



gala **news**

THE LETTER

Winter/Spring 2007 – Volume 18 Issue 1

President's Corner

I've been amazed at the reach of this little newsletter. In early November I received a phone call from a reporter for the Nov. 20th issue of *In Touch* magazine. It seems that they were wanting opinions on the outing of Neil Patrick Harris a/k/a Doogie Houser. It was kinda nice to see the GALA name in print next to a quote from a GLAAD representative. When I asked how they got my name, they said they had a copy of our newsletter. Who woulda known? And who would've guessed the first (and only) person who called me about it was my daughter, who had bought it to kill time during an airport delay!

Unfortunately, some people who receive this newsletter use it for less than appropriate purposes. Someone who has access to the newsletter is using the contact phone numbers of board members. GALA has always gone to great lengths to keep our membership list confidential. Please be assured that we will continue to do so.

You will read more in this newsletter about the wonderful growth of the Welcoming Community Network (WCN). Because this organization sprang from GALA, our membership list will be shared with them. They, too, will honor its confidentiality.

On a personal note, those of you who were at retreat may have been aware that I was experiencing significant back pain. Originally thought to be a pulled muscle, it was diagnosed as renal cell carcinoma which included a mass (about the size of a softball when finally removed) and had metastasized to a significant part of my spine and minimally within both lungs. I have had back surgery to remove as much of the cancer as possible, 13 radiation treatments, and surgery to remove the left kidney and its mass. For the last two months my daily task has been simply to try to get food to stay down and to remain hydrated, two tasks that I never dreamed could be so difficult. I am now preparing to enter the hospital for the first of two rounds of immunotherapy. That's a

fancy word for saying, "We're gonna make him really sick so we can administer the only known treatment to be effective in taming, even curing, this form of cancer." Nonetheless, please know that I am in good hands, as is GALA.

I tell you this because it is now necessary for me to step back from my role as president. Allan Fiscus has agreed to carry my load until I have completed the next phase of treatment. I think you'll be pleased with what's happening within GALA & WCN. God bless you all. Your support is a blessing.

Alan Zimmerman, 1/30/07

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Treasurer's Report, 10/1/06 to 2/1/07

Actual FY'07 Budget FY'07

Cash on Hand 9/30/06.....	\$11,003	
Income		
Memberships	800.....	\$1,500
Contributions	210.....	13,000
Grants & Foundations.....	600.....	200
Commissions (Amazon)	0.....	600
Special Projects: Book of Stories	0.....	4,000
Special Projects: Book Presales.....	0.....	1,000
Special Projects: WCN	0	
Interest	2.....	
Total Income.....	\$1,612....	\$20,300
Expenses		
Administrative	80.....	3,575
Field Organizer.....	0	
Retreat Reserve Fund	0.....	2,500
Newsletters	539.....	1,550
Region/Mission Centers	0.....	3,000
Welcoming Community Network....	106.....	1,000
Book of Stories.....		6,000
All Other Expenses.....	500.....	2,675
Total Expenses	\$1,225....	\$20,300
Income in Excess of Expenses	\$386	
Cash on Hand 2/1/07.....	\$11,390	

Note: Other expenses included amounts paid to Chihowa Retreat Center in October 2006 for Retreat lodging costs.
The FY 2005 IRS Form 990 was filed in mid January 2007 prior to the IRS deadline. Thanks to Fran for her assistance.

2007 GALA Retreat Chihowa Retreat Center outside 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

Talent Show: USO Radio Talent Show

If you would like to help with the planning, or
for more information, contact

Kip Dawson, kdawson316@aol.com

The Book of Stories: Update

The Book of Stories, edited by Bill Russell, will be jointly published by John Whitmer Books and GALA in paperback for only \$15 a book. The first \$1,000 in profits will go to GALA. Profits beyond that will be split between the John Whitmer Association and GALA. Unfortunately it will not be available by Conference time.

World Conference Activities

Community of Christ World Conference is scheduled for March 24-31, 2007. The theme: "Share Christ—Share Peace." GALA and WCN invite all interested participants to join in two jointly sponsored activities:

A worship service

Wednesday, March 28, 12:30 pm
College Park Congregation, 1021 W. College

Reception

Thursday, March 29, 5:30-7:15 pm
Olive Branch Inn, 200 N. Delaware

Welcoming Community Network

The Welcoming Community Network (WCN) was formally organized in January 2007. Elected to the Board of Directors were Meredith Bischoff, president; Sam Marmoy, vice president; Velton Peabody, secretary; Leonard Hitchcock, treasurer; Sharon Troyer, spiritual director; John Billings, Carol Cavin, and Curtis Filer.

WCN is a grassroots organization created with the support of GALA. Its purpose is to enable full participation of persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities in the life of the Community of Christ.

WCN will share in a \$150,000 three-year grant from the ARCUS Foundation¹ of Kalamazoo, MI, with (1) the Association of Welcoming Baptists, (2) Gay and Lesbian Affirming Disciples (Christian Church, Disciples of Christ), and (3) the Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests. These organizations are all members of the Welcoming Church Movement.

The grant will be used to hire a full-time faith-based community organizer who will work out of Minneapolis with all four programs individually as well as collaboratively to develop regional ecumenical workshops. The focus of the workshops will be to help individuals from each denomination acquire the training, resources and support necessary to assist congregations desiring to become more welcoming of GLBT persons.

Several Community of Christ congregations already have become welcoming congregations, and others are in the process.

Further information about WCN, future training opportunities, and how congregations may become officially welcoming may be found at WCN's new website:

welcomingcommunitynetwork.org.

¹*The Arcus Foundation provides funding in the fields of human rights and conservation. It envisions and contributes to a pluralistic world that celebrates diversity and dignity, invests in social justice, and promotes tolerance and compassion.*

Proud parents Marie Dixon, left, and

According to his new moms, newborn Francesco Dixon-McCoy has been a long time coming. Five years, actually. But as Guelph's first baby of 2007, this little one and his proud parents are finally watching everything fall into place.

Well, other than the baby's name, that is. Francesco is this newborn's middle name. His first name is still undecided. Marie Dixon and her partner Andrea McCoy are trying to choose between two names—Jack and Rowan. "We like both, that's the problem," Dixon said yesterday at Guelph General Hospital, just a few hours after delivering the baby.

The little one arrived at 8:45 a.m. on New Year's Day. He weighed a healthy eight pounds, five ounces. Dixon delivered him by caesarean section after the baby's Dec. 22 due date slipped past. The couple was packing baby clothes when the rest of Guelph was ringing in the new year.

"I just looked at (McCoy) and said 'Happy New Year, this is our baby's birthday,'" Dixon said.

The newborn is the couple's first child, and it's been a long road to bring this little one into the world.

"The process has been a good five years," McCoy explained. "But the timing's perfect, too."

Andrea McCoy, right, hold their new baby.

According to an amendment in the Vital Statistics Act, McCoy can now be registered as a parent on her baby's birth certificate. Previously same-sex couples could only have the name of the birth parent registered.

McCoy said it took about five years for all the pieces to come together—gynecologists, clinics and eventually successful artificial insemination. "There was so much work to get to this point," Dixon explained that they were "trying for so long to get pregnant."

Choosing 36-year-old Dixon to carry the child just made sense. "Marie's older and her biological clock's ticking a little bit more," McCoy said. "Marie was ready to have a baby."

And now the next step is naming their baby boy and soon leaving the hospital for their home in Guelph. Yesterday, baby Dixon-McCoy had several visitors crowding the tiny hospital room he shares with mom. All were hoping to get a peek at him, and he didn't even fuss at his cooing fans.

Great-grandmother Joyce Rush, who traveled from Meaford, was happy to add a seventh great-grandchild to her family. Though, she does have a preference for his name. "I always call him Jack," she said, laughing.

But the couple isn't in any hurry to decide on a name. They just want →→

Personal Greetings

Thanks so much for the latest edition of GALA News! We enjoy it so much! We visited with our sons Clyde Frey and Nathan Phillips of Buffalo, NY, and are thrilled with the way we see God working in their lives, and for the wonderfully supportive congregation they have in the Buffalo area.

Al & Willa Frey

Hi! Enclosed is my membership renewal. About myself: I'm a lapsed Christian who is slowly working my way back to Christianity. I go to the Fremont California congregation of the Community of Christ. I'm an out-and-about gay man, heavily involved in the recovery community. I used to be a volunteer at a domestic violence shelter. I've gotten into the habit of tithing, but I send most of that in donations into the local food bank and shelters. (Turn a gay man with a yuppie income and a ¾ ton pickup loose in a Costco to buy food for a food bank. The checkout clerks see me coming and hide!) It helps that one of the directors of the food bank goes to the COC church. I'm planning to move to Lansing, MI, in May. That's my hometown, and I'm moving back to be with family. Take care.

Larry Dunn,

"yuppie income, cowboy tastes"

The world is ever changing and yet some things seem to stay the same...the growing excitement of the Christmas season, the extra touches of thoughtfulness, the compassion that grows, the love that glows and shines...

May your troubles seem lighter, your challenges be inspiring, and your rituals be filled with meaning.

Thank you for the respect and love that we have received from you and other friends, and with deep sincerity try to give back always.

May the Light of the World be with you.

Hoot & Colleen Leonard, Midland, TX

to enjoy their new baby and this moment. After all, it's taken a long time to arrive at this point.

"After wanting something for so long, (and being) dedicated to something for years, it's quite overwhelming to get there," Dixon said.

By Laura Thompson, Guelph Mercury Tues., 1/2/07, lhompson@guelphmercury.com

Our thanks to Forrest Swall for sharing with us this article from the "PFLAG Weekly Update":

A Message from PFLAG's National President, John Cepek

My name is John Cepek. I'm the new president of PFLAG's Board of Directors. Having assumed office on 11/6/06, ... I've been on the job for only little more than a week. I've spent some of that time wondering how I could ever fill Sam Thoron's shoes. Anyone who has ever met Sam or heard him speak knows he's a gentle soul but a fierce warrior for equal rights and dignity for his lesbian daughter. He's gracious & eloquent. I'm, well, a little rougher around the edges.

I should tell you a little bit about myself and my family. My wife, Char, and I have been married for 37 years. We met in 1968 and eloped on June 7, 1969. We may not have attended Woodstock, but we did have our own summer of love.

We have two sons, Mike and John. Mike is 32 and straight; John is 34 and gay. John's coming out was somewhat atypical. During the Christmas season in 1990, Char noticed that he was walking out the back door of our house with a pile of presents. When mothers begin an investigation, all of their senses are heightened. From across the kitchen, Char saw that one name was written on all of the gift tags -- a man's name.

"This [fellow] must be very important to you," she said.

"Don't you know I'm gay?" John replied.

Seven months later Char and I attended our first PFLAG meeting, and we've been on the PFLAG march ever since. Char is currently the president of the eight-chapter PFLAG Council of Northern Illinois. After serving as a chapter president in Illinois, I joined the board of directors in 1998. I was secretary of the board for several years before becoming one of its two vice-presidents.

We continue to work in PFLAG because we want John to have the same rights as Mike, nothing more and certainly nothing less. We also want to create a society in which gay, lesbian, bisexual, & transgender (GLBT) individuals are accorded the same value as our garden-variety straights. In our opinion, no other organization has the potential to move this country away from prejudice and toward affirmation of our GLBT family members and friends.

I'm particularly excited about some of the new programs and projects PFLAG has begun. Under the leadership of the secretary of our board, Rabbi David Horowitz, our

Religious Leaders Working Group will introduce the PFLAG family voice into the ongoing discussions about sexual orientation and gender diversity in the communities of faith across this country. When doctrines of bigotry meet the voice of thoughtful human beings, they will be blown away.

Word to the wise: I envision a day in the near future when David will become one of the major national voices for diversity in religious bodies. In fact, I suspect he's going to be big, very big. Get his autograph before he starts charging for it.

I'm also thrilled to be part of **Straight for Equality**. Our new project is aimed at increasing the number of straight individuals working for GLBT rights. At our recent Midwestern Tri-Regional Conference, Jennifer Gerarda Brown, co-author of *Straightforward: How to Mobilize Heterosexual Support for Gay Rights*, suggested that nearly every GLBT individual has four straight friends or family members who support equal rights for that individual. This country currently has a population of 300 million. A conservative estimate would put the GLBT segment at about three percent, or nine million persons. We then have a potential volunteer straight pool of *36 million people*. Keep these numbers in mind when you hear me say that we hope to engage **only** two million straight allies to work with us. Sometimes, I like being conservative.

...Above all, let's remember PFLAG is built upon our coming out of the closet and telling our stories. We'll never have enough of the wisdom of Sam Thoron, and so I think his words on this subject from last week bear repeating:

"We change hearts and minds by telling our personal stories. Our stories cannot be denied. You cannot hate someone whose story you know. It is increasingly critical that we **tell** our stories, that we **tell** our truth. . . . Tell your stories, make your voices heard. **Stand up and be counted – now!**"

Yes, indeed, stand up and be counted!

In love and service for PFLAG, John
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LGBT Religious Archives Network Year-End Report

Accomplishments in 2006:

1. CREATING SHOWER OF STOLES
ONLINE EXHIBIT: LGBT-RAN's largest-scale venture in 2006 has been the creation of an

online exhibit for the Shower of Stoles Project. The Shower of Stoles is a collection of over a thousand liturgical stoles and other sacred items from LGBT persons in twenty-six faith traditions and six countries. Each stole celebrates the gifts of an LGBT person who is active in the leadership of her/his faith community or lifts up someone who has been excluded because of sexual orientation or gender identity.

This online exhibit--a collaboration with the Institute of Welcoming Resources and retiring Shower of Stoles coordinator Martha Juillerat--has two basic purposes: a) to preserve stories related to the donation of stoles that reside in Martha's memory; and b) to provide access to the dramatic witness of the Shower of Stoles--in a digital version --to many more persons across the globe.

The online exhibit includes info about the person(s) honored by each liturgical item as well the story behind its donation--plus photos. About one-half the collection has been posted to the exhibit and should be completed early in 2007. The costs of this venture have been underwritten by 32 friends of the Shower of Stoles Project, who have donated over \$14,000 to date.

2. ADDING PROFILES TO WEB SITE: Biographical sketches of 18 leaders of LGBT religious movements were added to the Profiles Gallery over the past year, bringing the total to 174. You can view all of the entries in the Profiles Gallery--leaders from a wide diversity of religious expressions throughout the world--at www.lgbtran.org/profiles.asp. The Pro-files Gallery was renamed this year (from Pioneers Gallery) in order to be more sensitive to diverse cultural contexts.

Note that the Profiles Gallery is not intended to honor particular persons, but instead to build an historical record that is as comprehensive as possible. Send bios or suggestions of persons to be profiled to profiles@lgbtran.org. The Profiles Gallery is the most-viewed part of the LGBT-RAN web site and is often used in research and in classrooms.

3. ADDING ORAL HISTORIES TO WEB SITE: Two more oral history interviews were posted to the LGBT-RAN web site this year. The interview with **Michael Cole**, founder of Christ Chapel in Long Beach, California, who died in 2005, was done by Dr. Melissa Wilcox in 2002. The **George Hyde** interview was conducted recently by Dr. J. Gordon Melton and recounts Hyde's involvement with the founding of a gay and lesbian congregation in Atlanta in 1946 and his subsequent career in

ministry. LGBT-RAN distributed an article on the ground-breaking historical significance of the Hyde interview that was published in several LGBT religious newsletters and magazines. LGBT-RAN's Oral History Project is unique in that its interviews are easily accessible for reading/ listening on the web site.

LGBT-RAN depends upon the financial support of many friends and partners in order to fulfill its unique mission to preserve LGBT religious history. Gifts can be sent by check c/o Chicago Theological Seminary, 5757 S. University Ave., Chicago, IL 60637 or by credit card at www.lgbtran.org

2007 Hate Crimes Vigil in Montgomery, Alabama

Following is the press release sent to Alabama state officials and media the week of Feb. 5:

Civil rights leader Rev. Robert Graetz will give the keynote address at this year's annual Vigil for Victims of Hate Crimes on the steps of the State Capitol. The Vigil is set for Sunday, February 18, at 4:00 p.m. and is open to the public.

The Vigil honors the memory of Billy Jack Gaither, who was brutally murdered on February 19, 1999, as well as others who have been victims of hate crimes over the years. Since 2000, the vigil has been scheduled close to the anniversary of Gaither's death to advocate for the inclusion of sexual orientation in Alabama's hate crimes legislation.

While Rev. Graetz is best known for his role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, he has long been an advocate for the full inclusion of gays and lesbians in our society. "When people are assaulted simply for being who God created them to be, it is more than an assault on them; it is an assault on our civil society," Rev. Graetz says. "I'm looking forward to the opportunity at the vigil to share with all Alabamians how important it is that our laws condemn the kind of violence to which gays and lesbians are subjected far too often," he added.

Alabama's annual vigil has attracted attention nationally, with well wishes extended by many leaders in the LGBT community. The Rev. Mel White, president of the national organization Soul Force, applauds the efforts of the vigil and in recent correspondence stated, "We must practice relentless nonviolent resistance. We must out-love our enemies by refusing to allow them to be victims

(and to make victims) any longer...Let's join together to do it!"

The 2007 Vigil is sponsored by Equality Alabama, with support from members, clergy, and friends of Holy Trinity International Christian Community Church, Immanuel Presbyterian Church, New Hope Metropolitan Community Church, and the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Montgomery.

Contact Person: Mike Tatum
Telephone: 334-263-4680
Email Address: mtatum4496@yahoo.com

Mike Tatum, chair of the planning committee and a longtime member of the Community of Christ, said "Our mission is two-fold: First, to decry any violence that takes place against persons based on gender, race, creed or affectional and sexual orientation. Second, to call attention to the fact that heinous crimes that are obviously motivated by hate are taking place in Alabama, and are not legally recognized as hate crimes.

"Our vigil has reached a point where attendance is in the triple digits and the local media provides some coverage. Our planning committee is officially endorsed by three local churches, and supported by Soul Force Alabama and Equality Alabama."

BREAKING NEWS

In August 2006, formal charges were filed with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) against Pastor Bradley Schmeling of St. John's Lutheran Church (Atlanta, GA) because of his committed relationship with Rev. Darin Easler. The trial was held last month, & the decision was released on February 8.

In a decision made public today, the hearing committee in the disciplinary action against Pastor Bradley Schmeling overwhelmingly affirmed the ministry of Pastor Schmeling and challenged the validity of the policy precluding pastors in same-gender relationships, saying it is "at least bad policy, and very well may violate the constitution and bylaws of this church."

The hearing committee called for the removal of the policy, giving two pathways to do so: through the judicial process of the committee on appeals, or through the legislative process of the churchwide assembly. Consequently, the hearing committee delayed the effective date of a decision to remove Pastor Schmeling until after the next ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

Emily Eastwood, Executive Director of Lutherans Concerned/North America, said

"This decision is courageous and unprecedented in the history of the ELCA. For an official judicial body of the church to call for removal of the discriminatory policy marks a tremendous shift in the on-going struggle for equality.

"Pastor Schmeling and St. John's presented a compelling case. Peter met Cornelius and the Holy Spirit became the wind of change. The hearing committee of elected and faithful Lutherans heard the witness and acted accordingly within its purview. While seven of the committee members felt that they did not have the authority to set new policy, the group was nearly unanimous in calling for swift and complete removal of the old.

"The decision has taken the case of one fine pastor in the deep south to the national stage. Unintended advocates, Pastor Schmeling and St. John's now stand squarely at the center of the ongoing conversation. LC/NA continues to accompany and support them in this process."

As a result of this decision, two tracks of action will proceed immediately. Pastor Schmeling has 30 days to decide to submit an appeal. Within 24 hours LC/NA and its collaborative partners under the banner of goodsoil.org will release the legislative package requested by the hearing committee in its decision. LC/NA calls on its members and RIC churches to answer the call of the hearing committee and bring the recommended motions to their conference and synodical assemblies. Organizing for the ELCA Churchwide Convention, August 6-12, 2007, at Navy Pier in Chicago, is already underway.

The full text of the decision of the Hearing Committee can be found on St. John's website, www.stjohnsatlanta.org.

Rejoicing Even in Times of Adversity, by Beth Stroud

The Rev. Beth Stroud joined the First United Methodist Church of Germantown (FUMCOG) in Philadelphia as an associate pastor in 1999. In April 2003, she told the congregation that she is a lesbian living in a committed relationship with another woman. In a church trial in December of 2004, Stroud was found guilty of violating a United Methodist Church law which states that self-avowed, practicing homosexuals are not to be ordained or appointed.

After the trial, Rachel Holly Miller visited FUMCOG the day Beth Stroud gave the sermon reprinted here. "Fred Day, the Pastor, joked that they're looking for a volunteer to be the next one on trial....because of all the attention and the visitors. That church really does love her. One of their board members made an announcement that immediately following the trial, they got together and hired Beth as their Minister of Education, the same post she had before. Then he sent an e-mail to the district office informing them the open position had been filled. That drew an enthusiastic standing ovation and Beth was fighting back the tears....I am so inspired and lifted up by the FUMCOGers...by their celebration of victory where others see defeat. They are quite a group."

One of the characteristics of the life of faith is the experience of counterintuitive joy. Just when the logical response to external circumstances would seem to be anger, or frustration, or despair, the person of faith may experience a strong, deep sense of confidence and gladness. In the midst of suffering and disappointment, laughter wells up from the depths of a person's heart. In times of terrible losses and setbacks, a person nevertheless discovers a song in her heart. I'm not talking about the way hard times help us appreciate the easier times or the way losing something of great value, like health or a relationship or a good job, can help us appreciate what we still have. I'm not talking about a Pollyannish insistence on looking at the bright side. Instead, I'm talking about a joy that bubbles up in and through us precisely at the hardest times, and that doesn't externally seem to make any sense at all. I'm talking about a joy that is God's gift to us at some of the most painful moments in our lives. I'm not talking about escaping from sorrow or denying grief. I'm talking about the discovery of a deep, resonating note of hope and purpose that incorporates suffering into a profound and beautiful harmony.

I'm talking about something I experienced during my church trial December 1st and 2nd. It was weird: all through that hard experience, with all that was overwhelming and sad and unreal and new and absurd about it, I felt – for the most part – really pretty good. I felt deep-down, in-my-bones good. I felt hopeful. I felt intensely present to the moment. I felt strong. I felt peaceful. I experienced much that humbled me and filled me with gratitude. And jokes and little ironies struck me funnier than usual. At moments – waiting with my family for word from the trial court, sharing a moment of strategy and hope with my legal team, or talking with Chris on our way up and down the hill – I actually laughed harder than I think I have in years.

Over and over, the Bible bears witness to this experience of joy that can't be explained by external circumstances. The Scripture readings today describe that joy as the people of God experienced it on two occasions. Isaiah expresses the joy of

the Israelites in exile in Babylon, longing for their own country and rejoicing in a vision of the desert in bloom as the Lord's ransomed people stream homeward. The Israelites' captors must have thought they were crazy to sing out joyful words like these:

*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert and shall rejoice and blossom; ...
The ransomed of the Lord will return,
and come to Zion with singing;
Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isaiah 35:1-16)*

In the Gospel reading, Luke gives us the words of Mary's joyful song as she, an unwed mother-to-be subject to shame and stigma and the misunderstanding of others, celebrates God's very life being born in her. Anyone who knew Mary, anyone who had some inkling of the suffering she would experience, especially if they didn't know or believe what was happening inside her, must have been incredulous to hear her sing:

*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in
God my savior, for he has looked with favor on the
lowliness of his servant. (Luke 1:46)*

These readings today are two examples of the counterintuitive joy that makes its appearance again and again in the Scriptures. Just when the prophets of Israel ought to be giving up on the mixed-up people who can never get their priorities straight, they utter hopeful words about God's promised future of justice, peace, and redemption. ...

This joy that people of faith can experience in painful times is a gift from God. It is as if God has opened a window into the alternate reality She has planned for us, and invited us to look through. We look through that window and see, as clearly as if we could touch it, the future in which the poor and lowly are lifted up, the hungry are fed, the blind see, the deaf hear, the ransomed return home and even the desert bursts into bloom. We recognize that this future isn't imaginary; it's as real as the suffering we experience now, if not in fact more so.

In the past two weeks, I've had profound moments of looking through that window into God's future. I'd like to share a few of them with you. During a break on the first day of the trial, a man I didn't recognize came up to me. He was very emotional, on the verge of tears. He said, "I just want to talk to you for a second." He said, "I'm as confused as hell about this issue of homosexuality. I am just as confused as hell. I wish the Almighty would write the answer in the sky and we would all know. I really don't know what the answer is. But I want you to know that I've learned a lot from you today. I wish I could say something better or more helpful. But if you're ever in my area and you'd like to talk, would you give me a call. I'm just as confused as hell." And he said his name, and that's when I realized he was the pastor of a large evangelical church in our conference, a pastor I had been told was very conservative.

That moment made me feel that perhaps the trial had opened up some sacred space for real listening and growth.

Rejoicing (continued)

Perhaps the eyes of the blind would be opened. The weekend after the trial, I got a call at home from a member of the trial court. He said, "I just want you to know that I never want to go through anything like that again. I really felt trapped by the church law. But I want to do everything I can to see that you get your ordination back someday I want to help change this law. I'm totally committed to it now in a way I wasn't before. If you can think of anything I can do, just let me know." Perhaps the trial did something to take away the complacency of moderates in the church, so that we all might see the pain and harm of an unjust law and work harder to change it.

Early last week, I got an e-mail from a member of this congregation who had gone to the mall on Sunday afternoon to do some Christmas shopping with his daughter. They were both wearing their "Beth is my pastor" badges. A young couple at the mall recognized the badges from TV and angrily took issue with the view they represented: that Christianity has room for gay and lesbian families. Now, this is a person who has a temper. I've been on the receiving end once or twice. But on this occasion, as he felt his anger rising, he did the Christian thing and walked away, not even responding when the couple called out after them, shouting a very un-Christian antigay epithet. When I read his email, I was amazed at how this heterosexual man's simple expression of solidarity with his lesbian pastor had become so much more, as he literally made himself vulnerable to the same suffering gay and lesbian people experience and fear every day. Perhaps the trial helped members of this congregation enter into a deeper solidarity with one another, truly sharing one another's hurts as the church is called to do.

Here's what I think makes me appreciate God's sense of humor the most: Listening to members of this church talk about their experiences over the past two weeks, I realize that if Fred and Melody and I had worked for six months to come up with a plan to force you to talk about your faith and your congregation in your schools and workplaces, we couldn't have done any better. This experience of the trial has made evangelists out of all of you, and you don't even like the word "evangelism." How funny is that?

I could give you more examples, but these will give you some idea of the window God opened for me in the middle of this trial, and the counterintuitive joy God gave me. I can see God's future as clearly as if it had already happened, even though it is clearly still very much under construction. I see a United Methodist Church that could be a meeting ground for people with different experiences and theologies, rather than a battleground. I see sacred space for real, deep, true, compassionate listening to one another, which can lead to conversion and transformation. I see the possibility of the kind of growth and vision that we experienced when FUMCOG became a Reconciling Congregation, only on a much larger scale, through which some of the very people who have the most questions might become the staunchest advocates of a fully inclusive church. I can see the day when people will recognize that God blesses all loving families. It might not come today or tomorrow, but it will come. Four years ago, when Chris and I had our commitment ceremony, Patricia Pearce, the

pastor of Chris's church, reminded us that Jesus commanded us to rejoice. She told us:

"You see, people for the most part don't care much for alternate realities. They like what they're comfortable with, and because of your relationship you will challenge some people's comfort level and elicit their disapproval or even hostility. There is only one thing you are commanded to do when that happens. Go out dancing. Or partying. Or gather together in the company of friends to share a meal and laugh together. Celebrate your relationship. Rejoicing in the face of persecution is the ultimate subversive act, because it is the way you reclaim the truth that you are blessed and that you are not alone."

After the trial, we did that. We obeyed Jesus' commandment to rejoice. The night of the verdict and the penalty vote, my family and I went out to dinner with a few of the people who had given literally days and weeks and months of pro bono work to craft my defense. It was an evening of eating great food, telling family stories, and laughing together as we shared our various experiences of the trial. Fred was with us, and as we gathered there was such a spirit of joy and optimism in the room he said, "If this is losing, what does winning feel like?" I won't say I haven't felt sad, or frustrated, or disappointed, or angry. But through it all God has also given me a sense of counter-intuitive joy. My prayer is that you can experience that joy as well, and this joy will be a source of strength and hope and perseverance for all of us. Amen.

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Stroud appealed the trial verdict and penalty, and on April 29, 2005, the Northeastern Jurisdiction Committee on Appeals overturned the trial court's verdict and penalty, citing legal error, and restored Stroud's clergy standing. The Eastern Pennsylvania Conference then filed an appeal with the United Methodist Church's top court, the Judicial Council.

On Oct. 31, 2005, the Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church announced its decision to reverse the Northeastern Jurisdictional Committee on Appeals decision, and to reinstate both the guilty verdict and the penalty that revoked Stroud's clergy credentials. There is no further appeals process. Church law is made or changed by a vote of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church. The next conference will be held in the spring of 2008.

Today Beth, who holds an MDiv from Union Theological Seminary, serves FUMCOG as a part-time pastoral assistant. She preaches several times a year and teaches the youth confirmation class. She is developing a youth curriculum for the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.

Beth and her partner, Chris Paige, make their home in Philadelphia. They serve their community as foster parents, and are currently blessed to share their life with a beautiful one-year-old girl.

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