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Affirmation

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

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Issue #5

Taking the Bible Seriously

by Victor Paul Furnish

United Methodists are committed to taking the Bible seriously, but are sometimes unsure what this involves. What does it mean, for example, to take the Bible seriously in the matter of human sexuality, including homosexuality?

We do not take the Bible seriously if we suppose it to have disclosed God's Word and will for all times and places,

and for every particular situation. If we try to use it as a religious database that can be "Googled" for specific answers about right and wrong, we are actually exploiting Scripture, presuming to find there what we think it should offer. But in the 21st century we face moral issues that could not have been anticipated or imagined in the ancient world (among the most urgent issues: nuclear energy and weapons, global warming,

overpopulation, and new biomedical technologies).

We *do* take the Bible seriously when we recognize and focus on what is truly definitive of the biblical witness and how that witness can shape and inform the ongoing task of moral discernment. For the distinctiveness of the Bible is not found in what it states or presupposes about the physical universe, human cultures, sex, statecraft,

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Is It Time For "Homosexuals" To Go Away?

by Diane DeLap
Affirmation Spokesperson

For the past 36 years the United Methodist Book of Discipline has contained some form of a statement declaring "homosexuality" incompatible with Christian doctrine. The 2004 Book of Discipline Paragraph 161.G states: "...Although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching..."

No civil or religious legislative body would today attempt to pass civil rights legislation referring to "colored people." (The term "colored people" is demeaning and inappropriate. I hesitated to use it in this article.) While it was in use at one time, it rightly became recognized that it was a hurtful term to the very people for whom rights were being sought.

In the same way the term "homosexuality" is being more recognized as having a negative conno-

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Pastoral Care Support Line 612-353-7445 thru end of GC

Soulforce Panel On History of Discrimination – Central Jurisdiction and LGBT Methodists Today 12:30 PM General Worth Square

RMN Worship Today 2:00 PM at First UMC Fort Worth, 800 W 5th St.

Breakfast – Every day **except Sun**, from 7:30 – 8:30 AM at First Christian Church. Last breakfast Sat 5/3.



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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.



It's OUR Bible, Too!

by Gary Shephard

"You should try reading *our* Bible!" a well meaning woman shouts at someone handing out Affirmation newsletters. I have a news flash for that very righteous woman. It's our Bible too. We've read it. We've studied it in seminary. We can quote it. We have the 23rd Psalm memorized (King James translation, of course!) And judging from some of the extremely silly things we've heard, sometimes I think we're the only ones that *have* read it.

For example, we know you're not paying much attention to Deuteronomy 21:18-21 where fathers and mothers are instructed to go to the town elders to have their disobedient sons stoned to death.

While we're in Deuteronomy, let's look at 21:15-17 for some text about that Biblical standard of marriage we hear so much about. A man is instructed to give the first born birthright to the first born son even if the firstborn son is born to the wife he doesn't love.

And cooking instruction! How many of you knew that you're not supposed to cook a kid by boiling it in milk from its own mother? That's

in various locations in Exodus and Deuteronomy.

And women! There's a problem for you. We can't trust them. "For they are of Eve who was deceived." That comes from 1st Timothy 2:11-15. We're going to have a heck of a time finding male finance secretaries and treasurers and administrative assistants. And what of our women pastors? We're in big trouble there. That next VBS should be interesting.

And the 1st Timothy 3 instructions on marriage seem intended only for bishops and deacons, not for the general church population. Dang, thought I might finally have a bead on that "marriage is one man, one woman" thing.

And the 1st Timothy 5:23 instructions to have a little wine instead of just water, well, I'm not going to be the one to bring that up at the AA meeting.

And yes, we've read the Sodom and Gomorrah bit. And we've read Ezekiel 16:48-50 too. I'll leave it to your imagination who that bit of scripture brings to mind.

If we keep reading after Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed we have that lovely little bit about Lot's

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economics, etc. Its distinctiveness is found in what it attests about God's acting for the welfare ("salvation") of humankind, and about living as God's faithful people. John Wesley said the same when he identified "faith and salvation" as constituting "the substance of all the Bible, the marrow, as it were, of the whole Scripture."

What Scripture portrays and states about sex is not part of its "marrow." Indeed, many of the presuppositions about human sexuality that underlie the Biblical narratives and pronouncements are no longer even credible, given advances in knowledge that continue to be made in many fields of scientific research. This is especially true of the texts tediously cited to "prove" that same-sex relationships are always and absolutely sinful. In accord with views that

prevailed in ancient societies generally—which had no conception of *sexual orientation* as we have come to understand it—these texts presuppose that *all* same-sex relationships are "unnatural" and immoral, because:

- Human beings are *naturally* attracted only to the opposite sex for the purpose of procreation, which is the only proper reason for sexual intercourse;
- Same-sex relationships violate the male's supposedly superior role in relation to females (in a male relationship, one partner was viewed as abandoning this role; a female relationship was viewed as totally usurping it);
- People are driven into same-sex relationships when they let their sexual desires get completely out of control and off track—so all such relationships are inherently lustful and degrading.

We are not taking the Bible seriously if we allow passages that reflect discredited presuppositions like these to distract us from the "marrow" of Scripture.

The "good news" of the Bible is that human beings exist and flourish as creatures of a just, loving, and faithful God, by whose grace and power the whole of creation is being redeemed, renewed, and restored. Jesus proclaimed both the absolute justice and mercy of God, and that God is absolutely impartial in administering justice and showing mercy. And Paul commended with special emphasis the baptismal declaration that "in Christ Jesus [we] are all children of God," whereby we have been liberated from the world's way of defining people only or principally with reference to ethnic and religious heritage, social position or sexual category.

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tation, particularly because of the use of the epithet "homo" in gay bashing. All current non-discriminatory legislation at the local, state, and federal levels uses the more accurate language "sexual orientation." There has been increasing recognition that "sexual orientation" language by itself is discriminatory. The recent Federal Employment Non-Discrimination legislation considered by the US House of Representatives originally added the inclusive terminology "gender

identity and expression" to cover the transgender community as well as others who do not conform to traditional gender roles. The removal of this language by the House leadership caused a significant rift in the LGBT community as many felt that rights for all minorities were being abandoned to win rights for one significant minority.

It is time to remove the word "homosexuality" from all legislation. To say that this word is "what the people in the

churches understand" is demeaning of the intelligence of our members. It is a pejorative term that should be replaced with the fully inclusive language "sexual orientation, gender identity and expression." If this General Conference truly wants to

move forward in the dialog to heal the United Methodist Church we must begin the process by using words of healing. Words have connotations. Let's move from the hurtful words in our legislation.

"Words have connotations. Let's move from the hurtful words in our legislation."



A Poem: "Mother Love"

by Rev. Dr. Jeanne Knepper
March 26, 1999

*Why don't you leave!
They shout,
murmur,
demand,
whimper.
Why not go where you're welcome,
which isn't here.
Don't you know
about majority rule,
about rule of law,
about discipline and order?

O God, I know.*

*And I know about
living,
scared and faithful,
to another rule:
do not abandon the babies.

And so I stay,
dancing,
arguing,
weeping,
loving—
refusing to leave,
so long as you have babies
and
some of them are gay.*

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daughters getting him drunk and well...it's all there in black and white in Genesis 19:30-38. (You **do** have your Bible with you, don't you?) That's a lovely little Old Testament reading we don't get to hear every Sunday.

"Truth to tell, we have read this Bible of yours, of ours, of our common Christian heritage."

Truth to tell, we *have* read this Bible of yours, of ours, of our common Christian heritage. Let's be honest. There's a lot in there that we don't pay attention to any more because it was intended for another time, another place, another society, another understanding.

Instead, let us focus on our common places and move forward.

Quote of the Day: *"The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed -- and hence clamorous to be led to safety -- by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary."* -H.L. Mencken, writer, editor, and critic (1880-1956)

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Lunch – Every day **except Sun**, from 12:00 – 2:30 PM at First Christian Church. Last lunch Fri 5/2.

MFSA Speaker series Every day **except Sun**, 1:15 – 2:00 PM at First Christian Church

Reconciling Closing Communion
Fri 5/2 after GC ends. Late.