



gala **news**

THE LETTER

Fall 2006 – Volume 17 Issue 3

Greetings from the President

“You have been changed.” Those were among the words spoken to Billie at her baptism during the recent GALA retreat in Texas. My reaction to that statement, though silent, was strong: “No, it is not just Billie who has changed. We have changed. Our community has changed.” As a church community and as GALA we become a slightly different group with the addition of each new member. We also change as members leave or become inactive.

The challenge of every organization is to address the ebb and flow of members. How can we best serve the needs of members, how can we attract new members, and how do we stay in touch with those whose faces and ministry we miss?

As your new board president, I look forward to addressing these and other questions with the GALA Board of Directors. We’re going through an exciting period of change. The development of the Welcoming Community Network has changed us in very positive ways. The WCN is expanding now beyond GALA and becoming a separate organization. Together, GALA and the WCN will continue the important work of bringing ministry to the members and friends of the Community of Christ. We’ve also been changed by a growing involvement of persons in the transgender/transsexual community. That wouldn’t be possible had we not taken the time to reach out and listen to their stories, struggles and concerns.

Other changes are before us, and I look forward to helping GALA during this next year to identify when and how we need to change. Yes, in some ways we’re still the same old GALA that you have known, but in other wonderful ways, we have grown. Please continue to support GALA as we try to bring servant ministry to the gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender, transsexual and questioning members and friends of the Community of Christ.

Alan Zimmerman

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Greetings, GALA members, family and friends

It's time to pass the reigns over to another president of GALA. It's was a challenge stepping in as president for this past year. It was a wonderful experience working with the GALA board. Their help, love and support were invaluable! Alan Zimmerman has a great board to work with for the next 2 years.

I'd like to thank those GALA members, friends and family who have offered the GALA board support, feedback, news articles, retreat planning and continued financial support. The work of GALA and WCN is important to our community and to the Community of Christ.

As the board takes on this next year's challenges and goals, I ask the GALA membership to continue to support us with communication and prayer.

Love always, Allan Fiscus

Treasurer's Report, 10/1/05 thru 9/30/06

	<u>Actual</u> <u>Expenses</u>	<u>Budget</u> <u>FY '06</u>	<u>Budget</u> <u>FY '07</u>
Cash on Hand 9/30/05.....	\$ 8,379		
Income			
Memberships	1,900	2,000	\$1,500
Contributions	13,223	50,000	13,000
Grants & Foundations.....	200	3,120	200
Merchandise Sales	162		
Commissions (Amazon)	587		600
Special Projects: Book of Stories	1,446		\$4,000
Special Projects: Book Presales.....	375		1,000
Special Projects: WCN	2,076		
Interest	7		
Total Income.....	\$28,355	\$55,120	\$20,300
Expenses			
Administrative	1,464	4,270	3,575
Field Organizer	13,781	34,200	
Retreat Reserve Fund	188	5,500	2,500
Newsletters	1,113	2,500	1,550
Region/Mission Centers			3,000
Welcoming Community Network....	484	2,000	1,000
Book of Stories			6,000
All Other Expenses.....	322	6,650	2,675
Total Expenses.....	\$17,352	\$55,120	20,300
Income in Excess of Expenses	11,003		
Cash on Hand 9/30/06.....	\$ 11,003		

The fiscal year-end figures are in and we ended the year in the black. A big thank you to all who contributed so generously this year! Thanks also to all who purchased items thru Amazon.com. We earned commissions of almost \$600!

I have included in the above figures the budget for 2007 that was approved at the retreat. Please note that one area of emphasis this year will be the publication of the *Book of Stories*. Also, remember that memberships become due each October 1. Now is the time to send yours in for the fiscal year 2007.

I want to express what an honor it's been to serve as your treasurer for the last four years. Although my term is ending, my involvement with GALA will continue as you are all near and dear to my heart. Thank you, Billy, for taking over the role of treasurer. I know you'll do a great job!

--Fran Zimmerman

2006 GALA Retreat--"Good News of Freedom"

Howdy, All Y'All

Over the Labor Day weekend, Bandera, Texas, the "Cowboy Capital of the World," celebrated its 150th birthday with a longhorn cattle drive and parade, re-enactments on the Medina River, an intertribal pow-wow, and the National Professional Bull Rider's Challenge. A mere five miles to the west of the party, the GALA crew descended on Camp Sionito for fellowship of a different sort, the annual retreat.

The scorpions and snakes kept a safe distance, allowing the nearly 50 attendees to enjoy beautiful (but hot) south Texas weather, delicious Texas food, and wonderful Texas hospitality. Our hosts were as accommodating as we could hope for, and helped create a terrific experience of learning, playing and communing with each other, with nature and with God.

The weekend opened with the receiving and decorating of our new cowboy hats that became a prominent feature throughout the retreat. Some campers could be found tinkering on their Texas lids throughout the weekend. As impressive as they all were, David Woosley's Wizard of Oz hat, proudly featuring Judy Garland's Dorothy, probably took the cake.

Saturday featured information sessions on the Welcoming Community Network and LGBT legal issues. But the hit of the retreat was guest Donna Ross sharing her inspirational story and enlightening everyone on transgender issues. Donna, who now lives in Kansas City with her wife Christy, recounted her transition experience, which was made very public on the front pages of the *Portland Tribune*. Her courageous story of hope, particularly how she re-connected with God through her experience, truly touched everyone who attended.

Funds were raised with a silent auction featuring wonderful handmade jewelry, courtesy of Allan Fiscus' mother, and other items. More money was raised via a definitely not-so-silent auction led by new board member, David Howard. Auctioned off were eclectic hand painted cowboy boots made into vases that were used as centerpieces at the banquet. Some went for as high as \$80, with all the money raised going toward the publication of the *Book of Stories*.

The retreat was made more special on Sunday night, when Billie sealed her commitment in the waters of baptism as part of a moving waterfront service, followed by her first communion as a member of the Community of Christ.

It was a joyful weekend full of sharing, making new friends, and experiencing the comforting love of God and each other. I think all would agree that they left Sionito uplifted and spiritually fed.

--Adam Smith

Donna Ross: To my GALA Family—Thank you for your hospitality, warmth and love at the 2006 GALA Retreat. Being your guest this year was a privilege that grew with meaning each day, culminating with Billie's baptism. It was an amazing honor to witness that marvelous passage. I look forward to continuing to share with you via e-mails and local meetings. Your friendship has a distinct place in my heart. God bless to all.

Mark Euritt (Mission Center President in Texas) told Sharon Troyer that the camp host at Sionito gave a glowing report to his board about the GALA community and experience. Prior to our arrival, he'd seen GALA as "them," but after our retreat, his heart was full of love for our community.

2007 GALA Retreat

Chihowa Retreat Center, Lawrence, Kansas

August 31 – September 3, 2007

“Wings on a Prayer”

(During World War II when the planes were all shot up, they just prayed their way home. We are like the planes; we need to make it home.)

Banquet: 40's swing music and uniforms (lots of nurses?!)

Talent Show: USO Radio Talent Show

For more information contact

Kip Dawson, kdawson316@aol.com

Send No One Away:

A Week of Welcome and Solidarity

Reach out and welcome one another to God's glory.

Jesus did it; now you do it! ~ Romans 15:7 The Message

In honor of **Solidarity Sunday**, the SoCal GALA Chapter and Basileia: An Open Door Community of Christ (charter member of the Welcoming Communities Network) sponsored the following activities Oct. 4-8, 2006, at the Anaheim Community of Christ, 827 South Walnut Street, Anaheim, CA.

- One hundred liturgical stoles from the **Shower of Stoles Project** were on display at Anaheim Community of Christ during the first week of October. Each stole tells the story of a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered individual and their congregation. These are stories of rejection, acceptance, faith and ministry.
- On Wed., Oct. 4, a service of prayer and sharing was held regarding the need for full acceptance of persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities and reconciliation with their Creator and their faith.
- On Thurs., Oct. 5, clergy and leadership team members of welcoming and affirming congregations, campus ministries, study groups, and faith-based support organizations were invited to come together to form the **Southern California Coalition of Welcoming Ministries**, an organization of united power and mutual support for the welcoming church movement.
- On Sat., Oct. 7, the church was open 9 am to 5 pm for quiet, personal reflection in the presence of the **Shower of Stoles display**.
- On Sun., Oct. 8, 3 pm, during the **Solidarity Sunday Service**, Guest Speaker Dr. Michael J. Adee, More Light Presbyterians National Field Organizer, spoke on “Send No One Away.”

For more information contact:

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On Saturday, September 23, 2006, in the presence of family and friends, Sam B. and David C. of Michigan made their covenant to share their lives together.

This picture shows David singing to Sam during their service. →

The Book of Stories, edited by Bill Russell, may be ordered in advance of publishing for \$25 a copy.

Antonio (Tony) Feliz' books—*Out of the Bishop's Closet* and *The Issue of Pluralism*—are available for \$10 each.

Send your check and order to Fran Zimmerman, 707 NE Pilgrim Way, Lee's Summit, MO 64086.

LGBT Religious Archives Network (LGBT-RAN)

at Chicago Theological Seminary is a grass roots, activist venture to promote and conserve the history of LGBT religious movements. LGBT-RAN is a resource center and information clearing house for preserving records of LGBT religious movements, while also encouraging historical study. Pass on news of this ground-breaking work to friends and colleagues.

Shower of Stoles Online Database: LGBT-RAN is moving forward with its collaborative project with the Institute of Welcoming Resources to document the Shower of Stoles in an online database. You can view the progress of this project at www.lgbt.org/stoles. About 150 stoles had been entered into this database as of August 17, with the goal being to enter all 1,000+ stoles. Your comments on the design, appearance and use of the Shower of Stoles database are welcome as we continue to refine and add to it in the coming weeks at mbowman@lgbtran.org.

You can support LGBT-RAN: (a) Contact us at info@lgbtran.org with information about existing archival collections from LGBT religious movements, records that need to be archived, or leaders of LGBT religious movements to include in our Pioneers Gallery. (b) Volunteer to assist our work at volunteer@lgbtran.org. The staff will help you get involved in whatever way is most appropriate for you. (c) Make a financial gift to support the work at www.lgbtran.org. You can send information on individuals, foundations and organizations that might be interested in funding this work to mbowman@lgbtran.org.

Be Filled With God's Love

Over the past month and a half I have contemplated and prayed about what God wanted me to share today with my Woods Chapel Congregation. As the days drew closer the more apprehensive I became. What I want to share with you today I have not shared in a large public setting before. It is a very personal and sensitive issue for my family and me. I have talked to my sons, Tyler and Tanner, and my husband Don, almost hoping that one of them would object so I would have an excuse not to share. But that did not happen. So I stand humbly before you today in faith. I hope you will listen with an open heart and that you will be filled, as God has filled me.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. –I Corinthians 13:13

It was sometime in the late fall of 2002, a day like any other. I had worked all day, came home, cooked, cleaned up dinner and thought I would begin to relax. I went into Tyler's room and found myself sitting on the side of his bed catching up on the day's events.

The conversation deepened and he began telling me things I knew I couldn't possibly be hearing correctly. I was hearing his words, but I was comprehending only bits and pieces of what was coming out of his mouth. The words were going into my ears but that was the extent of it. I could feel my body going numb; it felt as if I was having an out-of-body experience.

I tried to remain calm. What was he saying? Did he say he was gay, or did I imagine it? In my mind I was saying, "You must remain calm. You say you are a loving and understanding mom and now is the time to prove it." After a long conversation, of which I remember very little, I got up and left the room. I felt weak, drained emotionally and totally overwhelmed. My son is gay? There must be some mistake!

I went into my bedroom, shut the door and started crying. Don wanted to know what was wrong and so, in between sobs, I told him. I cried and cried, finally crying myself to sleep.

Over the next several months I struggled. I struggled big time. I cried a lot but I prayed even more. "Dear God, I love both of my children so very much. Where have I gone wrong in raising Tyler? Have I been too hard on him or not hard enough? Is this my fault? Maybe I'm a lesbian and don't know it and passed a faulty gene on to him. Is this Don's fault? Is he not a strong enough father figure? Or maybe it's a father/son quality time thing. When people find out they will judge me for the kind of parent and person I am. God, what is the answer? Please tell me." A million thoughts of guilt and inadequacy flooded my mind.

I wanted professional help for our family. I prayed for someone that would not condone homosexuality and push

it in our faces, nor condemn homosexuality and push it in Tyler's face. God answered my prayer and we were recommended to see Jeanne Earnest, a professional counselor. For our first few sessions we literally had to drag Tyler almost kicking and screaming the whole way. He would say, "You and Dad are the ones with the problem. Not ME! I am the same person I was before you and Dad found out I was gay!" We tried to explain that we didn't think he had a problem, but it was a good idea to have someone help us talk over our feelings and the feelings others may have for us and for him. We explained that he may not always be in a loving atmosphere and we wanted someone "neutral" for him to talk with on how best to deal with these issues. Jeanne was truly a godsend.

I continued to cry and pray. It became a daily habit. I prayed that God would bring someone to me for support and to lend a listening ear. In the fall of 2004 my prayers were answered -- or so I thought. I ran into Amy at a high school football game. Our families had attended church together and she suggested that we get together. I thought this would be the support I was looking for.

We met in the school parking lot and talked. It soon became apparent to me that Amy took a totally different approach. Their family had left our church for another denomination because of our church's views in certain areas, one of which was the homosexual issue. It was soon after their family left the church that their son Michael "came out." Once they found out, she told me they kicked him out of the house. Our entire time together turned out to be a bash session on how they felt a person chooses to be "that" way, and many other negative thoughts. I just listened, but inside I felt sick. I wanted to vomit! She expressed so much hate and hurt. I asked myself, "How could any mother turn her back on her child?" I love my children and I cannot turn my back on them even if I don't agree with or understand some of the things they do. I left the parking lot crying all the way home. Surely this was not the answer to prayer. Or was it? The rest of that week was really hard for me. I wrestled with lots of religious questions and asked a lot of questions of God.

One night later that week, as I stood in the kitchen with my hands in hot soapy water, staring at my reflection in the window, I prayed about what I had been told --that homosexuality is wrong. "God, I don't understand it. Am I supposed to understand it? What is the hope for Tyler? There are so many religions that condemn homosexuals. Tyler did not choose this. Who would choose to live a life harassed and belittled by others? Is there a place in heaven for Tyler?"

As I poured my heart, God's spirit came over me, pierced the innermost recesses of my soul, and I felt the peace that only God can give. God spoke to my soul in such power that I could barely contain the love shared with

me. I will never forget the words, "Tyler is my child. I have created him and I love him." I stood there with my hands in that hot soapy water, tears streaming down my face. For the first time in two years I was filled with the peace and love of God in a way that I had never felt before. I was filled with an understanding of the love that God has for each of us no matter what gender, color or orientation we have. It was that simple. There was no condemnation, no divine explanation about the homosexual issue, no complicated or philosophical anything! Just love—simple, unconditional love! If God does not condemn, then who am I to do so?

That experience was the turning point for me. I am at peace and have a different perspective on life. I do not know what makes someone homosexual. God did not tell me that. All I know is that God answered my prayers. We are all God's children—loved as if we were God's only child. God wants the best for each of us, wants us to love and to be loved, and desires to fill us with God's love.

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside the quiet waters;
He restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness
for His name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;
for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over!
Surely goodness and mercy will follow me
all the days of my life;
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord FOREVER!*
-- 23rd Psalm

May God open your heart and fill it with His love.

*Lavon Gard, August 2006, Woods Chapel
Community of Christ, Lee's Summit, MO*

Jackson County Woman Works to Lower Barriers

Sarah Finken is making the most of her time. At only 27 years old, she's running a political advocacy group in Jackson County, Missouri, on her own, and she's just getting started. Finken is the Kansas City regional field organizer for PROMO, a group focused on the lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgendered and queer (LBGTQ) population. The group promotes civic advocacy, political involvement, self-empowerment and equality.

Finken describes her volunteer work at the non-profit organization as a little bit of everything. "We do electoral work, provide education, set up networks between other groups and counsel those interested in speaking about their experiences," Finken said. "Our volunteers rally support and get GLBTQ individuals into office. We sponsor town hall meetings, lecture series, and we help start up youth groups."

Finken says she loves what she does, and that makes every day worthwhile. "Education is where my passion is," Finken said. "I want to get people involved in the processes that dictate their lives." She places a premium on eliminating stereotypes, hate crimes and anti-gay bullying in school, and she works with area students, including some from Independence, to meet that goal.

When Finken was pursuing her own education, she first focused on psychology and counseling. Some time during her collegiate experience, she started to realize that she was different. "I didn't view myself as simply a lesbian," Finken said. "The stereotyping didn't fit. When I talk about my gender or my sexuality, I say queer."

Before Finken started at PROMO, she worked for the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, going from high school to high school, speaking about equality issues and helping students establish peer groups.

In the lecture series PROMO puts on, identity issues such as the difference between gay or lesbian and queer have been topics. The group also has a series defining transgendered.

PROMO started the way so many civil rights movements begin, in a basement meeting, with a group of passionate people. In 1986 they were campaigning for the repeal of the Missouri Sexual Misconduct Law, which grouped homosexuality in with deviant sexual behavior. The group recently celebrated its 20th anniversary with a dinner and silent auction to raise funds, but the biggest news was that the 20-year battle to repeal the Sexual Misconduct Law had finally been won.

Nearly three years after Missouri's law was rendered unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court's ruling in *Lawrence v. Texas*, the Missouri General Assembly passed a law to strike the provision from the books.

While that battle spanned two decades, others have been won more quickly. Finken says the time frame isn't important to her. She's in it for the long haul. At the end of the day, Finken's needs are simple.

"I want peace, justice and equality for all," Finken said.

*For more information, visit www.PROMOonline.org.
From the 9/1/06 "Making a Difference" column in
The Independence *Examiner* by Andie Schmitt.*

More Light Montreal—International Conference on LGBT Human Rights & Outgames

As always, Michael Adee from More Light Presbyterians is articulate and brings tears to my eyes with his outspoken words and wisdom to both LGBT allies and to the institutions that misunderstand and oppress them. I hope the "spirit" of Michael's thoughts and experience in Montreal can inspire us to prepare to meet with and speak to our own church leaders.

Sharon Troyer

August 12, 2006: Greetings from Montreal, Canada and the first International Conference on LGBT Human Rights. 2,000 participants from over 100 countries came to the Palais de Congres for this extraordinary conference which preceded the First World Outgames in Montreal. This ...[has been] a life-giving, life-saving, history-making event focused upon creating a legacy for global human rights.

The conference was organized with five themes: essential rights, global issues, the diverse LGBT community, participation in society and creating social change. The five plenary sessions focused on one of five continents....

In Montreal Mayor Gerald Tremblay's official welcome address to open the Conference, he said, "Let us be certain, social progress does not occur by itself. Societies must take charge. This Conference and the First World Outgames are an opportunity, through their visibility, to contribute to a full social acknowledgement of LGBT rights." When the Mayor said this, I [wondered when our church will] "take charge" rather than ignore, resist or work against understanding, acceptance and equality for LGBT persons in both church and society?

Louise Arbour, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, spoke to the issues of identity, dignity and human rights. She said, "Neither the existence of national laws, nor the prevalence of custom can ever justify the abuse, attacks, torture and indeed killings that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons are subjected to because of who they are or are perceived to be. Because of the stigma attached to issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, violence against LGBT persons is frequently unreported and undocumented, and goes ultimately unpunished. Rarely does it provoke public debate and outrage. This shameful silence is the ultimate rejection of the fundamental principle of the universality of rights." And, I would add from a faith perspective, the shameful silence of the Church, its lack of moral outrage, its contributions to and sanctions of anti-gay prejudice and discrimination in church and society are rejections of the Gospel, the example and teachings of Jesus, and what it means to be Christian, moral and human.

Arbour spoke of the more than 80 countries, more than 1/3 of the nations in the world, who still have laws

criminalizing sexual relations between consenting adults of the same sex, with seven countries imposing the death penalty. Arbour said, "While this normative, political and social evolution unfolds, it is imperative to remain attentive and responsive to the plight of LGBT persons whose daily life is negatively affected by the current environment."

Arbour's emphasis upon the connection between "identity" and "dignity" was a theme that recurred throughout the conference and certainly in my own reflections. She spoke of "those special and unique characteristics that define our existence, including our sexual identity. As such, this right is closely related to the protection of life, human dignity, mental and physical integrity."

Arbour spoke of respect for human identity, including one's sexual or gender identity, while in contrast, too many in the Church seem fixated, even obsessed with sexual activity, or as they say, behavior, as if one's identity is somehow separate from one's life.

While listening to Louise Arbour, ... all those tired, old, illogical, unethical, even un-Christian prejudices seemed even more trivial, false and deadly: "love the sinner, hate the sin," "self-avowed practicing homosexual" (a phrase tossed at me on more than one occasion), "its (sort of) okay to be gay, but don't have sex," to the self-righteous, heterosexist "fidelity in marriage, chastity in singleness" which is compulsory heterosexuality or an imposed celibacy, and so on.

On the final day of the conference, we adopted the Declaration of Montreal which will be brought to the United Nations and world governments. The Preamble states, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." This famous first sentence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted almost 60 years ago by the General Assembly of the United Nations, still contains in a nutshell our political agenda as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transitioned and intersexual persons.

The call to ... Christianity and other religious traditions from this Declaration of Montreal includes: "We urge religious institutions and non-confessional organizations to put into practice the principles of tolerance and equality toward LGBT individuals among their own ranks, and to contribute to the fight for LGBT human rights in the world at large."

The First World Outgames drew over 12,000 athletes from 109 countries....In the Olympic Stadium, Canadian Gold Medalist Mark Tewksbury said at the closing ceremonies, "The Olympics ask us to be better athletes, the Outgames (*continued on pg. 7, col. 2*)

Bishops and Elders Council, September 11, Dallas, Texas

On September 9-11, 2006, Christian leaders whose organizations touch the lives of 98 million Americans gathered in Dallas, Texas, for the Bishops and Elders Council to end the homophobia and heterosexism in churches and to reaffirm Jesus' message of love, welcome, and acceptance of all people.

STATEMENT BY BISHOPS & ELDERS COUNCIL

On September 11, 2001, some leading Christian extremists portrayed the tragedy of 9/11 as God's judgment on America for the presence of gays and lesbians. The intervening years have witnessed an alarming escalation of religion-based, anti-gay attacks by both political leaders and religious groups.

Today, on the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, we, as leaders representing organizations that touch the lives of 98 million Americans, are united in our rejection of all forms of fear-based religion, all political manipulation in the name of Jesus, and governmental hostility toward gays, lesbians, bi-sexuals and transgender persons, especially that hostility that uses Christianity as an excuse to divide society and demonize minorities.

Today, as Christian leaders who have gathered in council in Dallas, Texas, we proclaim that discrimination, rejection, scapegoating, and oppression of gay people and their families are incompatible with the Christian ethic of love – and are not spiritual, democratic, patriotic, or fair.

Today, we announce that the anti-gay agenda against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender is effectively over. Thanks to a rapidly growing movement of churches and faith leaders in communities across the United States, thousands of churches now embrace Jesus' message that "*whosoever will may come*," and open their doors in welcome to same-gender-loving people of faith. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Christians, along with their families and allies, now have the option of nurturing their spiritual lives in faith communities that celebrate and welcome all of God's creation.

Motivated by our Christian faith and to further our nation's founding goals of justice and equality for all, we call upon all people of goodwill to work actively for an end to discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons by:

- **Realizing** that the relationships of same-gender loving couples are equal in every way to heterosexual couples and are worthy of both the right to civil marriage and the rites of Christian marriage;
- **Reaffirming** the rights of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender persons to full equality under the law, in-

cluding adoption rights, employment and housing protections, and the right to openly serve in the US military;

– **Refusing** to cooperate with or support political or religious leaders who caricature and condemn the lives of gays and lesbians;

– **Refuting** the ex-gay notion that sexual orientation and gender identity can and should be changed.

As unified followers of Christ, reclaiming our faith, we commit to speak boldly with our own communities and the larger culture from out of our experience as those who have been both oppressed and oppressor. We will communicate God's incessant call for justice, wholeness and peace, and work to equip ourselves and others to take concrete action to achieve God's loving shalom.

The Bishops and Elders Council further commits to continued work on behalf of all people oppressed or marginalized by poverty, immigration policies, HIV/AIDS, addictions, classism, sexism, ageism, or violence.

***Bishops and Elders Council, Dallas, Texas
September 9-11, 2006***

The list of clergy who signed this statement is available at <http://www.rmnetwork.org/flashnet/>, subject: [IWR Form] RMN Flashnet 2006-09-14

(cont. from pg. 6) ask us to be better human beings." Tewksbury went on to say, "This week in Montreal we were not second-class citizens. Thank you for helping us play for real."

I was not a second-class citizen in Montreal last week. Upon my return to the United States, I return to that second-class, unequal status where who I am, who I fall in love with, and how I choose to create family is not fairly or legally protected; upon returning home to the Presbyterian Church (USA), I return to that suspect, second-class status, automatically, categorically sinful, less morally and spiritual fit than my heterosexual or heterosexually-assumed sisters and brothers.

Participating in the conference, competing in the Outgames, experiencing the genuine hospitality of Montreal, I kept thinking this could be the Church, this could be my own church, this could be the United States, this should be the World. Someday soon, I hope, pray and work to those ends.

No matter what, remember that you are a child of God, created good in the image of God. Claim your identity, whatever it is, knowing that you are and it is a gift from God. Together we are building a Church for all God's people. With hope and grace from Montreal,

*Michael J. Adee, M. Div., Ph.D., National Field Organizer
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Faith Leaders Confront Catholic Bishops

A group of clergy from a multifaith coalition in support of same-sex marriage called on Massachusetts Roman Catholic bishops to stop their political campaign to revoke civil marriage rights for gays and lesbians.

Board members from the Religious Coalition for the Freedom to Marry (www.rcfm.org) held a press conference in downtown Boston ... on June 27, where they released an open letter to Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley and other Roman Catholic bishops of Massachusetts.

The letter charges the local church hierarchy with "religious discrimination" by trying to deny legal rights to same sex couples married by clergy of other denominations. The clergy—700 strong, representing 21 faith traditions—also said the Catholic hierarchy's action disrespects their various faiths' support for equal marriage and causes harm to thousands of their members.

Religious leaders openly criticizing one another is rare, and the move by RCFM highlights increased tensions and polarizing trends along conservative and liberal denominational and faith-based fault lines regarding marriage equality.

The RCFM letter is direct and hard-hitting, written clearly and forcefully. A few key excerpts are:

- "You are promoting prejudice through your political campaign, intentionally or not.
- "Thousands of Roman Catholics have signed our Roman Catholic statement in support of marriage equality. They have signed out of their pain and love and concern for the Church.
- "We urge you to stop trying to make your religious definition of marriage and the family the law of our Commonwealth." For the full text, see www.rcfm.org/LetterToRCBishops.htm.

As of June 28, Massachusetts was the only state which permits legal gay wedlock with more than 8,000 same-sex couples married under the Supreme Judicial Court's historic Goodridge decision....

Rabbi Devon Lerner, RCFM's director, said in a press statement that her group "has made several attempts in the past to talk with Cardinal O'Malley about our concerns and we have reached out as a board." But she explained, "We haven't received a response." Lerner also said she hopes for a dialogue. Meanwhile, "We cannot let the Catholic hierarchy's message go unchallenged. This is an important matter of justice and religious freedom for everyone."

During the press conference, Rev. George Welles, Jr., an Episcopal priest, rector of Church of Our Savior in Milton, MA, appealed to the foundational documents of the American Republic, including the Declaration of Independence and preamble to the U.S. Constitution. Welles called on the Catholic bishops to "preserve the integrity of our constitutional democracy."

Welles also said the RCFM expressed its concern in the open letter format for two reasons. "For those of us who proclaim homosexual persons and unions to be as natural as heterosexual persons and opposite sex unions—grand and glorious—we will be able to continue our respective practices without interference," he said.

Welles voiced another concern. "Once prejudice or discrimination has been allowed to corrupt our Constitution, there is no telling whose rights are threatened next."

Another speaker, Rabbi Daniel Judson of Temple Beth David (Reform Judaism) in Canton, said, "We believe the church

has the right to speak its mind; to vote according to its beliefs; and, of course, the right not to perform same-sex weddings in their churches." He added, "But we object to the church having a campaign to deny rights to a minority it objects to."

Judson also appealed to a former nun and Islamic scholar Karen Armstrong, who has studied three major faiths—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. When asked about her faith tradition, Judson said that Armstrong replied, "I am for whatever promotes grace and love in the world." Judson suggested that standard as a measure of how interfaith groups come together.

"Does taking away the rights of minorities promote grace and love?" he asked. "Does vilifying gays and lesbians inject more grace and love?" For Judson, the answer is no.

In her remarks, Rev. Anne C. Fowler, an Episcopal priest, rector of St. John's Church in Jamaica Plain and president of the RCFM, implicitly challenged Catholic Church teaching. Referring to a same-sex couple she recently married, Fowler said, "To call these families, these relationships immoral, deviant, disordered flies in the face of everything I know about them and everything I know about God's justice." She added, "To judge and condemn them to second class status is to judge and condemn our communities of faith who welcome, include, and honor them."

Catholic Church teaching makes a distinction between homosexuality and gay sex. During the last 20 years, Church documents have held an increasingly hard line, referring to homosexuality and homosexual acts as "intrinsic evil" and "objective disorder." More recently with the advent of marriage equality in Canada, Spain, Belgium, and the Netherlands, Rome has stepped up its public opposition. In a 2003 document, "Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons," the Vatican went so far as to say that same-sex relationships "create obstacles in the normal development of children" and asserts that "such unions would actually mean doing violence to them."

RCFM board member Rev. Tiffany Steinwert, a Methodist minister who is pastor of the First Church of Winthrop and of Cambridge Welcoming Ministries, addressed the Church's right to conduct its own campaign, which calls for letting the people vote on a proposed ballot measure. "This is not a pure democracy," she said. Citing the examples of women's suffrage and racial desegregation of public schools, Steinwert added, "Civil rights are not up for popular vote." Asked about responses from the chancery, Fowler said that calls have been referred to the Massachusetts Catholic Conference, or MCC, the local church's lobbying arm on Beacon Hill.

Even before the RCFM press availability, MCC executive director Edward F. Saunders, Jr., told the Boston Globe, "In no way does the church seek to intentionally discriminate against any individual or deny anyone their civil rights.... But there is a difference of opinion here, and that's democracy, and what it points out [is] this is an issue that the public should have a right to have their say on."

Asked about their feelings as Catholics, Charles Martel, an RCFM Roman Catholic liaison, said he had been writing for some time to O'Malley in hopes of meeting with him. Martel said it was "sad" that he has not heard back. "It's the same pattern of inaccessibility," Martel added. (*cont. on pg. 9*)

Same-Sex Marriages Can Reflect God's Covenant with Creation, Too

October 04, 2006

Last year I had the privilege of presiding at the wedding of two women in a beautiful ceremony in McKees Rocks. Wedding ceremonies are deeply spiritual affairs, affirming the love between two people before God and their commitment to one another in this life. Nancy and Brenda's joyous wedding was no different, and I feel blessed to have been part of their celebration.

It's also why, with my pretrial hearing set to begin tomorrow, I plan to plead "innocent" to the charges brought against me by the Pittsburgh Presbytery for overseeing the marriage ceremony of a same-sex couple.

I know there are colleagues within the Presbyterian Church who disagree with my actions. But it is clear to me that my decision to perform Nancy and Brenda's wedding was inspired by the Holy Spirit and is faithful to my pastoral call. I did not arrive at this decision overnight.

I spent several months in prayer and met with Nancy and Brenda many times before concluding that marriage between same-sex couples falls within the Presbyterian tradition of reform. Indeed, this commitment to reform is arguably the Presbyterian Church's primary gift to the Church Universal: our understanding that change is both possible and necessary in Christian life.

Because he and I share the same Reformed Christian heritage, my actions echo those of my own ancestor, Rev. Jonathan Edwards, the pre-eminent 18th-century American theologian, who also acted to challenge certain church practices of his day -- for example, the subjugation of Native Americans.

Today, I am proud to be part of this witness. Turning away from Nancy and Brenda's wedding would have meant turning away from my calling from God to help the church "give full expression to the rich diversity within its membership." In other words, marriage between two women or two men is consistent with the call to inclusiveness, diversity and openness within the church, which is rooted in the essential message of love proclaimed by Jesus.

Marriage also reflects the image of God's covenant with creation. As God's servant, I am called upon to perform marriage ceremonies for couples like Nancy and Brenda who show a sincere, loving commitment to God and to one another. Marriage between two men or two women can have all the qualities of marriage envisioned in Scripture, mirroring God's relationship with us: fidelity, love, progeny, family, community, companionship and mutual support.

It's love that makes a family. I witnessed the power of this love firsthand as a child when my uncle and his partner would visit from California. It wasn't until the 1990s that I learned my uncle had twice been sent to a sanitarium in his youth to be "cured" of his homosexuality. When my uncle became bedridden for nearly a decade in his 80s after a series of strokes, his partner was at his bedside caring for him every day. The bond of their commitment is what marriage embodies and honors.

Most of the gay and lesbian Presbyterians who live in Pittsburgh were born in Pittsburgh and grew up in the church. But many of them have fallen away from the congregations of their childhoods because they have been deeply wounded by the treatment they received. Surely this is not the path that God intended for His children.

It is my hope that the path we're on today is the centuries-old path of reform reflected in our church motto, "Reform and always being reformed according to the Word of God." Opening our hearts and our doors to our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters is a step toward reform. My own faith, pastoral duty and sense of justice compel me to say "Yes" when a loving, committed couple asks me to preside at their wedding.

When Nancy and Brenda got married on that summer day in 2005, God created a new thing, as God has in every other marriage before them. The Holy Spirit sealed the promise to sustain their marriage as long as both shall live.

Love between two people is always remarkable. When two people seek God's blessing of that love in marriage, it is awesome. Right now our faith is being reformed to include two men or two women in our understanding of marriage. Thank God!

--By the Rev. Dr. Janet Edwards, spiritual director and chaplain at General Assembly in Birmingham. Janet serves as a parish associate at Community of Reconciliation, a More Light Church, one of three in Pittsburgh, <http://www.communityofreconciliation.org/>.

*<http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/pp/06277/727109.stm>,
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(cont. from pg. 8) Another Catholic liaison, Constance Cervone, said it was "painful" and "perplexing" that "after 12 years of Catholic schools, to know that the Church and the message of Jesus Christ are being used against my civil rights." For more than two years Cervone and Janet Deegan have been legally married. Cervone's ultimate message to our church leaders is clear: "Stop aggressively campaigning against us," she said.

*--Chuck Colbert, June 28, 2006
www.innewsweekly.com/innews/print.php?article_code=2173*

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