
A Tale of Survival Over the Long Haul Facing Hate, Opposition, Indifference

*By Peggy R. Gaylord,
Co-Spokesperson*

(Affirmation was asked to respond to this question in relationship to Janet Wolfe's presentation at WOW2003.)

Affirmation started in 1975 and has been a presence at General Conference since 1976. The first homosexual restrictive legislation was added to the Book of Discipline in 1972, more in 1976,

and for many people within Affirmation, 1980 was a watershed year, like GC2000 was for some of you here. Affirmation at this point made a very clear decision not to put all of our resources toward fighting the battle at General Conferences. It was during this time that

the organization started developing other programs, nationwide chapters, and supportive safe space for lesbian and gay people. In 1984 after what was a devastating vote for many, Affirmation came back the next day and invited churches to become Recon-

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Talk to Us!

Tell Us Who You Are, What You Want From Us

For 30 years, Affirmation has been an advocate for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender concerns within the United Methodist Church. It has been the Church's *queer* voice.

In 1989, Affirmation developed a long-range plan to guide its movement into the future. That plan served us well for more than a decade. Now, however, as we face new challenges and opportunities within the world and the Church, we need to plan again. The time has come for Affirmation to take a fresh look at its history, challenges, capabilities and environment to create a vision that will empower and guide its future work.

We need your help. We need to know who you are. We want to discover what you need, what you hope, and

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Breaking News

Affirmation is mourning the death of our long-time friend Jeanne Barnett.

Jeanne led as much by presence as by words...and her words were always spoken softly and with care.

Check our web site - www.umaffirm.org for more information.

Talk to Us

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what you dream. Affirmation is not a voice in the wilderness... It is the voice of a community. So, before we plan, we want to know the people who are part of that community. We want to know you.

Please take a few minutes to help us create a clear vision so that we can speak with a strong voice for the Transgender, Bisexual, Lesbian and Gay community in the United Methodist Church.

Please return surveys included in this newsletter by Nov. 1, 2003, by mail or e-mail to:

**Affirmation/United
Methodists for LGBT
Concerns
ATTN: Frank Wulf
900 Hilgard Ave.
Room 316
Los Angeles, CA
90024-3009
res03ytz@gte.net**

You can download this survey on the Affirmation web site - <http://www.umaffirm.org> and send it electronically.

How to Find Your GC '04 Delegates

By Diane DeLap

All right now, so you want to find out who your General or Jurisdictional Conference delegates are. Well, you'd think that'd be easy. After all they were all elected in public sessions in each Annual Conference (AC) meeting, weren't they?

Yes, it is public information, but given the various Annual Conferences and the varying technical capabilities and shades of willingness to disclose information, it may be very easy to find the information about your delegates, or it may not. First of all, you may be able to pick up the phone and call your Conference Secretary. That office generally was the one who handled certification of the list of delegates to the General Conference Secretary. They have all required information on the delegates. In some conferences, however, they may be unwilling to give out that information without subjecting you to the third degree.

If you are fairly internet savvy and want to do some internet research, you can look at <http://www.umc.org/gc2004/> for general infor-

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Affirmation Newsletter

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

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 policies 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 common humanity by excluding or judging people because of their race, gender, class or physical abilities;

Empower people to undertake works of inclusion and justice where they are.

Finding Your Delegates

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mation about the 2004 General Conference. That site has a link to "2004 Delegation Listing." You might think that it would include a listing of all the GC delegates, but no, it has a listing of the number of delegates assigned to each Conference. While you're there you might check to see how many delegates your Conference was assigned.

OK, now that was interesting, but we still don't know who your delegates are. The next place to look is the UMNS (United Methodist News Service) 2003 Annual Conferences Reports page: (<http://umns.umc.org/acereports/index.html>). This page lists the news reports from all the Annual Conferences. Click on the link for your AC, then read the report. Somewhere in the report will be a listing of the delegates your Conference elected. Most Conference reports are pretty complete, with many including the General and Jurisdictional delegates for Clergy and Laity along with the Reserve/Alternate delegates. Some, however, give only the General Conference delegates.

If you want more information on your delegates, you might check out your Conference web site for a directory, or for a more detailed listing of the delegates. The Conference web sites may be found by going to: http://www.umc.org/locator/offices/annual_conferences.htm, and clicking on the map for your Jurisdiction. You will then be given a listing of all the Conferences in your Jurisdiction along with contact information and web addresses. That's a convenient place to look also if you've given up with your internet search, and want to go back to trying your Conference Secretary. That person probably will be listed on the AC web site.

If you want a single site to go to that provides a listing of all US Conference delegates, you can try: <http://www.nemfsa.org/DelgatesList.htm>. That page has a complete list of all General and Jurisdictional delegates. If you have any comments about that site or want to provide any inside information on your Conference's delegation, send me an email at ddelap@nemfsa.org.

Rocks Do Wear Away

By Gary Shephard

The Thursday WOW started I was running around trying to get everything put together for the Affirmation Reception. If I was at Houston Hall, I needed something at the dorm, a 10 minute, hot, humid, walk away. If I was at the dorm, I needed something from Houston Hall.

In the middle of all of this I had to make a run to the U of P campus bookstore.

Trying to get some change out of my pocket for the cashier, I pulled out my rock. It's been worn smooth by weather, sand and water. The cashier asked, obviously quite puzzled, "Is that a rock in your pocket?"

"Yes," I said, holding it up for her. "It's a reminder that we need to be patient. Some things change very slowly."

She smiled, I smiled and somehow the reception came together. And so it will be with our church.

Survival Tale Over the Long Haul

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cing Congregations. Open Hands started to be published. Much of our financial and people resources were directed toward this effort. We have often changed our focus away from hate by developing new strategy.

The 1988 General Conference was the first I attended; I had volunteered as a marshall. While I had attended the first RCP Convocation the year before, I had no other experience of Affirmation. So I tacked on the Affirmation Spring Meeting to the weekend before GC began; the topic happened to be on racism that year. I needed that bond of community; I became a part of a covenant group for the duration of GC. By day, I was a marshall; by night, I was in on the Affirmation regrouping—singing and debriefing, crowded in a room together. Marshalls and pages were repeatedly briefed on how we were expected not to allow any possible demonstrators to get past us, but many of us were sympathetic to Affirmation and would not have interfered. My covenant group took an afternoon to visit the AIDS Quilt on display nearby. We still

didn't know a lot about AIDS. One night after hearing whispered that one of the men had just received the results of his testing positive for HIV, I remember looking around the room at faces and wondering who would still be here by next General Conference. The Holly Near concert sponsored by the Women's Division fed our souls. Sometimes it seemed as if we had been beaten to a pulp by the end of the day, that we were children huddling together to find sustenance in each other, in our close community, to refill so we could go out and meet the opposition and verbal abuse again the next day. Shortly after GC that year, news came of a suicide of one of our members. Over the years, our members have died of AIDS, suicide, dysfunctioning livers, cancer and occasionally natural causes.

In 1988 Affirmation had also published a strategic visioning plan. One of the results of this plan was to spin off the Reconciling Congregation Program. We had hoped

that this would allow RCP to develop a much broader grass roots base than we felt we could do as a predominantly gay and lesbian organization. I think some of us had naively hoped that this new organization to which we had given birth would encounter less hatred and animosity. In some ways, I think that was true at times. I spent much of GC in 1992 helping in the RCP hospitality suite to host videos and participate in the discussions following, sharing my story and the stories of others, and listening to the stories brought to us that hadn't been shared before with anyone else. But, as Kathryn (Johnson, MFSA) and Cathy (Knight, RMN) reminded me yesterday, our opposition has come to lump us all together.

How else have we survived, beyond redirecting our strategy? Any organization survives because of its people and how its people survive. We read the scriptures. We expect to be delivered. We believe that minds and hearts are being changed. We find others

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Surviving...

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like us with whom we can worship, brainstorm, and reflect. We take time away from being in the face of hate. Some of us take time out of the UMC, finding spiritual sustenance in other places, and then come back refreshed (or maybe crazy?), feeling called to continue a witness in the UMC. We create places where we can feel like we're "Coming Home." We live our lives as fully as we can in spite of all that the UMC has legislated against us. We find each other at church gatherings everywhere. We watch for the small signs of hope that others may not see, the synchronicity of "God Winks," as a book I recently read names so-called coincidences. We take on the responsibility of being part of one of the largest Protestant denominations in the U.S. that everyone is watching. Finally, regardless of what the church ever legislates, we know the love of God, and we live in that knowingness—and in the knowingness that God always, always, leads us home.

Out Lesbian Elected as General Conference Delegate

Amory Peck, former co-spokesperson for Affirmation, reports that the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference, held June 18 – 22, showed strong support of LGBT issues. In legislative action, the annual conference petitioned the General Conference to alter language in the Book of Discipline regarding homosexuality to say that United Methodists are not of one mind on this issue."

During the conference the PNW Reconciling Ministries Network hosted a "sold out" dinner, and sold copies of *United Methodism @ Risk* at their rainbow - decorated booth.

The conference elected a strongly supportive delegation to General Conference, including Peck as first lay alternate and Rev. Mark E. Williams, Washington's openly gay pastor, as first clergy alternate.

In her candidacy speech to the laity session, Peck had said, "General Conference will be a symphony of voices. It will at times be a cacophony of voices. But, unless some very deliberate choices are made, one voice will be missing. The homosexual voice will be missing. People, both supporters and opponents, will speak about "the homosexuals," about "them." But, for so many reasons, the voice of those most

affected will not be heard. I'm a lifelong Methodist ... and a lesbian. I will share my life, tell my story, and put a face on what too often is only an issue. I will take my 'wild and precious life' and use it for the church of my heart. The Lord requires no less of me."

During the conference, the Women in Ministry honored Peck with their annual award given to a "woman who has opened doors for others." The presentation included these words: "Amory has exercised strong and consistent love for the church which welcomes her gifts, her prayers, and her service, but refuses to affirm her core life orientation and her deepest human covenant. For a work still in process, for an outcome yet unseen in our church which is deeply divided, the Women in Ministry present this award to Amory Peck for her courageous witness carried out with a generosity of spirit, forgiveness, creative energy, and a conviction of ultimate welcome and vindication for persons who now stand outside the church's doors."

Peck reports feeling challenged and excited by the election, humbled by the award, and rejuvenated by the sense of Annual Conference affirmation of LGBT support.

General Conference 2004 Planning Continues

By Jim Palmquist

Affirmation and its traditional partners (Reconciling Ministries Network [RMN] and Methodist Federation for Social Action [MFSA]) began GC 2004 planning formally in May of 2002.

Our leadership met in Chicago for two days with about 25 people to develop overall strategy. We have had several conference calls, the last being in July of this year. A core group met for a day in August in Washington, DC to work further on our efforts. And eight Affirmation members met with our partners in Philadelphia at Witness Our Welcome 2003 in August. Rev. Peggy Gaylord represented us formally.

Currently Affirmation and its traditional partners leadership are attending each other's Board meetings to further discuss our plans and develop them. In fact, several visitors from RMN and MFSA and other organizations will be at Affirmation National Council meeting at Drew University in mid-October for extended discussions.

Accomplishments in our effort include having our lodging plan implemented and announced. Our myriad of GC 2004 meetings and events with our partners and by Affirmation are being planned and booked progressively over this past summer and fall. Exciting new strategies have been considered and are being planned.

The Affirmation leadership team for GC 2004 includes:

Spokesperson - Female - Rev. Peggy Gaylord

Spokesperson - Male - Rev. Ken Rowe

Coalition Leader - Walt Jackson

Newsletter Co-Editors - Gary Shephard & Judy WestLee

Coalition Office Manager - Kathryn Mitchem

Legislation Leader - Rev. Larry Nielsen

Watch the Affirmation List Serve and the Affirmation Newsletter for more specific information about GC 2004.

National Council

John R. Calhoun
South Central Jurisdiction
Oklahoma City, OK
AffirmationOK@aol.com

Ms. Jay Campbell
South Central Jurisdiction
Houston, TX
campjee@pdq.net

Diane DeLap
At-Large
Wilmington, MA
Diane@DeLap.com

Rev. Peggy R. Gaylord,
Co-Spokesperson
At-Large
Binghamton, NY
607-723-4091
amiracletoday@prontetisp.net

Walt Jackson
North Central Jurisdiction
Madison, WI
Methodgy@chorus.net

Kathryn Mitchem, Co-Convener
Southeast Jurisdiction

Clarence R. (Rusty) Norment
At-Large
Mechanicsville, VA
804-746-7279

Jim Palmquist
At-Large
Macungie, PA
610-398-6818
bluemountain@entermail.net

Rev. Kenneth I. Rowe,
Co-Spokesperson
Western Jurisdiction
San Francisco, CA
Kianrowe@earthlink.net

Gary Shephard, Co-Convener
At-Large
Haslet, TX
Shephard@prodigy.net

Rev. Judy WestLee,
Newsletter Editor
Minneapolis, MN
612-927-4568
JJWestLee@att.net

Shirts! Short or Long Sleeves

By Jim Palmquist

After offering our long sleeve shirts last winter, we are now offering our new short sleeve polo shirts. They great looking and identify you with this grand movement! They also make great gifts. And we have them on hand.

The short sleeve shirt is an extra heavy 7.25 oz 100% cotton pique golf shirt and is slightly oversized. It has a rib knit collar and cuffs. It is natural in color (light beige) similar to our long sleeve shirts. It comes in men's sizes S-M-L-XL-2XL-3XL. The Affirmation logo is embroidered. The logo is on the web site <http://www.umaffirm.org>.

The long sleeve shirt is a 6.5 oz. long sleeve cotton denim twill. It is made of natural, unbleached cotton. It has a button down collar with a left chest pocket. The Affirmation logo is embroidered above the pocket. It comes in sizes S-M-L-XL-2XL-3XL and it is cut oversized.

The long sleeve shirts cost \$30 plus shipping of \$5 each for a total of \$35.

Please make a check for

the appropriate amount made payable to Affirmation and mail to: Blue Mountain Group, P.O. Box 3007, Allentown, PA 18106.

Tell us which shirt you want (long sleeve or short sleeve), provide the size you want, a check, mailing

address, email address and phone number. If you ask for it with your shirt order, we will send you a temporary Affirmation tattoo (in the same design and color as our embroidered logo) at no extra cost.

National Council to Meet at UMC Archives Site

Affirmation's Historian, retired archivist Ken Rowe, will host the opening session of our Fall Council meeting Friday, Oct. 10, at the Archives Building on the campus of Drew University. We're looking forward to learning a great deal from Ken that will help Affirmation strengthen its history recording and preservation.

Further into the weekend archivist Dale Patterson will work with our Program Committee on birthing our Oral History Project, and along with the Program Committee host an Oral History launching and training workshop on Sunday afternoon, Oct 12, to which the surrounding public is invited - Drew

undergraduates and seminarians, local church members, constituents and friends of Affirmation. Watch the Affirmation web site for details of time, place and content as the date approaches.

Other business of the Council at this fall meeting will include a progress report on Affirmation's Strategic Visioning Process; reflection on and identification of next steps resulting from our participation in last April's "Voices of Faith" conference and August's WOW2003; and continuing preparation for General Conference 2004. Any Affirmation member or constituent may suggest agenda items for the meeting via our e-mail address or web page site.

From the WOW Mountaintop to Discrimination Pits in One Week

By Gary Shephard

WOW 2003 was definitely a mountain top experience. We gathered with other sexual minority Christians from all over the US and Canada. We experienced a variety of worship styles. We had such a wide variety of workshops to choose from to expand our horizons. There was the plenary that challenged all of us on racism. There were entertainment options for all tastes.

And then we're all back home, getting wrapped up again in every day life. My partner and I were trying to plan a few days out of town, to have some quiet time to celebrate our anniversary. Where, though?

After a few days searching I thought I'd found the picture perfect place in east Texas. A small lake front resort with cabins, some of them with kitchenettes. When you're a vegan, sometimes it's easier to just cook your own meals when you travel, rather than find eating places that will accommodate these strange, other worldly

requests for means that don't involve dead critter. (We didn't feel marginalized enough as gay persons, we had to add vegan to the mix! A lot of people have gotten over the gay thing, but they still haven't figured out the vegan thing.)

This picture perfect place in east Texas, however, is perfect in picture only. The owners don't permit same sex couples to share a cabin. They'd welcome us with open arms (or so I was told) if we were willing to pay for two cabins. You can imagine what we thought of the idea.

Now I've heard the arguments. On the one side we're told to patronize our sexual minority business persons and support our community. On the other hand we're told that if we isolate ourselves too much we're not doing ourselves any favors. I've always tried to walk a middle line. Go outside the community when it seemed appropriate or indeed necessary.

And so, here on my attempt to find a close to home

vacation spot I went outside the community and got my wrist slapped by a resort owner who, I'm guessing, feels that his policy is keeping his little resort "family safe." Of course, it may be safe for his sort of family, but it's by no means safe for yours or mine.

After the shock wore off, I did a bit more searching and found exactly what we were looking for. A cabin in a wooded area, near a river, screened porch, full kitchen which is owned by a community member.

I'm shocked that something like this could, would and did happen right here in 2003. And yet, by turning inward to our community we've rescued our planned getaway. We'll have our quiet days to celebrate our anniversary, and cook our meals, and drink way too much coffee.

And we'll think about how far sexual minority persons have come. And how far we still need to go. And how much work still needs to be done to fill in these unexpected valleys.