

Drops of Water



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for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns

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Where Do We Go From Here?

*By Ken Rowe,
Affirmation Co-spokesperson*

I'm excited and tired, exhilarated and numb. As we hit deadline for the final "Drops of Water," the General Conference is still in session with tons of work to do. It is hard to get a good sense of the state of the church. It is safe to say our stances are a bit more to the

Right than expected, and the coordinating and oversight of boards and agencies could be more in the hands of the inclusive faction in the church. On the other hand, many extremely negative statements were defeated, and the moderate / progressives candidates dominated the final results of Judicial Council and University

Senate elections. All current boards and agencies will remain for the time being and there will be no radical change in the distribution of Bishops. There has not yet been the complete Southern Baptification of The United Methodist Church, but we are still on that path.

Thursday morning a powerful witness was presented to the General Conference by a multitude of faithful folk from Soulforce, RMN, Affirmation, MFSA, bishops, delegates,

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The Rock Will Wear Away Eventually

We came. We witnessed. We did our best to be the drops of water to wear away the stone. We find that this stone is a very hard stone. We did not succeed in wearing it away this time.

With that we recognize that there will be mem-

bership losses. Some progressive members will despair of the church ever changing, will tire of the process, and leave for more spiritually fulfilling pastures.

We also recognize that some may rejoice in our

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Coeditors: Gary Shephard & Judy WestLee

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Affirmation's Mission Statement

Affirmation: United Methodist is an activist caucus of lesbian, gay, bisexual, & 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.

If I Were Not Here, Would You Tell My Story?

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is one story in many. Please send the one you know to the address at the end of the story.)

*By Peggy Gaylord,
Affirmation Co-Spokesperson*

Suicide – we speak usually in hushed tones, euphemistically even more so than “normal” death. We don't want to hear about it. It seemed glossed over on the floor of the plenary session the other day when the rate was given of teen suicide related to sexual and gender identity issues, estimated at 30%. And it's not just teens – the rate for adults is probably higher as well, though these statistics are difficult to glean.

After being at the 1988 General Conference, volunteering the full time as a marshal, I heard the story of a woman who had committed suicide shortly thereafter. She was ordained a deacon as an open lesbian. After the voting, she knew she would not be allowed to be ordained an elder regardless of her gifts and graces. She had touched my life at a conference the previous year with a workshop she led, and then I had talked to her on the phone at great length one Saturday afternoon. I shared her story on the floor of my annual conference a few weeks later. We voted to become a Reconciling Conference. After the vote, our Bible study resource leader came up to me – he told me that he had married her (I was confused),

performed the covenant service between her and her partner. Somehow, she had lost sight of the difference between the acceptance of the UMC, and the acceptance of God. I knew her as a profoundly grounded spiritual person.

Four years ago, I experienced many losses in every area of my life in a few short months, virtually everything that had been important to me including the end of a long-term relationship. Sometimes I had a feeling of just wanting out of life. Who doesn't in a time like that? When my unemployment ran out, I reached a point of physiological panic and anxiety that could not be controlled by medication. As soon as I consented finally to try medication, my suicidal thoughts escalated dramatically (which I now know was also a side effect of the drugs, but no doctor admitted it then). This occurred in the months prior to GC2000. Since I had gone to three General Conferences already, my identity defined me as someone who does that. When my life changed so much that I couldn't go and be present, it was utterly unacceptable to me – being disconnected from the body triggered me into a crisis that resulted in my first psychiatric hospitalization at age 46, during GC2000. While some were arrested in Cleveland, I was also locked up. I spent the next 10 months in hell, constantly suicidal, with little relief from traditional

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Where Do We Go...

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staff, and visitors. We not only encircled the bar, we rolled the river of justice through the delegate seating, around the community table, and among the bishops. We want to thank all those who made it possible. You know who you are. A special thanks to SoulForce for working with such integrity and honesty this week as they and others negotiated the action.

Where do we go from here? That is an individual choice. If all the progressives left the denomination today, I believe that Affirmation would remain within The United Methodist Church to witness, care for, and feed those baptized who come

out and whose hearts are opened. The reality is that as a movement, we aren't leaving. We are continuing to celebrate the Spirit's movement in our lives and work to strengthen the connection between movements for inclusion and justice. For me, this General Conference is a time to reprioritize. I personally am committed to becoming active in the Reconciling Clergy, MOSAIC, and MFSA. This in addition to continuing in Affirmation. I hope to see many old and new friends at the Affirmation program retreat this fall and at MFSA's "Voices of Faith" March 31 – April 2, 2005.

Special Final Day Events

Friday, May 7

“Baptized, Blessed, and Beloved: We Are Still Standing” – Family Gathering with Lunch - 1 p.m. Smithfield United Church, Common Witness space. A time for sharing feelings and stories, singing songs, sharing “Miracle Moments,” and gathering as family before we leave Pittsburgh to be the church of Jesus Christ from sea to shining sea. Join us at our home away from home, Smithfield United Church.

After GC Closing Session

– The actual ending time of the closing session is unknown. Common Witness volunteers are invited to find the rainbow outside the primary exit of the plenary hall to stand together as a lasting witness to the delegates as they depart GC 2004. Send them home with the message, “We are still standing!” Then follow the rainbow and leaders to the Holy Communion site for a celebration of grace for all God's children.

Rock Will Wear Away....

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pain, having retained and clarified what they see as the ‘doctrinal purity of the church.’ To you we say that any victory that results in suffering and spiritual injury to others is a hollow victory at best. Our church has failed to declare itself a church to all of sacred worth.

To our members, we say,

Can we be like drops of water

Falling on a 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.

And the water comes again.

Meg Christian & Holly Near, Singers & Songwriters, © 1976 Thumbilina Music BMI/Hereford Music ACAP

Evening Gathering –

“Celebration of Life!” - After our Witness after the Closing Session. All Common Witness volunteers are invited to celebrate together at Tuscany's on 1501 E Carson St., a short walk from the Holiday Inn Express, our other home away from home.

If I Were Not Here...

medical models, being hospitalized six times.

It stopped almost as quickly as it had started, with a series of spiritual experiences in a few short weeks and concrete physical help from one of my pastors, an old friend. I want to be clear – my sexual identity was not in question; however, the effects of our societal and religious lack of support in understanding gay-identified people's situations were a significant contributor to my suicidal ideation. I didn't find hospital staff and health care providers to be homophobic, but they were heterosexist.

Suicidal thoughts had been an issue for me over the years though they had diminished until this particular period of time. I think anyone who generally feels different, never feels that they really fit in, is susceptible to these kinds of thoughts. I hadn't used any medication for depression in 30 years. In 1987 I had participated in a week-long healing seminar and was prayed over to

Last Day Events

Hospitality Room at Smithfield United is open 6 a.m.– 4 p.m. Open space available until 11 p.m.

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

Weekday Common Witness Lunch for delegates, volunteers and visitors at Smithfield Church, between 12 noon and 1:30 p.m. today.

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remove these thoughts. It was over two years before I had an occasional thought again. I was healed of my alienation in the world, not my sexual orientation. But sometimes suicide is a little contagious. When I heard a couple of years ago about a former Affirmation Council member who had killed himself, I spent a few days thinking that maybe it really is a valid option.

What makes this worse in a way is that I no longer think of it mainly as a way out; my belief has become that I would return to God and the Peace that passes all understanding in that other dimension beyond this world. Who wouldn't want to be "in God" instead of inside the plenary sessions of the United Methodist Church? When I lose the feeling that God is still present in this world, I just want to go Home. Somehow, I have to nurture my connection to God here in the present, and I need your help to do that. We primarily see God in how we experience each other. "May the God in me greet the God in thee." -Namaste.

Fortunately, I have been virtually free of suicidal thoughts for three years. But, if I chose to leave this world, would you tell my story of how the church didn't help me keep that sense of being able to be connected to God in this world?

Please send names and/or stories to Peggy Gaylord, Affirmation Co-Spokesperson, at aMiracleToday@pronetisp.net or PO Box 2988, Binghamton, NY 13902-2988.

It's Been Fun...Sorta...

Coming to GC to edit and produce a daily newsletter was a challenge. Writing stories, soliciting stories, formatting it, proofing it...all in a few short hours. We did it because we were chained to our laptops and had no choice.

You had 2 co-editors...Gary Shephard and Judy WestLee. They have been co-editing the quarterly printed Affirmation newsletter for about a year. Judy is hanging up her editor's pencil after the next print issue. (That's a hint that applications are being taken. See www.umaffirm.org or write Ken Rowe at kianrowe@earthlink.net.) GC 2008 will be in Fort Worth, TX, Gary's turf. So, he's not certain if he'll be helping out with local logistical issues or what.

If you've particularly enjoyed or been moved by a piece in our GC newsletter, we would certainly like to hear about it. If there was anything you think we really fouled up, well, be gentle but we need to hear about that, too, for the next GC daily newsletters so that we can do better next time.

*Gary Shephard
Judy WestLee*