

Affirmation

United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Concerns

Spring 1996

Volume 21

Number 1



Worship at General Conference

Affirmation will provide a special worship service during General Conference. The service will be during the noon lunch hour Friday, April 19. The location is still being finalized.

Bishop Fritz Mutti, of the Kansas Annual Conference, will be our preacher.

Further information, including the location of the service, will be publicized at the General Conference so that all who are interested may attend. If you want to know the location before arriving at General Conference, call Affirmation at 847-733-9590 and leave a message. You will be called back with the information.

If you can't be with us in person, please keep us in your prayers during this time.



General Conference Advocacy

Affirmation has adopted a platform entitled "And grace will lead us home." This last line from a verse of *Amazing Grace* evokes the "dangers, toils and snares" that have been our experience as lesbians, gay, bisexual and transexual people. We've known insults and rejection, loss of jobs and loss of children, denial of rights and evictions, bashings and murder. From the Appalachian Trail to Texas and Oregon, our people are being murdered because of their sexual orientation. The United Methodist Church *must* speak out against this.

People from Affirmation have helped plan a General Conference event to witness to the long-standing commitment of The United Methodist Church to human rights. Affirmation will call upon General Conference to honor that commitment by amending the Social Principles Statement in three ways:

1. Add the sentence "We support the basic rights of all persons to equal access to education, housing, employment, medical care, legal redress for grievances and physical protection," to the opening statement of Paragraph 72: The Social Community;

2. Add a new section to Paragraph 72: Rights Regardless of Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity;

3. Amend Paragraph 76, Our Social Creed, to include sexual orientation.

In addition, we call upon The United Methodist Church to adopt a resolution entitled: "Opposition to Discrimination Against Gay and Lesbian People."

...please turn to page two

**Don't Miss Affirmation's Spring Gathering
in Denver on April 13 & 14**

(See page three for details)

As before, we will coordinate our lobbying efforts with the Methodist Federation for Social Action. With them, we believe it is past time for the Church to remove all offensive and demeaning heterosexist passages and rules from the *Discipline*. We will certainly be forward to point out the contradictions between celebrating a commitment to human rights and retaining legislation that treats people quite differently based on the status of their sexual orientation. Nonetheless, our first line of advocacy is this: In a time when people are being killed because of their sexual orientation the Church must speak clearly and forcefully to defend human rights regardless of sexual orientation.

Jeanne Knepper



New Affirmation Council Member

We welcome Alice Knotts as a new member of the Affirmation Council. She fills one position of the five members at large serving now through April 1998.

Alice is co-coordinator of Shalom Ministries in Portland, Oregon. She brings to the Council a rich background in the United Methodist Church, its history, and has played an activist role regarding its social issues. ▽



General Conference Covenant Groups

An Affirmation General Conference tradition is being offered again in 1996! Our past experience has confirmed that small covenant groups are essential to our physical and spiritual well-being during any General Conference. Groups are formed to include those of us present and carrying out Affirmation's activities onsite, as well as those of you not in attendance but wanting to be part of the undergirding support network. Groups will form during Affirmation's pre-General Conference gathering April 13-14. If you want to be included in a Covenant Group but will not be in Denver for the April 13-14 gathering, please leave your name, address and phone number on Affirmation's phone line or E-Mail as follows: (Phone) 847/733-9590; or at our new E-Mail address: umaffirm@concentric.net.



Affirmation Goes on the Internet

With the coming of spring Affirmation is moving into the "Information Super Highway."

First our E-Mail address will be changing to umaffirm@concentric.net — note that's all lower case. To make communications with members and local chapters more effective we are building a database of E-Mail addresses. So we are encouraging everyone with an E-Mail address to let us know by sending us an E-Mail and saying Hi.

The second idea is to have an Affirmation Home Page on the World Wide Web (<http://www.concentric.net/~umaffirm> — again note all lower case). Our home page will include such items as the Affirmation Vision, Mission Statement, membership information, special events, Newsletters and information on General Conference. If any local chapters have home pages we can provide a link to their web page. If you are having problems with the home page or the new E-Mail address try paulhom@cris.com.

Paul Thompson
Communication/Evangelism Committee

**Affirmation's Spring 1996
Gathering, April 13-14
Denver, CO**

Enclosed with this Newsletter you will find the flyer and registration form for the Spring Gathering, Saturday, April 13, 12:30 P.M. through lunch on Sunday, April 14. We will be meeting at the Holiday Inn on Glenarm Place, which is also Affirmation's headquarters for the General Conference. National Affirmation Council member Richard Bates and other Austin, Texas, constituents are the design and leadership team for this gathering. In addition to exploring the theme "What is the future of the United Methodist Church. . .What are we modeling to our Children?", participants will also hear about Affirmation's work nationwide and details of its presence during General Conference. Persons planning to stay for part or all of General Conference will have opportunity to form small covenant groups that will continue throughout General Conference as a primary source of support and sustenance. Other persons not present for General Conference or the April 13-14 Gathering may choose to link with one of the Covenant Groups (see related article elsewhere in this newsletter). ***Hope to see you April 13-14! ▽***

Camp Sister Spirit

A recent newsletter from the Camp sets forth their Mission as follows: (in part)

"The mission of Sister Spirit Incorporated is to make available information, education, referral, advocacy and meeting space regarding social issues. We believe in creating a cooperative space for learning non-oppressive lifeways. Camp Sister Spirit is a residential meeting space where we utilize an educational experiential learning process to live and learn the interrelatedness of social issues."

For more information write:
Camp Sister Spirit, P.O. Box 12,
Ovett, MS 39464. ▽

Affirmation seeks to:

- coordinate advocacy with supportive United Methodist groups;
- respond to opportunities for ecumenical and interfaith witness and action;
- sponsor education and information services;
- inform members of activities in the church that may be of interest and offer suggestions as to possible responses.

I am interested in knowing more about:

- ☐ Becoming a member of national Affirmation and receive the quarterly newsletter.
- ☐ Upcoming national Affirmation Gatherings
- ☐ Affirmation groups or events in my region or city.
- ☐ Starting a local group.
- ☐ I want to provide financial support for the work of Affirmation.

I enclosed a donation of \$ _____

Name _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Annual Conference _____

**All Affirmation correspondence is mailed discreetly.
All contributions to national Affirmation are tax deductible.**

Mail to:

Affirmation
United Methodist for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns
P.O. Box 1021
Evanston, Illinois 60204

1996/97 NEWSLETTER DEADLINES

DEADLINE DATE		PUBLICATION DATE
May 15, 1996	SUMMER	June 15, 1996
July 10, 1996	FALL	August 10, 1996
October 15, 1996	WINTER	November 15, 1996
February 1, 1997	SPRING	February 15, 1997

All submissions should be sent to:
George F. Hodgdon
Newsletter Editor
248 Camp St., Unit H-1
West Yarmouth, MA 02673



Now Hear This!

Hear Ye! Call for Nominations for Council

Want to be a key player in opportunities for gay/lesbian/bisexual persons in the church? Know someone who has shown the ability to do so? Then please volunteer or nominate that qualified person to serve on Affirmation's Council.

Please have the nominee get in touch with either Council co-coordinator Ellie Charlton (916/989-2522) or John Calhoun (405/528-1177), or write to the PO box. Five positions on the Council will be filled at the April membership meeting in Denver, including four at-large members and one female member from the Western Region. ▽



We will have new T-Shirts for the General Conference highlighting our theme of "and grace will lead us home."

Shirts will be in many different colors in all adult sizes. They will be available at our hospitality room in Denver during the General Conference. Cost will be \$12.

If you would like a shirt but won't be in Denver, you can order them by sending your size and \$12 per shirt plus \$3 each to the address below. Checks should be made payable to "Affirmation."

Also, making a comeback will be the T-shirt saying "Self-avowed, Practicing United Methodist." Again, cost is \$12 plus \$3 if ordered via mail.

A few T-shirts from the Affirmation 20th Anniversary meeting are still available. The shirts are in a medium aqua color with a small left chest design. They are only available in sizes L and XL. Cost is \$10 plus \$3 handling.

To order any of these shirts send name, address, sizes and quantity (and identify which shirt(s) you want) to:

Judy WestLee
5705 James Ave. So.
Minneapolis, MN 55419

(And don't forget to enclose your check payable to "Affirmation.")

All mail orders for T-shirts will be filled only AFTER the end of General Conference. ▽



Come Home

On November 11, Jeanne Knepper, speaking as co-spokesperson for Affirmation, addressed the United Methodist Pre-1996 General Conference Press briefing with these remarks:

It is an amazing thing, to be standing here to address you, on several levels. One, you're still here. It's been a long time with a lot of information, but you're here, loyal and responsible to the end, showing your love for this church of ours by your faithful steady-

ness. Second, Affirmation's still here, still living out our loyal, if difficult, relationship with the church that is our home.

Affirmation will be in Denver for General Conference. As before, we'll publish a daily newsletter, host worship and celebration, and create a space for information and retreat.

As before, we'll ask this church we share to remove passages that demean or discriminate from its policies and social principles. We do not ask this naively or without knowledge of what has gone before.

Yet, we come to you with courage, hope and confidence, not in ourselves or in our own powers of persuasion. No, we come to you confident in the power of God's grace. That is our sole platform: Grace Will Lead Us Home.

You know the verse, from that most loved hymn:

"Through many dangers, toils and snares,

I have already come;
'tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home."

We believe that it's time for The United Methodist Church to come home.

We've been wandering in a wilderness of alienation, judgment, and estrangement too long: come home.

We've devoted precious human resources to defending the gates against people who seek to answer God's call: come home.

We've been quarreling over the jots and tittles of definitions and disciplinary paragraphs while a great world waits for the words of grace: come home.

Beloved colleagues, come home.

Come home to the gospel, preaching the good news
please turn to page eleven...

Reconciling Congregations Surpass 100

(Dec. 7, 1995)--The Reconciling Congregation Program reached a milestone in November as Pacific Beach U.M. Church in San Diego became the 100th United Methodist congregation to publicly welcome all persons, regardless of sexual orientation. This national movement, begun in 1984, now encompasses 103 Reconciling Congregations. In addition, 11 campus ministries have declared themselves "reconciling."

...a record year

for the program...

This has been a record year for the program with 18 new Reconciling Congregations and 6 new Reconciling Campus Ministries so far in 1995. "The tide is turning in The United Methodist Church," observed program coordinator Mark Bowman. "Several hundred more churches and campus ministries are considering becoming 'reconciling.' More and more United Methodists recognize that gay and lesbian persons and their families are being driven away from churches and want to invite them in instead."

A new program initiative, the *Open the Doors* campaign, directs this message of welcome and hospitality to The United Methodist Church's General Conference in April, 1996. This 1,000-member assembly, which meets every four years to write church law, has adopted unwelcoming policies toward gay and lesbian persons and their families in the past. Reconciling Congregations are calling on the General Conference to "open the doors" of United Methodist churches to all persons.

More than 2,000 indi-

viduals have enrolled as Reconciling United Methodists so far in the campaign, toward a goal of 9,600 by April, 1996. "Knock-Ins"--held in October in New York, Atlanta, Chicago, Denver, Fort Worth and San Francisco--trained 160 activists to carry out campaign activities in their communities. Persons are meeting with General Conference delegates urging them to advocate church policies to end discrimination against lesbian and gay persons and their families.

"*Open the Doors* is unleashing a ground swell in the church," noted campaign coordinator James Preston. "Reconciling United Methodist cards and inquiries arrive every day from dozens of persons who've just heard about the campaign. Stories of church doors being closed upon gay, lesbian and bisexual United Methodists and their families abound. Our message is, quite simply, that Jesus calls us to 'open the doors.'"

More information about the Reconciling Congregation Program and the *Open the Doors* campaign is available from: RCP, 3801 N. Keeler Ave., Chicago, IL 60641; 312/736-5526 (voice) or 312/736-5475 (fax). ▽



Request for Daily Newsletter at General Conference

During General Confer-

ence, Affirmation produces a daily newsletter which headlines the on-going events. This newsletter, which is entitled *AFFIRM!*, is passed out to the delegates every morning before the start of the daily sessions. As in the past, *AFFIRM!* will be available to all by mail. Anyone contributing \$25 or more for our presence at General Conference will receive all 10 copies of *AFFIRM!*

Write to:

Affirmation: United Methodist
P.O. Box 1021

Evanston, IL 60204

or call 847/733-9590.

AFFIRM! will also be available on the Internet. For more information, E-mail address is:

umaffirm@concentric.net. ▽



Council Officers and Staff Changes

Ellie Charlton, Council Co-Coordinator, has assumed the position of General Conference coordinator. John Calhoun has agreed to become the national treasurer. Board member Paul Thompson has volunteered to do data management and mailings, replacing part-time paid staff person Greg Wise, who has taken on greater demands of professional work in his home city. (And who contributed many hours as a volunteer beyond what he was paid for—many thanks, Greg!) ▽

Affirmation National Council

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Austin, TX
512/451-2329

Jeanne Barnett

Folsom, CA
916/989-2522

Robert Bryant

Atlanta, GA

John R. Calhoun

Oklahoma City, OK
405/528-1177

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916/489-2340

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612/824-5021

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847/475-4362

Judy Cara Hicks

Evanston, IL
847/864-7047

Rick Huskey

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202/232-0010

Jeanne Knepper

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503/760-4215

Nancy Levan

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209/432-6107

Ann Freeman Price

Nyack, NY
914/353-7522

Rebecca Richards

Baltimore, MD
410/426-3818

Paul Thompson

Studio City, CA
818/760-6633

Judith WestLee

Minneapolis, MN
612/927-4568

Mark Wilson

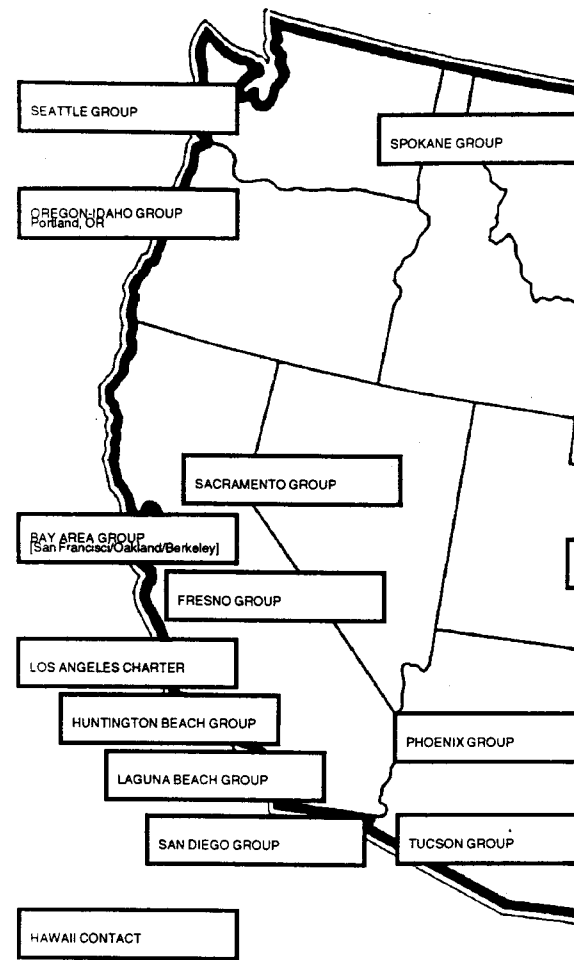
Tuscaloosa, AL
205/752-5799

Sam Wilson

Dallas, TX
214/426-6188

One woman in New York

One woman in Tennessee



Nashville Affirmation In 1996 the group will meet on the 4th Wednesday in Jan., March, May, July, Sept. and Nov. at 7 p.m. for a meal and fellowship either at a local restaurant or in someone's home. During the 4th Wednesday in Feb., April, June, August, October, and December, the group will meet at 7:30 p.m. at Edgehill UMC, 1502 Edgehill Ave. for an evening of forum and dialogue with an invited guest. In February, Atty. Abby Rubenfeld will be their guest, to talk about the current status of court procedures and related issues. For information about monthly meetings and other activities write to Affirmation, P.O. Box 24213, Nashville, TN 37202 or call 615-792-3534.

Dallas Affirmation Reverend Kay Hunter was the speaker at the August General Meeting speaking on "Experience Your Vision" The Dallas group participated in the Gay Pride Parade in September. The group usually meets every fourth Monday at 7:00 pm, at Northaven UMC, 11211 Preston Road at Northaven Road. The Third Sunday Lunches are regular gatherings of Affirmation members and their friends. For additional information write to P.O. Box 225831, Dallas, Texas 75222-5831.

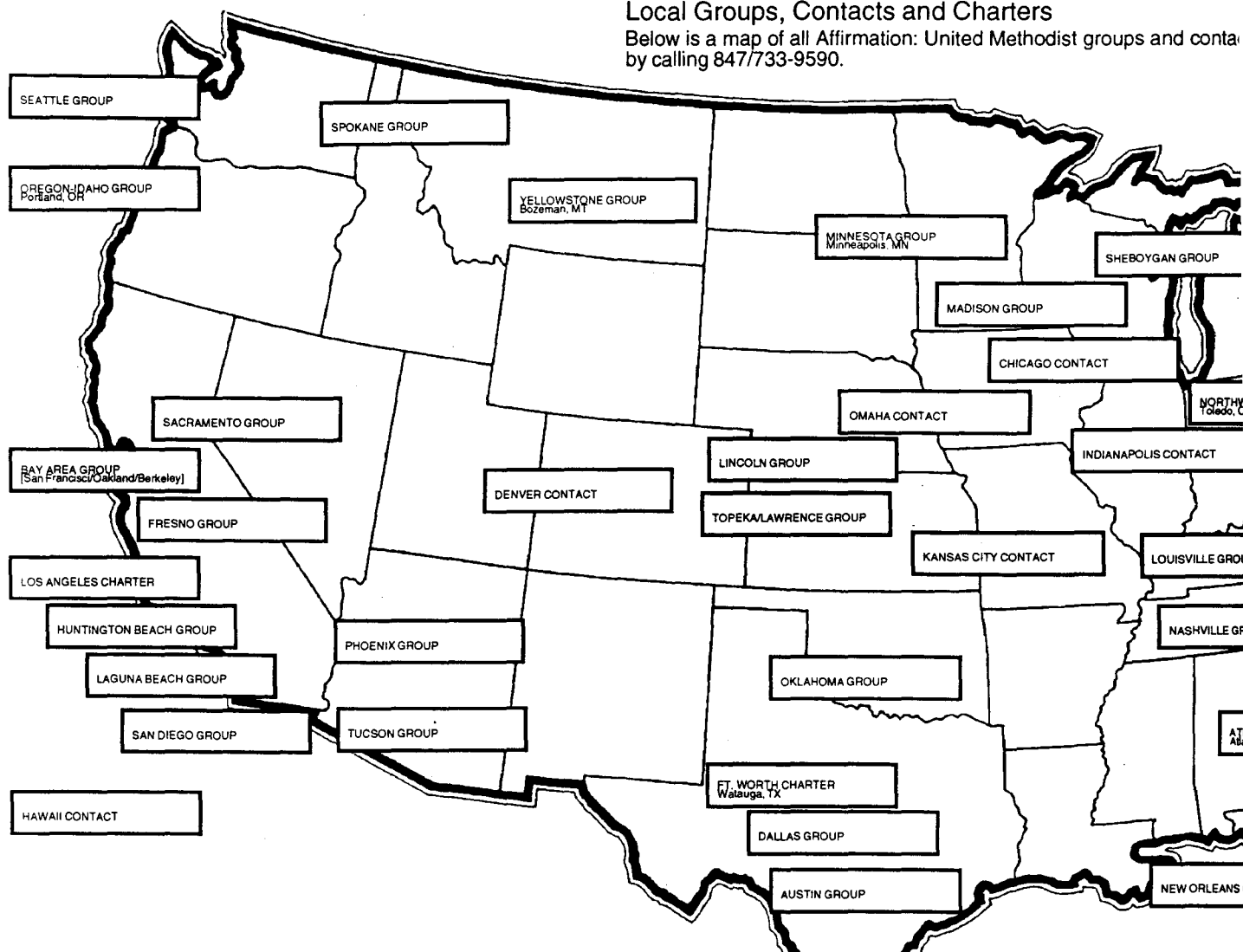
Affirmation Los Angeles The Lazarus Project director, Reverend Donn Crail, spoke at their November

Meeting. They welcomed the San Diego district. The San Diego district's Beach UMC voted to be in the California-Pa. The Rev. Beverly Sh... Affirmation first... Affirmation Los A... second Sunday of... programs, worship, fellowship at Holman. For more information 691283, West Hollywood 213/969-4664.

Austin Affirmation Chapter has ceased... energies will go... program in our loc...

Local Groups, Contacts and Charters

Below is a map of all Affirmation: United Methodist groups and contacts by calling 847/733-9590.



LOCAL NEWS FROM AROUND THE

Affirmation Reverend Kay is the speaker at the August Meeting speaking on "Be Your Vision" The Dallas group participated in the Gay Pride September. The group meets every fourth Monday at Northaven UMC, 11211 Northaven Road. The Friday Lunches are regular of Affirmation members friends. For additional information write to P.O. Box 225831, Dallas, TX 75222-5831.

Los Angeles The project director, Reverend [Name], spoke at their November

Meeting. They welcomed the first RC in the San Diego district when Pacific Beach UMC voted to become the 12th RC in the California-Pacific Conference. The Rev. Beverly Shamana addressed Affirmation first meeting of 1996. Affirmation Los Angeles meets the second Sunday of each month for programs, worship, refreshments and fellowship at Holman UMC at 7:00 p.m. For more information write to P.O. Box 691283, West Hollywood, CA 90069 or call 213/969-4664.

Austin Affirmation The Austin Chapter has ceased to exist. All energies will go toward the RC program in our local congregations.

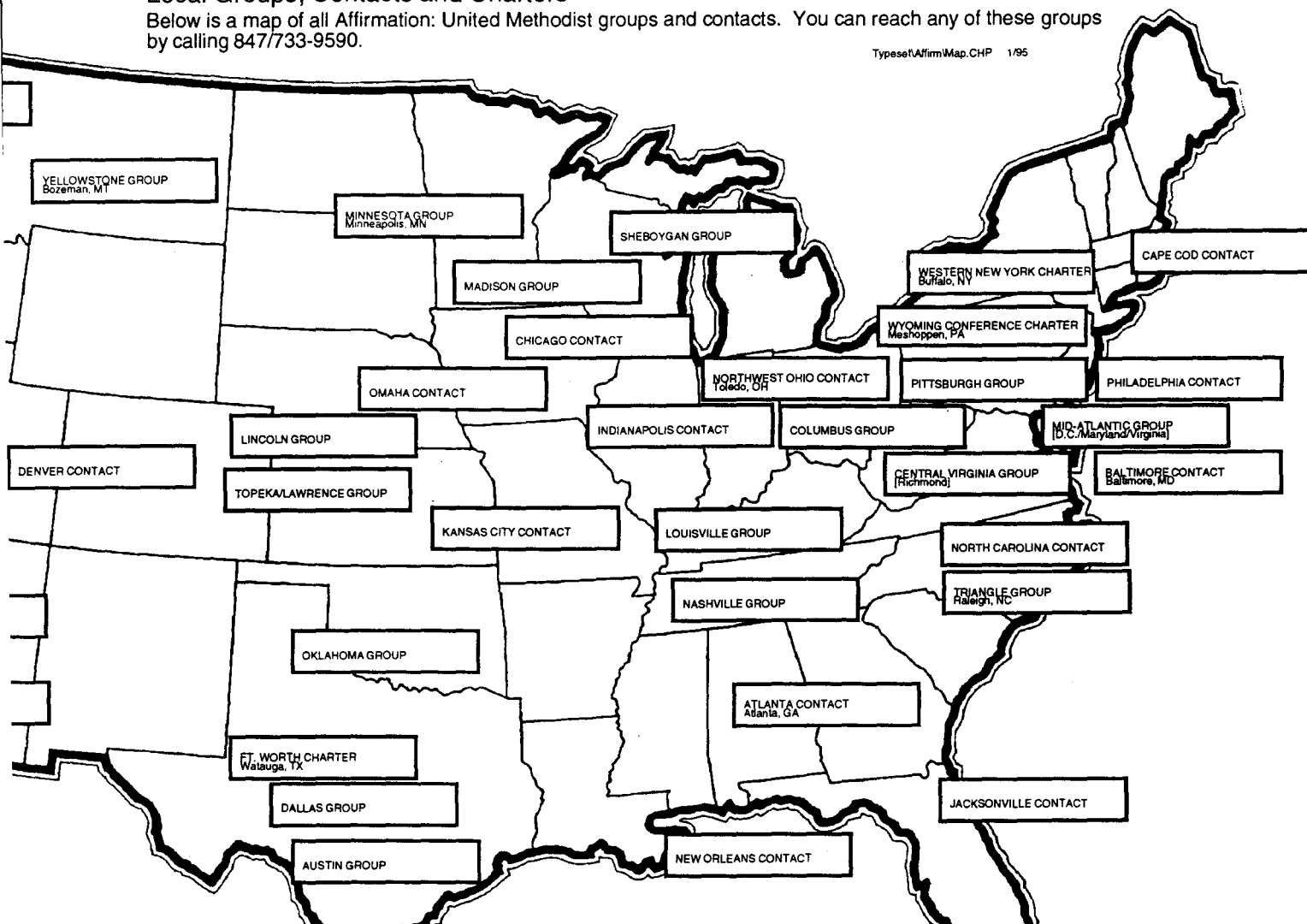
Affirmation Austin, begun in August 1987, has done a lot of good work in just eight short years. Trinity UMC is their first RC with St. Luke and Grace UMC in the process. For additional information contact Richard at 7403 Shoal Creek Blvd. Austin, TX 78757.

Shalom Ministries Oregon, Idaho and Washington residents are invited to the Building the Spirit Retreat Feb. 23-24 in Corvallis, Oregon. There are a variety of support groups are held throughout the week by Shalom Ministries. For more information about Shalom Ministries write to P.O. Box 66147, Portland, OR 97266 or call (503)-760-4215.

Local Groups, Contacts and Charters

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LOCAL NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

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Cape Cod Affirmation meets on the first Sunday of each month at 3:00 p.m. at the Osterville UMC. Following the meeting the group goes to a local restaurant for a light Sunday supper. For more information write George Hodgdon, 248 Camp Street, Unit H-1, West Yarmouth, MA 02673 or call him at 508-771-8609.

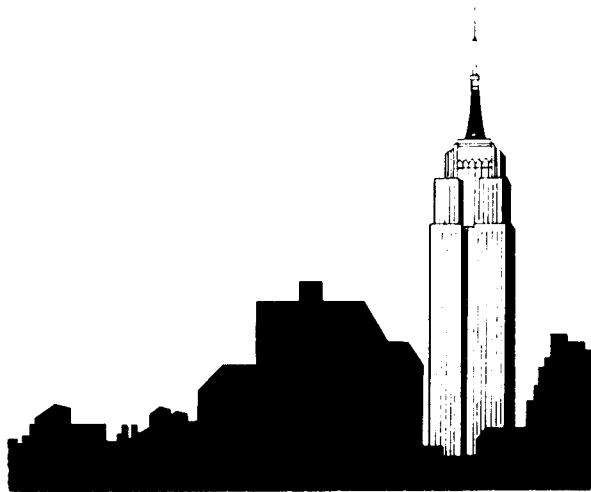
If your group was not mentioned in this issue, its because I haven't heard from you. Please send a copy of your Newsletter or information about how, when, and where your group meets. Be sure to include a contact person, address or phone number. You can send all information to Fritz Schultz, 801 Cole Street Apt. 2, San Francisco, CA 94117. 415-753-1354.

Affirmation Council Meeting in Atlanta

General Conference was heavy on the agenda at the Affirmation Council meeting January 13-16, 1996, in Atlanta. The Witness Committee arranged for Affirmation to share space at General Conference with three other groups: Methodists for Social Action (MFSA); Reconciling Congregation Program (RCP); and the Yellow Ribbon (women's caucus).

Affirmation will hold a Pre-General Conference event, Saturday noon through Sunday noon, April 13-14, to which supporters are invited. The event will brief people on issues and strategies for General Conference. (Check out the article and registration form elsewhere in this newsletter.) A worship service and evening celebration banquet with awards will round out our presence at General Conference.

The Evangelism Committee is coordinating Affirmation's daily newsletter for General Conference. It will be handed out to delegates to educate folks and address critical issues. Copies will be made available by mail for a fee. Local press contacts are being made in advance so our message will be loud and clear.



Beyond General Conference, the Affirmation Program Committee is working hard to plan the fall gathering which will be held in **New York City**, October 18-20, 1996. This is one week later than the usual Columbus Day weekend because there is a major display of the AIDS Memorial Quilt in Washington, D.C. over Columbus Day weekend. People may want to make an East Coast week of it by going to D.C. one weekend and move on to NYC sometime during the week to attend the Affirmation meeting.

Information on NYC sightseeing and inexpensive housing arrangements such as a Youth Hostel and other options will be made available

before the event. Set your vacation dates **NOW!**

Several at-large members of the Council have finished their tenure as of the April meeting so the Nomination Committee is developing a slate for action at the spring meeting. Ellie Charlton has decided to step down a year ahead of schedule and John Calhoun has agreed to serve as treasurer.

The Stewardship Committee reported that finances are in the black although General Conference expenses will be high and donations are needed to meet the need. Greg Wise, part-time paid staff person for Affirmation resigned. The Council accepted the offer of Paul Thompson to serve as a volunteer staff person for Affirmation.

The Council spent significant time reflecting on the work and movement of Affirmation nation-wide. Eight years have passed since Affirmation did a long-range planning process. The Council will be doing an assessment over the coming months and a report will be brought in at the fall meeting.

The Evangelism Committee will be developing a flyer with articles that can be reproduced in local group newsletters. Newsletter editors, watch for this!

The Council celebrated the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. and grieved the murders of Michelle Abdill and Roxanne Ellis, lesbian women who were United Methodist members of a Reconciling Congregation in Oregon. ▽



Affirmation to Host Celebration Banquet in Denver on April 22

Affirmation is planning a joyous *Celebration Banquet* on Monday evening, April 22 at General Conference in Denver. The festivities will be held in The Marriott Hotel at Denver City Center, which is just a few blocks away from the Denver Convention Center. You can look forward to a special evening which will include an award presentation, a special after-dinner program and a wonderful meal. You won't want to miss this very special event! Tickets will be available for purchase at General Conference from Affirmation Council members and in the Affirmation Hospitality Suite located at The Holiday Inn. Since this is also a major fund raiser for Affirmation, your donations would be very much appreciated, even if you are unable to attend General Conference. Donations can be sent to *Affirmation, P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204*. Please mark your check "Celebration Banquet 1996." ▽

UM Clergywoman Says She Will Stop Speaking on Homosexuality

UMNS) -- A United Methodist clergywoman who publicly revealed herself to be a lesbian last summer said she will decline any speaking engagements about the issue of homosexuality.

"...I have decided to limit my public speaking...to other issues...."

The Rev. Jeanne Audrey Powers, associate general secretary with the UM Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, explained she is trying to avoid any perceived conflict with denominational regulations.

In a formal statement, Powers said she considered the option of taking early retirement. "However, because I have been vocationally committed to the unity of the church and because I care deeply about the legislation being sub-

mitted by the general commission to General Conference, I have decided to limit my public speaking through General Conference to other issues on the ecumenical and interreligious agenda," she said.

The Rev. Bruce Robbins, the commission's general secretary, issued a short letter about her statement on Jan 3. He pointed out that he and Bishop William Boyd Grove of Albany, N.Y., the commission's president, "have defended her right to tell the truth about her sexual orientation."

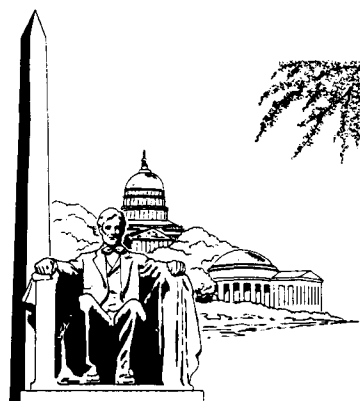
Leaders of the denomination's General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) have affirmed the commission's belief that Powers' revelation does not put it in violation of the *Book of Discipline*.

Paragraph 906.12 of the *Discipline* states "that no

board, agency, committee, commission or council shall give United Methodist funds to any 'gay' caucus or group or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality."

However, GCFA officials "did raise concerns" that continued public discussion about homosexuality by Powers might be viewed as promotion of such acceptance, Robbins said.

The clergywoman pointed out in her statement that "what constitutes 'promotion,' which has plagued the church for two decades, continues to trouble our denomination." ▽



**Go With Affirmation
to Washington, DC &
New York City!!!
October 11-13 through
October 18-20, 1996**

There are new developments in Affirmation's Fall 1996

activities! Since the time you received the last newsletter we learned of the Names Project Quilt Weekend scheduled for October 11-13 in Washington, DC. We have set in motion joint planning with Mid-Atlantic Affirmation toward a shared presence during the Quilt Weekend. We hope to jointly provide a hospitality space for quiet rest, fellowship and dialogue throughout the weekend. We will participate in the ecumenical worship to occur at the National Cathedral. We want also to jointly plan a designated one-time gathering sometime during the weekend, for United Methodists who've come for the Quilt Weeken. Watch for details in the next newsletter! ▽



**Fall Gathering in
New York City
Rescheduled for the
Weekend of October 18-20**

The New York site team has begun their work and will include exciting extra options
...continued on next page

Affirmation Newsletter

Published by the Evangelism
Committee of Affirmation
David Gunnell, Chairperson
George F. Hodgdon, Editor

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Affirmation: United Methodists
for Lesbian, Gay and
Bisexual Concerns
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Affirmation Newsletter is published quarterly and is mailed to every member of Affirmation.

The official views of Affirmation are stated by the Co-Spokespersons.

Opinions offered in signed columns, letters and articles are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Affirmation.

We reserve the right to edit or reject any material submitted for publication.

from page nine...

...Fall Gathering, N.Y.C.

for people wanting to come to New York City directly from the Quilt weekend. The program design team is planning around the theme "Building/Exploring a Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Theology of Liberation." Details of the full weekend and options for the preceding week will be announced in the next newsletter. **See you in Washington and/or New York City!! ▽**



From Chaos to Reconconciliation

John Linscheid starts off an article in a recent issue of *The Other Side* ("Creating Companionship," September-October 1995) "I suppose it was James Weldon Johnson's poem 'God's Trombones' that first suggested to me that the void of chaos might be identified with God's loneliness. 'I'm lonely--I'll make me a world.'"

Did God create our world because of loneliness? And did God create homosexuals to help fill that loney void? Mr. Linscheid's article is a reflection on the Creation Story as found in Genesis, and he is talking about the void and the darkness which existed before God started out on his great adventure. He goes on to say "We, too, who are a queer people, have hovered in darkness—alone." He relates God's loneliness to the loneliness felt by so many homosexuals.

One of the great themes of the Creation Story is that everything God created is good: "God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good" (1:31). And, of course, this includes homosexuals as part of God's good creation.

There is an old man who once thought (because of a "vision") that he was created *homosexual* because God wanted him to bring other homosexuals to Jesus Christ. Following the argument that Jesus' main purpose is to reconcile the world to God, this man now realizes that God has created *all* homosexuals for some very special reasons. Perhaps the greatest of these is to reconcile the world to God. Not that this is an *exclusive task* to be performed by homosexuals only. Nor is it the only reason that God created a certain number of men and women homosexuals. No. But perhaps it is the most important task for us, as members of Affirmation, to carry out. Perhaps it is because God has made homosexuals capable of "tuning in" to God easier than for most heterosexuals. The homosexual's "spiritual hearing" is more acute.

According to Genesis, God created the world out of chaos. And all that God created God proclaimed "good." But there are times when we, the inhabitants of God's good creation, think that the chaos has never been overcome. It is interesting to note that in the same issue of *The Other Side* there is an article entitled "The World According to MTV: Music videos and the aesthetics of chaos."

Well, with MTV here, who needs reconciling? The truth is that the world *needs* reconciling—the world needs to be reconciled to God. Okay, if God created the world out of chaos many millions of years ago, why can't he straighten it out today? Sure, that would be the simple way out of the mess we have made of things, and most of us would just like to sit back and let God do just that. But that's not the way God works—he depends upon *us* to clean up the mess that we humans have caused. And that's where the members of Affirmation come in. We have some of those special talents given to "queer" people just for this kind of job. It is a job for each one of us

...please turn to page eleven

...from page ten "From Chaos..."

regardless of our education, financial situation, success or lack of it. Of course, Affirmation has already started the reconciling process through the Reconciling Congregation Program, but more remains to be done. Is this *our* challenge from God? Evidently God likes to use the humble, the dispossessed, the outcasts of the world for his work. Homosexuals can probably be categorized in this way. This is our challenge—can we meet it? Can we succeed? Let's try! ▽

...from page four "Come Home"

of the love of God in Jesus Christ to everyone.

Come home to our Christian calling: proclaiming good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of vision to those who do not see and freedom to the oppressed.

Come home to the wisdom of our Wesleyan polity: evaluating pastors by gifts, grace and the fruits of their ministry.

Come home to evangelism.

Come home to mission.

Come home to grace.

Without grace, we won't span the chasms that rend our community. Without grace, we won't repair the rips in the fabric of our church. Without grace, our fragile human institutions will shatter, will rip to shreds. Without grace, our memories for hurt are too long, our suspicions too high, our demands too impossible.

Thank God, grace abounds, whether we deserve it or not. Grace can enable people who have labeled each other to welcome each other. Grace can clear our minds, so that we can see God at work in each other. Grace can transform our awkward attempts to mend the torn fabric into a beautiful embroidery of reconciliation.

Grace, and the love of God, turned the cross into an emblem of love.

Grace, and the love of Christ, turned the persecutor Saul into the evangelist Paul.

Grace, and the love of the Spirit, turned slave trader John Newton into the author of that hymn to Amazing Grace that we know so well.

Grace can heal our broken church.

Affirmation comes to General Conference proclaiming and celebrating the grace of God. We believe that our brothers and sisters

in Christ will respond to God's grace with warm hearts and open hands.

Alone, we could not persuade you to open the doors, embrace your sisters and brothers in the faith and stand together to counter oppression. But we are not alone.

Alone, we could not decide, all of us, to set aside our own painful histories and reach out to embrace and heal the wounds of our colleagues in the faith. But we are not alone.

Alone, we could not overcome our fears, let go of control, and step away from the worn pathways of judgment, bitterness and estrangement. But we are not alone.

We are caught, held, tumbled and wrapped in the grace and love of God, for whom nothing is impossible. In our lives, we know this. As deeply as we know anything at all, we know this. So we proclaim it, celebrate it and sing it out as our resolve and invitation:

"'tis grace hath led [us] thus far,
and grace will lead [us] home."

Brothers and sisters, let's go home.

Reprinted from the Nov. 1995 issue of Shalom to You the newsletter of Shalom Ministries. ▽



*Special Thanks to
the members of
Affirmation Council
for sending articles
for this issue
right on time!
the editor.*

FINANCE REPORT

As Affirmation prepares for our presence at General Conference in April, I am pleased to report that we are current on all obligations.

Our staff person, Greg Wise, resigned in the fall as he had another opportunity to pursue at the same time the Stewardship Committee was having difficulty finding the resources to pay the part-time salary. I wish to thank Greg for his excellent performance and organizational skills in this role. Affirmation has accepted the offer of Paul Thompson to perform the tasks of this staff position on a volunteer basis. Paul (as does Greg) has polished computer skills to enable Affirmation to further develop our database, enter the World Wide Web, and develop our e-mail capabilities.

A fund-raising letter was mailed to our entire mailing list in late January. All funds raised will be used for our presence at General Conference. Our only other obligations between now and the end of the fiscal year (5/30) are one more newsletter and recurring phone and other communication costs.

After General Conference the annual pledge drive will begin to raise money for a new fiscal year.

Your financial assistance to Affirmation is critical to our continued work changing the Church and providing Gatherings and the Affirmation newsletter.

*Sam Wilson, Chair
Stewardship Committee*

Affirmation Pledge Commitment

My contribution to Affirmation's presence at the 1996 General Conference is:

% of Budget	10%	5%	2.5%	1%	.5%	Other
\$\$\$	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1100	<input type="checkbox"/> \$550	<input type="checkbox"/> \$225	<input type="checkbox"/> \$110	<input type="checkbox"/> \$55	<input type="checkbox"/> \$_____

Please make checks payable to: "Affirmation"

Name _____

Address _____

Your donation is tax deductible.

Mail to:
Affirmation
P.O. Box 1021
Evanston, IL 60204

COME TO DENVER



April 13-14, 1996, for Affirmation's Pre-General Conference Gathering

Meeting Site: Affirmation's General Conference Headquarters, Holiday Inn, 1450 Glenarm Place, Denver, Colorado

Housing: Holiday Inn (return enclosed General Conference Housing Reservation form by March 1)
Private Housing (indicate on form below, by March 15)

Begins: 12:30 P.M. Saturday, April 13 (no lunch, snack food available)

Ends: With lunch Sunday, April 14

Registration: By March 15 (if you want private housing) or March 31 (otherwise)

Registration Fee:	<i>Income</i>	<i>Fee</i>
	Student/Subsistence	\$20
	Under \$20,000/yr	\$35
	\$20,001-\$30,000/yr	\$50
	\$30,001-\$40,000/yr	\$75
	\$Over \$40,000/yr	\$85

Theme: Since it is the children and youth of any group who decide its future, the programming committee decided to explore the topic of "What is the future of The United Methodist Church — What are we modeling to our children?" We as a church are a family and interact in similar ways. We will take a look at how our church family interacts on local levels and as a denomination. How functional or dysfunctional are we? Those gathered in Denver will explore this in small and larger group settings. We will also hear reports of Affirmation's work nation-wide and its General Conference presence plans.

Tear off here.....

Mail to P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204 or E-Mail umaffir@concentric.net

NAME _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

- ☐ I desire Private Housing (cannot be guaranteed after March 15)
- ☐ I will stay at the Holiday Inn (use enclosed General Conference Housing form)
- ☐ I will otherwise arrange my own housing
- I have enclosed the registration fee of \$ _____
- I have enclosed an additional amount to enable another to attend \$ _____
- TOTAL enclosed (Check payable to "Affirmation") \$ _____

General Conference Housing Reservations

for

**Affirmation: United Methodists for
Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Concerns**

**Methodist Federation for
Social Action**

Reconciling Congregation Program

Women's Caucus

These four United Methodist groups are sharing meeting and hospitality space during the 1996 General Conference in Denver at the Holiday Inn-Downtown (two blocks from the conference site). Housing for volunteers is also being reserved cooperatively. Volunteers participating in the witnesses of any of these groups should use this form for requesting housing reservations. If you have questions, call 312/736-5526.

VOLUNTEER NAME _____ DAYTIME PHONE (____) _____

ADDRESS _____ CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

I will be volunteering with (check all that apply):

____ Affirmation

____ RCP

____ MFSA

____ Women's Caucus

Please reserve housing for me for these nights:

____ Mon. 4/15 ____ Tues. 4/16 ____ Wed. 4/17 ____ Thurs. 4/18 ____ Fri. 4/19 ____ Sat. 4/20 ____ Sun. 4/21
____ Mon. 4/22 ____ Tues. 4/23 ____ Wed. 4/24 ____ Thurs. 4/25 ____ Fri. 4/26 ____ Sat. 4/27

I prefer this housing option:

1) HOLIDAY INN 1450 Glenarm Place (headquarters)

____ single room @ \$72

CHECK: ____ single-king OR ____ double-double

____ share with 1 person @ \$36 each

CHECK: ____ single-king OR ____ double-double

____ share with 3 persons @ \$18 each (two double beds)

Here are my other housing preferences:

ROOMMATE(S): _____

If not indicated, you will be assigned roommate(s) per housing option requested.

____ NONSMOKING ROOM or ____ SMOKING ROOM

OTHER SPECIAL NEEDS: _____

Here is payment for my housing: ____ (nights) X \$ ____ (rate) = \$ ____ (total cost)

____ Enclosed is my check (payable to Reconciling Congregation Program).

OR ____ Charge \$ ____ to my VISA/MASTERCARD # _____
Expiration ____/____ Signature _____

NOTE: Housing is limited so make your reservation early. Include payment for at least three nights. Payment in full must be received by March 1, 1996--the deadline for housing reservations.

RETURN OPTION 1 RESERVATIONS TO: Reconciling Congregation Program,
3801 N. Keeler Ave., Chicago, IL 60642 OR FAX TO: 312/736-5475.

2) HOUSING IN SOMEONE'S HOME (as available)

____ I would prefer housing in someone's home, recognizing that I will be responsible for providing my own local transportation.

**RETURN OPTION 2 RESERVATIONS WITH YOUR AFFIRMATION
SPRING GATHERING REGISTRATION FORM! Please note that these
reservations must be received by MARCH 1st also.**

Support AFFIRMATION at General Conference '96

Purchase your RAINBOW scarf or stole by
sending a check or money order to

"AFFIRMATION"
c/o Ellie Charlton
130 Shadowbrook Drive
Folsom, Ca 95630

The rainbow reminds us that we are banded together and
each color is important and a vital part of the rainbow.

In our communities, a rainbow
hung in a church or meeting
place welcomes the stranger.

AFFIRMATION volunteers handing out the daily
"Affirmation Newsletter" will wear these scarves.

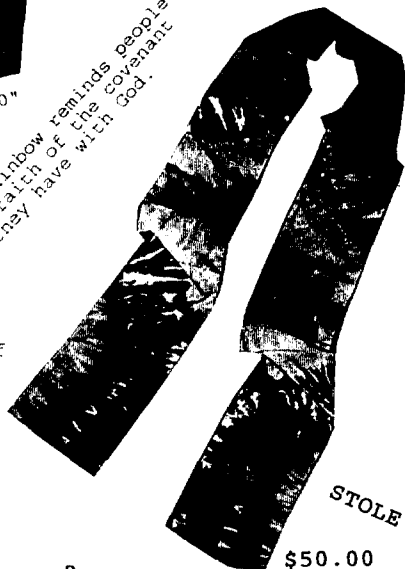
SCARF
25.00

scarf size: approx. 30" x 30" or 15" x 60"

The rainbow reminds people
of faith of the covenant
they have with God.

The rainbow worn on your clothing can be
like a welcoming embrace and a reminder of
the solidarity we share with another.

As our various liberation
movements have grown and matured,
the rainbow continues to remind
us that we share goals and dreams.



STOLE

\$50.00

Buy one for your favorite pastor!

Rainbow scarfs (worn by volunteers handing out the daily
Affirmation Newsletter) will be available following
General Conference. Order yours NOW!! \$25.00

Please include your address
and phone number. Be sure
to specify the items wanted.