

# Drops of Water



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## No Prayer Allowed?

The coalition of Progressive United Methodists ask: “Is it civil disobedience to pray?” or “Will General Conference 2004 of The United Methodist Church demand all praying cease?”.

Affirmation, the Methodist Federation for Social

Action and the Reconciling Ministries Network will join together in prayer over the General Conference from 6:30 to 8:15 a.m. today (Tuesday, May 5) before the opening worship service and plenary session.

Members of these three organizations will kneel along the walkways of the Convention Center for 90 minutes. Prayers will be offered for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons in all aspects of The United Methodist Church.

The Prayer Vigil will be repeated 30 minutes each before the afternoon and evening Plenary Sessions.

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## The Call Never Goes Away

*By Peggy Gaylord*

Sitting in the COSROW service Sunday, *Returning to the Well: A Celebration of Women Following Their Call*, suddenly I was remembering my own call to ordination, one that I've experienced at least since age 10, and how it was not fulfilled until I was ordained in a non-mainline denomination 10 years ago. Even though I was able to be ordained elsewhere, it

doesn't begin to “make up for” my call to ministry in the UMC. And even though it's been almost 30 years since I was exploring seminaries, finally realizing after the 1976 General Conference that the UMC was not ready for me nor I ready for the institutional UMC—I thought the wounds would heal completely over time;

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## Drops of Water

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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.

# Something Is Missing

By Michael Bledsoe

*"Something must have been left out of the recipe 'cause it didn't turn out at all like it was supposed to!"*

How often has this scenario happened to you or folks you know? Following a recipe from a trusted friend or family member, how high did your joyful excitement rise before falling to deep despair as you realized *something must have been left out of the recipe 'cause it didn't turn out at all like it was supposed to!*

Half my life ago, I found myself married to a beautiful, young woman. We loved God and were so excited to be serving God together as a team. We had a beautiful new born son. I had recently graduated from Perkins School of Theology and had been ordained a deacon. All indications seemed to say, God was guiding and moving us toward a wonderful and blessed ministry. Wife by my side, I'd soon be ordained an elder in the Central Texas Conference. But *something must have been left out of the recipe 'cause it didn't*

*turn out at all like it was supposed to!*

Before our wedding, I told my beautiful bride-to-be about the occasional attractions I felt to men, and I assured her I had never acted on those attractions. We agreed to proceed with our wedding plans as we were confident that our shared prayer life would bring God's power against all evil and our marriage would be so fantastic that my attractions to men would fade away. I had accepted Jesus, the Christ as my personal savior more than 10 years earlier, so that part of the recipe was already taken care of. We knew our gracious God would cause my attractions to men to fade away to nothingness. But *something must have been left out of the recipe 'cause it didn't turn out at all like it was supposed to!*

Before our 1<sup>st</sup> wedding anniversary, I knew my attractions to some men were not fading as they were supposed to. Even though some attractions were strong, I remained

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## Call Remains...

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but the pain from the scars can again be triggered in settings like these at General Conference, especially during worship.

What pain? The pain of not being able to pursue my spiritual journey in the way I understood it; the pain of being laity and being excluded from the “inner circles” of my clergy friends (laity can’t really understand, won’t understand or respect confidentiality, etc.); the pain of no longer speaking of the pain because it’s been so long, how could it possibly still be an issue, still ache or stab at times? Though I withdrew voluntarily from the ordination process, I didn’t begin to know the spiritual and emotional price I would pay over the years for not following then where I felt led.

In 1988 I saw a man in an official role for General Conference with UM Communications. We had dated for several months while I was a freshman at Cornell. I didn’t want to be pressured into a commitment while still a freshman, did not want to be pressured into a sexual intimacy beyond what

seemed to be appropriate for me in the context of the rest of my life at that time; I wasn’t sure I aspired to being a pastor’s wife. When I suggested that possibly we should shift to seeing each other a little less, he grabbed me by my throat and shook me to try to convince me to stay in the relationship. He convinced me only not to be in a relationship again where my partner was significantly larger than I. I saw him at Boston Theological Seminary three years later when I visited a session for prospective students. He could pursue his call to ministry, and I couldn’t.

I see other friends here who have been able to answer their call to ordained ministry. One person was someone I considered a close friend prior to her call to ministry. She was supportive of me, saw things with a different perspective than most, valued who I was—had been particularly nurturing when I finally shared that I am bisexual. Though I’m not aware of any conscious rift and sometimes I long for that lost connection, I think maybe it was natural that we would go our separate ways; her journey to seminary reminded me,

and her obviously successful ministry reminds me, that she could pursue her call to ministry, and I couldn’t.

While in my own case the process never reached an official determination of whether I had gifts and graces to offer the church, I’ve watched many people over the years, friends and acquaintances—lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people—whose gifts and graces had been confirmed and who: have pursued their call to ministry; have been stripped of their ordination; have voluntarily given up their orders; have transferred to other denominations; have withdrawn from the UMC or from Christianity—and some who have withdrawn from life, who have committed suicide when their call to be ordained was denied or they were denied at some other point in their ordination process.

Today, I am at General Conference, committed to answering the call resulting from my baptism: to be present; to stand; to speak, listen, and hear; for all those who have not been able to answer their call.

## 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.

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

## Missing....

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faithful to my wife. She encouraged me to seek counseling. I also tried a seminar and books promising freedom from homosexuality. I asked strong prayer warriors to pray for me and with me. Still, *something must have been left out of the recipe 'cause it didn't turn out at all like it was supposed to!*

After 5 years of marriage filled with internal torture, I filed for divorce, withdrew from seeking elders orders, and changed careers. How fervently we had followed the recipe of our trusted family in the faith, only to find out through personal trauma that *something had been left out of the recipe 'cause it didn't turn out at all like it was supposed to!*

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### 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.

Some 25 years later, my ex-wife, our son, and I all see how we did the right thing. We all see ourselves as much better off than had we tried to keep our marriage going without that special erotic love between partners in a long term, committed relationship. My ex-wife is now happily married, and I am too.

I met a wonderful Christian guy. We have built a long term, committed, monogamous relationship, and we celebrate our 18<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. He has nudged me along with God to seek a place of ministry making use of the gifts and graces God has given me. I am finishing my 1<sup>st</sup> semester in my journey to become a licensed professional counselor.

Please help us put an end to stories like that of my ex-wife, my son, and me. Please correct the recipe so that others won't have to find out through personal trauma that *something must have been left out of the recipe 'cause it didn't turn out at all like it was supposed to!*