
Supreme Court Ruling Cheered as Hope Sign

Affirmation joins in celebrating the Supreme Court's recent decision over turning the Texas law prohibiting intimate same-gender relations.

Rev. Kenneth I. Rowe, male co-spokesperson for Affirmation responded to the news, "This decision, coming at a time when many cities and states are celebrating Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Pride Month, is an important witness to the rights of individuals in

our society. Many of our members have been working on this and similar cases around the country, and it is a powerful reminder that the lenses with which we look at the world can change, and that drops of water can wear down the hardest barriers. This weekend is the San Francisco LGBT Pride Celebration under the theme 'You Gotta Give Them Hope' [a reference to a saying of slain gay city supervisor Harvey Milk.] This ruling gives us

hope. Not just in the secular arena, but if the highest court in the land can change its views, God only knows what's possible at General Conference or within the UM Judicial Council."

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Male Spokesperson Named *Welcome Ken Rowe*

The National Affirmation Council is pleased to announce the selection of Rev. Ken Rowe of San Francisco to the role of Co-Spokesperson at our Richmond, VA, meeting in April, 2003. Ken will join Rev. Peggy Gaylord who is currently our other Co-Spokesperson for Affirmation.

Ken has had a long history with Affirmation and has taken a significant leadership role in many of our activities. He has ad-

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WOW 2003 Plans Huge Gathering

Witness Our Welcome (WOW) 2003: the largest Christian gathering of LGBTQS persons from Canada and United States

The largest Christian event ever to focus on welcoming people of all sexual orientations will be Aug. 14 - 17, 2003, at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Witness Our Welcome (WOW2003) is an ecumenical gathering of sexually diverse and gender inclusive Christians from

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Strategic Vision Project Needs You

Affirmation's Strategic Visioning working group is preparing to review, clarify and guide Affirmation's direction. The team will be using telephone, internet, the web and prayer to discern what people today feel are the most crucial directions in which to put our energy and leadership. The Strategic Visioning group wants your suggestions. The group will develop specific ways for you to respond, but your input is welcome right now. If you have communication direct from God, your heart, your passion, your mind, your faith experience or your neighbor, call or write us immediately! We offer these reflections to stimulate a conversation. Biblical visions of leadership include different styles such as prophets, priests, and kings. Affirmation has had different styles, too. At first Affirmation had a strong nurturing or priestly role. Affirmation chapters provided safe harbors and spiritual nurturing. Affirmation took a parental role in founding the publication *Open Hands* magazine and the Reconciling Congregation Program (RCP). *Open Hands* provided communication needed to grow a movement and disseminated ideas and resources. RCP defined its work as supporting and growing local congregations who declared their desire to be inclusive. Now known as the Reconciling Ministries

Network (RMN), the program has grown and sprouted affiliated groups that undertake support, resourcing and advocacy. Affirmation gradually took on a prophetic role as voice and advocate of GLBTQ issues in the life of the church.

Every four years Affirmation goes to General Conference. Affirmation has been present to remind the church about its minority lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) members, families and friends. For many years the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) served as the political coordinating arm and Affirmation offered personal and spiritual support in this politically embattled arena where control over gay and lesbian issues has been heated and controversial since 1976. In 1996 and 2000, Affirmation took an active political role in AMAR, a coalition of groups working together on church governance and rules.

We're living in a time of major religious and cultural transition. Often people put religion and especially "church" in a box. Jesus, on the other hand, is about a way of life that transforms all of our experiences and empowers them with God's love. In the U.S., many people no longer believe that "the practice of homosexuality is a sin," yet that is still the view that

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Affirmation Newsletter

This Affirmation newsletter is a quarterly publication. 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.

Co-Editors:

Judy WestLee
Gary Shephard

Affirmation's Mission Statement

Affirmation 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.

Strategic Vision Project

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governs the church. The most rapidly growing major faith expression in the world is that of Pentecostals who exclude from membership LGBTQ persons. The United Methodist Church (UMC) is under seige by the Institute for Religion and Democracy (IRD), and others who design to take control of the church in a manner that would recapture the church and "clean house" of the gay and lesbian "scourge."

Cultural conditions have shifted in the U.S. and Europe. Many people affirm that LGBTQ persons have a right to work, marry, and receive partner benefits or that who a person loves is up to the individual. By and large, the LGBTQ community is not interested in church. Most United Methodist (UM) local churches are graying. Some are closing. Many are just barely hanging on. Too often our churches do not offer relevant "good news" to people of our time, straight or gay. Baby boomers and even members of the "me" generation are graying. Many people between ages 20 and 60 are neither joiners nor builders of organizations.

These changing conditions place Affirmation in a new time where a new vision is needed. We were born into this time and given these circumstances. Are we not here for a reason? Are we not here because God has

called us to be witnesses?

Please share your responses with us: Mary Gaddis in Holy City, CA, at 510-526-0984, Tim Tennant-Jayne in Minneapolis at TENNJAY@aol.com, Frank Wulf in Los Angeles at 310-391-5723 and Alice Knotts, convenor, in Talent, OR, at 541-535-3111 or aknotts@jeffnet.org.

Differences

"We can fight it only by showing an equally strong bond of friendship and trust. Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open."

Albus Dumbledore at the Hogwarts end of school year feast, Chapter 37, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

Council Meets in Grocery Store

The Affirmation Council met April 24 - 27 in Glen Allen, VA. I must say that in my tenure on the council, we've met in church basements, church meeting rooms, hotels and retreat centers all over the country. The spring council meeting was originally scheduled for the Richmond Hill Retreat Center in Richmond, VA. Renovations at the retreat center took longer than planned and as our meeting date approached it became more and more apparent that they wouldn't be finished in time.

Rusty Norment, council treasurer, and local host for this meeting, was able to schedule the Community Room at the Ukrops Supermarket in nearby Glen Allen, VA on very short notice. Rusty works for Ukrops, in the Ashland, VA store. Let me tell you, that Glen Allen Ukrops is one cool supermarket. They

have a large natural and organics section. I wanted to bring the store home with me.

Any council meeting tends to revolve around breaks and where the nearest grocery or drug store is. "I forgot to pack..." "I think I'm coming down with a cold and I need..." Here we could step outside, pick up what we needed, run through the express check-out, and be back before anyone knew we were gone. It was so convenient, we may need to meet in grocery stores more often.

During our council meeting we discussed our activities at the upcoming WOW2003 event. Affirmation will have a reception room during the WOW 2003 registration. We're trying to work out with RMN our participation during the

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Our New Spokesperson..

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vised our external strategy work in many areas and led the communications effort over the past few years. He has been Affirmation's delegate to the National Religious Leadership Roundtable. It meets under the auspices of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, which includes some of the leading theologians and activists in our movement across the denominations and the nation. With his strengths and background, he was an obvious choice for this prestigious and challenging role as Co-Spokesperson for Affirmation.

Ken was ordained an Elder in the Minnesota Annual Conference in 1994. He earned his Master of Divinity at Wesley Theological Seminary,

Washington, DC, in 1992. He served small rural parishes (*EDITOR'S NOTE: REALLY SMALL rural parishes!*) as well as an inner-city Minneapolis congregation, which included an on-site homeless shelter and food shelf. Since 1999 Ken has taken further academic training and worked in a variety of social issues and community building. A unit of the San Francisco United Way currently employs him in national justice work.

We are quite pleased to have this strong team leading our public positions for the organization as we enter the time for General Conference (GC) 2004. Watch for us at WOW 2003 and at GC 2004.

More Light Presbyterians serve as co-chairs of the WOW Coordinating and Planning Committee. "WOW 2003 will be an exciting experience with inspirational worship services, provocative Bible studies and a wide range of helpful and relevant workshops," said Rev. Floyd. In addition, WOW 2003 will also feature musical and dramatic performances, fun and exciting Youth programs and many other ways for people to connect with one another. More than 1,500 people are expected to celebrate the power of the Welcoming Church-mobilizing diverse and powerful grassroots movements to realize God's vision for an inclusive community.

Worship will be at the heart of the WOW2003 experience. Five plenary worship events will reflect a diversity of leadership and variety of faith traditions affirming that God's deliverance is truly for all persons.

Breakfast Bible Studies and Dialogues will feature some of the country's most enlightened thinkers, scholars, and lecturers. Columnist Irene Monroe will conduct a study titled "Justice begins in the Bedroom," exploring roles of power and how it is tied to sexual, racial, class and religious stereotypes. Biblical studies professor, Mary Ann Tolbert will lead a study exploring how (and whether) we can read this ancient text (the Bible) ethically and thoughtfully to proclaim that "God's Deliver-

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WOW Conference

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Canada and the U.S. which supports the full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and straight (LGBTQS) persons in congregations and ministries, mostly within the tradition of mainline Protestant churches.

The theme for WOW 2003 is **God's Deliverance is for ALL!** This powerful gather-

ing will serve to build on the work of the Welcoming Church Movement within mainline Protestant traditions, that strives for justice and inclusion for ALL people within the Body of Christ.

Rev. Wanda Floyd, founding pastor of Imani MCC Church in Raleigh-Durham, NC, and Elder Marco Grimaldo of

WOW Conference . . .

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ance Is Really For All.” Chris Glaser, writer, speaker and Presbyterian activist believes that the Bible gives us both the strength and stamina to challenge our own and the church’s less inclusive attitudes. Erin Swenson, co-founder and president of The Southern Association for Gender Education will lead a study-“Transgender Issues and the Church.”

More than 1,500 people are expected to celebrate the power of the Welcoming Church-mobilizing diverse and powerful grassroots movements to realize God’s vision for an inclusive community.

WOW 2003 begins on Thursday, Aug. 14 with registration and hospitality starting at 12 noon and opening worship begins at 7 pm. Friday, Aug. 15 begins with Breakfast Bible Studies & Dialogues at 7 am and Morning Worship at 9 am. Friday also includes a plenary titled Race, Racism and the Welcoming Movement, as well as workshops and Evening Worship. On Saturday, Aug. 16 following Bible Studies & Dialogues and Morning Worship, denominational and interest group meetings will be the highlight as well as workshops and evening entertainment. WOW 2003 closes with worship on Sunday morning.

The WOW registration fee includes participation in all four days of WOW2003 activities, plus tax, meals:

breakfast and lunch on Friday and Saturday, dinner on Saturday evening and Sunday breakfast. Adult registration: \$295 - Youth or Student fee: \$170.

For more information on WOW2003, visit our web site - www.wwow2k.org or call toll free at 866-550-3500.

Council Meeting

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denominational time Saturday morning.

As expected, discussion of the GC 2004 Affirmation witness took up some time. We had a proposal to do away with the council binders containing minutes of past meetings, and copies of the bylaws and various organizational documents. They’re heavy and hard to keep updated. Instead we’ll be moving to an electronic repository giving everyone on-line access to important documents in a consistent format. We’ve already laid a lot of the groundwork for this. We just need to put a few more pieces in place to make it a reality.

We elected Diane DeLap to the council. There’s an article written by her elsewhere in this newsletter.

Ken Ian Rowe was selected as male spokesperson. This position had been vacant since the death of

Randy Hagen last year, our previous male spokesperson.

Saturday morning Rusty took us on a brief tour of the Richmond area including the state capital building, and Monument Avenue. Monument Avenue is so named for the statues and monuments that dot its length.

Sunday morning we worshipped at Lebanon UMC. They’ve just recently moved into a new sanctuary. It has large windows along two sides to take advantage of the gorgeous view.

This church did something I’ve never seen before. After the ushers went from the front of the church to the back collecting the monetary offering, they started at the back passing baskets to collect a food offering for the local food bank. It seemed to symbolize a great deal of what we stand for to not only bring the monetary offering up to the front of the church after the collection, but to bring the food offering up as well.

We ended our council meeting with an open house at Lebanon UMC. Melanie Burrill conducted a program on how our stories tie us all together using Ann Thompson Cook’s book *And God Loves Each One* as her starting point.

GC '04 Legislative Platform in Process

Affirmation Council's Lynx Committee is tasked with working on issues between our organization and our partners and adversaries. As part of this mission, Lynx is currently working on a platform and legislative position for General Conference (GC) 2004.

John Calhoun developed an initial proposal for legislation, which was discussed and approved by the Affirmation Council in Richmond, VA, in April, 2003.

From that initial position, Lynx recruited retired Rev. Larry Nielsen to lead the Affirmation GC 2004 legislation effort.

Our plan is to build on our small successes in 2000. Although the pundits give us little chance of making significant changes, we are committed to remaining visible and showing support for all who do the difficult organizing work in their home churches, conferences and agencies.

Supreme Court Ruling

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Affirmation joined with the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA), the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) and Northaven UMC, Dallas, TX, as United Methodist voices submitting amicus briefs in support of overturning the Texas law. The National Council of Affirmation, signed on with the amicus brief as a clear witness to the language of the Book of Discipline, which supports human and civil rights for lesbian and gay people.

Affirmation is an unofficial caucus supporting changes Methodists.

On the subject of how this ruling affects the denomina-

tion, Rowe said "obviously, the ruling is directed toward a state law that has a domino effect on other state laws. It is further evidence that the church while supporting broad human and civil rights for L/G/B/T folk, the church has failed to keep up with society on the specifics. General Conference 2004 will be an important time in our church's history. We will decide to join the mainstream of society or end up part of the radical conservative fringe of society."

For more information contact: Ken Rowe at 415-595-0180 or e-mail: kianmn@aol.com, or Peggy Gaylord at 607-725-7002 or e-mail: amiracletoday@pronetisp.

National Council

John R. Calhoun
South Central Jurisdiction
Oklahoma City, OK
AffirmationOK@aol.com

Ms. Jay Campbell
South Central Jurisdiction
Houston, TX
campjee@pdq.net

Diane DeLap
At-Large
Wilmington, MA
Diane@DeLap.com

Rev. Peggy R. Gaylord,
Co-Spokesperson
At-Large
Binghamton, NY
607-723-4091
amiracletoday@pronetisp.net

Walt Jackson
North Central Jurisdiction
Madison, WI
Methodgy@chorus.net

Kathryn Mitchem, Co-Convener
Southeast Jurisdiction

Clarence R. (Rusty) Norment
At-Large
Mechanicsville, VA
804-746-7279

Jim Palmquist
At-Large
Macungie, PA
610-398-6818
bluemountain@entermail.net

Rev. Kenneth I. Rowe,
Co-Spokesperson
Western Jurisdiction
San Francisco, CA
Kianrowe@earthlink.net

Gary Shephard, Co-Convener
At-Large
Haslet, TX
Shephard@prodigy.net

Rev. Judy WestLee,
Newsletter Editor
Minneapolis, MN
612-927-4568
JJWestLee@att.net

Passionate, Progressive, Penitent Protestants Plot

Voices Of Faith Conference

By Diane DeLap

About 350 “Passionate, Progressive, Penitent Protestants”, as John Cobb described them, met in the Crowne Plaza Ravinia Hotel in Atlanta, GA, on the last weekend of April for the Voices of Faith Conference. Sponsored by the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) and the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN), the conference attracted progressive United Methodists (and two or three lost conservatives from the Confessing Movement) from throughout the United States.

Before I give a summary of the conference, I must say that I have struggled somewhat with this article. As a relatively new entry into the ranks of progressive United Methodists, I had not had the opportunity to participate in a large national gathering of others of like mind. I came from a more conservative background, and approached the Conference with some question in my mind as to what to expect. When I re-

turned, someone asked my impression and my response was “awesome!” or more correctly in a common phrase of my locale “wicked awesome!”.

The conference featured powerful, motivational preaching with uplifting singing, along with thought-provoking discussions and workshops. Mark Miller, Director of Music and Instructor of Church Music at Drew Theological School, led the music portion of the worship services throughout the Conference. Mark, along with his group, dubbed “Miller Light” featuring the soaring voice of Cassondra Kellan, led the group in song service that lifted and moved the spirit, and created just the right mood of worship that set the stage for the preaching that followed.

Rev. Barbara Lundblad, a Lutheran pastor who currently serves as Associate Professor of Homiletics at Union Theological Seminary, was the preacher for the opening worship on Friday and Saturday mornings. Her opening message on Friday focused on the need for reforming movements to honor the place of tradition in the life of the church, while being open to the changes that the Spirit brings. She reminded conference attend-

ees of the 12 stones that God commanded be brought from the Jordan River following the crossing of the Israelites with the flow of the river being stopped by God. God had commanded that, “These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever” (Josh. 4:7).

She suggested that these stones served as a permanent reminder to “protect the people from amnesia.” She also noted the suggestion in the story that other stones were commanded to be left in the river to be washed and changed by the running waters of the river, representing the need for ever-changing tradition. Both stones are needed, signifying both the ancient stories and those stories that God continues to write.

The Friday afternoon session began with a lively dialog session between Traci West and Hal Taussig moderated by Gil Caldwell. The conversation represented different approaches and possibilities for the progressive United Methodist movement. This session was concluded with the participants fielding questions from the audience. The afternoon sessions concluded with two 75-minute workshops with a variety of topics and presenters.

Friday’s activities concluded with a celebratory dinner

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Voices of Faith Conference . . .

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and a program featuring provocative speaker Dr. Hyun Kyung. Known worldwide for her views on spirituality, religious pluralism, ecology and women's rights, Dr. Kyung is an Associate Professor of Ecumenical Theology at Union Theological Seminary.

Saturday's program began with another moving message from Barbara Lundblad, followed by theologian John Cobb's exhortation to conference attendees to become "passionate, progressive penitent protestants."

The morning concluded with a discussion of the new book "*United Methodism @ RISK A Wake-Up Call*" by Leon Howell. This book was recently published by the Information Project for United Methodists. Bishop C. Dale White and Rev. Scott Campbell, who authored the study guide included in the book, led a lively discussion about the book and the importance of ensuring that its contents reach the widest possible audience in preparation for General Conference 2004.

The Saturday afternoon session included an opportunity for all participants to assemble in jurisdictional groups to discuss preparations for Annual Conferences, next year's General Conference, the election of delegates for General and

Jurisdictional Conferences, methods of dissemination of information between and among the Annual Conferences, and interested national groups who are preparing for General Conference.

The Conference sessions concluded with a vibrant song service led by Mark Miller. As conference participants gave parting greetings to each other all were encouraged to take the stones from the opening night's service as a lasting memorial of the conference and as a reminder that, like those smooth stones, their lives too could be shaped by the constant flow of the Spirit in their lives.

Notes:

The book "*United Methodism @ RISK A Wake-Up Call*" by Leon Howell is available from Genesis III Group; P.O. Box 336; Deerfield, NH 03037, Phone: 888-829-2947, Fax: 603-463-5621, Email: genthree@genesisthree.com.

Regardless of the number of copies ordered, the first copy of the book is \$12.50. The price decreases for additional copies.

Audio and video tapes, CDs and DVDs of the main sessions of the Voices of Faith Conference are available from: WGNM UPN 64 / Good News TV, P.O. Box 637; Macon, GA 31203, phone: 478-745-2366, Fax: 478-745-2367, e-mail: gntapes@gntvmin.org. (Good News TV is a media ministry of the Macon District of the South Georgia Conference of the UMC, and is not associated with *Good News* magazine.