

Affirmation

Winter 2003
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An Independent Voice for

United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns
PO Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204-1021 * umaffirmation@yahoo.com * www.umaffirm.org

4 Years Later Church Still Reeling from CA Holy Union

On Saturday, Jan. 16, 1999, Martin Luther King Jr. weekend, a service blessing the holy union of Ellie Charlton and Jeanne Barnett, a lesbian couple, was performed by The Rev. Donald Fado, pastor of St. Mark's United Methodist Church of Sacramento. He was joined by 150 clergy, including those who

co-officiated "in absentia" and ecumenical representatives. On their anniversary, we asked them to reflect on the past four years.

[Editor's Note: PG is Rev. Peggy Gaylord, Affirmation

Co-Spokesperson and EC is Ellie Charlton]

Affirmation Selects Peggy R. Gaylord as Co-Spokesperson

Affirmation is pleased to announce the election of Peggy R. Gaylord as our Female Co-Spokesperson at the National Council meeting in Austin, TX in January 2003. We welcomed her back to the Affirmation Council in 2001. She is the first openly bisexual member to assume this position.

She has been serving on the Program Committee and the Nominations/Leadership Development Committee where she has particularly demonstrated her commitment to diversity and inclusivity. "I do too recruit!" As Co-Spokesperson, Peggy has moved into meet-

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PG: Ellie, I remember that last meeting of the Study Committee on Homosexuality at Lake Junaluska.

We'd stroll around the lake while Jeanne was in closed meetings with the committee, much more relaxing than the other meeting settings had been. We'd talk about relationships, what was important to us—it was obvious to me your devotion to Jeanne. I mostly knew you from Affirmation; but, as I recall, in public church arenas you were pretty low-key about anyone knowing about the fullness of your relationship with each other.

How did that change come about?

EC: This is how it all started. General Conference 1996 changed The Social Principles to include "Ceremonies that celebrate homo-



sexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches." Because The Social Principles had historically been guidelines and not enforceable laws, most LGBT folks and supporters at General Conference had the attitude that their energy would be better put somewhere else.

But the Judicial Council decision in August 1998

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Voices of Faith Whisper New Life Into Church

The deadline for early registration to the Voices of Faith Conference has been EXTENDED to March 30! The event will be April 25 - 26 in Atlanta, GA.

A Conference for Progressive United Methodists, this exciting gathering will bring together progressive United Methodists from around the country to connect with other Progressive UMs, to ask questions that matter, challenge one another's thinking, participate in creative worship and plan together to make a difference in the life of the church and the world!

WORKSHOPS

Organizing Progressive Laity
- Ms. Marilyn Outslay
and Ms. Sally Ernst
The Church at a Crossroads:
Is It Time to Shake Off the
Dust?

- Rev. Greg Dell

Journalism: Progressive
Voices in Print

- Rev. Steve Swecker

Prophetic Preaching

- Rev. Mary Jo

Cartledgehayes

Race/Status/Culture/Lan-
guage & Politics Matters

- Rev. Gil Caldwell

New Directions in Theologi-
cal Education

- Dr. Phil Amerson

New Frontiers: The "T" in
GLBT

- Ms. Ann Thompson

Cook

Just Do It! - Organizing
Regionally

- Rev. Amy DeLong

Persons with Disabilities
Creating Community

- Dr. Kathy Black

Mobilizing Progressive Stu-
dents

- Rev. Eric Stone

Ecological Stewardship as an
Expression of Faith

- Rev. Sharon Del Gado

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

* Minerva Carcano

* Traci West

* John Cobb

* Hal Taussig

SATURDAY EVE PROGRAM

Hyun Kyung, Speaker

REGISTRATION FEES

Conference Registration (by
March 30) — \$165

Conference Registration
(after March 30) — \$195

Student Registration (by
March 30) — \$100

Student Registration (after
March 30) — \$125

*(Registration does NOT
include lodging, transporta-
tion or meals, with the ex-
ception of Friday's
Celebratory Dinner.)*

Make your room reservations today!

Crowne Plaza Ravinia, 4355
Ashford-Dunwoody Rd.,
Atlanta, GA 30346, 770-395-
7700. Room rates are \$89
per room plus tax (up to 4
persons per room). Contact
the national MFSA office for
room sharing information.

To register or for more
information, check the MFSA
web site: www.mfsaweb.org
or e-mail mfsa@mfsaweb.org
or call 202- 546-8806 or
mail: MFSA, 212 East Capitol
St., NE, Washington, DC
20003.

Affirmation Newsletter

This Affirmation newslet-
ter is a quarterly publica-
tion. Only Affirmation's
elected spokespersons
may represent the official
positions of this organiza-
tion. Opinions here
signed or unsigned are
those of the writers and
do not necessarily repre-
sent the opinions of
Affirmation.

Co-Editors:

Judy WestLee

Gary Shephard

Affirmation's Mission Statement

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

Proclaim a gospel of
respect, love and justice;

Relentlessly pursue poli-
cies and processes that
support full participation
of lesbian, gay, bisexual
and transgender people in
all areas and levels of the
United Methodist Church:

Overcome the barriers
that diminish our com-
mon humanity by exclud-
ing or judging people
because of their race,
gender, class or physical
abilities;

Empower people to un-
dertake works of inclusion
and justice where they
are.

Becky Steen: No Regrets But Growth

An Interview with Rebecca Steen

By Diane DeLap

In the opening minutes of a hearing before Bishop Felton May of the Baltimore Washington Annual Conference on June 28, 2002, Rebecca Steen announced her intent to surrender her ministerial credentials and leave the United Methodist denomination.

While this event brought to an end the protracted struggle that she had with her conference for recognition of her right to serve as a pastor, it has not resulted in the loss of her desire or ability to serve the God or the tradition she grew up in.

Becky has been on a journey to find her place of service in the church she loves from the time she, then as Rev. Richard Zomastny, approached Bishop May in October 1999 with a request for a voluntary leave of absence. This journey has taken her through gender reassignment surgery, including multiple surgical procedures and her resulting emergence as Rebecca Ann Steen. As well she has endured a grueling investigative process, a declaration of fitness for ministry and finally the firestorm of criticism that resulted in her resignation.

I spoke with Becky Steen late in February by phone from her home in the Baltimore area. She is settling into her new life with no regrets as to

the actions that she took to transition to live as a female. She remains active, although not as a member, in a local United Methodist congregation that is supportive, caring and loving.

She has been preaching in UMC churches as well as a Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), and has spoken on her experience in a number of UMC churches. She participated as a speaker at national Transgender Day of Remembrance services in Washington and Baltimore last November. She was guest speaker at colleges including American University and Loyola. She teaches Bible study at her church, and has begun a Pastoral Counseling practice offering service to the straight as well as GLBT communities.

Becky recently participated as one of three transsexual subjects in the filming of a documentary by Toronto producer CineNova for airing on The Learning Channel in the fall of this year. Becky was surprised to find that the producer's interest in her focused on the "normalcy" of her life. The filming involved Becky, her friends, pastor, medical support personnel, and included her preaching at an MCC service.

Her personal life is resuming some normalcy with relationships with her friends and family. She maintains a cordial relationship with her former spouse who has remarried "a wonderful man". She regularly visits

her two grown daughters who live in the Baltimore area. Her relationship with her son had been strained, but the public criticism she received motivated him to come to her defense and began the process of restoring those ties. He came home to celebrate last Christmas with her for the first time in four years.

Her greatest regret about the experience of the past year remains the loss of her opportunity to serve in ordained ministry, and the loss of many of her friends in the clergy. "What hurt the most was the way my brothers and sisters" in the clergy "who knew me the best violently rejected me." She was pleasantly surprised by the support she received, but hurt by those whom she felt had turned against her. The loss of her clergy family "when they should have been most supportive", was one of the most painful aspects of her experience.

She attributes the volatility of the issue to fear of the national conservative wing of the denomination and political pressure put on church leaders. She felt that once she came to a decision about the changes she needed to make in her life, she was up front with everyone involved. She didn't lie about what was happening, or try to hide what was going on. She made herself available for examinations and meetings, both public and private.

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New Co-Spokesperson

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ing the challenges of our current issues and situation. She is helping to drive development of our legislative proposals for GC 2004; offering ideas about other Affirmation items to sell as fundraisers and image builders; suggesting web page

improvements; drafting press releases; developing our position on the possible war in Iraq; and leading our effort to include more initiatives.

For more information about Peggy Gaylord, go to our web site - www.umaffirm.org

Becky Steen Interview Continued

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She felt that she had done everything she could to help the church understand the issues involved. She felt that she had gone through the prescribed process successfully, and had been declared fit for appointment. She saw the resulting controversy as an attempt to go outside of the process to find any accusation that could be brought to delay or block her appointment. Her concern was that having dealt with one accusation she would be faced with others. Having gone through the emotionally and physically difficult process of gender transition, and then successfully negotiating the grueling process to determine her fitness for appointment, she felt betrayed by those who were unsatisfied with the results and abandoned the process to bring accusations against her by engaging in personal character assassination.

She declares, "Every clergy needs to know that no matter how good (a job) they do, someone will be dissatisfied (with them and would) be

willing to bring charges against them." She resigned because she was frustrated with the prospect of a never-ending process of self-defense.

Becky Steen is excited about the new directions her life is taking. Not looking back, she is moving forward to find new opportunities for ministry. "A Methodist through and through", she is looking for ways to serve in the Wesleyan tradition. One of the greatest positive elements of this experience has been the level of support she has received from lay people as well as clergy. She feels that lay people have been more open with support than clergy, and has received messages of support from around the world.

"On balance", she says, "this has been a positive experience." It has given her new directions, new confidence, and renewed faith in God. The growth period has been slow, but a new person has emerged, more confident and self-assured.

National Council

John R. Calhoun
South Central Jurisdiction
Oklahoma City, OK

Ms. Jay Campbell
At-Large
Houston, TX

Lisa Fagerstrom
Northeast Jurisdiction

Rev. Peggy R. Gaylord,
Co-Spokesperson
At-Large
Binghamton, NY 13901

Rev. Kevin Higgs
Southeast Jurisdiction

Walt Jackson
North Central Jurisdiction
Madison, WI

Kathryn Mitchem
Southeast Jurisdiction

Clarence R. (Rusty) Norment
At-Large
Mechanicsville, VA 23116

Jim Palmquist
At-Large
Macungie, PA 18062

Rev. Kenneth I. Rowe
Western Jurisdiction
San Francisco, CA

Gary Shephard, Co-Convener
At-Large
Haslet, TX

Rev. Judy WestLee, Co-Convener
North Central Jurisdiction
Minneapolis, MN

Anniversary

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asserted that, even though it was in The Social Principles, because of the wording, it was enforceable law. At the time I said "That is not right and someone has to do something."

In October 1998 at St. Mark's UMC, Sacramento, Rev. Don Fado preached a sermon stating that he did not agree with the ruling and would perform Holy Unions anyway.

For more information about this service, please go to our web site - www.umaffirm.org.

OFFICIAL NOTICE - ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

The annual corporate meeting of members of Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Concerns, Inc., will be Saturday, April 26, 2003, at 2 p.m., at Richmond Hill, 2209 E Grace St., Richmond, VA 23223.

All members are invited to participate. The items of business will include confirmation of results of elections for regional Directors, election of members to fill vacancies on the Board of Directors, and any other business that the Directors deem appropriate.

Group Sports New Shirts

Affirmation Shirts Are Now Available

Affirmation shirts spread the word that the wearer is part of this progressive movement! And they are good-looking too.

They can be worn in casual church settings, at inclusive events in your community, at Annual Conferences, WOW 2003, General Conference and anywhere you want the community to know you are affiliated with progressive United Methodists. They also make great gifts.

The shirt is a 6.5 oz. long sleeve cotton Denim Twill. It is light beige and is made of natural, unbleached cotton. It has a button down collar

and button cuffs with a left chest pocket. The Affirmation logo is embroidered above the pocket in deep pink and black thread. It comes in sizes S-M-L-XL-2XL-3XL although it is cut oversized.

The shirts cost \$30 if picked up from Jim Palmquist near Allentown PA. There is a \$5 each charge for shipping.

For mail orders, please forward a check for \$35 made payable to Affirmation and mail to: Blue Mountain Group, P.O. Box 3007, Allentown, PA 18106.

Provide the size you want, mailing address, e-mail address and phone number.

Order Form

Item: Long Sleeve natural color cotton shirt

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone Number _____

Email Address _____

Size (circle one) S M L XL 2XL 3XL

Price: Provide a check for \$35.00 made payable to Affirmation Mail to: Blue Mountain Group, P.O. Box 3007, Allentown, PA 18106

"Within each one of us there is some piece of humanness that knows we are not being served by the machine which orchestrates crisis after crisis and is grinding all our futures into dust."

Audre Lorde (1934-1992) Black, lesbian, poet, activist, mother

Co-Convener to Leave at Term End

By Gary Shephard

Judy WestLee first managed to get a permanent space in my head at the first Affirmation Council meeting I attended in April 1998, there in the Wesley UMC basement, her home church in Minneapolis, MN.

What all is there to tell about Judy WestLee?

She was raised on a farm in southeast Minnesota hill country. There she learned to work too hard and play just as hard. She reminds us her first telephone was oak with a crank on the right side. She graduated from a one-room schoolhouse after 8th grade.

She went on to the University of Minnesota where she graduated with a BA in journalism. She worked as copywriter for newspaper advertising. She lived in New York City for 2 years writing program promotions on a local TV station. She returned to Minnesota to work several years on weekly newspapers in suburban Minneapolis as reporter-photographer-editor.

Judy was Director of Public Information for the MN Association for Retarded Citizens when she heard of a new committee planning a track and field meet. She volunteered to staff that committee. They called it "Minnesota Special Olympics."

When MN Special Olympics became an independent not for profit organization in January 1974, Judy went with

them as the first and at the time only paid staff member.

During the next five years Judy joined the United Methodist Church, sobered up and "gave her life to God." She attended seminary at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, GA.

Judy served local parishes in the MN Annual Conference of the UMC for about 10 years.

She's an ordained elder in the UMC. She became unappointable when she told her DS she was in a relationship with a woman. She became appointable after that relationship broke up, she was appointed again, only to meet her spouse, Janet. When she had a holy union to Janet, both changed their names (Judy from Westendorf; Janet from Lee) to WestLee. Judy became unappointable again.

She went to work at Sears, first selling tools, then water heaters. She is currently working at American Express Financial Advisors where she's been able to have Janet on her health insurance as her domestic partner.

Judy has a swan tattooed on one wrist. I've never asked why. *[NOTE TO GARY FROM JUDY: I spent a whole lot of time, money, tears and anger working with a therapist who did her best to convince me I was NOT the ugly duckling but rather a swan. The tattoo is there as a reminder*

to myself.]

Judy is 61. In an e-mail a while back she asked if she was old enough to have a "croning." (Judy, wasn't this that e-mail you wrote about Anita Hill's ordination that wound up on the Unofficial Confessing Movement web site where you were branded a "radical feminist lesbian demon horror of the universe" or something like that? We should all be so lucky when we get our 15 minutes of fame.)

Judy's rolling off the council in April 2003. She'll have reached her six-year term limit. She's starting to look for new ways to serve the organization after she leaves the council. Since her undergraduate degree is in journalism, she's decided that she'd like to take a crack at editing the Affirmation newsletter.

At GC 2004 Affirmation again plans to produce a daily newsletter and Judy has decided that she wants to do newsletter production.

Judy, you're a treasure to any organization that'll have you. And even better, and perhaps more important, you really do care about your fellow activists, how they're doing, and whether they're taking on too much. I'm sorry you're rolling off the council a year before me. (Or is that just me being selfish?) If I had my druthers, I'd druther the situation was reversed. Judy, you're one heck of a co-convener.

MidEast

The National Affirmation Council signed onto an Open Letter to LGBTST Communities Opposing War Feb. 16. On Feb. 13 the Audre Lorde Project (ALP) and the National LGBT Program of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) announced that within three weeks from its initial release, more than 130 endorsers, including more than 80 organizations within and outside the United States have endorsed an Open Letter to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two Spirit and Transgender (LGBTST) Communities Opposing War.

The Open Letter, first released Jan. 27 calls for active and creative opposition by LGBTST communities to the U.S. government's "war on terror" and impending war on Iraq.

Dayo Gore of the Audre Lorde Project and Kay Whitlock of AFSC noted that the endorsing organizations include people of color, youth, women-centered, faith-oriented, anti-violence, academic, local and state-wide LGBTST advocacy, legal advocacy, community-based health, economic justice and cultural groups or agencies and more.

"There is a groundswell of progressive grassroots and national LGBTST organizing against war on Iraq, which is one part of a much larger U.S. government 'war on terror'," said Gore. "Even as we join with majorities in the United States and throughout the world in opposing a

pre-emptive strike by the U.S. government against Iraq, we are also organizing resistance to the racism, violence, and repression that characterize the government's so-called 'homeland security' measures."

Both ALP and AFSC say that the 'war on terror' has become the justification for an accelerated redirection of federal funds away from human needs — health care, housing, child care, social services, and education — toward policing, prisons, and militarization, a redirection of human resources the organizations say was underway prior to 9/11. LGBTST communities are feeling the impacts. Those bearing a disproportionate share of the poverty and suffering resulting from funding reductions and budget cutbacks are communities of color, women, children and youth, and poor people.

"War on Iraq and the U.S. government's larger 'war on terror' cannot produce safety or security, but only human suffering, widespread violations of human and constitutional rights, and ecological catastrophe," said Whitlock. "Lasting peace can only be built upon a foundation of human rights, social justice and economic security for all."

The Open Letter grew out of a strategy meeting of LGBTST organizations opposing the "war on terror" convened last November in New York City by the Audre Lorde Project and the AFSC. Participating groups had al-

ready taken a public position against the "war on terror" (including pre-emptive U.S. attack on Iraq), were actively involved at some level in anti-war work, and agreed that racial and gender justice analysis needs to be central to the LGBTST movement's antiwar response.

To view current endorsers and the letter in its entirety, it may be accessed at www.alp.org. Groups and individuals are encouraged to add their names to this letter.

"Hosts With the Most"

If you want to experience the epitome of Texas hospitality, have Richard Bates and Grace United Methodist Church (UMC) host your next meeting in Austin, TX.

That was the experience of the Affirmation Council when it met at Grace UMC in January. Richard orchestrated the several congregational groups who prepared wonderful meals for us each noon and evening. Richard personally provided our breakfasts each morning.

A former Council member, male spokesperson and co-convenor, Richard is well aware of the heavy work load and hours the Council faces each meeting — and so gave us the treasured gift of being able to concentrate on Affirmation work.

We express deep gratitude to Richard, his partner and the members of Grace UMC for their wonderful gift of hospitality.

Council Offers VA Open House

Affirmation invites LGBTs (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgendered); friends, families and allies to gather at Lebanon UMC, Hanover, VA from 2 -3:30 p.m. Sunday, April 27.

When we're often faced with hostile or unsupportive surroundings it is a gift to be together for encouragement and sharing.

Some time ago our good friend Ann Thompson Cook wrote the publication "And God Loves Each One!" It has been used by many individuals and congregations, doing much to deepen our mission and movement. On April 27 we will have a speaker and time for good conversation that helps us not only remember the truth and strength of Ann's words for ourselves but also gain confidence and courage to be channels of that message to others in our daily lives. Watch the Affirmation web site (<http://www.umaffirm.org>) for the specific details. Consider coming early for worship - 11 a.m. at Lebanon UMC, 8492 Peaks Road, Hanover, VA.

WOW 2003 to Gather Biggest LBG Christian Group Ever

Witness Our Welcome 2003 (WOW2003): the largest Christian event ever to focus on welcoming people of all sexual orientations will be Aug. 14 - 17 at the University of Pennsylvania.

The ecumenical gathering of sexually and gender inclusive Christians from Canada and the U.S. supports the full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and straight persons in congregations and ministries.

WOW2003 will feature worship, renowned speakers, workshops, youth program and entertainment advocating for a fully inclusive church. Participants from a variety of Christian traditions, diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, diverse orientations and genders will attend this

extended weekend of events.

More than 1,500 people will explore the theme Witness Our Welcome 2003: God's Deliverance is For All! WOW2003 will celebrate the power of the Welcoming Church — mobilizing a diverse and powerful grassroots movement to live out God's vision for an inclusive community.

Affirmation is an official sponsor of this event.

For more information and to register for this event, visit their web site -- www.wow2K.org or call toll free 866-550-3500.

"Get your facts first, and then you can distort them as much as you please."

Mark Twain

Shower of Stoles Video Offered

The Shower of Stoles is a collection of hundreds of liturgical stoles from LGBT persons of faith from all over North America, from Canada to Cuba, Alaska to Hawaii. Some 20 denominations - including United Methodist - are represented.

The individuals represented by these stoles are active leaders in their faith communities - ordained ministers, elders, deacons, seminarians, church musicians, missionaries and other gifted people - who have been barred from serving their faith community because of their sexual orientation.

The collection was created as a witness to give voice to these faithful people.

The Shower of Stoles Project's new video is a moving portrayal of the stoles and their stories. Created to be used in adult and teenage Sunday school programs to foster group discussion, this 30-minute VHS video tells how the project began and how it impacts the people it has touched over the past seven years.

The video can be ordered with a suggested donation of \$20 plus \$3 shipping for each video. Make checks payable to THE SHOWER OF STOLES PROJECT and mail to: The Shower of Stoles Project, 57 Upton Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55405.