

Affirmation

Winter 1993
Volume 18
Number 4



GOOD NEWS FROM THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL

The Ruling

On October 30, the Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church overturned Oregon-Idaho Bishop William Dew's decision that Rev. Jeanne Knepper is not appointable. This was in spite of the fact that the Oregon-Idaho Board of Ordained Ministry and Clergy Session had both adopted a motion that said they "believed" that Jeanne Knepper was a "self-avowed practicing homosexual." The Judicial Council ruled that "The prohibition of an appointment must be exercised in compliance with the rights of all persons who are in full membership. In order to do that, the words 'status' and 'self-avowed practicing homosexual' must be defined by either the General Conference or the various Annual Conferences."

The Judicial Council also ruled that, should Bishop Dew decide to appoint Rev. Knepper, "it is without penalty or prejudice." We believe this means that no one can bring charges against Bishop Dew for making such an appointment.

History

In June, 1993, the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference Clergy Session adopted the motion:

We believe that Jeanne Knepper is what the General Conference describes in the Book of Discipline as a "self-avowed practicing homosexual." We believe also that she is called of God to ordained ministry in The United Methodist Church; we find that she has the qualifications, training, gifts and graces appropriate thereto. Our consciences are captive to the Word of God. We believe that in such a conflict we should obey God rather than human authority, as have our forebears in the faith (see Acts

5:29). We therefore recommend that she be continued in Probationary membership. Here we stand; we can do no other; so help us God.

In the light of this motion, Bishop Dew ruled that, while Knepper could continue as a deacon and Probationary member on leave of absence status, Paragraph 402.2 forbade him to appoint her. Four matters went to the Judicial Council from this situation. The Judicial Council overturned Bishop Dew's decision because the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference had neither adopted a definition of "self-avowed practicing homosexual" nor determined that Knepper fell within such a definition.

Even if the Annual Conference had done both of those things, they ruled, she could be continued on leave of absence and retain her probationary membership and deacons' orders.

The decision did not directly address the broad constitutional questions on the docket item that was drafted by Alice Knotts. Indirectly though, by stating that both the terms "self-avowed practicing homosexual" and "status" must be defined, the Judicial Council was issuing a broad caution to the Church. The Constitution of the Church forbids exclusion based on status. The ordinary meaning of the word status would include the clergy status of self-avowed practicing homosexuals. In order to be able to convict, the Annual Conference or General Conference would have to define "self-avowed practicing homosexual" in a way that doesn't turn upon the status of homosexual. This could be very difficult (we believe impossible) to do. As it plays out, therefore, this ruling may preclude any annual conference from forbidding to appoint until they have a) constructed definitions of both terms that do not overlap; and b) established

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through due process procedures (church trial?) that someone falls within those definitions. Moreover, it would take a vote of the clergy session to remove the person in question from ministerial standing.

Reflection

Surrounded by saints and angels, supported by representatives from MFSA and Affirmation, accompanied by my partner, upheld by prayers from around the nation and blessed by the good wishes of so many, I went into the Judicial Council hearing fully centered. George McClain of MSFA had made arrangements that we could go into the Gammon chapel in the morning before the oral hearings. He read Scripture. We prayed for strength and justice and clear understanding, and then we invoked the presence of those who have struggled for justice before us. We invited Anna Oliver, Ida B. Wells, Bishop Gilbert Haven, Mark Chamberlin, Harry Ward, Michael Collins, Thelma Stevens and Paul Abels, among others, to come and stand with us. We sang "How Firm a Foundation" there in the front of the chapel, all five verses, and let the words sink deeply in. And when we turned to leave, assured that this was now a holy space, who should be there, uncomfortable but unable to interrupt, but the lawyer from the Good News movement and his support.

If you were there, you could not miss the sense that many of us were about God's work. As the Good News lawyer spoke, repetitiously and without fresh insight, people all over the chapel had trouble staying focused or interested. As Alice Knotts and I spoke, we had the Council's full attention. When Larry Nielson from Minnesota spoke about the ministry of Reconciling Congregations, he saw tears welling up in the eyes of a man on the Judicial Council.

This is so clear: God is calling the church to be inclusive and value diversity. People in the church are hearing that call and beginning to respond. They will not move as swiftly as we desire, but they are moving and we shall overcome. Believe it.

Jeanne Knepper
11/1/93

SUMMARY OF BRIEF PRESENTED TO JUDICIAL COUNCIL

By Rev. Jeanne Knepper

Paragraph 15.14 of the Constitution of The United Methodist Church secures "the rights and privileges of membership in all agencies, programs, and institutions in The United Methodist Church, regardless of race or status." The Judicial Council has determined that this paragraph applies to the ordained ministry.

There is sufficient precedent to determine that homosexuality is a status. The Judicial Council has previously determined that marital status and spousal occupation constitute protected status under this paragraph, so status need not be immutable. Moreover, one can not reasonably distinguish between the characteristics of a status and the behavior through which it is known. As a status, homosexuality falls under the protection of Par. 15.14. Even the vote of a majority of General Conference delegates cannot render this Constitutional protection invalid.

Paragraph 2623.1.b makes "practices.. incompatible with Christian teachings" chargeable offenses. The language singles out the practice of homosexuality from a long list of other activity deemed "sin," "incompatible with the gospel" or "viola[tion] of Christian teaching." This is a logic that seeks to make distinctions based on homosexual status. It violates Par. 15.14 and is therefore both unconstitutional and invalid.

Paragraph 402.2 states that homosexuals may not be received, ordained or appointed if they "self-avow" that they "practice" their sexual orientation. Because it does not put a similar burden on heterosexuals, Paragraph 402.2 creates a preferred status for heterosexual people. The Judicial Council has already ruled that any legislation which extends to any group a preferred status not extended to others is unconstitutional. Moreover, Paragraph 402.2 invites the circumvention of due process. It is a bad and unconstitutional law.

The Judicial Council has previously determined that an Annual Conference could, in certain unusual circumstances, take "action that moves in the direction of restoration of rights and redress for injustice" even if that action conflicted

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with a Disciplinary requirement. When the Clergy Session of the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference sustained Rev. Knepper, it obeyed Paragraph 15.14 of the Constitution and Paragraph 113 and 403 of the Discipline by confronting Paragraph 402.2.

Nothing was noted against Knepper's character during the questioning related to Paragraph 705.6. In the absence of any charges and with the decisions of the Board of Ordained Ministry and the Clergy Session to sustain her, Rev. Knepper must be considered a probationary member in good standing who is entitled to an appointment.

NATIONAL AFFIRMATION ELECTION PROCESS

The Council is currently selecting the Nominations Committee. A member from each region will serve on this committee. Our Council is elected in two parts.

(1) Regional Representatives: Affirmation regions correspond to the United Methodist Church's five Jurisdictions. Ten representatives are elected from the regions. Each region has one representative. The remaining five are proportioned out based on the number of members in each region. Rounding could adjust the total number between nine and eleven.

National members and local groups may nominate persons by mail. The election for Regional Representatives will also be by mail with each National member receiving a ballot for their region.

Affirmation is committed to gender parity. Thus if a region has more than one person to elect, the second election is a person of the opposite sex who receives the highest number of votes regardless of gender.

(2) Members At Large: The Remaining Council members (to bring the total to 20) are nominated and elected at the Spring National Gathering in 1994. Nominations will be submitted to the members present. Additional nominations may be made by those in attendance. Election is determined by vote of the members present.

Currently the term of office is for two years. However, the Council believes there is a need to stagger the Council terms to provide continuity to program and operations.

If you have questions or wish further information, please contact Jeanne Barnett, Chair of the Nominations Committee, 737 Post St., #915, San Francisco, CA 94109, phone (415) 441-7630 (home) or (415) 474-3101 (work).

CAUGHT IN A DOUBLE BIND

There is a process in communication called the "double bind." Sonya L. Rhodes gives an example in an article entitled Family Treatment. "A mother beckons her three-year-old son to her lap. As he climbs up, she sighs under her breath and says, 'You're ruining my dress.' The two messages the child receives-- 'Climb on me' and 'Don't ruin my dress'--are impossible to satisfy simultaneously. If the child responds to the message 'Don't ruin my dress' and retreats, the mother further confuses him by saying 'Don't you love your mother anymore?' If he stays on her lap, the mother fusses and blames him for ruining her outfit." (p.434, see footnote) This is not a healthy environment nor does it promote mental health.

Consider the similarity to the messages the Church gives gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons: "Homosexual persons no less than heterosexual persons are individuals of sacred worth"...and, "We do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching." (The Book of Discipline, 1992, p.92.) If homosexuals are persons of sacred worth; does their not being compatible with Christian teaching mean that Christianity is not compatible with the sacred? But if homosexuals are persons of sacred worth and Christianity is sacred [assumed], why are they incompatible? Further, it would appear the Church is saying that homosexuals, as persons of sacred value, are not to give expression to the sacred, i.e., themselves.

The Church also says: "We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons," (p.92). Later the Church states: "Since the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church," (p.202). The Church says it

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will be in ministry with homosexuals. But it won't accept any homosexuals into the "ministry" so it can be in ministry with them.

Again, the Church says: "All persons need the ministry and guidance of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship which enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self,"(p.92). The Church claims it seeks to reconcile people with themselves. Yet it says that it is incompatible to express oneself, even though one is of sacred value. The Church claims that it seeks to reconcile people with others. Yet it declares that homosexuals are not to be accepted or appointed in ministry. Where is the reconciliation? The invitation and rejection are simultaneous messages.

This seems like a perfect example of a "double bind." There are inherent contradictions in the messages which are not acknowledged. This results in no-win positions for bisexual, gay, and lesbian persons. And it fails to validate their perceptions and thoughts.

To be healthy people, lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals must recognize the "double bind" messages the Church gives and not take personal blame for being in a no-win position. All have to take special measures to protect themselves and some may even need to absent themselves from this environment to be healthy. The gospel, the good news, is that it is possible to attain the goals of the Church, i.e., to be humanly fulfilled and reconciled with God and self as well as all others who will be reconciled--in spite of the Church environment called the "double bind."

Footnote: Rhodes, Sonya L., "Family Treatment," SOCIAL WORK TREATMENT, 3rd Ed., Ed. by Francis J. Turner, The Free Press, 1986, pp.432-453.

Submitted by Lowell Headley

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From Marc Denton, Caretaker
Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles
BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE

Dear Friends:

Hello, I would like to introduce my-

self. I am the caretaker for the Episcopal Diocese Book of Remembrance. Designed in an oversized book format it will become a unique hand-crafted work of art (a visual expression of our love and hope) as well as a historical document of our times. This project is being sponsored by the Bishop's Commission on AIDS Ministry.

Our purpose in establishing this document is quite simply to honor our dead and to insure that we preserve their names in the memory of succeeding generations.

...[Our] goal is to reveal the names of the people that we have loved and to illustrate the enormous impact of the AIDS epidemic upon the environment of our planet.

Inclusion in the Book of Remembrance is available to all members of the human family who have died of AIDS, without qualification. There is absolutely no cost or obligation to include a name(s) in this memorial. It is an integral part of the social and liturgical life of our community.

We would find it an honor to include anyone you wish in this memorial Book of Remembrance who may have died of causes due to HIV. You may send them to the address given below:

Attn.: Memorial Book

St. Thomas the Apostle Episcopal Church

7501 Hollywood Boulevard

Los Angeles, CA 90046-2813

Please, feel free to share this information with any of your friends or staff.

NEW STUDY MATERIAL

The United Methodist Publishing House anticipates a February, 1994 release of the study material on homosexuality. The 1992 General Conference mandated the preparation of study resources based on the report of the Committee to Study Homosexuality.

The material will contain a study book, leader's guide and an audiocassette tape. The tape contains statements from several members of the Study Committee, including Jeanne Barnett, an Affirmation member.

Affirmation plans to review this material as soon as it is available. We hope it will be adequate for local churches to use for discussion and study.

COUNCIL CHANGES NATIONAL GATHERINGS

The Program Committee of National Affirmation sent a survey to the membership with our summer newsletter to determine the needs of our members in regard to our National Gatherings. We have been meeting twice a year, in the Fall and Spring.

As a result of the survey response, at its October meeting the Council proposed the following changes in policy for National Gatherings:

1994 Two National Gatherings -- at a retreat center in the Spring and in Los Angeles, October 7-9.

>>> MARK YOUR CALENDARS NOW! <<<

1995 Spring -- National Gathering in Indianapolis

1995 Fall -- Regional Gatherings

1996 April 16-26 National Affirmation presence at General Conference in Denver, with our traditional dinner, but no other programming.

1996 Fall -- National Gathering

We will continue to hold National Gatherings twice a year through 1994. We will then move to one National Gathering per year and Regional Gatherings for 1995 and 1996. At the end of those two years, the new policy will be reviewed and its effectiveness compared with our current meeting policy.

There was a 10% return on the surveys with responses indicating a strong interest in Regional Gatherings, preference for camp/retreat center settings, and northeast and central parts of the U.S. as preferred meeting sites. Three day, Friday--Sunday meeting times are the strong preference.

We will seek your response from time to time -- so if you want a voice, please respond!

LOCAL GROUP NEWS

Local groups now have two ways to have their news items submitted to the Newsletter. Local groups can continue to send their newsletters or releases to Fritz Schultz, who edits the local group's information. Or they can send a camera-ready release. This new model is in response to requests from local groups. You are invited to send a camera-ready

layout of your group's news for each publication. The camera-ready layout cannot be any larger than 3-1/2" x 5" [this fits into the Newsletter margins]. There is no format other than the size. A uniform format may be fashioned at a later date, but at this time none will be required. Camera-ready layouts must be received before the Newsletter deadline. Continue to send your newsletters and releases to Fritz Schultz, 801 Cole St., San Francisco, CA 94117, or send your camera-ready layout to the National Affirmation Newsletter, P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204 before the deadline (the next deadline is Feb. 1, 1994 for the Spring Newsletter).

FUTURE NATIONAL GATHERINGS

The following is our National Gathering schedule as we know it at this time:

1994--Spring--at a retreat site*

Fall--October 7-9 in Los Angeles, CA

1995--Spring, April 21-23 discussing a site in the midwest

Summer and Fall--regional gatherings **

1996--General Conference April 16-26. Affirmation will have a significant witness at General Conference. Save these dates now. More information later.

Fall--National Gathering *

*Dates and location to be determined.

**Dates and locations to be determined by each region.

1994 NEWSLETTER DEADLINES

SPRING

Deadline Feb. 1 -- Pub. Feb. 25

SUMMER

Deadline Apr. 25 -- Pub. May 18

FALL

Deadline Jul. 15 -- Pub. Aug. 10

WINTER

Deadline Oct. 22 -- Pub. Nov. 15

All submissions should be sent to:
National Affirmation
P.O. Box 1021
Evanston, IL 60204

Affirmation National Council

Jeanne Barnett
San Francisco, CA
415/441-7630

Sue Bock
Austin, TX
512/452-6399

Robert Bryant
Raleigh, NC
919/851-5880

John R. Calhoun
Oklahoma City, OK
405/528-1177

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(717) 833-4434

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708/475-4321

George Hodgdon
West Yarmouth, MA
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816/363-6892

Jan Olson
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Jim Scurlock
Richmond, CA
510/232-7958

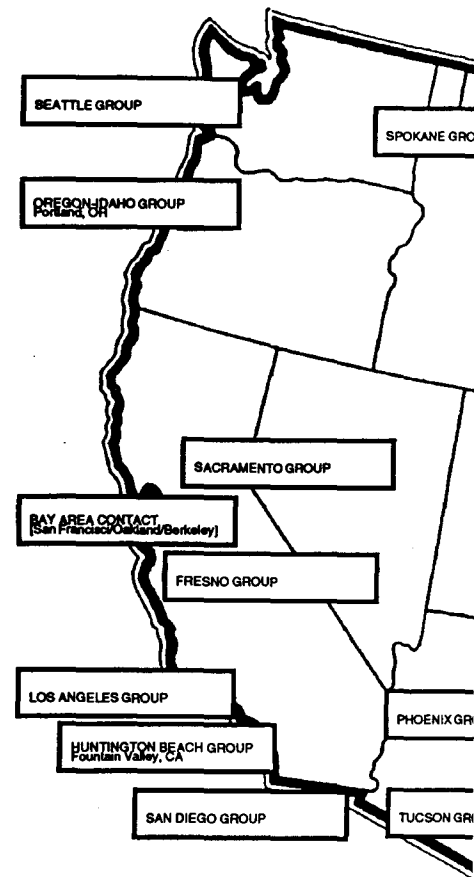
Paul Thompson
Studio City, CA
818/760-6633

One man in Chicago

One Woman in Maryland

One woman in Pennsylvania

One woman in Tennessee



LOCAL NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

Affirmation Oklahoma City meets second and fourth Saturdays at 6:00 pm for a potluck and program. For more information write to 5944 N.W.. 35th Street, #61, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 73122-1532 or call 405-495-3914.

Affirmation Tulsa information about this group can be received from P. O. Box 701566, Tulsa, OK 74170.

Affirmation Susquehanna Valley Call Joel at 234-2093 for more information.

Affirmation Sacramento meets the first Monday of every month at St. Mark's UMC. For more information contact St. Mark's UMC, 2391 St. Mark's Way, Sacramento, Ca. 95864.

Fresno Affirmation meets monthly. For more information write to 6488 Mariposa, Fresno, CA 93710.

Please contact Fritz Schultz for any corrections or additional information you want included about your local chapter of Affirmation. Fritz requests that you send your Newsletter or information about when and where your group meets. Be sure to include a contact person or address or phone number. You can send all information to Fritz Schultz, 801 Cole Street Apt. 2, San Francisco, CA 94117. 415-753-1354.

Affirmation Tucson should be contacted through St. Francis of the Foothills UMC, 4625 East River Road, Tucson, AZ 85718

Dallas Affirmation Monday at 7:00 pm, at 11211 Preston Road. In May they Interfaith AIDS Memorial other Dallas Gay organizations. In discharged "Soldier o to nearly 200 people meeting. The Dallas tremendous amount Zuniga's appearance. Archer, former Exec Lifereach International topic of HIV and AIDS the Lesbian and Justice Barbara Rose District Court of A spoke to the group highlight in October "Bandannas" Campou

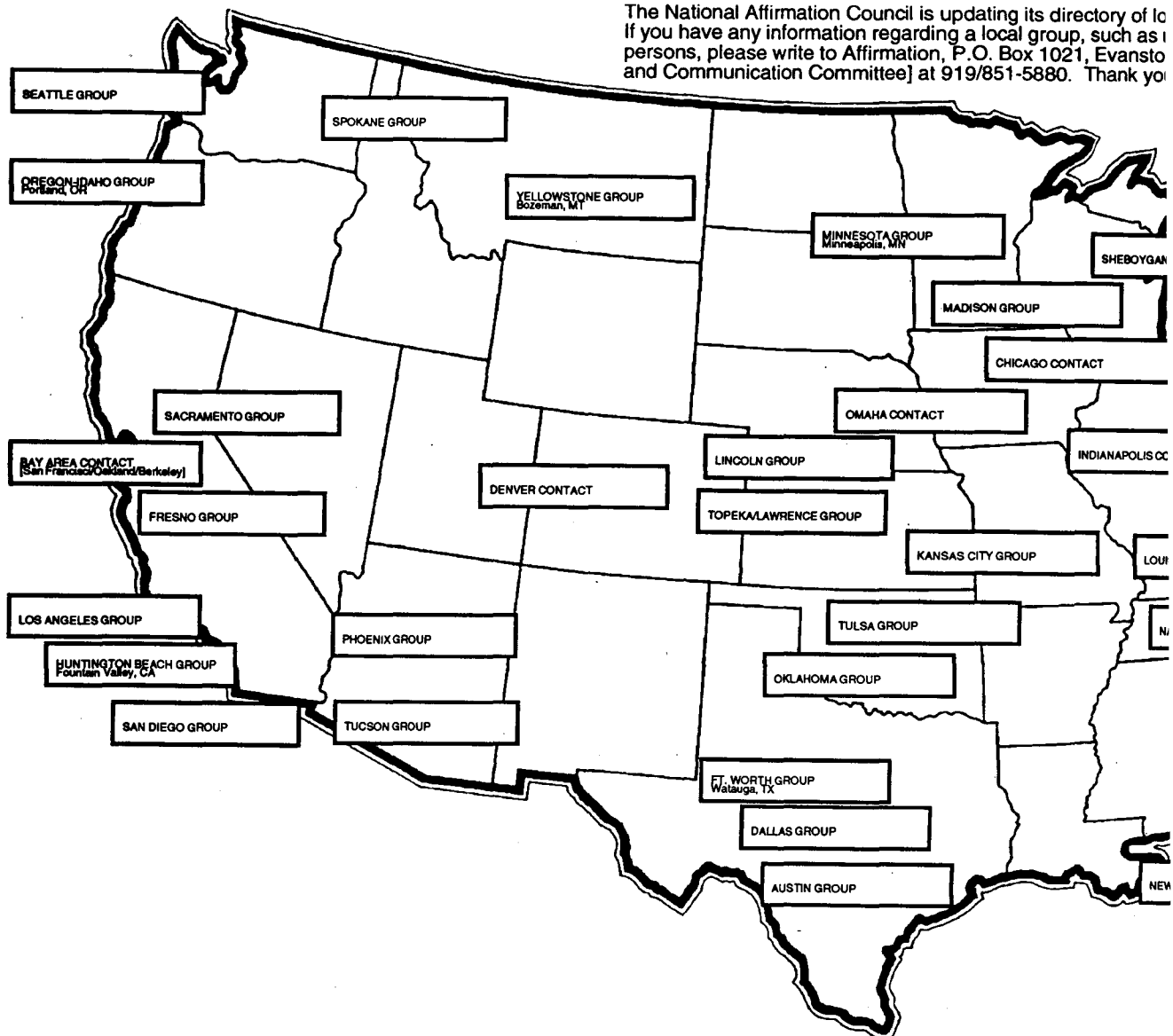
THE COUNTRY

Affirmation meets monthly. For more information write to 6488 Fresno, CA 93710.

Contact Fritz Schultz for any questions or additional information included about your local group of Affirmation. Fritz requests that you send your Newsletter or let him know about when and where your meetings are held. Be sure to include a person's name or address or phone number. You can send all information to Fritz Schultz, 801 Cole Street Apt. 2, San Francisco, CA 94117. 415-753-1111

Phoenix Tucson should be contacted through St. Francis of the Valley UMC, 4625 East River Road, Tucson, AZ 85718

The National Affirmation Council is updating its directory of local groups. If you have any information regarding a local group, such as its name, address, or phone number, please write to Affirmation, P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204 and Communication Committee] at 919/851-5880. Thank you!



Dallas Affirmation meets every fourth Monday at 7:00 pm, at Northaven UMC, 11211 Preston Road at Northaven Road. In May they participated in a Interfaith AIDS Memorial service with other Dallas Gay and Lesbian organizations. In July Army's discharged "Soldier of the Year" spoke to nearly 200 people at their monthly meeting. The Dallas group received a tremendous amount of publicity from Zuniga's appearance. In August, Phillip Archer, former Executive Director of Lifereach International discussed the topic of HIV and AIDS discrimination in the Lesbian and Gay community. Justice Barbara Rosenberg of the Fifth District Court of Appeals at Dallas spoke to the group in September. A highlight in October was the "Boots & Bandannas" Campout held at Joe Pool

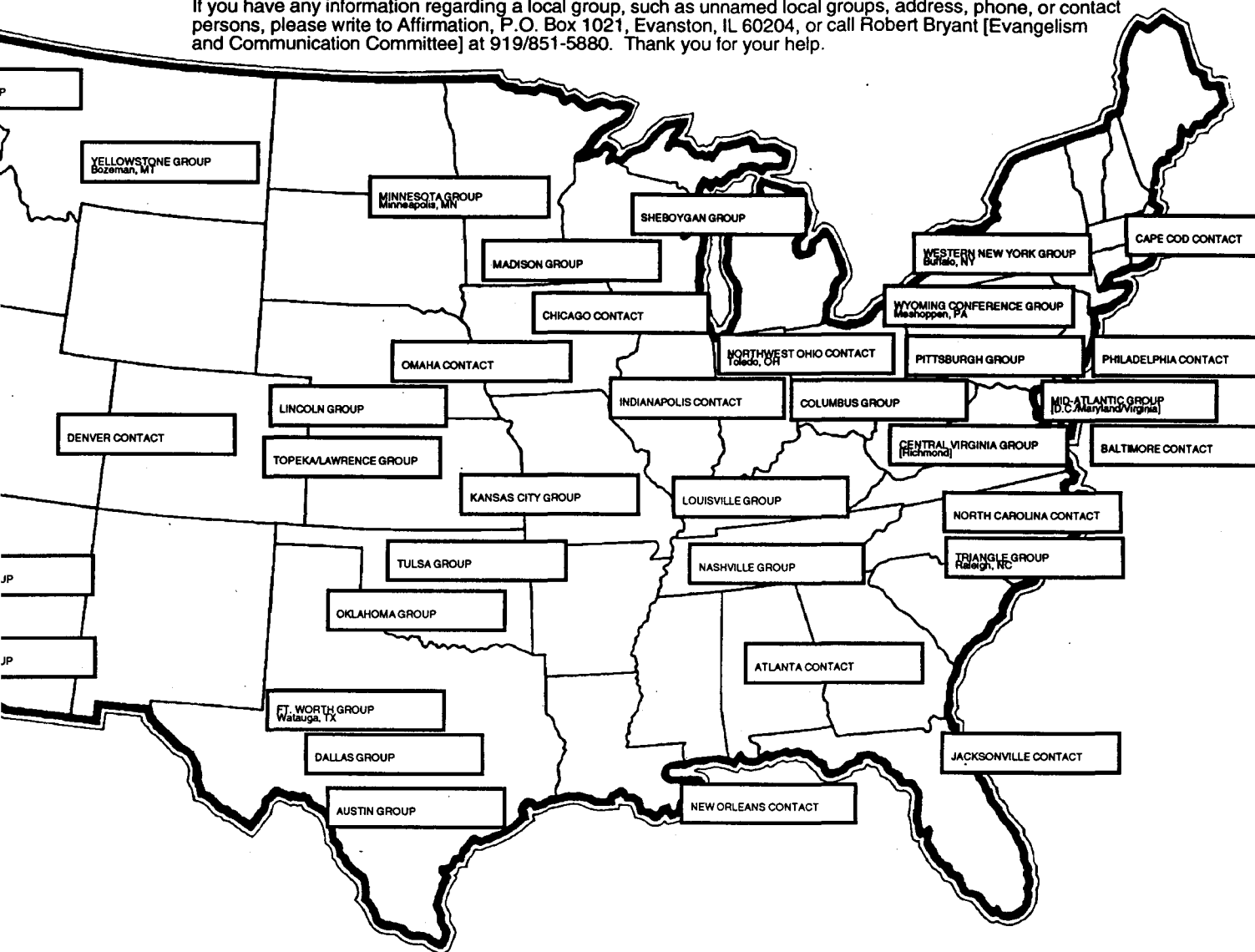
Lake. For additional information write to P.O. Box 225831, Dallas, Texas 75222-5831.

Affirmation Fort Worth for more information about this groups activities write to P.O. Box 48382, Fort Worth, TX 76143

Affirmation in Chicago For more information concerning any local activities and the names of Reconciling Congregations in the area, write to Affirmation/Chicago c/o Jan Olson. P.O. Box 705, Evanston, IL 60204.

Nashville Affirmation meets the last Wednesday of each month for their regular meetings. In June they held a literary evening where members shared

The National Affirmation Council is updating its directory of local groups. Below is a map of all known groups. If you have any information regarding a local group, such as unnamed local groups, address, phone, or contact persons, please write to Affirmation, P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204, or call Robert Bryant [Evangelism and Communication Committee] at 919/851-5880. Thank you for your help.



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Nashville Affirmation meets the last
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favorite selections of prose and poetry.
In July they had a report on the
Reconciling Congregation Convocation
in Washington D.C. held at the
beginning of the month. In September,
Kathleen Maloy, co-chair of the Lesbian
and Gay Coalition for Justice spoke to
the group. For information about
monthly meetings and other activities
write to Affirmation, P.O. Box 24213,
Nashville, TN 37202.

Affirmation Philadelphia can be
reached at Calvary UMC, 815 South
48th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19143

Affirmation Western New York for
more information please write to Suite
211, 1479 Kensington Avenue, Buffalo,
New York 14215

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Affirmation Los Angeles is a gospel speaking people. They marched together with Huntington Beach Affirmation on June 27th in the Gay Pride Parade. Bishop Mel and Mrs. Lucille Wheatley and the Reverend Dr. Bert All marched with the group along with a music-filled truck, banners, and signs identifying the participating UMC congregations. Also in June the group held its Annual Picnic at the California-Pacific Conference in Redlands, California. The group presented their Honorary Homosexual of the Year awards to individuals supportive of Affirmation. They also honored Bert All, a clergy person who has been a leader in Affirmation Los Angeles since its beginnings. In October they welcomed Lorri L. Jean, Executive Director of the LA Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center as speaker to their monthly meeting. The group also participated in the Second Annual Interfaith Service In Recognition of National Coming Out Day. Regular meetings are held on the second Sunday of each month. The group begins at 7:00 p.m. Write to Affirmation Los Angeles, P.O. Box 691283, West Hollywood, CA 90069 or call 213/969-4664.

Austin Affirmation hosted the National Affirmation meeting in the beginning of October. They were wonderful hosts with a wonderful banquet Saturday night featuring local entertainment. The group meets bimonthly for its usual potluck and program. Recent meetings have been in member's homes and local restaurants. For additional information write to Affirmation, 7403 Shoal Creek Blvd. Austin, Texas 78757

Central Virginia Affirmation meets twice a monthly with a worship service and program the 2nd and 4th Mondays

of the month at Pace Memorial UMC, 700 West Franklin St., Richmond, Virginia. April found the group meeting for supper at the Athens Taverna for some of the best Greek cuisine in Richmond. In May the group worshiped with Lebanon UMC in Hanover county. The Annual Affirmation 4th of July Picnic brought folk out for fun, food, and fireworks. The Richmond Lesbian & Gay Pride Festival brought the group out in September. They also participated in Sunday worship at Westhampton UMC. For more information write P.O. Box 25615, Richmond, VA 23260-5615 or call 746-7279 or 746-1204.

Mid-Atlantic Affirmation meets weekly for Sunday Evening worship services and a Tuesday Evening Bible Study. The group hosted the National Affirmation meeting before the National March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Rights. Affirmation members were invited in May to participate in the celebration of Christ Church 30 years of ministry in the Baltimore Annual Conference. Mid-Atlantic Affirmation held its first meetings at Christ Church in 1979. Weekly meetings are held at Dumbarton UMC, 3133 Dumbarton Street NW, Georgetown. For more information write to P.O. Box 23636, L'Enfant Plaza Station, Washington, D.C. 20026-3636 or call Mike at 703-960-5876.

Affirmation of Wyoming Conference has a worship service every Sunday at 7:00-8:30 pm in the Narthex of Tabernacle UMC, 83 Main St. Binghamton, New York. In May Rev. Mark Marino, Associate Pastor at Endwell, UMC helped the group celebrate Pentecost. At the June meeting Rev. Rebekah Sweet, Pastor at Forest City, PA and spouse Rev. Birney

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Kellogg, Pastor at Thompson UMC helped lead the worship. For more information write to P.O. Box 2988, Binghamton, NY 13902-2988 or call 717-833-4434.

Affirmation Topeka-Lawrence

P.O. Box 4776, Topeka, KS 66604

WITNESS COMMITTEE REPORT

The Witness Committee considered six items as it met before the Austin National Gathering.

Judicial Council, October 27-30, 1993

Affirmation has an interest in six items on the docket of the Judicial Council for its meeting in Atlanta, GA. Troy and Minnesota Annual Conferences have each sent an item dealing with covenant services for gay or lesbian couples. Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference has sent four items dealing with the ministerial relations of a probationary member deemed to be a "self-avowed practicing homosexual" and continued in good standing. Affirmation members will be present at the oral hearings and will participate in a service led by the Methodist Federation for Social Action.

National Council of Churches, November 10-12, 1993

The Metropolitan Community Church has asked leaders from all national lesbian/gay affirming Christian groups to join them at a Baltimore meeting to be held as the National Council of Churches holds its annual General Board meeting. The Metropolitan Community Church continues to seek a formal relationship with the National Council of Churches. The over-all purpose of this ecumenical meeting is to build community among gay and lesbian Christian caucuses, to be in solidarity with MCC in its relations with the National Council of Churches, and to encourage the NCC to practice justice in regard to lesbian and gay people. Affirmation co-spokespersons Gloria Soliz and Jay McCarty will attend. We want the Church ecumenical to understand that already there are gay, lesbian and bisexual Christians within the

member denominations of the National Council of Churches. Last year, Bishop Melvin Talbert, Secretary of the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church, spoke in favor of granting observer status to MCC. We hope for continued witness for justice from United Methodists this year.

General Conference, 1996

The Commission on the General Conference has decided that the 1996 General Conference will be held in Denver, Colorado, in spite of Colorado's adoption of a constitutional amendment that denies gay men and lesbians protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation. Part of the compromise to maintain the Denver site was a promise that there would be a planned presence to witness to the commitment of the United Methodist Church to defend the human and civil rights of all people, including homosexuals. Affirmation, MFSA and the Reconciling Congregation Program were named as organizations that would be invited to help plan this witness event.

The Witness Committee has sent a letter to the Commission on the General Conference asking it to convene a planning team of representatives from Affirmation, the Reconciling Congregation Program, MFSA and Denver area United Methodists who've been active in the human rights campaign in Colorado. We expect the invitation to include travel, housing and meal expenses for three people from each group who will jointly plan a significant and impactful witness for the human rights of lesbians, gay men and bisexual people.

Intercaucus Group--ongoing

We continue our commitment to intercaucus organizing with numerous "liberal" caucuses. That group is developing a theological basis for working together, with an eye toward a later public declaration. It also plans to work together on emerging General Conference issues. The last meeting was in July, the next will be in early March, 1994. Jeanne Knepper has been representing Affirmation at these meetings.

Educational Materials from the Study of Homosexuality

The 1992 General Conference mandated the Church to prepare study materials based on the report of the Commission to

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Study Homosexuality. We understand that those materials will be available in March, 1994. The Witness Committee plans to acquire and review the materials, especially inviting Affirmation members with church educational backgrounds to assist us in formulating that response. We understand that Drs. Sally Geis and Tex Sample are putting together a book of supplemental materials to enhance the basic study. Our inclination is to assume that the work they do will be helpful and of high quality.

Philosophy and Techniques of Activism

The Witness Committee has begun an internal dialogue about the attitudes and methods we bring to social change work. Do or should our methods change as we are invited to the discussion table, as with the General Conference witness of 1996? Where should we be flexible and where firm? What opportunities and dangers can different styles of activism create? We intend to engage in dialogue about these questions with the whole National Council in January. Do you have something you'd like us to think about in that regard? If you do, please send it (before Christmas) to the Witness Committee. The more we hear from you, the more we can be confident that we are representing Affirmation well as we make our witness in various church, ecumenical and national settings.

Jeanne Knepper
Witness Committee

NATIONAL GATHERING SPRING OF 1994

Location to be Announced

"Celebrating with Worship"

CALL FOR PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS/ PROGRAM CONTENT

One of the things we do best is worship. We are turning to the excellent resources within our own membership to explore new meaning in traditional worship and new, creative forms of worship which can bring needed spiritual depth and meaning to our lives as a worshipping community.

Please contact the program committee chair, Sue Bock at (512) 452-6399 if you have suggestions for content or leaders for our 1994 Spring Gathering.

IN MEMORIAM Michael Lynn Troyer

Michael Lynn Troyer, 44, of Evanston, IL, died peacefully at home on Wednesday, Nov. 10, 1993. Michael had been an active member of Affirmation, and a champion of justice for all persons. A memorial service was scheduled for Nov. 20 at the First United Methodist Church, Evanston.

Born in 1949 at LaOtto, Ind., he was raised on the family farm with his younger brothers Phillip and Don, his sister, Paula, and grandmother, Eva Troyer. The nurture and love that existed in that family really made Michael the strong individual he was.

It was during college that Michael became close friends with Faith Logsdon and they married in 1972. Michael and Faith were both teachers and lived in Roselle, IL, while teaching at Lake Park High School for four years.

Michael was still searching to express who he really was in the early 70's and by 1976 Michael and Faith decided their journeys were going in different directions and they were divorced.

Michael then started to really learn about integrating the various parts of his life into a cohesive unit that meant not hiding parts of his life but blending all of the pieces into a healthy whole.

Michael started working for the Presbytery of Chicago in 1980 and took the opportunity of putting what he believed into the real life experience of being an office manager and trying to eliminate sexism, racism, classism, ageism and homophobia from the workplace.

Living with Michael was often a community experience; there were roommates, visitors from out of town and always someone who came into his life who needed an opportunity to be affirmed and deserved a chance at being included in a community of growing, caring people.

Out of that experience of living in community, a number of people formed a "found family" called **Dudcrest**. This open, sharing and cooking group was the family that many people were amazed could function with so many different kinds of people. That network was the source of many wonderful dinners, parties and events including the Annual Dudcrest Halloween Ball.

These are some of the things for which Michael Troyer will be remembered.

AIDS: PRAYER OF MEMORY AND HOPE

The following is a worship service by the Austin Jewish Fellowship in Texas.

For those who have died

ELEH EZKERAH - THESE WE REMEMBER

'Tis a fearful thing
To love
What death can touch.
To love, to hope, to dream,
And oh, to lose.
A thing for fools, this,
But a holy thing,
A holy thing to love.

For your life has lived in me;
Your laugh once lifted me;
Your word was a gift to me.

To remember this brings painful joy.

'Tis a human thing, love,
A holy thing,
To love
What death can touch.

THIS WE ACKNOWLEDGE

AIDS is like another world -
A world of disease,
A world of fear,
A world of death.

But AIDS is not of another world.
AIDS touches our lives -
Our families,
Our community,
Our world.

We dedicate ourselves
To those AIDS has taken from us;
To their memories,
To their courage,
To their lives.

WE READ RESPONSIVELY

In the rising of the sun and in its going down, we
remember them.

*In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter, we
remember them.*

In the opening of buds and in the rebirth of spring, we
remember them.

*In the blueness of the sky and in the warmth of
summer, we remember them.*

In the rustling of leaves and in the beauty of summer,
we remember them.

*In the beginning of the year and when it ends, we
remember them.*

When we are weary and in need of strength, we
remember them.

*When we are lost and sick at heart,
we remember them.*

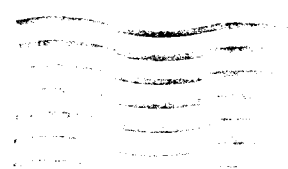
When we have joys we yearn to share,
we remember them.

*So long as we live, they too shall live, for they are now
a part of us,
as we remember them.*

CLOSING PRAYER

O God, full of compassion, You who dwell on high, grant perfect rest in your sheltering presence to all whom we mourn this day, to all who have died of AIDS. Source of Mercy, let them find refuge in the shadow of Your wings, and may their souls be bound up in the bond of eternity. May You be their possession.
May they rest in peace.
And let us say: Amen.

P.O. Box 1021
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