

Affirmation

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United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Concerns

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Goodbye, Randy, We'll Miss You

We didn't formally introduce you to R. Wesley Hagan, our Male Co-Spokesperson, and now we must say goodbye to Randy.

Randall "Rusty" Wesley Hagan, 47, of Arlington, VA, died June 24, 2002, of complications from cancer. Besides being our Male Co-Spokesperson, Randy was co-moderator of Called Out, an e-mail ministry for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered Christians. He was also active in Washington, DC's Different Drummers and a member of Lambda Sci-Fi.

Randy was born in Peoria, IL. He graduated from the University of Southern Illinois at Carbondale with a BA in theater. He moved to the Washington, DC area in the early 1980's, where he worked as a database administrator and web designer for government, education and scientific organizations. Randy was also active in the Reconciling Ministries Network and a member of Dumbarton UMC in Washington, DC. He was also active in the DC Metropolitan Community Church.

One of the Council members' clearest memories of Randy is from our Council meeting this

past January in Oakland, CA. It was the last meeting Randy could attend due to his failing health. He came to Oakland with his cane, his oxygen tank on wheels, his complexion ashen. His hair was a memory. His pixy brown eyes smiled at us from behind a sign he brought with him. The sign was a quote by Harvey Milk, the slain openly gay San Francisco supervisor: "Ya gotta give 'em hope!" Randy kept reminding Council members of that sign.

Council members will do their best to remember it, Randy.

Here We Are!

Thank you, Dear Friends, for your patience. Here at long last is an Affirmation newsletter.

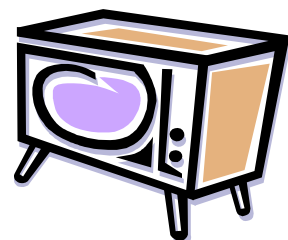
As with many volunteer organizations, Affirmation struggles with people having energy for a task/getting burned out. Duties change periodically.

All of this is to say: We know probably even better than you know that we have been missing publication dates. We apologize. We will try to do better in the future. Because it has been a while since our last publication, we are including in this issue many items that would have been published earlier but still have relevance.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact us.

Southern Comfort on HBO

Southern Comfort premiered on HBO nationwide April 14th. It's a documentary of Robert Eads, a transman, who transitioned from female to male. He was told by his doctor not to bother with a hysterectomy, and was also given no recommendation to continue with regular gynecological checkups. When he fell ill, he and his friends could not find health care for him until after over 20 refusals. When he finally was treated he was in the advanced stages of ovarian cancer. It shows his family, biological and chosen; their "lifestyles" (living in a rural area; he was invited to join the KKK); many of the day-to-day issues for people who have transgendered experiences. It's a moving film about love, strength, and courage, 90 minutes that are sure to touch your heart. My friends advise a box of tissues nearby. It has already won 19 awards nationally and internationally. I had the great fortune to meet a number of his friends in the film at the DC showing.



Kairos CoMotion – How We See Ourselves.....

Kairos CoMotion

By Judy WestLee

Feb. 21 -23, 2002
Madison, Wisconsin

*Now is the Acceptable Time
For Wholeness
For God's Shalom
For Change
For Justice
For Love
For Compassion
For Mercy
For Openness
For Reconciliation*

The following Affirmation National Council members - Steven Webster, Walt Jackson, and Judy WestLee [accompanied by her partner, Janet WestLee], attended this event.

The event was hosted by a new grouping of WI UMC clergy. So much so that some of those attending thought **only** Wisconsin UMC clergy were in attendance. I think attendance was at about 300. Besides the Wisconsin UMC clergy, I recognized Sue Laurie, RMN North Central organizer; Mark Bowman, WOW; Kathryn Johnson, MFSA, Greg Dell [and his wife Jade], Church Within the Church [CWC]. Also from MN were Jeanne Audrey Powers, and Michelle Miller and her partner Sue Torkelson.

The conference featured two sessions presented by Bishop Jack Spong and two sessions presented by Bishop Judy Craig. Holly Near gave an inspiring and wonderful concert that Friday evening. Various workshops completed the agenda.

Spong raised some very thought stimulating questions such as: "How do we put these two statements together: I am Christian. I live in the 21st century."

Spong declared Jesus taught one cannot be human and prejudiced at the same time.

Spong: No one can explain God. We can only tell how we experience God.

Spong: When people are freed to be all they can be, we are following Jesus.

Craig was, as always, inspiring, also. She talked about the Biblical quote about "living stones" and that, of course, this is an oxymoron. As are many things said in the Bible. But, she declared, "We are to be living stones! Not rock heads!" She reminded us that it is more demanding to drive a movement than it is to stay in an institution.

Craig declared the Way of Christ is our calling rather than the Way of the Church. [Why does that seem familiar?]

Craig then cautioned against reading the Bible by ourselves. "It's very dangerous," she said. "Biblical stories are meant to be told in community. We all need the mutual accountability found in community."

Laurie told us not to be afraid of "Bible bullies."

Wisconsin Bishop Sharon Zimmerman Rader preached the closing worship.

Affirmation Newsletter

The Affirmation newsletter is a quarterly publication. Only Affirmation's elected spokespersons (Amory Peck) may represent the official positions of the organization. Opinions offered in signed or unsigned columns, letters, and articles are those of the writers and to not necessarily represent the opinions of Affirmation.

Coeditors for this issue
Judy WestLee
Gary Shephard

Affirmation's Mission Statement

Affirmation is an activist caucus of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people, and our family and friends, organized to speak for ourselves. Together we:

proclaim a gospel of respect, love, and justice;

relentlessly pursue policies and processes that support full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people in all areas and levels of the United Methodist Church;

Overcome the barriers that diminish our common humanity by excluding or judging people because of their race, gender, class or physical abilities;

Empower people to undertake works of inclusion and justice where they are.

Progressive Christianity Strategy Report

From Kairos CoMotion
Conference February 2002 –
Madison, Wisconsin

by Tom Lambrecht, Good News

This report is based on information from two observers who attended the Kairos CoMotion event in Madison, Wisconsin, Feb. 21-23, 2002. The purpose of the event was to rally the troops on the “liberal” side to work toward General Conference 2004. The main speakers were Bishop John Shelby Spong, Bishop Judith Craig, and Bishop Sharon Rader.

NEW DESIGNATION

This group now wants to be known as “Progressive Christians” rather than “liberals.” I guess they feel this circumvents the political connotations of “liberal” and enables them to define their movement in a new way.

The movement is based on an entire worldview that is different from traditional Christianity. They took pains to clarify that they are not just organizing around the inclusion of homosexuals, but more basically a view of ongoing revelation that can supercede Scripture. This is in keeping with the findings of the liberal-conservative dialogue sponsored by the CCUIC several years ago.

NEW ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The new organizational umbrella for the Progressive Christianity movement is “The Church Within a Church Movement.” They see themselves creating a new church based on this Progressive Christianity worldview that can grow within the mainline denominations before separating from them.

They intend to model their movement on the Good News movement, which they see as the paradigm for developing a cohesive alternative structure within an existing denomination. The multiple other groups would then fall within the umbrella of The Church Within a Church. These other groups include the Reconciling Network, the Clergy Alliance, Affirmation, and the ethnic minority group pushing acceptance for homosexuality.

They intend to use the Open Hands magazine as their flagship publication, modeled on Good News magazine.

The Church Within a Church will have four focuses:

- 1) General Conference legislation,
- 2) formation of the shadow church,
- 3) Radical Obedience (using that new name instead of ecclesiastical disobedience),

- 4) theological reflection and writing. Some will work within the system for change, while others will try to break the system. They are trying to develop mutual support for people working toward the same goal with different means. Right now, there is some animosity between those who are trying to break the system and those who are trying to work within the system for change.

2004 STRATEGY

They look at 2004 as the watershed year in their movement. They plan to again pull out all the stops in attempting to legislate change at the 2004 General Conference. They actually expect to lose, however, and plan to come to General Conference with a plan for division in hand. There is still quite a bit of anger from people who left the UMC after the 2000 General Conference toward those progressives who stayed. Some thought everybody should leave after 2000.

In addition to the organization work outlined above, they plan to hold rallies around the country similar to the Kairos CoMotion event. They plan some rather aggressive publicity events, as well as some rather dramatic disobedience of church law. They hope to provoke the church into making martyrs of

How Good News Sees Kairos CoMotion

Continued from previous page

them. Their goal is to gain public support for homosexuals and make the institutional church and evangelicals look bad. They want to portray evangelicals as all being in the mold of Fred Phelps. They want to make 2000 General Conference protests look like a Sunday School picnic in comparison with what they do in 2004.

They are linking with progressives in other mainline denominations, believing (as we do) that there is more in common across denominational lines. They are working with Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Roman Catholics. They see a Progressive Christian denomination emerging that would cross traditional denominational lines. I believe this means they see their progressive theological approach as more important than denominational distinctives. They also expect the black Methodist denominations (AME, AMEZ, and CME) to join with them in the new progressive denomination. (I see this as unrealistic, but they are trying to cultivate top leaders within all of those denominations, and they are trying to portray the issue as a racial one.)

They see this as not just a theological divide between progressives and evangelicals, they also see it as a north-south split along regional lines. In that context, they are trying to portray the southern church as a good old white boys' network, made up of evangelical rednecks. They

are working with all of the ethnic caucuses except for the Hispanic caucus.

They see John Shelby Spong as the Martin Luther King of the Progressive Christian movement.

Of the 300 people who attended the Kairos CoMotion event, about one-half were from Wisconsin (mostly clergy), one-third were from Northern Illinois (including large representation from Broadway UMC, Greg Dell's church), and the remaining 20% were from the Western Jurisdiction and from Madison academia (University of Wisconsin professors and students).

EVANGELICAL STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

I see several implications for our evangelical strategy, in light of this information.

1) We ought to continue keeping the pressure on the other side through accountability actions (publicizing disobedience, filing complaints, etc.). However, we should take care not to overreact and create martyrs when it is not necessary.

2) We need to prepare our constituency to expect the onslaught that will come, as the progressives attempt to stage media events. We shouldn't get flustered or intimidated by their tactics. If we can just stay strong

for two more years, we may be able to bring closure to this conflict.

3) We should continue focusing on the theological issues of disagreement. We need to help the mainstream UMC find its theological identity as a point of unity. Otherwise, even if the progressives leave, we will not have anything more than institutional unity (with an even stronger tendency to minimize conflict and disagreement). We need something positive to hold us together and give us our identity as a denomination.

4) We could consider setting up behind-the-scenes contacts with leaders of the other side to work out a mutually agreeable plan for them to leave. Several years ago, we were saying that we wished there were a way for us to help them leave. Now we have the opportunity to do that. In working out the plan, we should not be vindictive or greedy. Instead, we should work out a reasonable plan that penalizes no one. After all, we might have been in the same situation ourselves. We should treat them as we would have wanted them to treat us.

All truth passes through three stages: First, it is ridiculed; Second, it is violently opposed; Third, it is accepted as self evident.

Arthur Schopenhauer

We await with excitement your

Council Nominations Requested!

One of the points of real strength in the life of Affirmation is the representative nature of its leadership team -- the national council. Affirmation's by-laws provide for a twenty-member council, part to be elected by Affirmation members as representatives from each geographical jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church, and part to be at-large members from across the country, elected members present at the annual business meeting in April to balance the composition of the council in areas of gender, race, age, etc. The Council's Nominations and Leadership Development Committee is given the responsibility to conduct these elections. More important the committee continuously seeks to identify persons with the commitment, perspective, energy, gifts and skills to help Affirmation and its Council become ever stronger and more effective in its mission as an activist caucus of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people and their families and friends, organized to speak with the voice of LGBT people. We have current vacancies on the Council to fill, and in 2003 will hold regional representative elections.

You are invited any time, but especially now, to let us know of your own interest or suggest the names of others you believe are ones who should be invited to consider council membership.

response to this invitation and look forward to getting acquainted with many more of you who have much to contribute to Affirmation. Please use the information on the front page masthead of this newsletter (phone, e-mail or snail mail) to contact us soon! Please indicate that you are wanting your information to be given to Affirmation's Nominations and Leadership Development Committee.

Wyoming Conference Affirmation Chapter

By Peggy Gaylord

Having started in December 1990, the Wyoming Conference Affirmation chapter in Binghamton New York continues to offer weekly ecumenical worship for the community on Sunday evenings. Worship is let half of the time by clergy, and half by lay people. While our numbers have been going down this past year, they are growing once again. Our chapter also co-sponsored a traveling photo exhibit of gay families, "Love Makes a Family," for the month of February at the local public library.

"There will always be someone begging you to isolate one piece of yourself, one segment of your identity above the others and say, 'Here, this is who I am.' Resist that trivialization. I am not just a lesbian. I am not just a poet. I am not just a mother. Honor the complexity of your vision and yourselves."

Audre Lourde

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Trembling Before G-d

2001 USA
Directed by Sandi
Simcha Dubowski

Shot over five years in Los Angeles, Miami, San Francisco, London, Jerusalem, and Brooklyn, this documentary focuses on homosexuality among Hasidic Jews. Director Dubowski interviews dozens of people, both in support of and against the religion's hard line stance on homosexuality, but focuses on a handful who have either been ostracized by their friends and family for coming out or who live in constant fear of being discovered. There are plenty of stories and anecdotes; some like the first openly gay rabbi, are interesting, some are amusing ("Orthodykes"??) and some are heart breaking, but all present a provocative look at faith and identity.

True Spirit Conference

By Peggy Gaylord

February 15-18, 2002, I attended the True Spirit Conference in Washington, DC, "Letting Our True Spirits Soar...", presented by The American Boyz Organization [which aims to support people who were labeled female at birth but who feel that is not an accurate or complete description of who they are (FTMs), and to support their significant others, friends, families and allies (SOFFAs)]. The organization has affiliates in more than twenty-three states and provinces in North America.

The contact information for the North American Office is:

The American Boyz, Inc.
351 Pleasant Street,
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Northampton, MA 01060
VOICE: 413-585-9059
FAX: 413-586-1890
www.amboyz.org
info@amboyz.org

Their website contains extensive information and links to many relevant sites. While I have had only a chance to skim the possibilities, one article caught my eye: *10 Ground Rules for Making Transmen Feel Welcome at M2F Meetings* by Jessica Xavier & Gary Bowen. It reminds us again that we all need to watch our assumptions no matter who we are.

(<http://www.amboyz.org/articles/groundrules.html>).

Sex and Social Issues

By Peggy Gaylord

On Tuesday February 19, I attended a panel presentation at Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA (a UM school), part of a Public Affairs Symposium, "Sex and Social Issues." We believed this to be an historic moment, possi-

bly the first time an intersexed activist was invited to speak on the same panel as a doctor who does sex/gender re-assignment. The panel topic was "Assigning Gender: The Ethics of Corrective Surgery." Should babies born with atypical genitalia be surgically altered to resemble more typical male or female anatomy? Activist Emi Koyama, the Program Assistant of the Intersex Society of North America presented alongside Professor Peter Lee, MD, of the Hershey Medical Center—discussing whether such children should undergo surgical intervention at birth. Koyama indicates that the evidence is accumulating (both studies and anecdotally) that points toward the best option may well be to leave these children as they are until they are old enough to make the decision for themselves. Some numbers indicate that there are about 2000 births a year or five babies a day being born into this kind of situation.

For further information:

info@isna.org

Emi Koyama at emi@isna.org

www.isna.org

(707-283-0036)

From <http://www.amboyz.org/intersection/flyer.html> :

"Congratulations! Is It A Boy Or A Girl..."

And What To Do If It's Not So Clear

The Truth and Reality About Intersex Children

"We all want the best for our children, and none of us want our children to suffer, but sometimes we can't always agree on what "the best" actually is. If you're the parent of a child born with an intersex condition, you may not be sure what is right for your baby. This information was written by real intersexuals, those of us who live and cope and manage with our conditions all the time. We feel that you deserve to know what it's like for us, and what it might be like for your (current or potential) intersex child. As parents, you deserve the real truth, straight from the source. We'll try to answer your questions here.... "

For The American Boyz Policy On The Treatment Of Intersexuals, look at:

<http://www.amboyz.org/intersection/position.html>

What or Whom Do We See?

By Peggy Gaylord

Last summer I had a call from my first woman lover. In the course of the conversation, she told me that she was going to have sex change surgery. This seemed to me to have come out of the blue. She's my age, 48. She said she had never told anyone that she felt like she was male and trapped inside of a female body until she finally told a psychotherapist in the past year. A few weeks later, she felt like something was missing. When she explored what it was, she realized that what was missing was her anger. Having finally told someone else, finally sharing what she feels has been the main issue in all of her anger and rage over the years (fostered by her years in the military), she experienced the release of a lifetime.

While I may have felt caught off guard with this information, I could not retrospectively come up with any clues--and at the time we were together, I had been training in human sexuality and psychology courses. Yes, she looked butch; yes, she had what could be called masculine traits--but because of who we are as gay-identified people, I think we're more flexible in our lives, utilizing both so-called masculine and feminine traits or characteristics, probably to a greater extent than the general population.

The next day I noticed an ad in our local gay paper that our AIDS agency was soliciting people who identify as transsex-

ual or transvestite in order to gather information on the needs of the transgender community. I called to ask whether I could attend.

There were three staff people and only two outside attendees, one of whom was me. What was interesting was that both the other attendee and at least one of the staff people blatantly assumed that I was not transgendered. They did not wait to see how I self-identified. I have met many people over the years who are transgendered, many of whom could totally "pass" in society, and who do. We are arrogant to believe that we can really know just by looking, whether with gay-dar, or in this case, trans-radar. It will be a hindrance to our seeking out transgendered persons and being able to learn more.

Thirty years ago there were many separate labels. A transsexual was primarily defined as someone feeling trapped inside the "wrong" gender body. Transvestites were thought of as mainly heterosexuals dressing in clothes stereotypical of the opposite sex as opposed to gay people dressing in drag. Hermaphrodites were people who had been born with some or all of the genital parts of both genders, who in most cases were then assigned a gender within the first few days of life. (Unfortunately, what doctors chose or recommended at birth did not always correlate with the person's adolescent and adult ex-

perience of self.) Now we lump all of these plus more into one large umbrella category of "the transgendered community."

As I've journeyed through life, from an adult perspective, I came to acknowledge that for many years I had thought of myself as male or at least androgynous. In my autobiographical writings where I wrote of myself in the third person, I consistently used male pronouns. At many times I was uncomfortable with my body and unaccepting of it. For instance, I would have chopped off my large breasts because they were in the way. In a number of situations I thought about streamlining my body. How much of this was influenced by the issue of privilege in our society (with white male privilege hierarchically at the top); how much of it was influenced by Twiggy being held up as a physical role model (for those of you who weren't born yet, she was shaped like a toothpick;) how much of it may have been influenced by my natural sexual orientation as bisexual; or, on the continuum, was it a lesser case of transgenderism?

Over the years I have worked with national and local gay-identified organizations which are struggling to be inclusive but not understanding the connection with transgenderism. In fact, we had similarly struggled with the issue of bisexuality, but at least there was a parallelism in sexual orientation; transgenderism has more to do with sexual identity and biology. A

What or Whom Do We See? (Continued)

transgendered person may be any sexual orientation. By the way, if they are defined as one sexual orientation and then have sex change surgery, have they changed to the opposite sexual orientation?

Because of these organizations' struggles, I started attending workshops led by transgendered people. I grew up in a household where I was taught to have compassion for all people, whatever their beliefs, behavior, characteristics, or origin. (Admittedly, I think my parents sometimes thought that I had taken it further than what was absolutely necessary.) I started reading books on the topic.

Three years ago I traveled a couple of hours each way to hear Leslie Feinberg speak (author of *Stone Butch Blues*, *Trans Liberation--Beyond Pink or Blue*, and other books.) For the first time I really understood her position that especially groups of people who are pushing the boundaries of sexuality, sexual identity, and gender roles/conformity all need to join together, as well as need to join in the larger struggle to build alliances with everyone who suffers from discrimination and prejudice.

I ran into a friend in a bar one night. Somehow we got on this topic. He said that his impression is that the gay community is pushing further and further away because the issue is confusing and not very well understood. Bisexuals may be more

natural allies of trans people; but we all know there's a stigma of being bi in a gay (or straight) community, so the alliance may still not wield much clout.

People continue to try to limit us as who we are because it's easier to see things in more black and white terms while most of our lives are spent in the grays. As a friend of mine, Judy Davis, wrote, "It is about not trying to make people fit into our little boxes or excluding individuals who are not like us but rather celebrating the diversity that makes our community so unique and beautiful."

Storytelling Project

By Peggy Gaylord

When I was a very young child, I often thought of Jesus as a storyteller. When I thought of heaven, I saw myself and others lying in triple or quadruple bunk beds listening to Jesus tell us stories. It was such a soothing image as I fell asleep. That was long before my own bunk bed or church camp experiences. But aren't we all drawn to stories or storytelling?

When the program committee met in October, we decided that one of our primary emphases would be to share, collect, offer, and document in whatever way possible the variety of stories within our denominational experiences. We want to be able to say that this is what is happening in and around the United

Methodist Church in various areas of the country, just as a speaker I heard the other night stated that your congressperson wants to know what is specifically happening in his or her district. Some of us felt that, in terms of our tradition of the Wesley quadrilateral (that we know through Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason,) it is our sharing of our experience with others that broadens their experience, and thus may be responsible for the most profound impact in the change that has already occurred around LGBT issues and acceptance. I don't believe "putting a face" on our issues or making a "heart connection" will ever be an out-dated strategy for fostering greater understanding.

Therefore, we made a commitment to include storytelling wherever possible in our collective work. We hope that as the communications committee modifies Affirmation brochures or literature, we can add mini-stories. When we publish our newsletters, we will include personal stories or insights. We hope to implement an area on our web page to accept and post brief stories in an on-going manner. Wherever we worship when the Council meets, we will incorporate a time of sharing with the congregation on an appropriate level. We want to hear their stories; We want to hear your stories; we want to share ours and others. Our committee would like to pick up on the idea of the 25th anniversary team to publish an anthology when we have collected enough stories.

Storytelling Project (Continued)

We are researching getting permission to access and print already documented stories.

As part of this emphasis, we started implanting a time of congregational sharing in Oakland at the Lake Merritt UMC where we worshipped on Martin Luther King, Jr. Sunday (a format similar to our Listening Post held in Birmingham last October.) We were also blessed to be able to be present for the opening display of one of their members, Madeline Mason, an African-American woman around 100 who is a doll-maker artist. Following the fellowship hour, we met with a dozen people, most of whom serve on their reconciling committee. We asked, how do you perceive the atmosphere in your local church, your district, and annual conference? What are your highlights and/or disappointments around LGBT or other inclusivity issues, especially during the past year? And then we exchanged stories and invited their questions of us.

If you have a story you wish to share, if you'd like to be involved in collecting stories, let me know. I will be coordinating this effort until we find a volunteer to focus on this individual project. (Contact information for Peggy is in the Affirmation Council list on page 5.)

Program Committee On-going Plans

When the Program Committee met in October, we covered several items including: debriefing Affirmation's presence at the RMN Tacoma convocation; distinguishing between retreats and workshops/conferences, both of which could reflect celebration and fellowship; topics on which we might wish to focus; possible programmatic ways of supporting clergy/ex-clergy (especially via Internet to facilitate discussion of and network for finding new jobs or helping re-tool,) collecting and disseminating stories of real people; and speaking or telling of stories in communities where the Council meets.

In January, we continued to expand our work on these ideas. (See articles elsewhere in the newsletter for more specific areas.) We'd also like to invite your ideas and/or your participation in helping to plan and carry out the program committee's objectives. Contact us with your interests. The Program Chair is Lisa Fagerstrom.

Lake Merritt UMC Oakland Sharing Time

Approximately a dozen persons talked with National Affirmation Council members during the fellowship hour following worship. Their nine member Reconciling Committee were the predominant participants. Their Reconciling Committee focuses on two things: being a congregation that is as welcoming as possible, providing regular visible

programming such as movie night, etc.; and affecting the larger denomination through witnessing efforts, such as developing and presenting a current readers' theatre production based on the UMC Judicial Council Holy Union case.

They participate in the San Francisco Pride Parade, walking along side Bethany's cable car and passing out flyers. They experienced great fulfillment in seeing the surprise on people's faces that the religious community was so strongly present in the parade. There were many tears, and they have a fuller understanding of how so many LGBT people experience just the opposite reception by or in the church. Lake Merritt UMC's Reconciling Committee did their own listening session with LGBT persons in their own congregation to see what they need/want – getting a very strong answer “as much as we can **all** do together!”

What that Affirmation can help them would be: to keep them posted as to what is happening around the country, and to assist them in getting more active at their own annual conference level – finding ways to break into long-time leadership circles.

The sharing was indeed an excellent time!



Regional Workshops Planned--Are You a Workshop Leader?

Having received feedback from our membership, we plan to start offering workshops in regional areas, hoping to initially piggy-back onto our council meeting sites and dates (as opposed to national offerings in the past). Some of the topics of retreats or workshops/conferences we are exploring are: aging in a youth and beauty culture; readdressing bisexuality and transgendered sexuality in a stronger, more thorough and current way, possibly focusing on gender identity; implications for using the term "queer" (does it mean more than a condensed label for LGBT?); same-sex couple relationships events, including the topic of interracial couples; and non-violence.

While we can easily come up with more ideas than we can ever do, we'd like to invite your ideas and/or your participation in helping to plan and carry out these or similar ideas. Do you have a workshop or two that you regularly lead? We would like to utilize our "inside, ready-made" resources as much as possible, and adapt for our constituency. Contact us with your interests. We are currently assessing whether we can offer a program in Pittsburgh during the week after Easter.

If you have any input, please contact me: Peggy Gaylord, aMiracle@pronetisp.net

NRLR Save Dame Campaign

The National Religious Leadership Roundtable (NRLR) is an interfaith coalition of over 40 faith-based organizations representing a variety of religious traditions supporting the equality of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people. Member organizations of the Roundtable together represent millions of people of faith in the United States. Co-founded by Equal partners in Faith and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), the Roundtable is now a project of NGLTF.

At its Washington, D.C., February meeting, the Roundtable committed itself to assist the SAVE Dade Campaign by moving its August 11th -13th meeting to Miami and offer an action centered public witness. The Roundtable plans to engage 400 people of faith to speak with voters door-to-door about the importance of defeating this attack on human rights. We estimate that this two-hour, face-to-face session could result in over 10,000 individual conversations with voters - enough to make a significant difference in the campaign, and hopefully ensure that we protect the ordinance.

Some history: The Miami-Dade County Commission voted to place the repeal of the three-year old amendment to the Human Rights Ordinance that extends protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation in housing, employment, financing, and public accommodations on the ballot Sept. 10, 2002. On that day, the voters of Miami-Dade will go to the polls and decide if some of their fellow citizens should be denied the same rights afforded all others - they will choose equality and fairness or intolerance and discrimination.

In 1977 Anita Bryant led the "Save Our Children" campaign, which overturned the first-of-its-kind legislation (in a major municipality) that extended basic rights to gays and lesbians. The New York Times has called this referendum fight--to be held on the 25th anniversary of the first one--the "second battle of Miami" and believes it will "be a pitched battle that could charge the national political atmosphere" with ramifications for both religious conservatives and gay activists.

In preparation for that vote, the National Religious Leadership Roundtable is working in collaboration with SAVE Dade and a newly organized local group of progressive religious leaders called the Interfaith Coalition on Human Rights in Miami-Dade, to identify a variety of ways that congregations and religious leaders can help stop the repeal of this ordinance. The Coalition is having its first planning meeting on Monday, April 29th at St. John's United Methodist Church. St. John's was Anita Bryant's family church for many years. It is now a Reconciling Congregation!

We are also seeking the support of religious leaders and organizations from across the United States. If you would like to help, or would like to suggest a congregation that could help, please contact: Deb Kolodny, NRLR Facilitator at: DebraRuth@mac.com

For specific information on how you as an Affirmation member can be involved in this project, contact: Ken Rowe, Affirmation Council Representative to the NRLR at: kianrowe@earthlink.net

Progressive Coalition Ponders GC 2004

By Judy WestLee

Alternative ways of "doing church" will be presented by progressive caucuses of our church at General Conference 2004. Modeling how church time, energy and money could/should be spent will be the focus this yet to named group.

Some 25 representatives of Affirmation, the various groups within the Reconciling Ministries Network, the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) and Soulforce met recently to strategize around the upcoming general conference.

The theme of a weekend conference during the conference will soon be decided. In the meanwhile, look for a baby picture of yourself and try to determine the date of your baptism. More information on this will be coming.

If there were any doubts, the answer is one question is: **Yes! We'll be at General Conference 2004 because we are an integral part of our church.**

Coretta Scott King To Speak Nov 22

SAN FRANCISCO -- Civil rights legend Coretta Scott King will deliver an historic address this fall at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco to benefit the Metropolitan Community Foundation. This will be the first time in the history of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender move-

ment for civil rights that Mrs. King has made a major policy statement in San Francisco specifically on LGBT issues. It is expected that she will use her historic appearance in San Francisco to address human and civil rights and the convergences between different forms of oppression and discrimination.

The event, titled, "Circles of Hope 2002: A Tribute to Coretta Scott King," will take place at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Nov. 22. The event will pay tribute to Mrs. King for decades of prophetic and compassionate work on behalf of the civil rights community.

Mrs. King, 75, has long been an advocate for LGBT civil and human rights. She's spoken out on many issues including the military's ban on gay, lesbian and bisexual soldiers, against anti-gay ballot measures, for federal legislation to outlaw job discrimination, and for compassion and dignity for people living with HIV and AIDS locally and globally.

"This event provides us with a tremendous opportunity to say thank you to Mrs. King for her important work," said Rev. Dr. G. Penny Nixon, president of the Metropolitan Community Foundation and senior pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of San Francisco. "This year especially, we will celebrate the quiet and persistent push for nonviolent social change -- a movement that Mrs. King has led for so many years. The roots of the American Civil

Rights movement, under her tireless care and cultivation, have borne fruit around the world, across all faiths, colors and cultures. It's no exaggeration to say that the movement for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered civil rights is a proud descendant of that movement, nourished by Coretta Scott King's heart and hands."

Relationship Weekend Offered to Lesbian Couples

After three very successful events this three day, professionally facilitated workshop is being offered for a fourth time. The Partners Enrichment Weekend will provide participants with a tool box of skills which can enhance and enrich a relationship for many years to come. Through a variety of interactive exercises with each individual's partner, participants will have opportunities for self-exploration, strengthening communication skills, and learning tools for conflict resolution, all aimed at keeping joy and passion in their relationship.

This Enrichment Weekend will be October 4 - 6, 2002 and will be held at a beautiful retreat center in the Sierra Foothills.

This is put on as a service to the community. Charges cover actual costs.

The steering committee members include: Jeanne Barnett, Ellie Charlton and Sue Charles. Consultants are Kate MacKenzie, LCSW and Sandy Little, MFT.

For more information or registration form contact:

Partners
PO Box 60882
Sacramento CA 95860

voice mail - (916) 484-4155

Spring Council Meeting

By Gary Shephard

The Affirmation Council met April 4th-7th in Pittsburgh, PA.

We started off Friday with a diversity workshop led by Peggy Gaylord.

After much discussion over several council meetings, we've finally decided to give up the organizational phone number. It was just too expensive for the number of calls we were getting on it. Instead, for now, we'll use the phone number of one of our spokespersons as the official phone number of the organization.

We discussed an initial draft of proposed legislation for GC 2004.

We selected the Affirmation participants for the GC 2004 strategy meeting taking place in Chicago May 19th-20th.

There was a lot of discussion concerning the dialogues on homosexuality. There are two sets of dialogues in progress as a result of two different resolutions from GC. The general feeling on the council is that we don't expect much to come of the processes, but we're watching them anyway. So far they seem very 'pre-planned' and closed to outside input.

Saturday morning the council took a walking tour of downtown Pittsburgh. The convention center (still under construction) will be a big improvement over the convention center in Cleveland. It looks as if affordable close in hotel space will be a challenge. Should the coalition decide to have a hospitality and resource room as we did in Cleveland, one option would be to get a room in the convention center itself. If that's not possible, we'll have to look at more creative solutions.

We held elections at the annual corpo-

rate meeting. Rolling off the Council are Mary Padilla, leaving one year early due to health concerns, and David Gunnell who had reached the end of his current term and had not expressed an interest in serving another term. Peggy Gaylord was re-elected to serve a full term as an At-large member in a position she had filled in 2001 mid-term. Jim Palmquist, active as head of fund development, was elected to the council to fill an empty slot for Northeast Jurisdiction male.

We wrapped up the council meeting Sunday morning with a wonderful worship service at First UMC Pittsburgh.



Book Review: *GIFTED BY OTHERNESS: Gay and Lesbian Christians in the Church*

L. William Countryman and M.R. Ritley

Reviewed by Amory Peck

While I was busy doing Affirmation business in the meeting room of the Washington Inn during the winter council meeting, my partner Linda was wandering San Francisco.

Sunday afternoon while I was busy discussing communication strategies for the organization, Linda was at the James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center of the San Francisco Public Library, listening to Countryman and Ritley discuss their book, *GIFTED BY OTHERNESS*.

"I felt a little guilty," says Linda with a smile, "but not enough to keep me out of the city, and away from the discussion. It was an opportunity to see in person two of the two theologians we'd just heard about when visiting the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry on Friday.

"I liked hearing their personal stories, how M.R. stumbled into the ministry and the Episcopal Church by showing up for a meeting on the wrong day, and how Bill lived the straight life until he just no longer could."

Since I couldn't be at the Hormel Center, I'm experiencing the two Episcopal priests through their book.

The back cover captures the main thrust of *GIFTED BY OTHERNESS*. Gay and lesbian Christians are in the awkward position of trying to explain themselves to two mutually hostile audiences. On the one side, the gay-lesbian community is often deeply suspicious of anyone connected with Christianity. On the other side sits the church which often wishes that gays and lesbians would go away, or at least disappear into the woodwork quietly.

I've just begun to dip into the book, but I'm eager to continue. I appreciate the assumptions underlying the text: As baptized Christians, we ourselves are the church, and we are obviously here, as we always have been; end of statement. We are not defective heteros; we are perfectly normal gay people. We will invite gay culture itself into the Christian context. We will freely use gay language and jokes, be camp if we feel moved to be, and flame as freely as God's love does.

This seems an important book, for it fills a need the church itself cannot, or will not, address. Clearly, the divided church itself is in no position to offer either moral or spiritual leadership here, or at least in any way timely enough to matter to a great many gay and lesbian Christians whose pain, confusion, and anger can certainly not be put on hold while the discussion goes on.

Marilyn McCord Adams, Professor of Historical Theology, Yale Divinity School, said "Countryman and Ritley help the gay and Godly (but often church-damaged) recognize and reclaim the holy ground that belongs to them." I certainly appreciate the authors adding their voices to so many who guide us in this exciting, treacherous journey.