

Affirmation

Summer 1994

Volume 19

Number 2

WOMEN CHURCH LEADERS RESPOND TO ATTACK BY CONSERVATIVES

More than 800 United Methodist women from 40 states released a statement supporting the emerging role of women in shaping the denomination's theology and direction in a press conference in honor of International Women's Day, March 8.

...the growing partnership of
women and men in the Church...

The statement, entitled A Time of Hope -- A Time of Threat affirms the growing partnership of women and men in the Church while stressing the need for the Church to respond to growing "hostility toward outspoken, creative and courageous women of faith."

The statement was issued in the wake of an ecumenical conference on "Re-Imagining," which was held in November 1993 in Minneapolis. The conference was attended by more than 2000

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JUDICIAL COUNCIL DECISIONS

(From the May, 1994, "Shalom to You"
Newsletter of the Shalom Ministries)

ORDINATION --

At its April 27-29 meeting the Judicial Council upheld a 1993 ruling by Bishop Sano of California-Pacific Annual Conference. This decision gives yet

...the status of being gay or
lesbian should not be a bar to
appointment or ordination...

more space to annual conferences who believe that the status of being gay or lesbian should not be a bar to appointment or ordination.

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JEANNE KNEPPER HONORED

On May 14 the Lee and Mae Ball Award, given by the Methodist Federation for Social Action for "Outstanding Christian Social Witness," was presented to six persons, including Jeanne Knepper, convenor of National Affirmation's Witness Committee and co-director of Shalom Ministries in Portland, OR. Shalom Ministries, founded by the Rev. Dr. Alice Knotts and the Rev. Ms. Knepper, seeks to provide education, justice and empowerment to lesbians, gays and bisexuals in the Portland area. If you wish to aid them in their work, please write to them at P.O. Box 66147, Portland, OR 07266.



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The National Gathering
Los Angeles October 7-9, 1994

Please turn to page 11 for details

WOMEN CHURCH LEADERS

Continued from page one...

...the Ecumenical Decade:
Churches in Solidarity with
women.

women, almost double the turn-out projected by planners. The conference marked the midpoint of the Ecumenical Decade: Churches in Solidarity with Women.

While conference participants' evaluations were largely positive, unofficial conservative organizations within several denominations have used coverage of the event to attack women church leaders...

Drafters of the statement say they came together to respond to "public attacks on the leadership, theology and funding of the recent conference," and to put the issue into the broader context of the role of women in developing theology.

Such a stand is in keeping with United Methodist doctrinal and theological standards which, according to the denomination's *Book of Discipline*, say:

"Currents of theology have developed out of ... the movement for the full equality of women in Church and society.... The challenge to the United Methodists is to discern the various strands of these vital movements of faith that are coherent, faithful understandings of the gospel and the Christian mission for our times." ...

Authors and signers agree they "stand strongly in the United Methodist tradition that honors theological diversity," and describe the current theological endeavors of women as a "reformation."

As "women, loyal and committed

to the United Methodist Church," they call upon "all sisters and brothers to join in celebrating and living into this movement with the Holy Spirit."

They encourage men and women throughout the church to join them by signing the statement.

(The full text of the statement is printed elsewhere in this newsletter.)



JUDICIAL COUNCIL

Continued from page one...

The decision related to the case of Rev. Frank Wulf, an elder in the Cal-Pac conference. In a letter written to a conference leader in 1992, Wulf had acknowledged being a "self-avowed practicing homosexual." Charges were filed against Wulf. Following a process used in Rocky Mountain Conference in the case of Julian Rush, Bishop Sano asked the Board of Ordained Ministry to draft a definition of "self-avowed practicing homosexual."

The Board of Ordained Ministry declined to adopt a definition and recommended that clergy who so identify themselves should be evaluated for ministry based on Paragraph 403, John Wesley's traditional standards for ordained ministry. Paragraph 403 makes no reference to sexual orientation.

When he was asked for an episcopal ruling about the legality of the Board's decision, Bishop Sano ruled that it was not illegal to decline to define and to use Paragraph 403 for evaluation. He appointed Frank Wulf to attend school.

The Judicial Council has upheld Sano's ruling. This decision, taken with the October 93 rulings, suggest that, at one

level, it might be wise for annual conferences to avoid being hasty in the adoption of definitions.

...In the absence of charges,
clergy retain their rights to or-
dination and appointment...

So long as there is no definition of "self-avowed practicing homosexual," charges cannot be processed against clergy believed to fall into that category. In the absence of charges, clergy retain their rights to ordination and appointment.

...two drawbacks. First, it is
temporary...

This may be an expedient way to temporarily suspend the persecution of gay or lesbian clergy, but it has two drawbacks. First, it is temporary. It gives the power of decision over to the 1996 General Conference, which will feel more pressure to define the terms if annual conferences to not have working definitions in place.

...Second...the plan will hurt
church morale...

Second, and ultimately more important, this plan will hurt church morale. It will leave the church in the place where it neither enforces nor challenges a bad rule. Conservatives will be dismayed by the unwillingness of their peers to obey church law and gay men and lesbians will continue to feel rejected by the church.

The solution to this problem lies with the meaning of the constitutional word "status." It is here that we must make a clear decision. Either the constitu-

tion includes people who live out their sexual orientation as gay men or lesbians, or it does not. If it does include and protect homosexual persons, the prohibitions of paragraph 402.2 are unconstitutional regardless of how the words are defined. We strongly recommend that annual conferences focus their energy and best thinking on the definition of status.

Shalom Ministries suggests either of two definitions: 1) those non-trivial characteristics by which a group of people are identified, by which their common experiences may be shaped, and by which their legal character or condition may be determined; or 2) A legal relationship or legal condition of a group of persons.

COVENANT SERVICES ---

The Council clarified its October 1993 ruling on the legality of clergy conducting covenant services for lesbians or gay men. The earlier ruling had observed that annual conferences do not have power to establish or alter church rituals and that pastors are responsible to oversee the worship life of the congregation

...neither annual conferences nor bishops can tell a pastor the s/he cannot officiate at a covenant service...

 while complying with church law. Many, including Shalom Ministries, have interpreted this to mean that neither annual conferences nor bishops can tell a pastor that s/he cannot officiate at a covenant service, although anyone who believed that such a pastor had broken church law could attempt to bring charges of disobeying the order and discipline of the church against her/him. The April 1994 ruling confirmed that interpretation when it clarified the orig-

inal decision by adding "...the pastor, who intentionally disregards the covenant to be obedient to the order and discipline of the church, is subject to the fair process of grievance, complaint, and/or charges for such violation."

This may sound like a toughening of a stand against such covenant services. In fact, it is not, for a simple reason. We find no rule in the Discipline that forbids same gender covenant services. This is not a case of oversight, because the General Conferences of 1988 and 1992 received proposals for such a rule and those proposals were defeated. Someone who wanted to bring charges against a pastor who conducted a covenant service would have to list the paragraph of the Discipline that was violated. There simply is no such paragraph. The decision to conduct a same gender covenant service may be unpopular and politically uncomfortable, moreso in some areas than in others. As we read it, it is not illegal, nor can any annual conference make it a violation of church law.



WITNESS COMMITTEE REPORT

General Conference Planning

Affirmation has begun planning for our presence at the next General Conference of The United Methodist Church, which

We will have rooms in the Hotel Denver...located 2½ blocks from the Convention Center...

 will meet April 16-26, 1996, in Denver, Colorado. We will have rooms in the Hotel Denver (Hol-

iday Inn), located 2½ blocks from the Convention Center. The rooms rent for \$68 per day and sleep one to four people. We plan to locate our office, press room and hospitality room in the same hotel, which will be on a major travel path for many delegates.

As part of the planning process, the Witness Committee facilitated a meeting to gather suggestions at the April '94 National Gathering in Fayetteville. Those present made suggestions about our programmatic and legislative presence and about the witness event to be planned as a part of official General Conference business.

Programmatic ideas named include:

- *a celebratory banquet
- *an AIDS memorial service
- *a daily newsletter
- *contact with people "back home"
- *a support system for those on site
- *nightly gathering/debriefing
- *a quiet room
- *street theater
- *noon-time panel presentations
- *sending out a newsletter packet as a fund-raiser
- *displaying and selling our own resources
- *"get-away" trips for those on site
- *a mid-Conference party for ourselves
- *a retreat option prior to General Conference
- *a visible marker to designate Affirmation people ready and available to talk with individuals who want/need to talk
- *having a publicly visible presence through flags, banners, signs or a rented window
- *marking our money given during the open communion

Please turn to page four...

WITNESS COMMITTEE

Continued from page three...

We decided to invite individuals or chapters to adopt and implement ideas that appeal to them. If you would like to take responsibility for something on this list, or if you have an idea we haven't included, contact the Witness Committee through the Affirmation address: P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204.

The Witness Committee will use the suggestions made about legislative presence to draft a platform statement and legislative

If you have ideas to contribute...

proposals. These will be presented for review and revision at the Fall National Gathering in Los Angeles. If you have ideas you'd like to contribute, please send them to the Witness Committee before August 31. We will send our platform and legislative proposals to our allies by late Fall 1994.

Denver Declaration

Affirmation has worked with other caucuses in an intercaucus effort to find areas of cooperation and commonality in our preparations for General Conference. Members and delegates from nine caucuses have participated in a process that created *The Denver Declaration: Return to Community* printed elsewhere in this newsletter.

The Affirmation National Council endorsed the Denver Declaration as a first step and called on allies

...circulate the declaration for signatures...

to continue working for the inclusion of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals in the ordained ministry. The Council also decided to circulate the declaration for signatures. Anyone who wishes may copy the declaration and ask other United Methodists to sign on. Signatures will be collected at the Affirmation P.O. Box in Evanston and combined with those collected through other caucuses.

Homosexuality Study

The materials prepared to make the work of the Committee to Study Homosexuality available for local church study are now available from Cokesbury (1-800-672-1789). The study

...Discussion Rules that emphasize respectful listening...

committee report fills most of the student book. Useful additions in the student book include a list of Discussion Rules that emphasize respectful listening and a sampling of ministries a church might undertake as a result of the study.

The leaders' guide includes an audio tape of speakers heard by the committee. The guide offers many activities that should

...One exercise...helps people think about the "unrecognized advantages of heterosexual persons."...

increase openness, sensitivity and awareness. One exercise, for example, helps people think about the "unrecognized advantages of heterosexual persons." The study plan anticipates that classes will devote six 90-minute (or 10 hour-long) sessions to the material.

The materials look surprisingly good. While it is true that they include materials from those who would lead people out of homosexuality, those pieces are more than counterbalanced by activities that should lead to greater understanding and openness.

Jeanne Knepper
Convenor, Witness Committee



GAYS & LESBIANS FIND HOME IN CHURCH IN NEW MUSICAL

HOME: A Parable of Beatrice and Neal, an original musical drama, will play in churches in 15 midwestern cities this June in a gala premiere tour.

HOME dramatically portrays the power of love to reconcile Christian discord about homosexuality. The show and tour are being produced by the Reconciling Congregation Program in celebration of its 10th anniversary.

...the idea of the church as "home"...

The composer/director Timothy McGinley explores the idea of the church as "home" in this show. Stirring music punctuates the stories of six very different persons in need--who are seeking something more from life. As these disparate characters' lives intersect, they share their struggles with each other and discover a basis for communion together.

...three key attributes of a home...

Please turn to page nine...

Editor's Note: The following Denver Declaration has been prepared--through three years of dialogue among nine fellowship groups and caucuses--in order to "call United Methodists together instead of continuing current factions. We met at the Korean United Methodist Church of Greater Washington, D.C. on March 1, 1994 to draft this declaration. [It] is unlike any other declaration submitted in the past. It is inclusive, grace filled, loving, and grounded in Wesleyan theology....This declaration reflects a broad spectrum of our denomination and calls us together. We truly want to heal our denomination instead of splitting it into right and left factions"--from a letter from United Methodist Clergy Couples, one of the nine caucuses. The Affirmation National Council has endorsed this Denver Declaration.

DENVER DECLARATION: RETURN TO COMMUNITY

"With hearts strangely warmed," we are a pentecost church. No longer separated by cultural barriers, no longer driven apart by differences or ideologies, we are united by the love of God and neighbor. We accept Christ's commission to be an inclusive church. We work to build unity within our church. We call upon the grace of God to enable us to offer compassion to all persons, especially as we hold different opinions. We wish to encourage people to discover for themselves how to live God's call. John Wesley followed a time tested approach: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity."

We rejoice in our faith in God that gives us the freedom to be disciples of our Savior Jesus Christ. Our God is bold. Our God is strong. Our God can withstand our doubts and fears. Our God is not limited by the inadequacies of human language. We are called to think about our beliefs, study the scriptures, and pray for guidance to grow in our faith journey. Faith opens our hearts. Faith accepts diversity. Faith guides our actions. Faith rejects the manipulation of fear to divide us. Issues call for dialogue, not condemnation; prayer, not idolatry; courage, not hate. We are called to live, not in fear, but in hope-filled faith.

Wesley believed that "the world is our parish." His ministry was particularly directed toward bringing hope and faith to the poor, the sick, the disadvantaged, and lifeless institutions. He spoke out strongly against systemic economic and social evils of his day. Before his death, Wesley sent his preachers across the oceans to the four corners of the globe. As Wesleyans, we continue the ministry begun at Epworth. We celebrate our global connection, embracing peoples of all races and nations in Jesus' name.

We are committed to healing our denomination instead of splitting it into factions.

We are committed to celebrating all that unites us as Christians.

We are committed to working with all those who follow Jesus Christ.

We are committed to building a world where all people are free to use the gifts that God has given them at worship, and in the world.

We are committed to defending the human rights of all persons regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, creed, economic situation, handicapping condition, national origin, status, and age.

With Christ, we are committed to feeding the hungry, setting free the oppressed, and exposing evil systems which create poverty and injustice.

(Please refer to the paragraphs in the Witness Committee's report, printed elsewhere in this newsletter, under the heading Denver Declaration.)

NATIONAL AFFIRMATION COUNCIL ELECTED

National Affirmation completed its election process for 1994 at the National Gathering in Fayetteville, AK. Regional Representatives to the Council were elected by mail ballot in March. The At Large Members of the Council were elected by persons present at the Spring Gathering. The following persons comprise the new Council:

REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES ELECTED FOR TERMS MAY 1994 - APRIL 1997

NORTHEAST REGION:

Tom Russell	Washington, D.C.
Brian Smith	Allston, MA
One Woman	Maryland

SOUTHEAST:

Mark Wilson	Tuscaloosa, AL
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NORTHCENTRAL:

Morris Floyd	Minneapolis, MN
David Gunnell	Evanston, IL
Judith Westendorf	Minneapolis, MN

SOUTHCENTRAL:

Sam Wilson	Dallas, TX
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WESTERN:

Jeanne Barnett	San Francisco, CA
Paul Thompson	Studio City, CA

AT LARGE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

TWO YEAR TERM

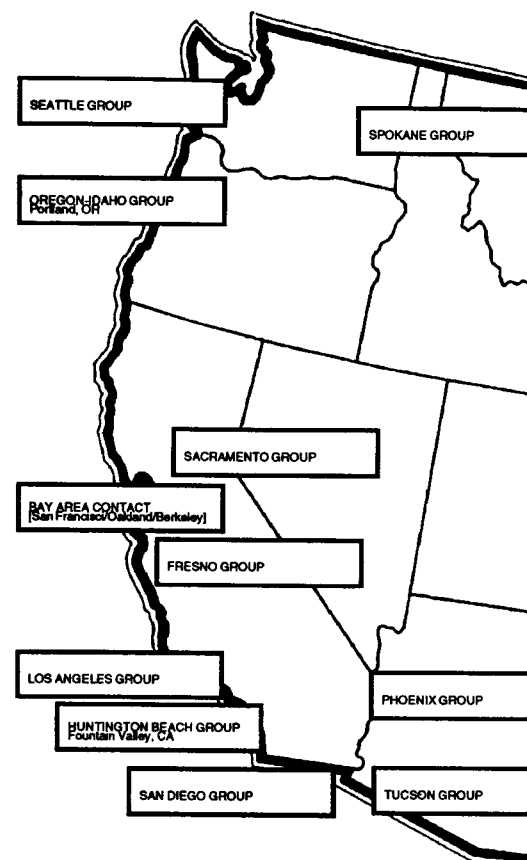
May 1994 - April 1996

Robert Bryant	Raleigh, NC
Ellie Charlton	San Francisco, CA
Jeanne Knepper	Portland, OR
Jay McCarty	Kansas City, MO
One Woman	Tennessee

ONE YEAR TERM

May 1994 - April 1995

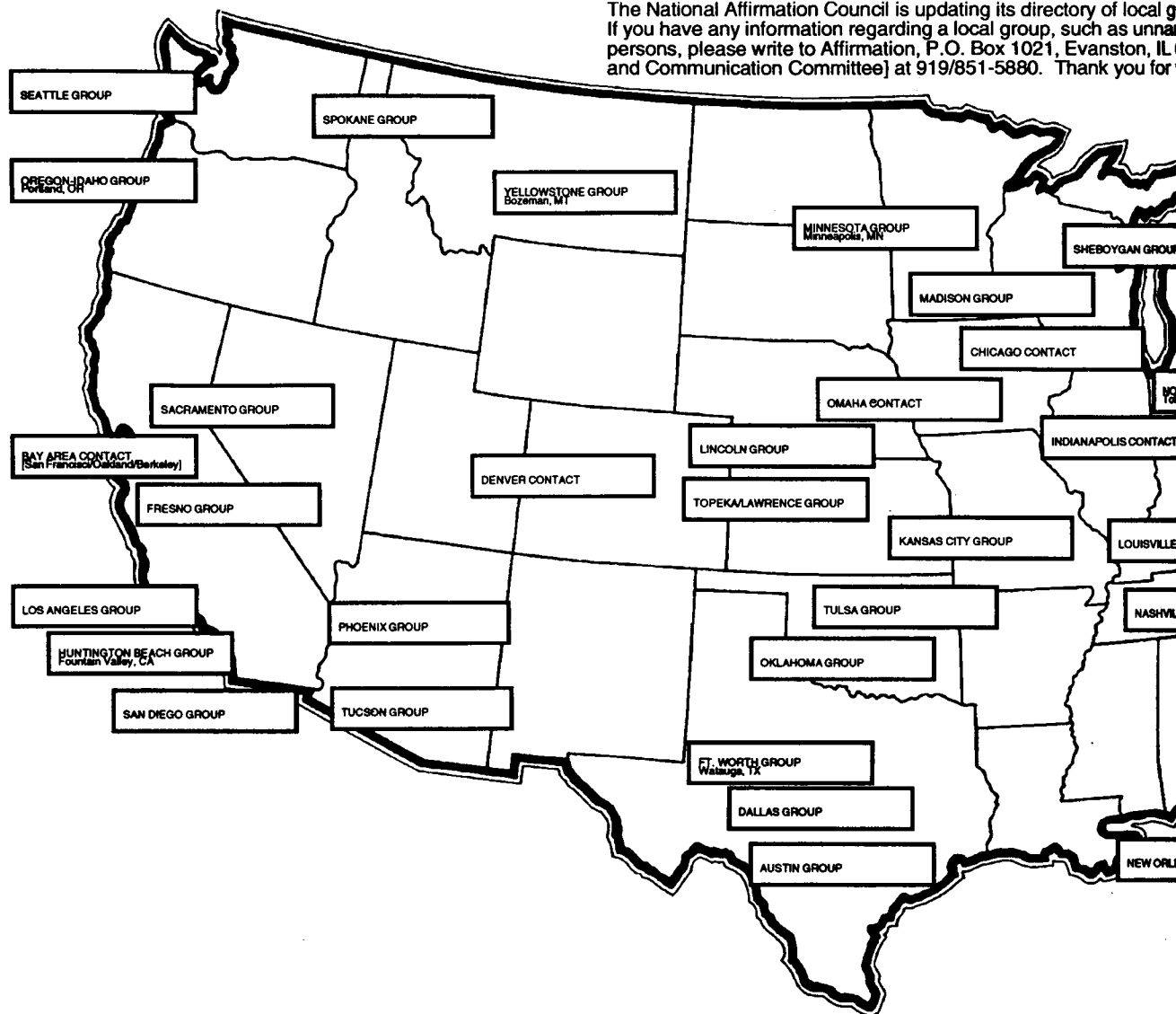
John Calhoun	Oklahoma City, OK
One Man	Chicago, IL
Nancy Levan	Fresno, CA
Jan Olson	Chicago, IL
Gloria Soliz	San Francisco, CA



LOG

Affirmation of Wyoming
Conference was joined by Rev. Steve Heiss from Broad Street UMC for worship service based on the book *Stranger at the Gate*. The group started out June with a potluck at Tabernacle UMC. Members of the group took a trip to the 25th Stonewall Anniversary in New York City. The group holds worship service every Sunday at 7:00-8:30 pm in the Narthex of Tabernacle UMC, 83 Main St. Binghamton, NY. In December the group had tree trimming and brunch to celebrate the holidays. This group has incredible ministry and a wide range of programs. For more information write to P.O. Box 2988, Binghamton, 13902-2988 or call 717-833-4434.

The National Affirmation Council is updating its directory of local groups. If you have any information regarding a local group, such as unnamed persons, please write to Affirmation, P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60201 and Communication Committee] at 919/851-5880. Thank you for

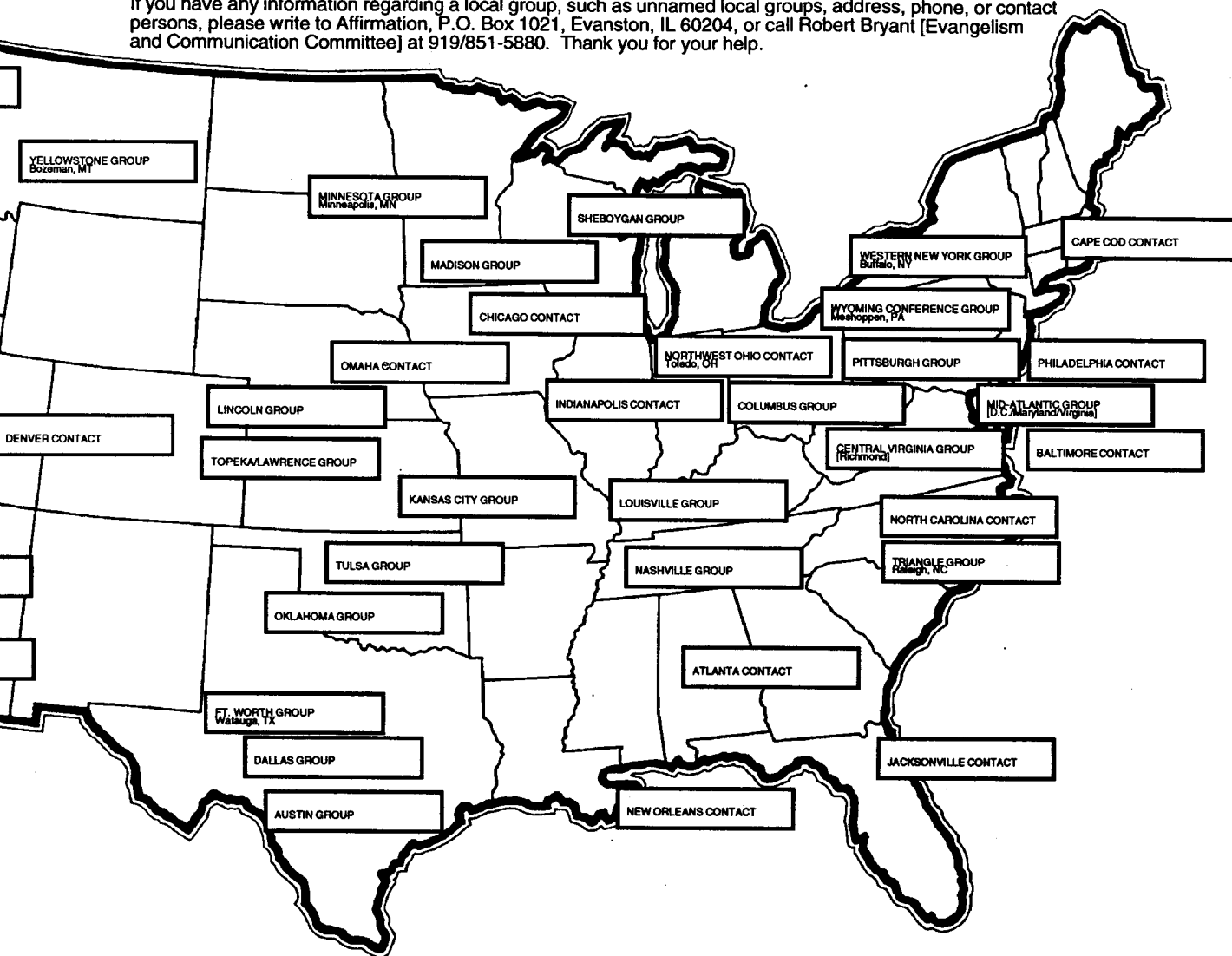


LOCAL NEWS FROM AROUND THE

Affirmation of Wyoming Conference was joined by Rev. Steve Heiss from Broad Street UMC for a worship service based on the book, *Stranger at the Gate*. The group started out June with a potluck at Tabernacle UMC. Members of the group took a bus to the 25th Stonewall Anniversary in New York City. The group holds a worship service every Sunday at 7:00-8:30 pm in the Narthex of Tabernacle UMC, 83 Main St. Binghamton, New York. In December the group had a tree trimming and brunch to celebrate the holidays. This group has an incredible ministry and a wide range of programs. For more information write to P.O. Box 2988, Binghamton, NY 13902-2988 or call 717-833-4434.

Dallas Affirmation usually meets every fourth Monday at 7:00 pm, at Northaven UMC, 11211 Preston Road at Northaven Road. In February, the group had a panel discussion by members of P-Flag about being parents of gay and lesbian children. Dallas Affirmation was selected as the coordinator of the International AIDS Candlelight Memorial and Mobilization on Pentecost Sunday, May 22. This year the Legett-Wardlow Lecture Series will be held in honor of Mike Merrifield. Sam Wilson attended the National Spring Gathering in Fayetteville, Arkansas. At that meeting Sam Wilson was installed as a Regional Representative for the South-Central Region. For additional information write to P.O. Box 225831, Dallas, Texas 75222-5831.

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.



AL NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

Dallas Affirmation usually meets every fourth Monday at 7:00 pm, at Northaven UMC, 11211 Preston Road at Northaven Road. In February, the group had a panel discussion by members of P-Flag about being parents of gay and lesbian children. Dallas Affirmation was selected as the coordinator of the International AIDS Candlelight Memorial and Mobilization on Pentecost Sunday, May 22. This year the Legett-Wardlow Lecture Series will be held in honor of Mike Merrifield. Sam Wilson attended the National Spring Gathering in Fayetteville, Arkansas. At that meeting Sam Wilson was installed as a Regional Representative for the South-Central Region. For additional information write to P.O. Box 225831, Dallas, Texas 75222-5831.

Affirmation

Central Virginia Affirmation holds meetings at Pace Memorial UMC, 700 West Franklin St., Richmond, Virginia. In addition to the worshipping community, Pace Memorial UMC, is home to UM Campus Ministry, the Pace Community Drop-In Center, and Central Virginia Affirmation since 1988. The group also meets at Lebanon UMC in Hanover County. Central Virginia Affirmation attended "A Comic Performance" held as a fund raiser for Sexual Minorities Student Alliance at VCU. Central Virginia Affirmation gathers for Sunday morning worship and informal meals. For more information write P.O. Box 25615, Richmond, VA 23260-5615 or call (804)746-7279 or (804)746-1204.

Please turn to page 6-B...

Page Seven

SWEDEN APPROVES GAY MARRIAGES

from *BAY WINDOWS* June 9--15, 1994

STOCKHOLM -- Sweden followed Denmark and Norway on June 7 and passed a bill allowing same-sex couples to marry -- a measure one supporter said was a "contribution to love."

After lengthy debate the Riksdag, or parliament, voted 171-141, with five abstentions, to accept the Registered Partnership Law.

Elisabeth Persson of the small Leftist Party, a supporter of marriage between same-sex couples, said the law "protects a personal relation. It is a small but important contribution to love." The vote makes Scandinavia a leader in gay rights. In 1989, Denmark became the first country in the world to allow marriages between members of the same sex. Norway adopted similar legislation last year.

Sweden partnership law gives gay couples the same inheritance, tax and other benefits and obligations as married heterosexuals. But it stops short of allowing gays to adopt or have children through artificial insemination. Some Swedish psychologists argued that it could be problematic for a child to be raised by parents of the same sex.

Under the new law, which takes effect in January 1995, gay couples can marry in civil ceremonies. It does not give them the right to church weddings.

Social Democrat Maj-Lis Loow, who chaired the judicial committee that prepared the bill, said no further gay-related reforms were being planned.

During debate, little opposition was voiced against homosexuality; opponents focused on legal technicalities such as how to describe gay marriages in statutes.



A clipping from a friend:

From this angle

Here are some types of questions that could appear on a reverse questionnaire for heterosexuals:

- What do you think caused your heterosexuality?
- When and how did you decide you were heterosexual?
- Is it possible that heterosexuality is just a phase you may grow out of?
- Is it possible your heterosexuality stems from a neurotic fear of people of the same sex?
- To whom have you disclosed your heterosexual tendencies? How did they react?
- Why do heterosexuals feel compelled to seduce others into their lifestyle?
- Why do you insist on flaunting your heterosexuality? Why can't you just be who you are and keep quiet about it?
- Studies show that more than 95% of child molesters are heterosexual. Do you consider it safe to expose your children to heterosexual teachers?
- With all the social support marriage receives, the divorce rate is still 50%. Why are there so few stable relationships among heterosexuals?



1994 NEWSLETTER DEADLINES

DEADLINE DATE

PUBLICATION DATE

FALL

July 15, 1994

August 10, 1994

WINTER

October 22, 1994

November 15, 1994

All submissions should be sent to:

National Affirmation

P.O. Box 1021

Evanston, IL 60204

AN EXPLANATION about the long delay in getting this issue of the Newsletter in the mail: There was great confusion (on my part) as to who was to prepare the Newsletter. Since I was no longer on the National Council I did not think that I was to continue as editor of the Newsletter--until material arrived late May for this issue. Upon investigation, I was told that I was still editor. It was too late to put the issue together in time to meet the publication date, and a pre-planned vacation further delayed the work. Then the copy machine in my office (on which I rely for much help) was out of service just when I needed it most--all these things have contributed to the late arrival of this issue. I expect to be back on schedule with the Fall Issue.

George Hodgdon, Editor

LOCAL NEWS

Continued from page seven...

Affirmation Los Angeles is hosting the National Gathering of Affirmation. The Gathering will be held in on the Sunset Strip in West Hollywood. The group celebrated the union of Anne Giese and Christina Allan in April. Affirmation Los Angeles had a presence at their Annual Conference. In May, the group celebrated the inclusive Mother's Day. The group welcomed Lucile Wheatley who shared her experience as the mother of a gay son. Affirmation Los Angeles had booths in both the Long Beach Pride and Los Angeles Pride Celebrations. The group received its official charter from National Affirmation. At the traditional Affirmation Picnic at Annual Conference, there was the presentation of the Honorary Homosexual Award intended to honor non-gay identified persons who have provided leadership and support on behalf of lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals. The Bert All Award is intended to honor persons for their work within Affirmation organizations through the Conference. Affirmation Los Angeles meets the second Sunday of each month for programs, worship, refreshments and fellowship at Westwood United Methodist Church at 7:00 p.m. For additional information write to Affirmation Los Angeles, P.O. Box 691283, West Hollywood, CA 90069 or call 213/969-4664.

Nashville Affirmation had a game night in February. In May Bishop Dale White spoke to the group about "Surviving on the Margins in the Church Today." In June the group attended "A Parable of Beatrice & Neal" presented by the Reconciling Congregation Program for its 10th Anniversary. Nashville Affirmation meets monthly for a potluck and a time of fellowship at Edgewood UMC, 1502 Edgehill Avenue. For information about monthly meetings and other activities write to Affirmation, P.O. Box 24213, Nashville, TN 37202.

Austin Affirmation meet bimonthly for the 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

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

Mid-Atlantic Affirmation meets weekly for Sunday Evening worship services and a Tuesday Evening Bible Study. For more information write to P.O. Box 23636, L'Enfant Plaza Station, Washington, D.C. 20026-3636.

Shalom Ministries has Tuesday night support groups and has fellowship and worship on Wednesday night. Shalom Ministries is a United Methodist ministry of education, justice, and empowerment for the Portland area. Co-Directors Dr. Alice Knotts and Rev. Jeanne G. Knepper are giving religious leadership to people who have been rejected by the Church and those who believe that sexual orientation is not a reason for discrimination. For more information about Shalom Ministries write to P.O. Box 66147, Portland, OR 97266 or call (503)-760-4215.



If you want news about your local group included in this Newsletter, I need to hear from you. Please send your Newsletter or any other information that explains how, when, and where your group meets. Be sure to include a contact person, address or phone number. You can send all information to Fritz Schultz, 801 Cole Street Apt. 2, San Francisco, CA 94117. 415-753-1354.

A TIME OF HOPE --A TIME OF THREAT

This is a time of hope. The partnership of women and men in the United Methodist Church is growing--in the Council of Bishops, in Annual Conferences,

Globally, the voices of women are being heard...

in local congregations, and in theological schools. Christian community and sharing of leadership are broadening across racial and ethnic lines. Globally, the voices of women are being heard, and cooperation among Christian women increases denominationally and ecumenically. In theological books, sermons and liturgies, women are singing a new song.

But this is also a time of threat. Hostility toward outspoken, creative, and courageous women of faith is not new, but it is now more sharply focused. Public attacks on the leadership, theology, and funding of a recent conference call us to speak out.

Constructive dialogue is welcome...

We are convinced that people frightened by fresh theological insights and by challenges to narrow orthodoxy are attempting to discredit and malign women. Constructive dialogue is welcome, but irrational and distorted attacks increase an environment of violence against women.

For years the United Methodist Church has been divided by controversy over the leadership

of women, reproductive rights, inclusive language, and homosexuality. As women have

At the heart of the conflict are diverse images of God...

addressed these issues, the clash of theological perspectives has intensified. At the heart of the conflict are diverse images of God, the meaning of a multi-racial, multi-cultural church, ecumenical commitment, equal participation of women, and the dynamics of control and power. What is at stake is who will name these issues, how the issues will be described, and who will set the agenda for the future of the church.

We are clear that the verbal attacks on the Re-Imagining Conference in Minneapolis (November, 1993) are not isolated. While some naysayers have rushed to judgment on the basis of hearsay, others appear to be part of an ongoing design to split and weaken the United Methodist Church:

- Criticizing the Women's Division and undermining the effectiveness of local units of United Methodist Women are affronts to over a century of faithful witness and missionary service.

- Refusing to acknowledge the positive relationship between sexuality and spirituality, present in both Christian tradition and contemporary theological writings, deprives the church of a rich and essential wholeness.

- Accusing feminist, womanist, and other women theologians, as well as our theological schools, of departing from historic Christian faith is an attempt to constrict the work of the Holy Spirit.

- Engaging in verbal violence against lesbians reveals

the homophobia in the church and denigrates the rich contributions that homosexual persons have made to the church through the centuries.

- Creating a climate of witch-hunting, name-calling, and fear destroys Christian community and erodes the church's capacity to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We have to ask how it is that so much time, energy, and money can be put into these invectives instead of into mission and ministry.

The use of the term "heresy" in our time may be a way of refusing to hear the voices of

Today creative theological minds explore the whole range of issues...

those who have been marginalized in the life of the church. Today creative theological minds explore the whole range of issues, including the biblical meaning of God's Wisdom, Sophia, (like God's Word, Logos). Similarly, in light of social experience, such as slavery and female sexual abuse, understandings of sacrifice, atonement, and martyrdom are being re-examined.

The scriptural promise of the Holy Spirit creates the space and the inspiration for new faith

...the United Methodist tradition which honors theological diversity...

experience and fresh theological insights in every era. We stand strongly in the United Methodist tradition which honors theological diversity and encourages

openness to emerging theological initiatives. We believe that God needs no defense, and that God's children of all backgrounds are called to be true to their own experiences and to articulate their faith, faithfully.

Today's "reformation" holds the potential for life-giving renewal in the United Methodist Church

We...call on all sisters and brothers to join us in celebrating... this movement of the Holy Spirit.

and in the hearts and lives of women and men alike, We, the undersigned women, loyal and committed to the United Methodist Church, call on all sisters and brothers to join us in celebrating and living into this movement of the Holy Spirit.

February 1994

Beryl Ingram-Ward
 Patricia J. Patterson
 J. Ann Craig
 Susan Murch Morrison
 Ruth M. Harris
 Jeanne Audrey Powers
 Heather Murray-Elkins
 Peggy L. Halsey
 Barbara B. Troxell



*GAYS & LESBIANS FIND HOME...
 Continued from page four...*

McGinley notes three key attributes of a home: "a place where one is welcomed by others, where one has some sense of ownership, and where one can be honest about oneself." McGinley contends that churches have generally not been home for gay and lesbian persons. "Churches have said to gays and lesbians: 'You are not welcome here;' or 'You can sit in our pews but not speak;' or 'You can come if you hide who you are.' That's not what I believe God intends the church to be."



McGinley anticipates that the show will help heterosexual Christians reconsider some of their traditional beliefs and stereotypes of gays and lesbians.

...churches can rise above judgmental exclusiveness...

On the other hand, his message to gays and lesbians is to not be discouraged by the words of inhospitality they've heard from churches. "I'm trying to convey a glimmer of hope that churches can rise above judgmental exclusiveness and embrace loving inclusiveness--that the Body of Christ can truly become a 'home' for a diversity of persons."

The Reconciling Congregation Program, which is producing the show and tour, is a national network of United Methodist churches and organizations that publicly welcome gays and lesbians. Over the past decade, 73 congregations, 4 campus ministries, 4 regional conferences, and numerous other groups have joined this ever-expanding movement.

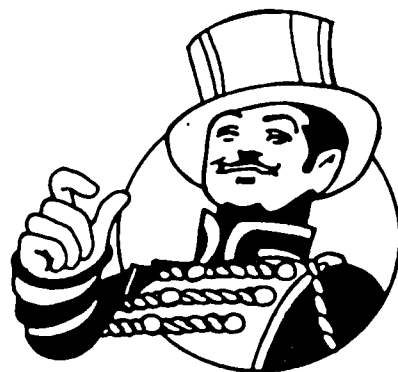
...both a celebration...and a proclamation...

"This gala tour is both a celebration of the success of the Reconciling Congregation movement over the past ten years and a proclamation of our essential

message to the wider church and society," according to program coordinator Mark Bowman. "Reconciling Congregations are a vivid illustration of churches that have become a home for gays and lesbians and many other so-called 'outcasts.' We are delighted by the unique opportunity to inspire thousands of persons with the passion and drama of McGinley's *HOME*."

The complete tour schedule is:

June 9 (preview) Chicago
 (First U.M. Church)
 June 10 (premiere)
 Indianapolis (Broadway U.M.C.)
 June 12 Nashville
 (Edgehill U.M.C.)
 June 13 Louisville
 June 14 Pittsburgh
 (East Liberty Presbyterian Church)
 June 16 Cleveland
 (Church of the Redeemer)
 June 17 South Bend
 (Broadway Christian Parish)
 June 18 Toledo
 (Central U.M.C.)
 June 19 Columbus
 (Third Ave. Community Church)
 June 21 Springfield, Ill.
 (Trinity U.M. Church)
 June 22 St. Louis
 (Centenary U.M. Church)
 June 23 Cedar Rapids
 (Faith U.M. Church)
 June 24 Minneapolis
 June 25 Madison
 (University U.M. Church)
 June 26 Chicago
 (Hemenway U.M.C., Evanston)



Of Things Spiritual

CHANGE ME, GOD, CHANGE ME!

For years, that was my prayer! I knew that I was different--in fact I thought I was the only "fairy" in the whole world--but even when I realized there were

...God did not answer my prayer.

some others like me, I still prayed for God to change me, to make me "straight." To no avail--for some reason God did not answer my prayer.

As a teen-ager, and young man, I had never heard my Baptist ministers (nor the Congregational nor Methodist ministers I frequently heard) say anything about the "sin" of homosexuality, but somehow I knew that it was wrong, and I wanted God to change me--I realized that I could not do so on my own. And I often wondered why He did not grant me my wish.

...one night...I changed my prayer...

And then one night (when I was about 33 years of age) I changed my prayer, why I do not know. Instead of asking God to change me, I asked "Why?" Why am I gay? And the response was instantaneous! A bright vision and, at the same moment, words implanted in my mind: "You are a homosexual because I want you

to bring other homosexuals to Jesus Christ." No, I did not hear the voice of God speaking, but the words were as clear in my mind as though I had heard someone. Nothing was said about my changing, nor about my changing others--I was accepted by God just as I am, just as all the others are accepted just as they are.

Some will say that I had been drinking that evening, or that I was under the influence of drugs. That is not so. I sincerely believe that God was answering my prayer (and I had finally prayed the right prayer!).

...I do know that God has called me for this special work...

I do not know why others are created "gay," but I do know that God has called me for this special work, just as he has called many others--others who have done and are doing a much better job than I, but we all have something to contribute--we would not have been called otherwise.

The vision indicated that there would be suffering here on earth if I accepted God's challenge, although there would be "stars in my crown" in heaven. I was scared! I didn't want to suffer, and, anyway, I didn't know what to do to carry out God's command. The sexual revolution had not started, I knew no activists (if there were any at that time), and *what could I do?*

...I behaved like Jonah and tried running away from God...

So what did I do? I behaved like Jonah and tried running away from God. You guessed it--it doesn't work. But I "ran" for

years. In fact, for almost 30 years. And looking back over the last eight or nine years since I stopped running, I can't say for sure that I have accomplished anything for God. But I have tried and shall keep on trying, and perhaps one day I shall know what I have accomplished.

Yes, God--Change me--I continue to pray, but with a difference--change me into a better follower of Jesus Christ! Amen.

Anonymous



DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO WRITE FOR THIS COLUMN?
"Of Things Spiritual" is a space for us to relate personal stories of our relationship to God and of God's love for us just as we are!

"The Closet Corner" presents stories of how members of Affirmation have been able to "come out" to family and friends--their experiences, and suggestions for those who are still in the closet.

Send your stories to the Newsletter Editor, c/o Affirmation, P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204. The deadline for the next issue of the Newsletter is July 15, 1994.



Start Writing NOW!

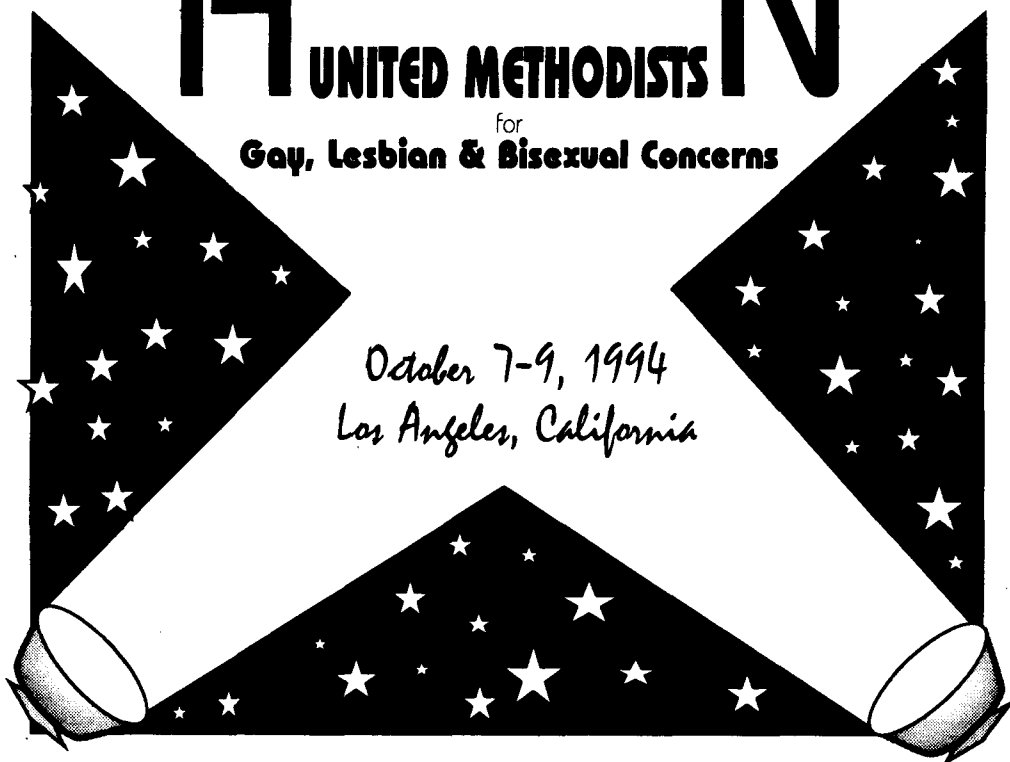


The National Gathering

AFFIRMATION UNITED METHODISTS

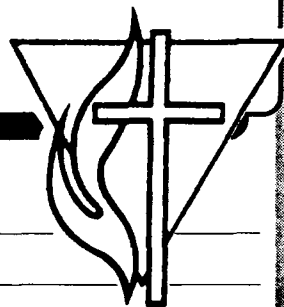
for
Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Concerns

October 7-9, 1994
Los Angeles, California



AFFIRMATION
UNITED METHODISTS

NATIONAL GATHERING
Los Angeles 1994 Pre-Registration



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LETTERS • OPINION • EDITORIAL

editorial

They're coming for you. Are you ready?

The religious right declared war on all of us last month in a meeting which was supposed to be secret, but out of which some unknown person or persons smuggled a tape recording with chilling ramifications for your future.

There is an article which begins on page one of this issue detailing what went on at this meeting. In the hopes that you'll read at least part of that article, the summary here will have to suffice to say that right-wing zealots are coming for you. Not "coming for you" in the sense that Nazi storm troopers raided the homes of Jews. First, they attack you with propaganda.

If any lesson came out of that awful period during World War II, it is that civilized persons should never forget that it wasn't monsters who did the day-to-day bidding which made Hitler's rise begin; it was everyday people instigating relatively minor indignities against their fellow man because they felt they had morality and God on their side.

Are right-wing fundamental-

ist zealots on a par with the Nazis? This newspaper has never taken lightly, or done cavalierly, comparisons with the Third Reich. To call someone a Nazi is probably the most overused and overwrought insult in political activism. But in this case, the comparison seems apt.

The right-wing in this country, as detailed at that secret May meeting, has declared the eradication of gay civil rights as its top priority for the next 10 years. They plan on using outdated stereotypes and class resentment to turn American society against us. They will, without any shame, use lies — like a plan to link gay rights with organized crime and the pornography trade — to turn us into pariahs.

Anyone with even a cursory knowledge of pre-World War II Germany will recognize those tactics as the same ones used to portray Jews as members of a gutter race whose supposed gains were everyone else's loss. Don't be mistaken. We are not talking about civil debates regarding the need for special laws to protect lesbians and gay men. We're talking about an all-out effort to portray you as

something evil and dangerous.

Much has been written recently about the meaning and importance of the Stonewall uprising 25 years ago during which an eclectic assortment of individuals decided that they would no longer tolerate police harassment of them because they were homosexual, a drag queen, or a combination of the two. How important those events were at the time is the subject of debate among historians.

Whatever the answers to these questions, what matters most about the Stonewall uprising is its symbolic value. It matters little whether Stonewall patrons wore dresses or chinos; what matters is that they stood up to a threat when doing so could have meant more so than today a loss of freedom, employment, and reputation.

Now the religious right is poised to attack you. Only it won't be with nightsticks and threats of arrest. It will be through an organized campaign of deception done 1990s-style with computers and mass-mailings. It will be done to ensure that if you are even slightly in the closet, you will stay there, never free to live your life openly.

Can they do it? Probably not in today's political climate. But times change, and political winds blow the other way. A concerted anti-gay campaign begun now and carried out for the next 10 years means that, if left without a serious challenge, today's eight-year-olds will come of voting age in the year 2004 having been weaned on a steady diet of hate and lies. How will they feel about your rights?

This battle — and it is a battle — can be won. We can win hearts and minds, even conservative Christian minds, over to what is just. But the relative handful of activists now working in our organizations cannot do it alone. Your presence is vital; your courage, essential. Come out. Get involved.

Celebrating with Stonewall 25 this weekend is a needed and deserved break for many of us. But after the party's over, who will get down to the business of making sure the legacy of those bar patrons from 25 years ago is not left to slip away under this planned onslaught? Will you? ▼

The Big Lie in far-right agenda

By FRANK RICH

JANE ALEXANDER defends the slopping around of AIDS-infecting blood!" shouted Rep. Robert Dornan of California on the House floor.

Jane Alexander? How did the se-date chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Arts land in this gory mess?

To understand that, you have to appreciate just how ruthlessly demagogues will play the gay card, especially in an election year. No matter how large the show of force by homosexual men and women in Sunday's Stonewall march in New York, gay-bashing remains a booming political sport for the right — a sure-fire way to whip up votes, campaign contributions and a national witch hunt in the grim tradition of Salem and Joe McCarthy.

Ms. Alexander's bizarre new predicament is a classic illustration of how bigotry spreads like an epidemic through the body politic. For two days last week, the House vote on the NEA budget was held hostage by the likes of Dornan and Rep. Clifford Stearns of Florida, who ranted about endowment support of an artist named Ron Athey, who allegedly exposed an audience to HIV-infected blood during a theatrical performance. When Ms. Alexander refused to disavow either Athey or the grant, she, too, became a target.

The chairwoman was right to stand her ground, and not just for honoring the principle of artistic freedom. The Dornan gang distorted the facts. Athey, who used at most \$150 in NEA funds from the

Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, did indeed cut a tattoo-like pattern into another man's back as part of a performance using ritual to dramatize his own struggle with suicide and healing. And he did blot the tiny amount of blood with paper towels.

But the blood was HIV-negative, not positive, and no blood or towels had any contact with anyone on stage or in the tiny audience, as verified by Minnesota health authorities.

But why let the facts stand in the way of a cause? Athey, who is himself HIV positive and openly gay, is just the homosexual punching bag the right was searching for now that Robert Mapplethorpe is dead. He was plucked from obscurity after a sensationalized, secondhand account of his performance appeared in *The Minneapolis Star-Tribune*. Now the artist is a villainous poster boy for a national fund-raising pitch by the Christian Action Network. Jesse Helms, Robert Byrd and Don Nickles are all wielding his performance as a club to threaten NEA funding in the Senate later this summer.

The politicians who smear Athey are after far bigger game than the minuscule federal arts appropriation, however. Their real aim is to win support for the far right's entire agenda by spreading homophobic panic. And the easiest way to foment that panic is to insinuate that gay men are conspiratorially spreading a lethal virus among heterosexuals.

Lest anyone doubt the effectiveness of this Big Lie technique, consider the case of another vilified gay

man who returned to the spotlight last week: David Acer, the Florida dentist who was accused by six patients of infecting them with AIDS.

As "60 Minutes" reported last Sunday, exposing evidence secured under the Freedom of Information Act, there is now strong reason to suspect that Acer was the innocent victim of both a witch hunt and an incomplete investigation by the Centers for Disease Control. A sworn videotaped deposition and a gynecological exam reveal that the dentist's most famous "victim," the late Kimberly Bergalis, though publicly declaring herself virginal, had a history of both sexual activity and venereal infection.

"I did not do anything wrong," said Ms. Bergalis in her famous congressional testimony of 1991 — an appearance promoted in part by Jesse Helms. Her case was used by the right then much as Ron Athey's Minneapolis performance is now — to frighten the ignorant into voting for politicians who promise to protect them from gay subversives out to destroy America.

Unlike Acer, Athey is around to speak for himself. But as the apolitical product of an evangelical Christian upbringing, he is more baffled than angry about his sudden notoriety on Capitol Hill. "None of the beauty of my art is being talked about," he says in genuine innocence, as if he might somehow still move the hearts of those in Washington who are busy turning his very name into a rallying cry of hate.

Frank Rich is a New York Times columnist.