



Affirmation

An Independent Voice for:

United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns

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Where Do We Go From Here?

By Tim Tennant-Jayne, *Affirmation Co-Spokeperson*

General Conference 2012 is over. The delegates decided that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people are still unwanted in The United Methodist Church. Now many of us are asking, "What do we do now?" Let's be honest, the results of this year's voting were depressing. Disheartening also describes it. Frustrating. After all, we'd done so much work towards this Conference. We felt sure that the number 40 would prevail and our years in the church wilderness would be over. Like hopeful sports fans, we wore our rainbow team colors and "tailgated" in the Tabernacle. Alas, it was not to be. We realize that God doesn't act in predictable ways. It has been 40 years since the "incompatible" phrase entered *The Book of Discipline* and it looks like that's going to stay for at least 4 more.

And yet. And yet. As I write this one month after we left Tampa, I can see God's mighty Spirit moving. Yes, even in the good old UMC. The vote served to awaken many people to the hatred within those words and within our denomination. Several bishops joined us outside of the bar of the Conference. Some spoke out against the

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Western Jurisdiction Moving in Our Direction

By Jeanne Knepper

Meeting together July 18 - 20, 2012 in San Diego, California, the Western Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church adopted several resolutions, which together declare:

- The Western Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church apologizes for the actions of the 2012 General Conference of the United Methodist Church which perpetuated marginalization of LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and ambiguous) persons and continues to dehumanize and demonize our LGBTQIA sisters and brothers. We are deeply sorry and ask for forgiveness.
- In response to our common belief that God's grace and love are available to all persons, the Western Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church states our belief that the United Methodist Church is in error on the subject of "homosexuality's incompatibility with Christian teaching." [Paragraph 161F of the United Methodist Discipline.] We commend to our bishops, clergy, local churches and ministry settings the challenge to operate as if the statement in

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GC Blues

By Jan Olson

I couldn't drag myself out of bed Friday morning, April 27th. I kept wondering why I was so tired and why I couldn't get myself to move. I'd had enough sleep. My body didn't ache any worse than it does most mornings. I wanted to get up to distribute the *Love Your Neighbor* coalition newspaper, which I really enjoy. So what was keeping me from getting up?

I couldn't come up with an answer. I just kept resetting the alarm clock for later and later. When I finally swung my feet over the side of the bed I just sat there, immobile, at a loss for what was the matter with me.

When I was finally able to move, I seemed to go through the motions without really paying attention to what I was doing. I had my usual morning protein shake. I checked my emails and texts, and I started reading from my current book. The words did not register. Even though it is an exciting, grab-your-attention thriller, I found myself having to reread paragraphs again and again. What was consuming my thoughts? What was keeping me so unfocused?

Finally, I realized that it was something that happened Thursday night. At the plenary session I heard Mark Miller's voice crack as he talked about the harm. I saw the emotion of years of abuse by people who profess to know Jesus. I felt my own emotions spilling out with my tears as left the convention center. I was unable to understand it all.

Luckily, as I drove myself back to my hotel alone, unaware that what I needed was to be with loving, caring support, my friend Ben pulled up behind me on his scooter. We rode together, decided to share an indulgence, and perhaps an escape, in Hagen-Daz ice cream and look at pictures of the conference together. By the time I went to my room I had laughed and felt better thanks to the time with my friend.

But this morning my friend wasn't with me. It was just me trying to get the energy to function in the world. My thoughts have been swirling. I have been trying to make sense of it all. I have been wondering why people hate people like me so much. I can't make sense of people who say they love Jesus and want to follow him but can be so hurtful, so harmful, and so down-right mean. I can't make sense of it. And then I try to hate them back but I can't find that feeling. I know hate is wrong. I know it's not how God wants me to feel. But I still want to. I want to be able to hate them so I don't have to feel the pain, the rejection, and the confusion. It's not in my nature. It's not the way I really want to live. I don't want to be like those that hurt us, that hurt me, by judging what God has made me to be. So I sit here in the pain. Not even hoping this morning that things will change. Just hoping that I will find the energy, the desire, the need to reach out to my friends.

Affirmation Newsletter

The Affirmation newsletter is published three times a year.

Only Affirmation's elected spokespersons may represent the official positions of this organization. Opinions here, signed or unsigned, are those of the writers, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Affirmation.

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Mission Statement

As an independent voice of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people, Affirmation radically reclaims the compassionate and transforming gospel of Jesus Christ by relentlessly pursuing full inclusion in the Church as we journey with the Spirit in creating God's beloved community.

Adopted January 2005

* Note: substitute the symbol "@" for the letters "_at_" in the email addresses.



Affirmation at General Conference

By Tim Tennant-Jayne, Affirmation Co-Spokesperson

The United Methodist Church's General Conference met in Tampa, FL, this year and Affirmation was there. We were part of the Love Your Neighbor (LYN) Coalition. Affirmation has worked with other groups before at General Conferences. But this time we really functioned as a coalition, not a collection of individual organizations. The LYN Coalition was Affirmation, the Black Methodists for Church Renewal, Methodist Federation for Social Action, the National Federation of Asian American United Methodists, the Native American International Caucus, and the Reconciling Ministries Network. Many of us have been having weekly conference telephone calls for the past year. Some weeks there were up to three different calls with three different teams or groups. It has been a busy time.

So what were we doing? Well, in the months leading up to General Conference we were contacting delegates and urging them to support our concerns. We were developing social media connections. And in Tampa, the hectic pace continued. People were up bright and early passing out the Coalition newspaper, *Love Your Neighbor News*. We distributed rainbow bandanas and lanyards to everyone. Jan Olson kept a game room going for people needing a break. We served breakfast and lunch in the Tabernacle meeting tent. Affirmation members took leadership of the daily street theater events. Our co-spokesperson, Laci Adams, helped lead the Sunday

worship service with Dr. James Cone. We were part of the flash mob and the flash chorus. One of our newest council members, David Weekley, led a luncheon discussion on being transgender in this church. We were involved in planning legislative actions and we were there protesting. In addition, Walter Lockhart again organized our Chaplain's Hotline for folk in crisis and coordinated a daily communion service.

Special recognition also needs to be made of several other Affirmation folk. Steven and Jim, who does so much of our artwork, were there selling T-shirts. Thanks to Tom for the great photos. And thank you Bil for providing the much appreciated massage work. Thanks to our editors, Judy WestLee and Gary Shephard, who worked on the newsletter even though they couldn't be there in person.

One very special highlight was our Sweets for the Sweet reception. This year it was held on the 40th Anniversary of adding the hateful language to *The Book of Discipline*. By that evening, it was apparent that healthy and helpful legislation would not pass. So Affirmation held a party. We showed the Church that we LGBTQ folk are still here. We reminded each other of the love God has for us and we have for one another. Throughout General Conference, Affirmation worked to truly be the Church, opening hearts, opening minds, and trying to open doors for Christ Jesus.

The Call, 35 Years And Counting

By Jeanne Knepper

"Take my hand . . ." Five years after the church spoke "incompatible," Jesus reached through time, space, and consciousness, calling me to journey on an entwined pathway of ordained ministry and lesbian relationship, not that I understood that fully when I said, "Yes."

1980, 84, 88, 92. The quadrennial struggle, feeling I am called to contain the irreconcilable within myself, walking two paths that the church insists, must diverge. Tears, journaling, prayer and dialog: "What would you have me do?" "Keep coming. I am with you." Strong friendships, and stronger faith, formed in life and work on the margins.

1993. Begin Shalom Ministries, ministry at the edge. Take my quaking self to Atlanta to stand up before the Judicial Council. Made available for appointment.

An understanding: this work is worth a lifetime, my lifetime.

A vision given: Ask the wall, person by person, to transform itself into an arch. Immense gratitude for all those who make this journey their own. No one does the work alone.

1996. Fifteen bishops speak out at General Conference. One of them, William Dew, ordains me. I am forever grateful.

A principle given: Let those who support unjust law, enforce unjust law. Do not do their work for them. Stay balanced. Be trustworthy.

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Paragraph 161F does not exist, creating a church where all people are truly welcome.

- We urge the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops to develop a concrete action plan for the Western Jurisdiction to operate as a jurisdiction that upholds full inclusion in every aspect of our ministry.

The Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops has acted, creating a new area of commitment, a Strategic Plan for Biblical Obedience, to be chaired by Retired Bishop Melvin Talbert. The language of "Biblical Obedience" is now being used to highlight the differences between our Christian call to treat all people as beloved children of God and the church's demand that we discriminate against LGBTQIA people. The bishops are taking it as their responsibility to provide leadership as we live into Biblical Obedience in the Western Jurisdiction.

Finally, the Western jurisdiction declared that it is the sense of the jurisdiction that if any bishop of the Western Jurisdiction be charged, tried, and convicted of ordaining or appointing a "self-avowed practicing homosexual," an appropriate penalty for the trial court to assign would be a suspension from the exercise of Episcopal office for a period of 24 consecutive hours.

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Call everyone a colleague.

2001. Appointed to serve University Park UMC. Oh, my God, what joy!

In the midst of it all, ministry: Love, listen, speak, stretch, laugh, grow. Learn to be kind. Stop seeking credit. Cultivate gratitude. Scream into my pillow and rise to care for the vulnerable. Follow Christ deeper into compassion, deeper into resistance.

Never stop dancing. Play. Listen whenever the red tail calls. Go outside. Don't let go. Be ever grateful for love received, for daughters and sons-in-law, for grandchildren and for a sweet giggle-mate, partner and friend-for-life. There is so much goodness.

Claim recess, but know this: The road bends but doesn't end. We still walk hand in hand. It is a blessing beyond words.

Update Your Contact Info!

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It helps too if we have an up-to-date email address in case your snail mail starts coming back. In fact, in this world of instant communication, we'd really like to have your email address so that we can contact you with urgent action requests. We'll only do this if you tell us it's ok to communicate with you by email. Otherwise we'll only contact you by email if your snail mail comes back undeliverable.

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lack of love the conservatives voiced. By our actions of continuing love, we gave some moderate delegates and bishops the courage to act on their faith. The next day a sizable group of active (not just retired) bishops joined us to express support for clergy willing to perform weddings for all people. Since General Conference, faithful United Methodists in Iowa and elsewhere are publicly urging this church to truly Do No Harm. [See **Note From The Editors**, Page 7.]

I look back at General Conference and I am proud that the Love Your Neighbor Coalition stopped General Conference sessions. After decades of facing ever worse and worse restrictions on our lives, we kept the delegates from making *The Discipline* anymore hateful. That's two sessions in a row we've held the line.

So, where do we go from here? That is probably the question I have heard the most since GC. That and the companion question of "Why should I stay?" Some folk may need to step back and take a break. Others may find God's Spirit leading them elsewhere. What is next for Affirmation? We head to the next General Conference. We go on to Portland, OR. And we start now. Your Affirmation Council is beginning the work for 2016 now, in 2012. We are committed to continuing this effort.

As Holly Near and Meg Christian sang, we are "like drops of water falling on the stone, / splashing breaking dispersing in air / Weaker than the stone by far but be aware that / As time goes by the rock will wear away." Affirmation was born out of the desire to help The United Methodist Church know the truth of God's Love for all people. We will continue the effort we've begun. I invite you to continue walking this journey with us.

Forgive Us Our Sins

By Jeanne Knepper

You know, one of the concepts that I don't like to talk about much, when I hear it in the religious world, is the concept of "sin." Sin—it almost always is about personal failings, failings in the eyes of others or ourselves, failings that we need to repent of, to seek forgiveness for, to get right with God about. Now, I know, if we dig around enough, we can find this kind of sin for most all of us. I cut off other drivers or do some mental jockeying so it can be clear that I'm smarter than someone I don't like very much. I can accept that's a sin. I get loud and forceful when I'm feeling threatened—I'll give you that one as well. But, the reality is, I go a bunch of days at a time without doing anything that shreds the social fabric, and so, I expect, do you. And yet, there are all these religious folk who insist that Jesus died for my sins. Well, right out loud, I'm gonna say—there's not enough of them to be worth killing someone for. I expect, even if we added up all the sins of all of our lives, all of us, it wouldn't be enough to be worth his life, or anyone else's. It's just a crock, that Jesus died because of our personal sins.

Oh, anyone listening to General Conference heard enough about sin those two weeks. The conference actually debated, for over an hour, whether God loves everyone, whether our sins can separate us from the love of God, and, horrifyingly enough, finally declared, by a margin of only 56%, that God does love everyone! Holy baloney, boys and girls, that's outrageous, as well as unbiblical and un-Wesleyan and uncharitable and just plain awful. If there is anything that is basic ground-level undebateable in my understanding of the One who is at the center of all being, it is that God is Love, for everyone and everything, period. I suppose I could stop the sermon right there. But, you see, we need to know what to say when people surprise us with this goofy language, and even more when we start to internalize it. Let's take a look, for a bit, at the concept of sin and how it fits in, biblically.

Jesus was clear: God is compassionate, like a loving parent. God welcomes the prodigal son, God desires our healing, God rejoices when the prisoner is set free, the blind one begins to see, the poor hear good news and the oppressed are liberated. Taken together, God desires that our brokenness, in the largest sense, be set right, be healed. Sometimes, our brokenness is about personal failings, large or small. In those times, it is appropriate to seek forgiveness, from the ones we have injured, and from God. This is a large part what the recovery from addictions is about—setting our lives aright again by facing our personal failings and seeking to restore relationship.

Sometimes, the brokenness we live with has very little to do with our personal failings. Let's go back to General Conference for some examples. The Conference had a period of "holy conferencing," times of protected conversation, during which it was supposed to be safe for people to speak deeply about who they were, so that there might be more understanding, so that the conversations about sexual orientation and gender identity might be about real people instead of issues. It was a decent concept, but poorly executed. The time was cut short; there were no monitors of the conversations; people had neither the skills nor the will to avoid doing harm. And there **was** harm. During these supposedly "holy" conversations, gay men and lesbians were compared to drug addicts, drug dealers, and prostitutes in multiple settings; gay men were equated with those who practice bestiality; lesbians and gay men were lumped with alcoholics; gay men and lesbians were identified as "those" people, not part of the family, not delegates; bisexual men and women and transgender people were simply ignored. One translator visibly turned his back to a delegate and put distance between them when the delegate self-identified as gay. One delegate kept hitting an identified gay delegate while waving his arms around passionately while speaking. One translator was so upset at the hate language he heard that he came in tears to apologize to a gay delegate.

You could say that these actions were simply the personal sins of the ones who were disgusted that gay men and lesbians were at the General Conference, but that would be missing the systemic component: the General Conference set up a structure that could and would victimize vulnerable people, an oppressive structure. The General Conference put concern for its schedule ahead of its supposed commitment to "do no harm," elevating procedure and calendar above human relationship. The General Conference, by its choices to be slipshod and to ride roughshod over protests about those decisions, made it clear that it—and through it, that the United Methodist Church—valued institutional goals over healing, over compassion, over acting in a Christ-like manner. So, let's say it—the General Conference engaged in idolatry, being more driven by the concerns of church as an institution, than

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by the concerns of God. The church acted as though the church *is* God. It is not. The church is an institution that seeks to *serve* God, in its better days, in the hope of our hearts. When the church engages in the brokenness of idolatry, it does not need forgiveness; it needs confrontation. I remember the words of Amos, speaking as a prophet to the temple leadership when religion celebrated the powerful instead of protecting the vulnerable:

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. [Amos 5:21-24]

If there is no justice, if there is no compassion, God will not delight in our rituals of worship, no matter how well-executed. Our songs, our sermons, our prayers and our sacraments please God only if they are an integral part of our concern for justice, of our commitment to compassion.

There are so many ways that people are harmed: by their own poor decisions, but also by oppression, by exile, by inequitable distribution of the necessities of life, by prejudices and hatreds built into law, by being taught, and believing, that they are worthless, powerless, and unable to advocate for their own well-being; by being taught, and believing, that God desires them to accept their assigned place in life, by being taught, and believing, that they are people of no worth, that who they are is an affront to all that is holy. There is so much harm, and most of it cannot, and will not be, put right by forgiveness. Idolatry cannot be forgiven: it must be turned away from. Institutional self-centeredness cannot be forgiven: it must be confronted. Personal unwillingness or inability to stand up for one's self as a God-beloved creation cannot be forgiven: it must be unlearned and replaced with the sure knowledge that one is worth a better life and with the courage to refuse to settle for less.

There is a reason why we seldom have liturgies of confession in this congregation. I believe that too many of us have been told too frequently that the problems we face in our lives are of our own making and that God wants us to sit down, shut up, be quiet and emulate "gentle Jesus, meek and mild." That might be true, sometimes, for people who wield great power in the world [although I will never agree that Jesus was meek and mild!] It is not the big issue for a congregation that insists on standing alongside the many folk who are marginalized in our culture. Here, I believe the far more important message is this: God created us and loves us and desires that all of us will have the resources, encouragement, and nerve to live up to our identity as God's beloved children who are called to create a world where all can thrive. The message is also this: we do not live or thrive alone. In fact, our most cherished sacrament is this: that we meet Jesus, and that we internalize God's love for us, when we come to the table together.

Affirmation Press Release Wedding Bells are Ringing March 7, 2012

By Tim Tennant-Jayne, Affirmation Co-Spokesperson

Affirmation: United Methodist celebrates the recent spate of good news regarding the equality of legalized marriages. Of particular note, both Houses of the legislature of Washington state have approved marriage equality and Governor Chris Gregoire has signed this measure into law. Affirmation: United Methodist is especially pleased to see that Bishop Grant Hagiya is supportive of this law. The voters in Maine have signed petitions requesting a referendum approving of marriage equality. Both Houses of the New Jersey legislature have approved marriage equality for that state.

The rest of the press release is here:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/UMCalledOut/message/4153>

Affirmation Press Release Medical Study Support for Our Children

March 7, 2012

By Tim Tennant-Jayne, Affirmation Co-Spokesperson

The February 1, 2012 issue of *Pediatrics: the Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics* contains several articles on studies of suggested treatments with transgender children. *Pediatrics* is a peer-reviewed journal that is highly respected in this field. The authors looked at young children who consider themselves a different gender than what society considers them to be. It reviewed over a decade of work by physicians, therapists, and researchers affiliated with Children's Hospital Boston, MA. The writers strongly urge medical professionals to take these children seriously and highlight the benefit of early medical intervention.

The rest of the press release is here:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/UMCalledOut/message/4152>

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standard of marriage.

So what's going on? Is there a sudden rise in homophobia all of a sudden now that our president has endorsed marriage equality? Is it a general bit of backlash because we're making progress state by state and court case by court case? Do they fear they're losing the battle and the entire country is going to hell, quite possibly in a hand basket and they have to strike back any way they can?

Or does almost everyone having a smart phone able to capture audio and video, capture moments that previous went unrecorded? Do Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter become a magnifying glass and a megaphone for the far right and bad behavior in general? Or are they just making public incidents that previously went unrecorded and unremarked?

Either way, I think the next few years are going to be a bit on the rough side. We're going to have to steel ourselves before we look at Facebook, shake our heads as we hear about the next homophobic video to go viral on YouTube, and brace ourselves for the latest volley of hatred on Twitter. Each day we're going to run into increasingly virulent homophobia from a variety of sources.

I'm still signing articles as "A Man in Texas" because of policies in my conference. I'm not ordained clergy, so I'm safe on that front, but I don't want to risk the ordination of the clergy in the church I'm an active member of. (Yes, I've seen it happen in my conference. Not with the current bishop, but until I know for sure how the current bishop feels towards such things, I'm keeping a low profile.)

When I was growing up, my lesbian and gay role models committed suicide, rotted in jail, went insane, or were 'rescued' using psychotherapy. Now we have positive role models, and we're wired up to find a solution to bullying. We have the support of our nation's president and vice president.

Yes, I think it's all getting better. Finally. However, there's still much work to be done, because there's still a lot of hatred, homophobia, transphobia, and misunderstanding out there.

Note From The Editors

It's taken us a bit of time to get this edition of the newsletter together. After GC 2008 our first post GC newsletter came together fairly quickly. This time both of the editors had events going on above and beyond GC 2012 (as hard as that may be to believe!)

Things are starting to calm down. We expect the next newsletter to be out about six weeks after the council meets in October.

The Called Out Editors have posted an item with a lot of the UMC news over the summer. Good things are happening, just not at the GC level. Read about it here: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/UMCalledOut/message/4218>

You can always keep up on news by reading UM Called Out: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/UMCalledOut/messages?o=1>

Is It Me, Or Is Homophobia Hitting New Lows?

By A Man in Texas

The news this summer has had a surreal tinge to it. It seems more like something from Kevin Smith's *Red State*, than serious news reporting.

First there was the "fence the queers" sermon where the preacher wanted to put us behind electric fences until we all died out. Fortunately he didn't get into the details of how his "Fourth Reich" would play out and how he'd determine who was queer enough to go behind the fence. Thanks to someone on the church's video system who didn't think to hit stop, the video of the sermon hit YouTube and went viral. He claims he was just preaching what's in the Bible. (I'd like to hear his sermon on Deuteronomy 21:15-17. Or maybe that's only in us homos' bible.)

Then there was the YouTube video of the 4 year old singing "Ain't no homos gonna get to heaven," in a church, being cheered on by the congregation. That's just so wrong on so many levels. What are the parents, and that church, teaching that child? Good grief, this is 2012, not 1952.

One Million Moms, an organization whose name is 4.0% to 4.7% correct (they have about 40,000 to 47,000 members depending on the source) has attacked JC Penney yet again for a gay friendly ad that will appeal to the younger crowd and certainly to some of us of a certain age. Granted, I don't see references to One Million Moms in the mainstream media. I only see these protests popping up on Facebook from the LGBTQ Nation feed.

We had no progress at GC 2012. Nothing repealed or overturned. We couldn't even pass legislation (yet again) that says we're not of one mind on sexual orientation.

In the middle of all of this, Affirmation got a rather interesting email addressed to "church leaders" upbraiding us for leniency towards same sex marriage. The sender obviously hadn't done his or her homework. We're certainly not church leaders. If we were, things would be radically different in the UMC. The email did go on for quite a bit and quoted the usual verses. It took me a few days to get around to replying because in the lead up to GC there's not much time for dealing with this type of thing. When I did reply, I apologized for the slowness of the response, pointed out the church leaders thing, and asked if Deuteronomy 21:15-17 was the biblical definition of marriage, and if not, where in the Bible could I find it? Surprisingly, the email didn't bounce. Often people set up temporary Yahoo or Hotmail accounts for these missives, and delete them after they send their diatribe, which shows me just how seriously we should take them. I haven't heard back yet on my Deuteronomy question. If I do, my next question will be how Levirate marriage fits into the biblical

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