

Drops of Water



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for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns

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We Come to Build Bridges

By Judy WestLee

Once years ago a friend of mine, her then 5 year-old son, and I went fishing. It was her son's first fishing trip. We fished off of a dock. The young man caught a fish and he was excited. Later I noticed he was quiet, which was unusual. I looked over to see what he was doing. He was feeding his just caught fish our bait worms! I asked him what he was doing. He explained he wanted to fatten up the fish so it would be bigger. We had a long discussion about patience and letting things come in their own time.

I am reminded of that incident as I contemplate what our United Methodist Church is going through today. I see there being three basic positions on the issue of

“homosexuality.” One group - perhaps the largest group - is undecided because of the conflicting information given. A second group is convinced by its understanding of the Bible and church history that homosexuality is a sin, that same-gender relationships are not blessed by the church and that homosexual persons are “not fit” to serve as parish ministers. [Being one of those persons, I must tell you that language really hurts!]. The third group is equally convinced by its understanding of the Bible, our personal experiences, and study of recent medical research, that being “homosexual,” i.e. attracted to the same gender persons, is a God given trait rather than a behavior option and that “homosexual” persons should be held accountable for the same behavior standards as are heterosexual persons.

And so there we are...at a standoff for many years... many General Conferences.

One of my New Testament professors in seminary, Dr. Fred Craddock, used to teach us hard lessons of the Bible by first carefully laying out one side of the argument and then just as carefully laying out the other side of the argument. After going through all of that, Dr. Craddock would ask: “So, which opinion is right?Who KNOWS!” Dr. Craddock understood the reasoning of both positions.

As a United Methodist who would label herself as “progressive,” I think I understand the position of those who want to limit what lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender (LGBT) persons can do. But I

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Coeditors: Judy WestLee & Gary Shephard

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Affirmation's Mission Statement

Affirmation: United Methodist is an activist caucus of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, our families, and friends, organized to speak for ourselves. Together we:

- * Proclaim a gospel of respect, love, and justice;
- * Relentlessly pursue policies and processes that support full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in all areas and levels of The United Methodist Church;
- * Overcome the barriers that diminish our common humanity by excluding or judging people because of their race, gender, class, or physical abilities;
- * Empower people to undertake works of inclusion and justice where they are.

Our Prophetic Witness

By Gary Shephard

On the one hand Albert Einstein said, "Insanity is endlessly repeating the same process and hoping for a different result." On the other hand Winston Churchill said "Success is going from failure to failure without a loss of enthusiasm."

After the disappointment of GC 2000 some of us left the church – burned out, disgusted, and emotionally injured. We lost friends and allies after 1992 and 1996 as well. Each person has their own capacity for the tedious job of trying to open up the church. When we've hit that limit for the sake of our own sanity it's time to move on.

And yet what of the infants now being baptized? What of the children coming up through our Sunday Schools, Vacation Bible Schools, UMYF that know they're different? That go to the Bible and find frightening words? That hear frightening words from their parents, and their friends, and their youth leaders? From the pulpit on Sunday morning? Even, if they have the patience to read it, the Discipline?

Who will speak the words of comfort and reassurance they

need to hear? Who will tell them, "Our church has it wrong!"

Who will raise a voice for those who are called to preach God's word, but are told by our Discipline that they're not good enough? Who will object when legislation is put forth saying that they're unstable, not suitable to be preachers of the word?

Who will raise a voice for those with LGBT family members who are afraid to come out about their family for fear they'll lose the support of the church they love? Who will raise a voice for the mother that lost a gay son to AIDS but twelve years later still suffers in silence? Who will cry "Shame! You have failed as a church!" for her? Who will give voice to her grief? Who will be the church for her?

How many voices have been silenced? How many suffer in silence? How many turn from God because of the spiritual violence of our church? Who will hold the church accountable? Who will tell the church that this is a life and death issue for more people than we'll ever know? Who will tell them

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ask those of that opinion to recognize our understandings, also.

The concept of local autonomy in deciding which route to take...no LGBT rights or full LGBT rights...left to Annual Conferences. John Wesley understood that churches and church locations vary and that ministry must be tailored to fit each setting. Remember Article XXI of *Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task* (found on p. 64 of *The Book of Discipline*) allows the church to change, or abolish rites and ceremonies, so that all things may be done to edification.

We call upon everyone to understand we have different worldviews. We see things differently. Not that one view is wrong and another view is right. It's more of a "Who KNOWS?" situation.

For the past three years Affirmation has run a fund raising campaign called "Turning Walls into Bridges...Brick by Brick." The campaign explained "Now is a great time to break down the walls that divide us...brick by brick, opposition by opposition, and use those bricks instead to build a bridge

of understanding and cooperation. Affirmation works to make space for all people, including you, within the UMC. We do it taking down the walls of prejudice brick by brick, and instead of hurling those bricks at others, we use those bricks to build bridges of understanding."

Get to know us who disagree with you...of which ever view you identify. Ask us about our homes, our gardens, our dogs / cats, our children / step-children, our grandchildren / step-grand-children (I have a great story about me teaching my 18-month old step-granddaughter how to eat a banana!). Let's get to know each other as 3-dimensional people rather than single issue people.

And let's get on with the doing the work of the church rather than continuously disagreeing over this topic. Our world is at war. We have a horrendous AIDS epidemic. Our children need to be fed, have medical care, housed and educated. Our elders need to have access to medicine without having to choose between prescription drugs or buying food. Let's get excited about the things which excited Jesus. Please join us on this new bridge of understanding.

Prophetic Witness....

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that people are dying?

With this inspiration Affirmation, MFSA, and RMN are here with plans for prophetic witness. There will be people who say we're insane. We're endlessly repeating the same process and expecting a different result that's just never going to come. We're a bunch of loonies if we expect the outcome to be different this time.

By that definition, yes, Affirmation is proud to admit insanity. We embrace it. As an organization we will go from failure to failure, enthusiasm undiminished.

When GC 2004 is over we'll measure our *success* not by whether progressive legislation passed. We won't measure our *failure* by whether any legislation put forth by Good News or the Institute for Religion and Democracy or Confessing Movement passed. We'll measure our success by the witness we provided at GC 2004 and the church we modeled. Prophetic insanity. It works for us.

Love Makes a Family

Love Makes a Family is an exhibit of photographs and interviews with families that have lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members. Through first-person accounts and positive images, this exhibit seeks to challenge and change damaging myths and stereotypes about LGBT people and their families. Love Makes a Family helps in the process of dismantling the destructive power of prejudice and intolerance, thereby making the world a safer place for all families.

Love Makes a Family is being shown in the meet-here.com space at 945 Liberty Ave., just two short blocks from the convention center and a block from Smithfield United Church, during regular open hours, generally 6:30 a.m. to midnight. Telephone number for meet-here.com is 412-456-0829.

Love Makes a Family was arranged to be at General Conference by the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference Reconciling Ministries and Affirmation.

Members Invited to Annual Affirmation Corporate Meeting

The corporate annual meeting of Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Concerns, Inc., will be at 2 p.m. (1:30 sign-in and reception) Saturday, May 1, 2004, at Smithfield United Church, 620 Smithfield St., Pittsburgh, PA 15222. All Affirmation members are invited to participate.

Members wishing to vote in the election for the Board of Directors must be credentialed during the signing in time. If your membership is not current you will need to bring it current to be able to vote.

The items of business will include:

- Elections of five members for three-year terms to the Board of Directors
- Election of members to fill vacancies on the Board of Directors
- Change all corporate papers to reflect the name "Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns"
- Report of the Strategic Visioning Plan
- Any other business that the Directors deem appropriate.

The Directors constitute the Affirmation Council.

Daily Events at GC

Hospitality Room at Smithfield United is open 6 a.m. – 2 p.m. and 7 – 11 p.m. weekdays through Thursday, May 6.

Weekday Breakfast and Legislative Briefing For Delegates (Volunteers and Visitors welcome) 7 – 8 a.m. Smithfield United.

Weekday Common Witness Delicious and Affordable Lunches for delegates, volunteers and visitors at Smithfield Church, 620 Smithfield St., between 12 noon and 1:30 p.m. weekdays.

Do You Have A News Item, Story, Or Calendar Item for *Drops of Water*

Send it to

AffirmationNewsletter@yahoo.com.

If you send an attachment, please paste the text of your item into the body of the email too. You can page us at 800-946-4646 pin 1434076 to make other delivery arrangements.