



# Affirmation

An Independent Voice for:

United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns

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## The Commission on a Way Forward

*By Gary Shephard*

General Conference 2016 is in the rearview mirror. However, for an issue extremely important to many of us, we won't have to wait until GC 2020 to see what's next.

On the second Wednesday of GC 2016, the Council of Bishops made a proposal. They would form a special commission, to be known as the Commission on a Way Forward. This commission would have as its goal to propose how the church could move forward on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. Including in this proposal was a request that trials of LGBTQI and LGBTQI supporting clergy be curtailed (but not eliminated). It also tabled all petitions that had made it out of committee.

After the usual wrangling on the GC floor, the proposal was accepted.

The membership of the commission has now been named, but has not yet met face to face. Affirmation (as well as I'm sure many other organizations) asked for a seat at the table. Our request, as far as I know, was never acknowledged. RMN did succeed in getting their executive director, Matt Berryman, selected.

As I understand it, the commission is to present its findings in July or August 2018, with any legislative solutions being voted on at a called General Conference in February or March 2019. The delay between the release of the commission's decisions and legislation is to give the delegates 230 days to review the proposals before voting on them.

The delegates at this called GC will be those that served in 2016, or their alternates if they're unable to serve. An annual or a central conference can choose to elect new delegates, if they wish.

This, in my own personal opinion, is a good approach. They've finally gotten the discussion out of the 10 day pressure cooker of General Conference. I hope and pray that they will come up with a solution that will keep most if not all of us happy.

## Affirmation's Work in Uganda

*By Ann Craig*



Life for LGBTI people in Uganda was never easy but, in 2007, American Scott Lively made it much worse. He went to Uganda and worked directly with lawmakers to help draft the Anti-Homosexuality Bill known as the "Kill the Gays" bill. International pressure kept the bill from passing until early 2014 when a slightly less heinous version was voted through.

Employers, landlords, and neighbors forced LGBTI people to flee because the law included prison for them if they did not report them. Without job or housing, some fled to Kenya and applied for asylum. Others fled from house to house within Uganda. The law was annulled in August of 2014, and some people returned to rebuild their lives despite ongoing discrimination.

One of our members was in contact with a group led by Chaplain Denis Iraguha, founder of The Liberty Africa Youth Foundation (TLAYF). His goal was to form two businesses to train people so they could earn their

*(Uganda...Continued on page 2)*

*(Uganda...Continued from page 1)*

own livings. TLAYF received a grant from Affirmation about a year and a half ago to establish the businesses, a hair salon and a brick making venture.

Under the leadership of Chaplain Iraguha, the hair salon was set up and is still in operation. About 4 men and 13 women have worked there at different points of the year. They've learned and shared their skills, and it's a profitable business.



The brick business was successful too, but faced many challenges. Towers of 20,000 bricks emerged with ovens built into the side which were filled with firewood, sealed, and burned to harden the bricks. Torrential rains hit the area before some of the bricks were fired and several members of the team were flooded out of their homes.

Nonetheless about a dozen workers, both men and women, were employed over a nine month period. In assessing the projects, Chaplain Denis said, "On both projects we have gained experience on how to handle finances. This is a number one success as leaders of The Liberty Africa Youth Foundation, how to make prices of different items, bargaining power, treating the customer, providing services to different clients. Some members of TLAYF have benefited by getting training and have skills in both molding bricks and all stages through to market time. Some other members have gained skills in different men's and women's hair styles."

At Affirmation's recent Denver meeting, the national council decided to support the HIV / AIDS pastoral care ministry of Chaplain Denis with the members of TLAYF and the broader community. With \$160 per month, he will deliver food, assist people with clinic visits, share HIV / AIDS education, and provide spiritual support.

Life is still difficult for Ugandan LGBTI people but there are signs of hope. Chaplain Denis brings his group together for worship and support, while other Ugandans are part of a lawsuit based on international law against Scott Lively for crimes against humanity. In recent weeks, the trial heard oral arguments at the US District Court in Springfield, MA.

Every action which supports and defends LGBTI people around the world is a sign of hope.

### Affirmation Newsletter

Only Affirmation's elected spokespersons may represent the official positions of this organization. Opinions here, signed or unsigned, are those of the writers, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Affirmation.

Articles for consideration for publication may be submitted to: [AffirmationNewsletter at vahoogroups.com](mailto:AffirmationNewsletter@vahoogroups.com)\*

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### Mission Statement

As an independent voice of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people, Affirmation radically reclaims the compassionate and transforming gospel of Jesus Christ by relentlessly pursuing full inclusion in the Church as we journey with the Spirit in creating God's beloved community.

Adopted January 2005

\* Note: substitute the symbol "@" for the letters "\_at\_" In the email addresses.



## Where Can I Pee?

By Diane DeLap

“Where do you expect me to pee?”

On February 17, 2011, Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick issued an executive order banning discrimination on the part of the state or its contractors against transgender employees of the state government. As a state employee at the time, I was present at the official signing ceremony the following day.

At that time, legislation was pending in Massachusetts to extend non-discrimination protections to all transgender citizens. The issue of public accommodations for transgender people like myself – including restroom use – was a major stumbling block for many legislators. I visited several of the legislators during this period to urge that legislation including public accommodations be passed. At one point I was in the office of one of the legislative assistants, and I posed the question at the head of this article to him. He stared at me blankly and never responded. At that time I was approaching 70 years old. His position was that we should use the restroom corresponding to our birth sex. How could he tell an elderly woman that she must use the men’s room? He had no response, because he knew that his position would put my life in serious jeopardy.

The legislation finally passed on November 23, 2011 however, with legislators caving to the now familiar fear-mongering “restroom bill” charges, the important public accommodations portions were tossed out. Finally on July 7<sup>th</sup> this year the Massachusetts legislature passed a bill with public accommodations protections for all transgender people.

Through the years, right wing fear mongers have found the “restroom bill” meme a useful tool to further oppress the transgender community. Even those who we would think would be allies raised this issue. In the early 2000s I was on the board of an LGBT organization in the Boston area, and was told the following account by a fellow board member. The board had sent a group to speak with Barney Frank to encourage his support for Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) legislation pending in Congress. He told the group that he would never support ENDA legislation that included protections for the transgender community. He angrily told the group that Congress and businesses would never support legislation which would put trans-women, who

he described as “men,” in women’s restrooms and locker rooms.

Frankly, as a Trans woman, I don’t want predators in the ladies room either. One of the problems is that I am identified as a predator. This is one of many false arguments presented to prevent trans people from using public restrooms that correspond to their true gender identity. Historically, there are so few examples of predatory behavior that it renders this argument false. U.S. District Judge Thomas Schroeder wrote in an August 26th decision that “... the record suggests that, for obvious reasons, transgender individuals generally seek to avoid having their nude or partially nude bodies exposed in restrooms, showers, and other similar facilities.”

Also he writes, “on the current record, there is no evidence that transgender individuals overall are any more likely to engage in predatory behaviors than other segments of the population.”

Much of the fear mongering results from a misunderstanding of the transgender condition. Often the argument is presented that laws permitting transgender access to public restrooms will allow a man to decide to wear a dress to gain access to women’s restrooms. The transgender condition is not one that can be turned on and off at will. It is a life-long condition.

I always knew that I identified as a female. I didn’t understand what those feelings meant. I just knew that my life was out of sync. I finally concluded that I needed to transition to live my life as a female. My transition resolved the “out-of-sync” feeling and I would never revert back to live as I had. When I enter a ladies room it is to take care of personal needs, and I am always concerned that stall doors are closed and my privacy is maintained. As Judge Schroeder notes in his decision, existing “laws against indecent exposure, peeping, and trespass protected the legitimate and significant state interests of privacy and safety.” And “there is no indication that a sexual predator could successfully claim transgender status as a defense against prosecution under these statutes.” When anyone enters a public restroom with predatory intentions, they are violating existing laws. As a Trans woman, I need to be able to pee in peace when I am in a public ladies room.





## The UMC Must Change

By Gil Caldwell

The United Methodist Church, must, I believe, acknowledge the multiplicity of challenges facing the USA and the world. While we as United Methodists fiddle with our long history of focusing on only one concern that we claim is "incompatible with Christian teaching," our country and the world burn with issues of human survival. [Editors' Note: *We think the prohibition against cooking a lamb in the milk from its' own mother should be at the forefront of everyone "sin list."* It's in Deuteronomy three times. Yes, we know someone that counted.]

National and worldwide poverty with the powerlessness it creates is breaking the world apart. Terrorism, limited healthcare, greed, political polarization, gun violence, the trafficking of girls and women, drugs, racism, sexism, income and economic imbalance, joblessness, and other problems are issues and concerns that cry for the attention of The United Methodist Church.

We as the Church in response to same gender loving persons appear to be, "The Republican Party at Prayer." There have been times when I registered and was active as a Republican; in Massachusetts in relation to the candidacy of Senator Ed Brooke, and in Chester, Pennsylvania, when I sought to be a Frederick Douglass-like Republican. I am saddened today in a nation that needs so seriously the best of Democratic and Republican Party ideals, which the Republican Party seems to want to return to "old occasions" rather than the new occasions presented by the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It appears some in the UMC wants us to do so as well!

A relative of mine invited me to attend a meeting of the Ethical Culture Society, and I did as one who believes we who are Christians must "hear" what those who are not, are saying. This is what I heard; ***"The reasons for the disenchantment with religion, especially among the young, are several. Perhaps the most compelling is a negative reaction against the power, rhetoric, and bombast of politicized fundamentalist and evangelical Christianity."***

I consider myself an evangelical Christian. I seek to be a follower of Jesus and be informed and shaped by what God has done and is doing in Jesus, my Christ. The rhetoric, bombast, and power display since 1972 of those who have held the UMC hostage with their anti-

gay language and legislation have made so many young people disenchanted with The United Methodist Church.

May those in the future that write the history of 21st century United Methodism be able to say that the Commission on a Way Forward in its language and legislation made The UMC a church for the 21st century, rather than seeking to keep alive the distorted, dishonest, Bible-based bigotry of other centuries.

***"The reasons for the disenchantment with religion, especially among the young, are several. Perhaps the most compelling is a negative reaction against the power, rhetoric, and bombast of politicized fundamentalist and evangelical Christianity."***

I, as an 82 year old African American United Methodist clergyman, have yet to observe that my denomination in its language and legislation has said, "The practice of anti-black racism is incompatible with Christian teaching" with the consistent fervor that we have seen with "the practice of homosexuality." I believe there are many United Methodist African Americans and United Methodists in Africa who wonder, why?

All Lives Matter, United Methodist Church! I hope and pray that the Commission on a Way Forward will bring much needed change.

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### Jim Palmquist Becomes Treasurer

After many years of great service as Treasurer and a key guiding force for Affirmation, Jan Olson is stepping into the mail processing role and Jim Palmquist is leaving mail processing to become Treasurer.

Jim was the Coconvenor for Affirmation from 2004 to 2008 and left the National Council after six years of service in 2008, which was the maximum term length at the time. He participated in three GCs and has run our Christmas card assembly effort since 2002. He has been an LGBTQ activist in his community and the state of Pennsylvania where he lives, and has leadership roles in AARP and ACLU there.

We welcome Jim in his new role, and we thank Jan for her service.

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### Brochures Available!

If you'd like to help spread the word about Affirmation, let us know. We'll mail you a few brochures. Send an email to [umaffirmation\\_at\\_yahoo.com](mailto:umaffirmation_at_yahoo.com) (Subject: "Brochures") or drop us a line at Affirmation / PO Box 1021 / Evanston IL 60204-1021.

## Affirmation National Council Meeting

We met in Denver, Colorado, the week before the election, November 3 to 5, for the fall council meeting. Post GC 2016, we had much to discuss.

We worked hard to move Affirmation into its next chapter of advocacy. We welcomed our new treasurer, Jim Palmquist, and we thanked Jan Hensley-Olson for her years of service. We welcomed new council members Josh Culbertson, Ben Roe, Bea Fraser-Soots, and Derrick Spiva, although Bea was not physically present.

Foremost on our minds was what reactions we need to have ready for the results from the Commission on a Way Forward, and what our presence will be at and to the called General Conference. We don't know yet where the called General Conference will be. The church (through the Commission) will be discussing our lives—once again—with only token representation from LGBTQI United Methodists.

We've supported LGBTQI people in Uganda. We discussed the best way to continue that support. (See article elsewhere in this newsletter.) We also discussed how to support persons undergoing church trials.

The tumult in the church and the vitriol of the national campaign gave pause to us, so we took stock of the assets that Affirmation brings to the United Methodist table. Affirmation is the oldest LGBTQI group in The United Methodist Church. We were the first to add "B," then "T," and then "Q" to our name—and backed it up with leadership from all communities. Our members founded Reconciling Congregations Program (now RMN.) We are relatively small but continue to be supported and led by a dedicated base that knows there is always the next chapter of inclusion and justice to be written.

When the Affirmation National Council decided to meet in Bishop Karen Oliveto's jurisdiction, we reached out to her and received a warm welcome. She wrote:

*"I had an amazing time at the Council of Bishops. So many bishops greeted me with open arms, embracing*

*me with tears and saying, 'I have waited so long for you.' And there is a Spirit of openness and inclusivity that surprised me. We have crossed a threshold together and there is no going back.*

*"Please give my greetings to my brothers and sisters in Affirmation. You all have inspired me in countless ways, making a way when there was no way, and showing me what courage and perseverance looks like. For that I give thanks to God for you all!"*

We signed Christmas cards to hundreds of members to remind them in this season of danger and hope, Advent, that we are here working for better church and a better world. We reflected on General Conference where we provided critical support and leadership. Affirmation was the one among the 12 members of the Love Your Neighbor Coalition (LYNC) that had the resources and flexibility to put the down payment on the entire hotel that became our staging ground for events and communication.



From left: Ann Craig, Gary Shephard, Ben Roe, Josh Cubberston, Derrick Spiva, Lyn Ellis, Jan Hensley-Olson, Jim Palmquist, Mary Lynn Ragan Clunn. Not shown: A woman in New York.

We reflected on our activities at GC. Each night we celebrated communion in the open air courtyard at the Jupiter Hotel. We scheduled two speakers, only one of whom made it to GC to speak. We had our Sweets for the Sweets reception. Affirmation volunteers helped with everything from the vitally important to the incredibly mundane. We staffed a hotline for pastoral counseling which received calls from on-site

as well as across the country. The spiritual harm in the name of the church we love causes deep hurt and can leave people bereft.

Our work is not complete and we still have committed, skilled leadership in Affirmation to advocate for a church and a world that respects the diversity and dignity of all people.

Our next meeting will be a conference call in January, date and time to be scheduled. We'll have an in person meeting in Minneapolis MN April 21 – 23, the week after Easter.

## Affirmation National Council

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**\* Note: substitute the symbol "@" for the letters "\_at\_" in the email addresses above.**

## Remembering Greg Dell

*By Jan Hensley-Olson*

Affirmation and all organizations and individuals that fight for a more justice-filled world have lost a beloved friend. Gregory Robert Dell, age 70, passed away in Raleigh, NC, on Sunday, October 30, 2016, from complications of Parkinson's Disease. Greg has spent a lifetime championing the disenfranchised.

Greg was a pastor in the United Methodist Church for 40 years, serving churches in Naperville, Minooka, Evanston, Oak Park, and Chicago. His ministry focused on issues of peace, justice, and the celebration of human diversity, including a commitment to the inclusion of LGBTQI persons in faith communities.

In September 1998 Rev. Greg Dell officiated at a covenant service for two gay men who were members of his congregation, Broadway United Methodist Church, in Chicago. Charges were brought against him for being disobedient to The Book of Discipline. During the closely watched trial, Dell argued that his ordination vows to serve his congregation took precedence over church rules. In 1999, a jury of 13 voted 10 to 3 to suspend him indefinitely. The suspension would be lifted if he pledged not to do it again. He refused. On appeal, the suspension was changed to one year. He returned to Broadway UMC after he served the suspension. He said "I've been doing wedding celebrations for gay and lesbian couples for 18 years and I just did them because two people wanted to affirm in a faith community their love for each other as a gift from God. Thirty percent of my church was gay. What was I supposed to say, 'I'll take your money, I'll baptize your babies, but I can't marry you if you love each other?'"

His activism started as early as high school when he marched behind Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. through a white Chicago suburb. In college he actively recruited African-American students to attend an almost entirely white student body at Illinois Wesleyan. He protested

against South Africa's apartheid government, U.S. involvement in Nicaragua and El Salvador, and the Iraq War. The list goes on and on.

Greg was passionate about many issues but especially about inclusion. For Greg, All truly meant All! His beliefs were transformed into action which led to many arrests for civil disobedience. "I know no one else who's as articulate as he is on issues of theology and social justice," says Rev. Lynn Pries of Naperville, who's known Dell for 30 years. "He's just an extraordinary person with extraordinary gifts. He's somebody who takes his faith seriously, even when it means a great cost to him personally."

Thank you, Greg, for standing up for us even when we were unable to do so ourselves. Thank you for welcoming us with open arms and a love-filled heart. Our loss is Heaven's gain! On behalf of Affirmation, the Council wishes to extend sympathy to Greg's family, friends, and students. Peace be to his memory. Rest in Power, Greg.



### **Googling? Try GoodSearch Instead!**

We here at Affirmation are really big on earning money in easy, unobtrusive ways. That's why we're so excited about the opportunities to fundraise using GoodSearch.com, the Google of charitable search engines. The next time you're on your computer and you need to find something, you can just go to [goodsearch.com](http://goodsearch.com), select *Affirmation - United Methodists for LGBTQ Concerns* under *Cause* as your charity and search away. We'll get a penny for every search term. It may not seem like much, but every bit helps!



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## Memories

*By Rev. Kathy Leonard Raines*

The setting was Baltimore, Maryland and the year was 1984. Our seminary choir was there to sing and ring bells at the morning worship service, and then we had the rest of the day to observe General Conference. As I walked through the marketplace with its many displays, I ran into a mentor and former pastor, who invited me to join her in a silent witness: people would stand in a circle around the upper level of the venue holding signs in support of LGBTQ persons. (This was before Reconciling Ministries Network; my memory is that the title of the advocacy group back then was "Affirmation," but I could be wrong. That was a long time ago!) My response: "No, I don't want to do that, as I don't want people to think I'm part of your group." [Editors' note: Affirmation created the Reconciling Congregations Program after the 1984 GC and later spun it off as its own organization. After GC 2000, it changed its name to Reconciling Ministries Network, RMN for short.]

I have carried that shame for 32 years now.

But as I reflect on that other General Conference (the last one I have been able to attend, albeit briefly, before this year's), I think the invitation, and my rejection, have shaped my witness in the years since. As a child of God and follower of Jesus, to what am I called? I firmly believe I am called to advocate and work for justice for all God's beloved children, created in the divine image. My calling is to proclaim the Kingdom of God, where all are welcomed, included, and embraced.

Love, commitment, and calling join together to witness to God's Kingdom work and Jesus' wide embrace of all people.



*Rev. Kathy Leonard Raines is a wife, mom, pastor, and balloon artist whose primary value is joy.*

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