our life together as a congregation."

I never thought in my lifetime I would witness this moment in a black church. When I got up to speak from the pulpit at Union's celebration I was fighting back my tears and joyously thinking of the many African American LGBT people who now have a place to worship in Boston. And I considered the amazing courage it took for Union United Methodist Church to struggle against the torrential waves of homophobia still current in the black church. ▼

Irene Monroe, named one of Boston's "50 Most Intriguing Women" by Boston Magazine, is a graduate of Wellesley College and New York City's Union Theological Seminary. She is a doctoral candidate in the Religion, Gender, and Culture program at Harvard Divinity School. The Editorial Advisory Committee invited her to be the first annual columnist for Open Hands.



We welcome 800-word submissions to “My Turning Point,” a regular feature of *Open Hands*, told in first person, about how you changed your mind about lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people. Please include a snapshot of yourself and a brief self-description.

My Turning Point

Catherine Sager-Bohnert

Passion for social justice has always been an earmark of my faith. In a seminary paper, I once described Jesus as the “Liberator” who came to set us free from all forms of personal and societal bondage so that we could give ourselves fully to the task of loving God and neighbor. This image of Jesus as Liberator came to shape my theology and practice of ministry.

I first recognized incongruity between my beliefs and the official position of my denomination when I was a novice ministry candidate. Through the working of the Spirit I was paired with a candidacy guide who pastored a Reconciling congregation and introduced me to the Reconciling movement. As part of the process we spent some time examining the Social Principles in the United Methodist Book of Discipline, and I stumbled over this passage: “Homosexual persons no less than heterosexual persons are individuals of sacred worth.... Although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching, we affirm that God’s grace is available to all.” It struck me as contradictory and presumptuous to profess the sacred worth of all persons only to imply that some were decidedly less holy than others. I began to question the United Methodist Church’s stance.

Resolution to my doubts and questions came when the Spirit provided a catalyst in the form a woman in one of my classes who embodied everything I thought a Christian and pastor should be. She was gentle, kind, and intuitive, with gifts of empathy, honesty, and humility that both shamed and inspired me. One day she confided that she was a lesbian. Her revelation caused me no discomfort; rather, I experienced it as I would any intimate detail about a friend. I was touched by her trust and moved by her story of struggle to live with integrity in a culture that all too often offered only suspicion, fear, and hateful rejection. Because she was my friend, her pain became my pain.

But I took it a step farther and felt the anger she had moved beyond. I was angry with any and all persons, especially Christians, who would judge and condemn her on the basis of her identity. And that is, for me, precisely where the issue hinged. It was a matter of identity, not the misleading terms of “choice” or “lifestyle.”

During my remaining days in seminary, my disenchantment with narrow-minded religion grew. I discovered that the ugliest form of prejudice was the kind hiding insidiously under a veneer of religious self-righteousness. In a pastoral care class, several students admitted their reluctance to counsel persons who might be gay or lesbian. Then, two of my friends who were seeking student pastorates were turned down by their prospective churches; one rejected for being female and the other because of his interracial marriage. Each of these events shocked and outraged me, but I wanted to believe that they were isolated incidents and did not reflect the nature of the institution. I clung to the hope that the church would

humble itself and be cleansed of its “isms”—racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism—so that it could move forward, healed and whole, into a new era of fairness and equality for all.

Any illusions I may have had along such lines were shattered by the decisions made at the denomination’s General Conference in the spring of 2000. By a strong majority, the delegates voted to retain the discriminatory language regarding homosexuality in the Book of Discipline, including the prohibition of “practicing” gays and lesbians from ordained ministry. I took a long, hard look at the church, and saw an institution unwilling to embrace all with the same kind of gratuitous love that Jesus displayed, an institution that decried injustice and intolerance all the while using criteria such as race, gender, and sexuality to determine who would and would not be allowed to fully participate.

As I struggled to comprehend, the United Methodist Church announced a nationwide media campaign to promote its “open minds, open hearts, and open doors.” I was in disbelief over the church’s hypocrisy. I also could not help wondering how I could, with any sense of integrity, represent a denomination that seemed opposed to my most deeply held commitments.

The turmoil that I felt was one factor in my decision to leave the candidacy process for ordained ministry in the UMC and explore the possibility of membership and ministry in other, more progressive, churches. I felt comfortable with Unitarian Universalist principles and attended services at a local church, but the emphasis on rationalism left me cold. I then ventured into the Unity church and found some solace, but could discern no meaningful outlet for mission and ministry.

I despaired of finding a place where I could truly feel at home. But the Spirit brought persons into my life who encouraged and guided me. Amazingly, each of these persons had a connection to the Reconciling congregation that had once been pastored by my former candidacy guide. I found myself returning over and over again to this small but thriving church and always receiving a genuinely warm welcome. Their sincere commitment to “do justice, practice kindness, and walk humbly with God” won me over and I became a member. Even though I still sometimes wonder if I belong in the United Methodist Church, I have found a congregation where I have no doubt that I do.

The time has come to recognize that sexual orientation and gender identity are lived realities just as race and gender, not just “issues.” Empowered by the Spirit, we must call the church to forsake its distraction with transient and illusory concerns. Liberated from idolatry, the church will then be free to give itself wholeheartedly to the work of loving God and neighbor. ▼

Catherine Sager-Bohnert is a graduate of the Methodist Theological School in Ohio and is a member of Central United Methodist Church, a Reconciling congregation in Toledo, Ohio. She dreams of the church becoming a community that celebrates God’s diverse world and lives in harmonious relationship with all of creation.



Conversion, The United Church of Canada Way Changing a Denominational Mind

Alyson Huntly

Some conversions happen in a flash of blinding light. Some don't. For example, I've never had a once-for-all-time "moment." Instead, my own conversion has happened over decades. Personal experience, challenge, encounter, the movement of God's spirit in my life—all this has drawn me over and over again into a new ways of seeing myself, God, and the world. Feminism, coming out, waking up to racism and economic injustice, spiritual re-awakening—all these have been ongoing conversions.

I think my own denomination, The United Church of Canada, is a bit like me. The United Church didn't become converted to a queer-positive stance in a blinding flash. In fact, the United Church doesn't seem to do anything in a blinding flash. Maybe it's our Canadian nature, maybe it's our history, maybe it's the climate, who knows. But we seem to move slowly to new ways of seeing and being.

In August 2000, The United Church of Canada renounced a forty-year old resolution that had declared homosexuality as sin. The General Council, the United Church's highest elected body, made the decision after three hours of serious but respectful debate and personal sharing. The General Council also encouraged all church members and church courts to offer healing for the damage caused by the church's historic stance on homosexuality. It affirmed that all human sexual orientations are a gift from God. It affirmed gay and lesbian partnerships and agreed to work for their civil recognition as well as to honor them in services of blessing. And, it encouraged the congregations of the United Church to enter into the Affirming congregation study process. (The Affirming congregation program is the

welcoming movement within The United Church of Canada.) And so, The United Church took a few more small steps towards inclusion and justice for GLBT people.

In the Beginning...

It has been a long journey. In the mid-1970's the United Church sweated and debated and studied some more, as it struggled to come to terms with emerging understandings of sexuality—human sexuality in general, feminism, and homosexuality in particular. After almost a decade of deferrals "for further study" the United Church finally faced up to the issue of sexual orientation and ministry, declaring in 1988 that all people, regardless of sexual orientation, could be members of the United Church and that all members were eligible to be considered for ordered ministry.

Even though the secular media declared the ordination of homosexuals a done deal in 1988, this decision by no means ended the debate. Two years later the church revisited, and confirmed, its decision on ministry. And in the years that followed, new issues entered the arena: the blessing of same-gender relationships, civil rights for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, the situation of gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth in Canada, and the experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people in ministry.

The United Church continues to work on the issues, with national standing committees, study and action programs, and, for those congregations in the Affirming congregation program, study and reflection. The process goes on—personal stories, study and debate, and changes in society and individual "conversions" all combine to challenge and change the church.

"Change isn't as dramatic as sudden conversion."

Gary Boratto, a United Church minister from Waterloo, Ontario, was a delegate to the 2000 General Council. "For most of us, change isn't as dramatic as sudden conversion," he says. "I can't point to any one moment when my former self suddenly wasn't what it was supposed to be." Gary thinks it's like that in the church, as people and institutions slowly grow and move.

He points to a danger in making the church's decisions in 2000 seem overly dramatic or heroic. "I think we're finally catching up to where the world is," he says. "I don't think we should try to make ourselves sound noble just for doing what we should be doing. I don't think there is anything particularly noble about my own congregation deciding to become an Affirming congregation. I am proud of them but they are only doing what they should be doing. Places where there is repression—those are where the real bright lights are."

Gary doesn't think the decisions of the 2000 General Council were hard for the church. "For all their nonsense, the media has helped. The immense amount of media coverage, and even the sitcoms, have normalized gay and lesbian relationships. Even the Simpson's had an episode about a gay man! The comfort levels have increased, so I don't think it was such a terribly difficult thing for the church to do."

Some parts of the process are more difficult, however. The imperative of the issues still calls people to speak out because they simply cannot remain silent. Gary recalls the bravery of people who told personal testimonies at the General Council meeting. "There was a young man who stood up and talked as

a gay man, knowing that he could lose his job." It may not be a single blinding flash, but there is still something remarkable about the change that continues in the United Church.

These many little conversions that have opened the church

Teresa Moysey, also a United Church minister, was another a delegate to the General Council in 2000. Even two years later there are moments that stand out in her mind. Events that have occurred in one form or another each time the church has debated homosexuality still have a ring of the miraculous about them.

"As folk lined up at the microphones to debate the resolution (renouncing the statement that homosexuality is a sin), one of the folks who had been vocally anti-gay in the past said his name. Even those who didn't know him by appearance recognized the name." Teresa recalls. "He began talking about the history of where we've been on this issue and how we pledged to continue to walk together whatever our opinion. People thought he was going to say that we'd failed to do that, or something,

but he didn't. He said, 'I think this is the next step we need to take.' The room went dead silent." It has happened many times before, these many little conversions that have opened up the church, but it is still awesome when it happens.

It's a reminder of the movement of God in the conversion process. Time and again as the United Church has debated the hard issues of human sexuality, people have commented on the profound spirituality of the experience. This debate was no exception.

"There was an enormous sense of the Spirit in what was going on," Teresa says. "The Spirit allowed us to listen to one another and in the midst of that to discern God's presence. There was strong debate but always in a very respectful tone. That commission was a blessing to those of us who were able to be part of it."

In Teresa's home congregation in Winnipeg, Manitoba, the issue of whether or not to become an Affirming congregation has been on and off the table for a few years now. It's back on the table at the moment, with a committee looking at it once again. Some think it's a good idea, some think it's

passé, what with all the changes in legislation that have happened in that province. Some people are pretty sure lesbians and gays would be welcome in the church regardless of what is decided. "This is all good discussion to have. It's what we'll be talking about," says Teresa. "I think we're moving on and I think on the whole we want to be more open and understanding."

Teresa thinks her congregation is fairly typical of other United Churches in her area. It's probably quite typical of the church as a whole. Slow and steady, a bit on the cautious side, but moving. It's what you'd call conversion, United Church of Canada style. ▼

Alyson Huntly is a United Church diaconal minister. She is the author of many books and resources on justice and spirituality, including Daring to Be United: Including Lesbians and Gays in The United Church of Canada;



The Gentle Dark; and Naomi's Daughters: Bridging the Generations. She lives in Ottawa, Canada.

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God's Wide Embrace

LAKEWOOD
L.M.



1. O love of God your wide em - brace cre - ates a
2. 'Tis there I find a gath - ering throng who lifts a
3. Still, there are times of doubt and fear when I cry
4. And there you stand! I hear your voice! In your em -
5. I rise and sing, now joy - ful - ly, your faith - ful
6. And when my heart has sung your praise and jour - ney'd

just and wel - come place where truth is sov - ereign host, not
cho - rus of faith's song. The har - mo - ny of hope and
out, "O God, be near! Bring jus - tice, truth and heal - ing
brace I can re - joice in my own faith and hope and
ser - vant I will be! The truth and jus - tice of your
through these earth - ly days, my soul will then lift up the

guest, where all can know your heal - ing breath.
praise re - veals the won - der of your grace.
hand, O God of hope, the great I Am."
end, O Je - sus, teach - er, sav - ior, friend!
word will be my song 'til all have heard.
song and sing it through the ag - es long.

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William Matson lives in Washington, DC where he manages the Terrace Theater at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. He has studied at Wesley Theological Seminary, is a lifelong United Methodist and has long been involved in the GLBT religious movement. Another of his hymns has recently been published by Abingdon Press.

From Falwell's Liberty College to Gay Pride's Grand Marshal

Vaughn F. Beckman

Jerry Falwell constantly reminded us at Liberty University and Liberty Baptist Seminary that we were being trained to be “Champions for Christ.”

More than 15 years have passed since I attended Liberty, and I must say that I have been honored to become a “champion”—but one very different than Christian fundamentalists ever imagined.

I grew up in a very religious family on the island of Deer Isle, located off the Maine coast. My father passed away in a car accident when I was six years old, and I spent much of my early childhood days living with my grandparents. They were a religious couple, slow to preach, but quick to practice love and acceptance. That example was powerful as I pondered God’s call to serve others through ministry.

During my high school years, my grandfather’s walking disability often prevented him from attending church. His Sunday mornings were devoted to listening to TV evangelists. His favorite was Jerry Falwell. It is hard to explain how intriguing Falwell can be. His personality can be infectious to many. Falwell was just beginning a Christian college, and in 1978, with the encouragement of my grandfather, I enrolled in Liberty Baptist College (now Liberty University).

I loved it at Liberty. The rules were incredibly strict, but there was an excitement in working hard to prepare to serve God. Not only did I get a solid liberal education, I got some of the best teaching in the Bible, theology, biblical languages and church growth. By the time I finished Liberty Baptist Seminary, I was recognized as the top student in the field of theology.

Liberty went through formative changes when I was in attendance. In 1979, Falwell started the Moral Majority. Nothing would ever be the same as we were encouraged not just to reach others for Christ, but to work hard to

return a moral sensibility to a needful nation. Like most others at Liberty, I bought into that rhetoric and world view.

Sitting in the pew, listening to Jerry Falwell preach each week, can put one in a tremendous state of denial. I experienced affectional attraction toward other guys, thoughts I always remember having, but I chose to put those feelings aside and squelch them. I knew I was called to be a minister and I believed that with enough faith, God would solve my problem.



Vaughn with his grandmother at his graduation from Liberty Baptist College (now Liberty University) in May 1981.

I journeyed from Virginia with an offer to work in Christian Education at a Baptist church in Waipahu, Hawai‘i. That was a great year, but in 1985, I was offered a more fulfilling position working for a Baptist church in San Jose, California. I loved my work, but there continued to be an undercurrent of struggle regarding my sexual orientation. I tried with every ounce of strength to get rid of this desire with an inordinate amount of prayer and abstinence. I began attending an ex-gay ministry. Nothing seemed to work.

I was lost. I was defeated. In 1989, after many years of great frustration, I “threw in the towel” and walked away from the ministry. I walk away from the world of fundamentalism, starting my whole life over, knowing I could not change, no matter how much others said I could. I had given it my best. I finally had to come to terms with the fact that I was gay.

I had a background in education and I started teaching in a middle school while working toward a graduate degree in administration from the University of San Francisco. In 1990, I saw an advertisement in a gay paper for an “Open & Affirming” congregation called First Christian in San Jose, California. I visited for nearly a year. In 1991, I was formally welcomed as a member of this new church.

God began to open my eyes to a whole new view of ministry and service. I committed myself to the issues of justice and peace, and I began to truly understand what it meant to stand alongside those who are marginalized. In 1994, after working in preparation with the Northern California Region of the Disciples of Christ, I was ordained. I had no intention of going back to my “closeted” days as a Baptist, and made it very clear that I was to be ordained “openly” gay.

I entered the pastoral search process for churches. I applied for several years, but soon realized that most Disciples churches were not “ready” to hire an openly gay pastor. Many Disciples’ regions would not ordain gays or lesbians. I had moved forward by leaving fundamentalism, but I had no idea how narrow the road would still be.

The years I was not considered for a pastoral position were painful, but they still were good years. I had the joy of becoming a school principal, and then, most surprisingly of all, I became the executive director of the Council of Churches of Santa Clara County in July,



Vaughn as Grand Marshal in the 1999 San Jose Gay Pride Parade.

1997. There is some irony in heading a coalition of 100 congregations, many of which I could never pastor.

The Council accomplished much, including programs on homelessness, economic justice, youth assets, violence prevention, and gay ministries. We organized more than 50 affirming churches into the "Alliance of Welcoming Ministries" and held powerful gay pride worship services. I joined the Steering Committee of the Interfaith Council in Silicon Valley, was appointed to the City of San Jose Human Rights Commission and to the County of Santa

Clara Human Relations Commission. In 1998, the County awarded me one of the first "Unity in Diversity" Awards, and in 1999, I was named Grand Marshal of the San Jose Gay Pride Parade. I was honored.

I look back and am amazed at how much I have grown and changed over my many years since leaving Liberty. Thanks be to the Divine for opening me to see, hear, and understand all people. In 2000, I began to work part-time as Director of the San Jose Peace Center while making a commitment to re-enter the pastoral search process again.

Amazing things do happen! On September 9, 2001, I was installed as the senior pastor of the First Christian Church of Honolulu, Hawai'i. The journey toward answering the call to be a church pastor was finally fulfilled.

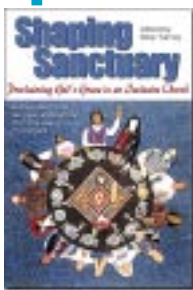
It has been a long and unexpected road from Liberty to Honolulu. Not an easy one, but one I would not change. In the midst of this difficult and painful journey, I have found "wholeness" about who I am, but even more importantly: I have been given the gift of sharing and teaching that wholeness to others. ▼

Vaughn F. Beckman is senior pastor of First Christian Church, Honolulu, Hawai'i, an Open & Affirming Disciples of Christ congregation. He serves on the Council of GLAD (Gay, Lesbian, and Affirming Disciples Alliance) and the Open Hands Editorial Advisory Committee.



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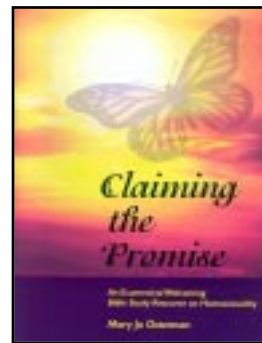
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A Letter to My Sisters and Brothers in Christ

By Youtha C. Hardman-Cromwell

I am a reconciling United Methodist. I want to tell you why.
In 1991 while my husband Oliver and I were visiting Berlin. In one of the museums we saw these words of Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller from 1945:

First they came for the Communists,
And I didn't speak up, because I wasn't a Communist.
Then they came for socialists and trade unionists,
And I didn't speak up, because I was neither.
Then they came for the Jews,
And I didn't speak up, because I wasn't a Jew.
Then they came for the Catholics,
And I didn't speak up, because I was a Protestant.
Then they came for me,

And by that time there was no one left to speak up for me.
More than anything else that I read on that trip, those words have remained in my consciousness and shaped my understanding of my witness in the world.

Being a woman of African descent in the United States, enjoying the measure of opportunity and freedom that I have, I know that to be able to do so is contrary to the history of persons like myself in this country. Someone helped to change the course of that history. Someone who was not a person of African descent stood against slavery. Someone who was not a woman stood against oppression and exclusion of women. Someone stood up for me when I was not present or able to stand up for myself. It is a gift from each one who made that choice for which I can only express gratitude by doing the same for someone else. I experience this gift from others especially in my role as an ordained person, an opportunity that, at times in the history of the church, was denied to blacks and to women.

Time has vindicated those who stood against the exclusion and oppression in the wider society and in the church of those of African descent and those who happen to have been born female. Yet there remain those who would resist full inclusion in the life and ministry of the church of either women or blacks or both. Even though the sins of racism and sexism still stain the garments of Christians, they are widely recognized as sins, incompatible with the Gospel. That has not always been so. Christians in the past were wrong and they justified their sin of racism or sexism by both the Bible and Christian tradition.

In 1993, I officiated at the funeral service of my cousin, who died as a result of being infected by the AIDS virus. The pastor of the church where he had been an active member for many years *should* have led that service, and it *should* have been held in the sanctuary where my cousin had worshiped and sung in the choir until he felt excluded. But when a new pastor was selected, my cousin no longer felt welcomed and stopped attending.

At one family reunion, he and I had stood together in my mother's kitchen making homemade ice cream and trying to identify a church where he might feel both welcomed as a gay man and nourished spiritually. He had already tried all the congregations I knew anything about, but he had not found a new congregation to call home. He could not be buried from a church that had nurtured his relationship with God and to which he had given so much of his personal time and resources.

Because I was on the staff of Howard University School of Divinity, his memorial service was held in the chapel there. In that reality, I experienced much pain and regret that his community of faith, my sisters and brothers in Christ, could reject him in this way.
I had come a long way from my days of innocence, ignorance, and confusion about what it meant for persons to be gay or lesbians. (When I entered seminary, I was not even able to get my mind

around the concepts of bisexuality and transgendered realities.) But I had the experience of my cousin, musicians in the church of my childhood, and others whose paths had crossed mine. More persons widened my experience, proving an intellectual challenge to my thinking.

I first wrestled with the issue of homosexuality being a choice. How could or would someone choose to be treated with such disdain? Why would one choose a life that led to so much pain for the person and one's family? To do so would be to act insanely and clearly there was no other indication that these people I knew were insane. I had to take a closer look at this issue. There had to be another explanation for the existence of homosexuals in the world. For me the fact that they were created a minority did not argue for their not being a variation in God's creative plan.

I thought about my mother who is clearly ambidextrous if not a left-handed person. She uses her left hand for all those things we teach: writing, cutting with scissors, and the like. When she was a child, left-handedness was unacceptable. Children who were left-handed were forced to learn to use their right hands instead. Some people asserted that left-handedness was evil, associated with the devil. But my mother is naturally left-handed. She is not evil. She is and was and has always been a window to God for me. Through her life and love, I am able to get a glimpse of who God is. Those who made her write with her right hand were wrong. To be left-handed is not wrong. All that God has created is good, even when it is not the norm and is not understood by us. "And God saw all that had been made and it was very good." It is not coincidental that homosexuals were once commonly, in the black community at least, referred to as "left-handed."

So it must be for all God's children: we are all created good. I am black. I did not choose it. I am a woman. I did not choose to be female. But I love being a black woman, child of God, ordained minister of the Gospel. God did not make a mistake with me. I do not believe that God was mistaken when God created some of us gay, some lesbian, some transgender, some bisexual, and some straight. Some of us are left-handed. The mistake, indeed the sin, is in our misjudgment and in our fear of that which is different and of that which we do not understand.

How, then, can I look into the eyes of my gay brothers, lesbian sisters, bisexuals, transgenders or transsexuals, and other of my brothers and sisters who may know themselves to be sexual persons in ways that I do not experience or fully understand? How can I see their exclusion and oppression and turn away uncaring? How can I leave them without my assistance, support, and love to resist those who would exclude them from the circle of God? I cannot stand by to watch them try to open doors of the church and not lend my being to the effort. I must take a stand against their exclusion and oppression.

I must stand for my own sake and for the memory of my cousin and for the health and faithfulness of the church and for our shared belief in the love of God for all persons. We understand our racism and sexism better now than we did in the past. I believe that someday we will understand our homophobia and heterosexism better for what they are—sin. I want in my lifetime to have been on the right side of this issue—God's side—affirming as good all God has created. Instead of exclusion, the energy of the church family should be directed at how we can affirm each other in all our created variety and how we can construct and live by a moral system that helps us all be more faithful to God's purpose for our sexual energy and desire. This must be an ethic that includes the behavior of us all: heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, transgender, or

When they came for me—black woman who sought ordination—someone had been there for me. What if they should come again? What if they come for you or for your children?

Your partner in the work of our Lord,
Youtha C. Hardman-Cromwell



Youtha C. Hardman-Cromwell is the director of the Practice in Ministry and Mission Program at Wesley Theological Seminary. She created and taught "Sexual Issues in Parish Ministry" while on the faculty at Howard University School of Divinity, and now teaches that course at Wesley Theological Seminary. Youtha serves as the Program Chair for the Reconciling Ministries Network.

How I Do Sex

An Essay in Queer Christianity

Erwin C. Barron

Am I normal?

It's a constant question for most gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, and sexually questioning people. Our bodies and desires constantly raise the issue, "Am I normal?"

I certainly don't fit the standards of normality set by heterosexual society. In every magazine, on every billboard, everywhere I look, I see men with women in passionate embraces. Heterosexual marriage is expected of almost everyone; just ask my grandma who is constantly concerned that I don't have a "little woman" in my life. Heterosexuality is assumed. One of the first questions anyone asks when meeting me is, "Are you married?" Every form I fill out asks for sex and marital status, and I don't fit any of the boxes provided. So, no, I am not normal, not "heteronormal."

But, am I queer?

This debate is raging in gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered communities. Most of us GLBT folks are fairly ordinary people, especially those of us who are Christian. People who take on the name "queer" are often the flamboyant and radical fringe, and few would want to identify with them. Most of us would be happy to accept conservative, gay writer Andrew Sullivan's description of himself as "virtually normal" in his book by that title. We realize that we may not be completely "normal," but we don't want to think of ourselves as "queer." We want to fit into ordinary society and ordinary churches, be treated fairly, and just blend in.

Gay writer David Link describes this feeling well after a wonderfully welcoming Thanksgiving with his family:

I have wrestled with myself over whether, as a gay man, I am queer. I have decided that I am not. Queer is the word of the other, of the outsider, I do not feel as if I am outside anything due to my sexual orientation." (Link, p. 271)

Yet, aren't we outsiders? How can GLBT people *not* be outsiders? We can't just "decide that I am not queer," because that designation is something that others decide for us! Gay, lesbian, transgender, and bisexual people *are* the "other" in a heteronormative society. Heterosexuality is expected, is seen as normal, so then by definition of that society, a GLBT person is abnormal or queer. Queer theory recognizes and accepts that reality and works from there. It has little to do with flamboyance or radical politics. Describing ourselves as "queer" is simply recognizing the very real nature of heteronormativity in our culture.

Gay writer and historian Bruce Bawer has argued eloquently against using the word "queer" and against what he understands as queer theory and politics. His book *A Place at the Table* argues for gay and lesbian inclusion in "normal" society and against queer theory/gay studies. He says:

Gay Studies scholars are inclined to agree with anti-gay reactionaries on one point—namely, that gays will never be accepted as full and equal members of society, will

never be allowed their places at the table. Indeed, these scholars tend to dismiss the idea of society as consisting, metaphorically speaking, of a single big table. (Bawer, *Table*, p. 210)

And in another book, *Beyond Queer*, he quotes a lesbian, queer activist, "We don't want a place at the table—we want to turn the table over." (Bawer, *Beyond Queer*, p. 18)

Bawer is concerned that radical queer politics harms the cause of gay and lesbian civil rights, overturning the table. He insists that most gay and lesbian folks are not radical, but are quietly quite ordinary. Bawer suggests that we are just like everyone else, so we deserve our rights and our place at the big, happy American table.

No one would argue with the politics of civil rights for GLBT folks, but queer theory does challenge Bawer's presuppositions. Can anyone really be "normal"? Everyone is unique in some way. Queer theorists dare to suggest that there is no "normal"! This great, big, welcoming table does not exist in American culture. We have become much too diverse, multicultural, multi-racial, and differently sexualized. Instead of trying to be accepted into "normal" society, just like everyone else, "queer" folks are trying to rethink the whole structure of how we construct our society.

Queer activist Michael Warner writes in his book *Fear of a Queer Planet*:

Many people in the last two or three years...have shifted their self-identification from "gay" to "queer." The preference for "queer" represents, among other things, an aggressive impulse of generalization; it rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration of simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal. (Warner, p. xxvi)

These "queers" want to challenge the entire "regime of the normal," not settle for mere toleration or simply working for political interest representation. They want to explore how the whole of society is permeated by sexuality and diversity, and not settle for a nice "normal" smile and a pat on the head.

Radical queer feminist Pat Califia talks about the same idea more colorfully as she describes traditional lesbian writers:

It was almost as if on some level they were still hoping to have Mom or the parish priest pat them on their heads and say, "There, there, I understand now. Being a lesbian is a good thing. You're not a sexual misfit. You're a freedom fighter." (Califia, p. 15)

That's a beautiful dream, a dream where we all completely accept each other as equals, seeing no differences, recognizing every single person as "good." But, that has never happened, and it is not going to happen! Majority society has a powerful need to create an "other" by which it can define itself and justify its practices. Women, minority races, poor people, the disabled, and especially GLBT folks have been forced into this role as "abnormal other," and the "normals"

"How I Do Sex" is a feature of *Open Hands* that explores how the writer reconciles or integrates sexuality and spirituality. Submissions should be 800 words and accompanied by a photo and brief self-description.

feel free to ostracize, ridicule, oppress, pity, and even to kill people in these groups, thereby, giving themselves more power.

We don't have to be flamboyant queens or leather dykes or radical fairies to be queer. No, we just *are* queer. By calling ourselves "queer" and exploring queer theory, we are deconstructing the idea of what is "normal." As post-normal queers, we free everyone, both "normal" and "abnormal." When we escape the tyranny of the "normal" we prepare the world for a kind of radically new inclusiveness where we celebrate real differences, where we refuse to categorize and we recognize the queer in everyone. We can find there a totally new kind of community. There we find the radically queer Reign of God

Perhaps Jesus had that in mind in his strange story about the wedding banquet in Luke 14:16-24. All the "normal" people were invited to the banquet. The places at the table had been set for the respectable, good, "normal" people. But, they refused to come! They had good "normal" things they needed to take care of. One had just been married, so the good heterosexual man could not, of course, come to the banquet. Instead, the host is forced to invite the sick, the disabled, the sinners—the queer, in a word. But not enough of them would accept the invitation. Perhaps they had trouble with being called "queer." So, the host invited yet others to come to the table. And then, most amazingly, he declared that *none* of the "normal" people would be allowed to sit at this table, which believers equate with God's kingdom!

That is a radically different kind of banquet. That is a new kind of community, accepting differences in a radically new way. That is a queer banquet table, where there are no "normals." And yet it is still the Lord's table! May we all be compelled to come to God's queer table just as we are, to enjoy the feast, welcomed by God's loving arms! ▼

Erwin Barron is a Presbyterian minister living in the San Francisco Bay area with his life partner, Asher. Erwin is completing his Ph.D. in ethics and social thought at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. He is also Director of Christian Education of Old First Presbyterian Church in San Francisco, where he tries to help folks think of themselves as being just a little "queer."



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One Change Leads to Another

Bob Brashear

Excerpted from a sermon, "Reformed and Reforming," delivered October 28, 2001 in New York City.

It was a day that changed everything. Not a day of violence, like we know so well, but a simple act that changed everything. October 31st, 1517. Martin Luther went to the Cathedral at Wittenberg and nailed his 95 theses to the door. What was it that drove him to do that, that day?

There was a new Cathedral to be built: St. Peter's basilica in Rome. And in these pre-bingo days, the best fundraising scheme was the sale of indulgences, the idea that saints could pray to get our loved ones out of purgatory, shorten their stay. And for so many days on the dollar, those prayers could be sold. This didn't sit right with Luther. And the problem is, once you start asking questions, one leads to another.

His questions about the sale of indulgences led him to question the whole idea of saints, to reinterpret the communion of saints as being that gathering of all believers at Eucharist. So the day he chose to nail his theses was chosen deliberately. All Hallows Eve, the night before the feast of All Saints, the day commemorating all the little saints not big enough for their own day.

His thoughts about saints led him to believe that there was a priesthood of all believers—that all believers had their own ministry, whether seminary-trained, ordained or not. And if all believers had their ministry, then the Bible needed to be in the language of the people, in the hands of the people. So he translated the Bible into German. And so the internet of his day, the printing press, was used to get the Bible into the hands of the people. And if people needed to read the Bible, then they needed to be able to read., thus the Reformation's emphasis on education.

His thoughts went to worship as well. If the Bible should be in the vernacular, then music should be in the vernacular too. He believed that on Sunday morning, people should worship with the same music they drank and caroused to the night before. Drinking songs, songs of the streets would become the source music for new hymns.

Even though at the start, he had no more desire to start a new denomination than Jesus did a new religion, his action had political and theological implications that create change to this day. ▼

Bob Brashear, a graduate of Yale Divinity School, is pastor of West Park Presbyterian Church in New York City.





Movement News

The second **Witness Our Welcome** gathering has been scheduled on the University of Pennsylvania campus in **Philadelphia August 14-17, 2003**. The campus is readily accessible to the city's historic district, cultural centers, and gay community. The WOW2003 Coordinating Committee is seeking recommendations for speakers, topics, and workshops. Visit the website (www.wow2k.org) and mark your calendars.

Chicago Theological Seminary hosted a public reception April 26 to launch its new **Gay & Lesbian Religious Archives Project** (www.glra.org). The GLRA will coordinate and support the preservation of the history and records of the GLBT Christian movement in the U.S., stimulating and enabling scholarly research in the field. Founder and former publisher of *Open Hands* **Mark Bowman** serves as GLRA's coordinator. Funding has been provided by the **E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation** and the **Riverside Church Sharing Fund**.

Reconciling Ministries Network announced a new online ministry on its website (www.rmnetwork.org) that will provide devotional material "to help you in your Reconciling journey." Minneapolis-based **AHS Foundation** announced funding for RMN in its efforts to enlist United Methodists in northern jurisdictions who want to reclaim the Wesleyan tradition of a fully inclusive church.

More Light Presbyterians expressed disappointment at the defeat this year of **Amendment A** to the Presbyterian Book of Order that would have deleted its anti-gay ordination provision. In the wake of the defeat has come a flurry of more than a dozen court judicial cases against individuals who are gay and lesbian or have ordained gays and lesbians, most initiated by an individual layperson living in Virginia but holding membership in a conservative church in southern California.

Bishop Paul Egertson, spouse **Shirley Egertson**, and **Rev. Reinie Heydemann** were honored with the **2002 Jim Siefkes Award by Lutherans Concerned** at a banquet during the **Biennial Assembly of Lutherans Concerned/North America**, held July 18-21 on the campus of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. The Egertsons, long active in our movement in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, were recently featured in a video on parents of gay or lesbian children produced by Lutherans Concerned. In April, 2002, Bishop Egertson participated in the ordination of **Rev. Anita Hill** in St. Paul, Minnesota (see her story in *Open Hands*, Winter 2002, issue [Vol. 17, No. 3]). Heydemann, of Edmonton, Alberta, has been a leader of our movement in the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada**, strengthening Lutherans Concerned within that denomination. The Siefkes award recognizes nongay advocates and is named for **Pastor Jim Siefkes**, who initiated the meeting which led to the founding of Lutherans Concerned in 1974.



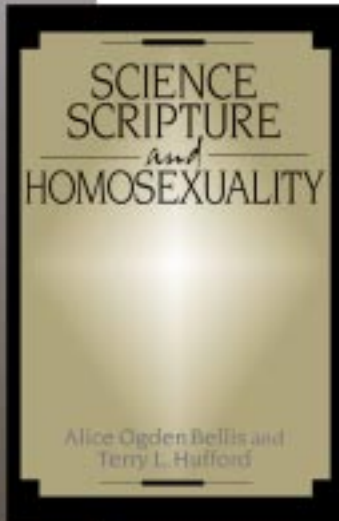
Jack Hartwein-Sanchez

God's Sense of Humor —The rainbow banner celebrating Gay Pride in Columbus, Ohio, was mounted on the city's light posts alongside Presbyterian banners commemorating the denomination's annual legislative session meeting there in June. General Assembly was relatively quiet on LGBT issues this year; but pro-GLBT meals, meetings, and worship services were very well attended. The More Light Presbyterian luncheon focused for the first time on transgender and bisexual concerns with speakers Rev. Erin Swenson of Atlanta and Rev. Susan Halcomb Craig of Los Angeles.

The **Brethren Mennonite Council** has welcomed **Gloria Kroph Nafziger** of Kitchner, Ontario, to serve as the first **Director of the Supportive Congregations Network Ministries**. From her local Publicly Affirming congregation and broader Mennonite Church leadership to the board of Christian Lesbians Out Together (CLOUT) and chair of the BMC, she has been an energetic contributor to the Welcoming movement, speaking and publishing widely. Nafziger will be providing support and resources to SCN congregations, pastors, and others who are supportive. Creating this position frees up other staff to focus on GLBT outreach, and was made possible by a challenge grant from the Gill Foundation of Colorado (www.gillfoundation.org) and BMC donors. **The Gill Foundation**, with an endowment of \$260 million, is the largest funder of LGBT organizations in the U.S. ▼

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B O O K S C A N T O O .



Science, Scripture, and Homosexuality

by Alice Ogden Bellis and Terry L. Hufford

Paperback, \$12.00
ISBN 0-8298-1485-X

The collaborative work of a biblical scholar and a biology professor, *Science, Scripture, and Homosexuality* is written in a highly accessible manner, addressing Scripture passages relating to homosexuality, and explaining the foundation of genetics and the growing evidence suggesting an organic basis for sexual orientation. The prevailing message its progressive authors wish to convey is that "the role of the homosexual, as well as the heterosexual, within the Church should be based upon common criteria for all: love of Christ, belief in God, and consideration of the special gifts, talents, experiences and dedication that an individual can bring to the Church." Ideal for church school discussion.



Courage to Love

Liturgies for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community

by Geoffrey Duncan

Paperback, \$23.00
ISBN 0-8298-1468-X

Created for use by clergy and lay leaders, *Courage to Love* is an exceptional collection of worship and liturgical resources inclusive of and sensitive to the needs of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender persons. It includes poems, prayers, stories, litanies, same-sex blessings, marriage ceremonies, celebratory material, and Eucharistic and baptismal liturgies that are beneficial for relationships with families, church, and community. Written by an international array of authors and compiled by Geoffrey Duncan, *Courage to Love* is an outstanding resource for both public worship and private devotion.

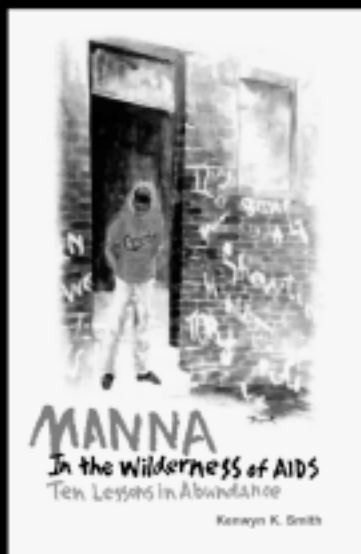
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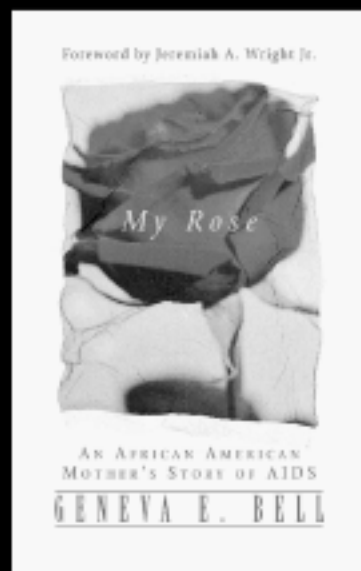
MANNA In the Wilderness of AIDS

Ten Lessons in Abundance

by Kenwyn K. Smith

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ISBN 0-8298-1458-2

The true story of seven motivated people from a Philadelphia church whose modest initiative to serve food to persons with AIDS transformed into a vibrant, interfaith, nonprofit organization aptly named MANNA (Metropolitan AIDS Neighborhood Nutrition Alliance)—and resulted in the revitalization of their community, themselves, and their church. Author Kenwyn Smith was the first chair of MANNA's board of directors, serving from 1990 to 1996.



My Rose

An African American Mother's Story of AIDS

by Geneva E. Bell

Paperback, \$13.00
ISBN 0-8298-1160-5

A mother's moving story of her gay son and his struggle with AIDS, and her devastation, shame, and anger at God. But it is also a witness to the deep faith that enabled the author to come to terms with this tragedy, as well as a record of how a family, a community, and a church were transformed by God's love.

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