

The Newsletter *

(*Until a name/logo is chosen!!)

"Giving Voice to Vision in the San Francisco/Greater Bay Area!"

Vol 2: No 2

February/March 1990

Standing Well Before God

A Letter from the Rev. Dr. Krister Stendahl on the Occasion of the Ordinations of Jeff Johnson, Ruth Frost and Phyllis Zillhart

The following letter was read by the Rev. Howard Deporte at the ordination service on January 20, 1990.

To the ordinands: Ruth Frost, Phyllis Zillhart, and Jeff Johnson:

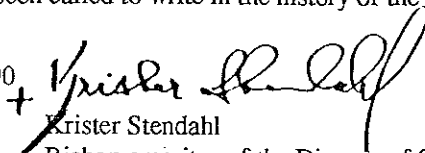
Since I cannot be with you at your ordination which—it seems—must take place *extra ordinem*, I want to send you a greeting affirming my conviction that the steps that your congregations and you are taking stand well before God.

This conviction of mine is based on my studies of the Scriptures and it was tested in the deliberations of the Council of Bishops and the General Assemblies of the Church of Sweden. In the Council of Bishops we agreed to disagree as to the imposition of the celibate life on persons of homosexual orientation. It seems to me that especially in the Lutheran tradition it would be pastorally questionable to make a celibate lifestyle a condition for ministry, although the free choice of celibate lifestyle has both its dignity and its place in the church and also among us Lutherans. I am convinced that as Christians all of us must live our sexuality responsibly, and that Christian ethics puts equal emphasis on fidelity and mutuality.

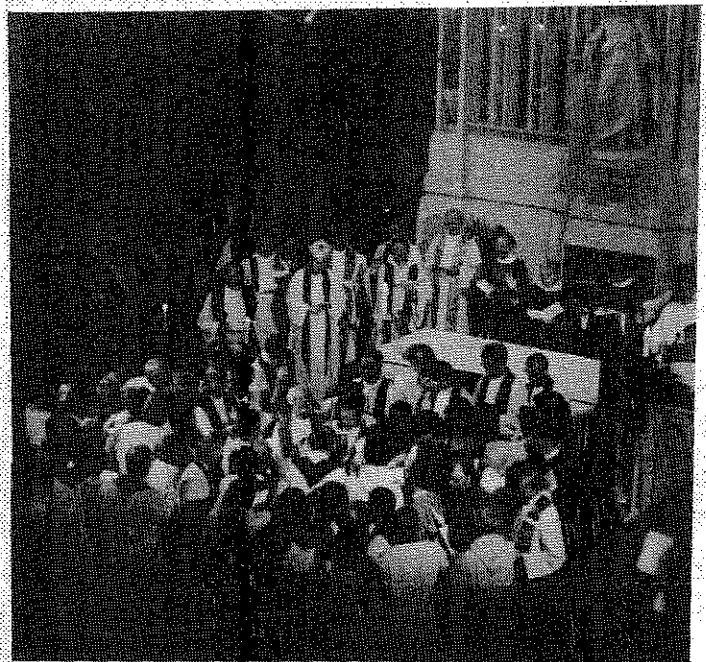
My conviction is also that it is right for your congregations to proceed in an extraordinary manner and find ways for your ordination. Church history in general and Lutheran history in particular supply precedents. The rather recent case of an Episcopalian ordination of Women Priests (in Philadelphia) which was only later accepted by that church makes it reasonable to expect that something similar will happen also for you.

I am sure that you appreciate the magnitude of change in attitudes and thinking that new insight and openness as to gay and lesbian reality has brought into the church. Therefore, as you now assume a ministry of pioneers and a pioneering ministry, it is my sincere prayer that you be given much grace and joy in the Spirit so that you can be preserved from bitterness and condescension toward those leaders and members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America who are not ready yet to rejoice with you in the new chapter which you have been called to write in the history of the Lutheran ministry in the USA.

On the Eve of the Epiphany AD 1990



Krister Stendahl
Bishop emeritus of the Diocese of Stockholm,
Church of Sweden



The rite of ordination at St. Paulus Lutheran

Ordination Highlights:

"Let it be acclaimed that Jeff Johnson, Ruth Frost and Phyllis Zillhart are ordained ministers in the Church of Christ. They have Christ's authority to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments, serving God's people." Rev. Lucy Kolin, Presiding Minister, Service of Ordination.

On Saturday, January 20, 1990 the congregation gathered at St. Paulus Lutheran Church was joined by Lutherans and ecumenical supporters gathered at worship services in Chicago, St. Paul, Chelan (WA), Seattle, Washington D.C., Phoenix, and Milwaukee in celebrating this acclamation with shouts and applause. The following morning and for the next

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**LUTHERAN
LESBIAN & GAY MINISTRY**

LLGM is an emerging coalition of lay individuals, clergy, congregations and other communities of faith committed to the Gospel, to lesbian/gay ordained pastoral leadership and to progressive ministry with, by and for the lesbian/gay community.

Mailing Address

LUTHERAN LESBIAN & GAY MINISTRY
152 Church Street
San Francisco, CA 94114
415/553-4026

Pastoral Staff

Rev. Jeff Johnson
Rev. Ruth Frost
Rev. Phyllis Zillhart

Steering Committee

Rev. Jack Schieman, Chairperson
Rev. Lisa Gaye, Secretary
Rev. John Frykman, Treasurer
Ms. Joan Heapes
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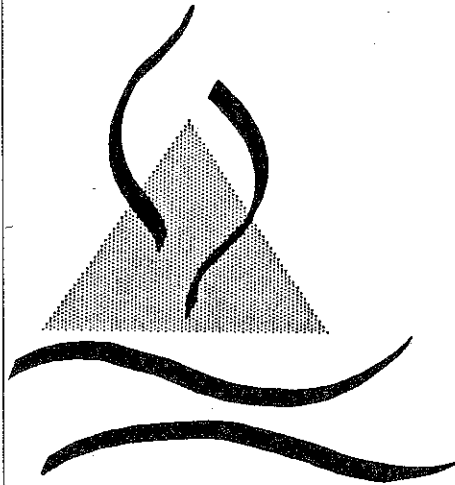
The mailing list for *The Newsletter* is composed of individuals who have themselves indicated interest as well as those who have been recommended for inclusion to us. If you have names to add or wish to be dropped from the mailing list, please let us know and the appropriate changes will be made. *The Newsletter* will be mailed in plain envelopes to persons who request it.

The Newsletter is edited each month by Rev. Jeff Johnson. An Editorial Board sets policy for the *Newsletter*.

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Ruth's Ordination Reflections

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone. There in their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with him. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. "It is wonderful for us to be here. Would you like me to make three shelters here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah?" Mt: 17:4



I like Peter. He dares blurt out what the other disciples are thinking but would never say. There the three are, on the heights with Jesus awed by thunder and fire and smoke, dazzled by the rapture and terror of the divine. Peter wants to stay there forever, soaking in the power and the glory and the Sacred Presence revealed to him.

Our ordination was that kind of transfiguring experience for me. St. Paulus "cathedral" provided our sacred space, the drummers our thunder, the thurifer our smoke, and Carter Heyward our prophetic voice. Then there was the pageantry and beauty, and celebrating community. We were blessed that day as well as called. Peter, James and John. Jeff, Ruth and Phyllis. I wanted to build three shelters and stay there. But here we are, one month later, struggling to finish unpack-

ing, find our way around the city with our ever-present map, set up office space, organize computer database, respond to our well wishers and plan the program of LLGM. Clearly, we can't stay sheltered in the sacred spaces. We must leave to discover them anew in the commerce of everyday life. We must find blessings in the ordinary. And we must be the blessing we were called to be.

I will always draw strength from the power conferred on us that day by the hundreds of hugs, prayers, blessings and tears entrusted to us by the gathered community in San Francisco and the seven satellite communities across the nation. It was a marvelous beginning for the difficult challenge of our ministry.

A New Thing? Only Somewhat!

In one sense a "new thing" has been done. But on a more important level, the ordinations of Jeff, Ruth and Phyllis elevate, applaud, affirm and celebrate the struggle for justice and the doing of ministry by lesbian and gay people, clergy and lay, which have a long and enduring history in the Lutheran Church. Hopefully this "new thing" in San Francisco will only highlight and emphasize the importance and vitality of ministries happening among our community throughout the ELCA.

The January 20 liturgy was dedicated to all persons whose lives testify to the struggle against oppression in the church: to all lesbian and gay pastors; to lesbian and gay seminarians struggling with oppressive structures; and to the radical, and life affirming grass-roots ministries throughout the ELCA—especially to **Wingspan** (St. Paul, MN), **Lutherans Concerned North America**, and the **50+ Reconciled In Christ Congregations**.

We are honored to be partners and to work with you toward inclusivity, justice, mutuality and right-relationship among all the people of God.

LLGM's Spring 1990 Program

The three programmatic offerings scheduled thus far reflect our commitment to integrating sexuality and spirituality, our belief in the goodness of nurturing lesbian and gay male partnerships, and the importance of furthering understanding between gay people and straight people.

The Power of the Erotic—A 4-week discussion series open to both gay and heterosexual people using the works of Carter Heyward *Touching our Strength: The Power of the Erotic and the Love of God*; and Audre Lourde, *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*.

Nurturing Our Partnerships—A 6 wk couples enrichment series designed for lesbian and gay male couples who are not in crisis but wish to deepen and enliven their intimacy in a supportive environment. Couples in mixed group will explore together the following topics:

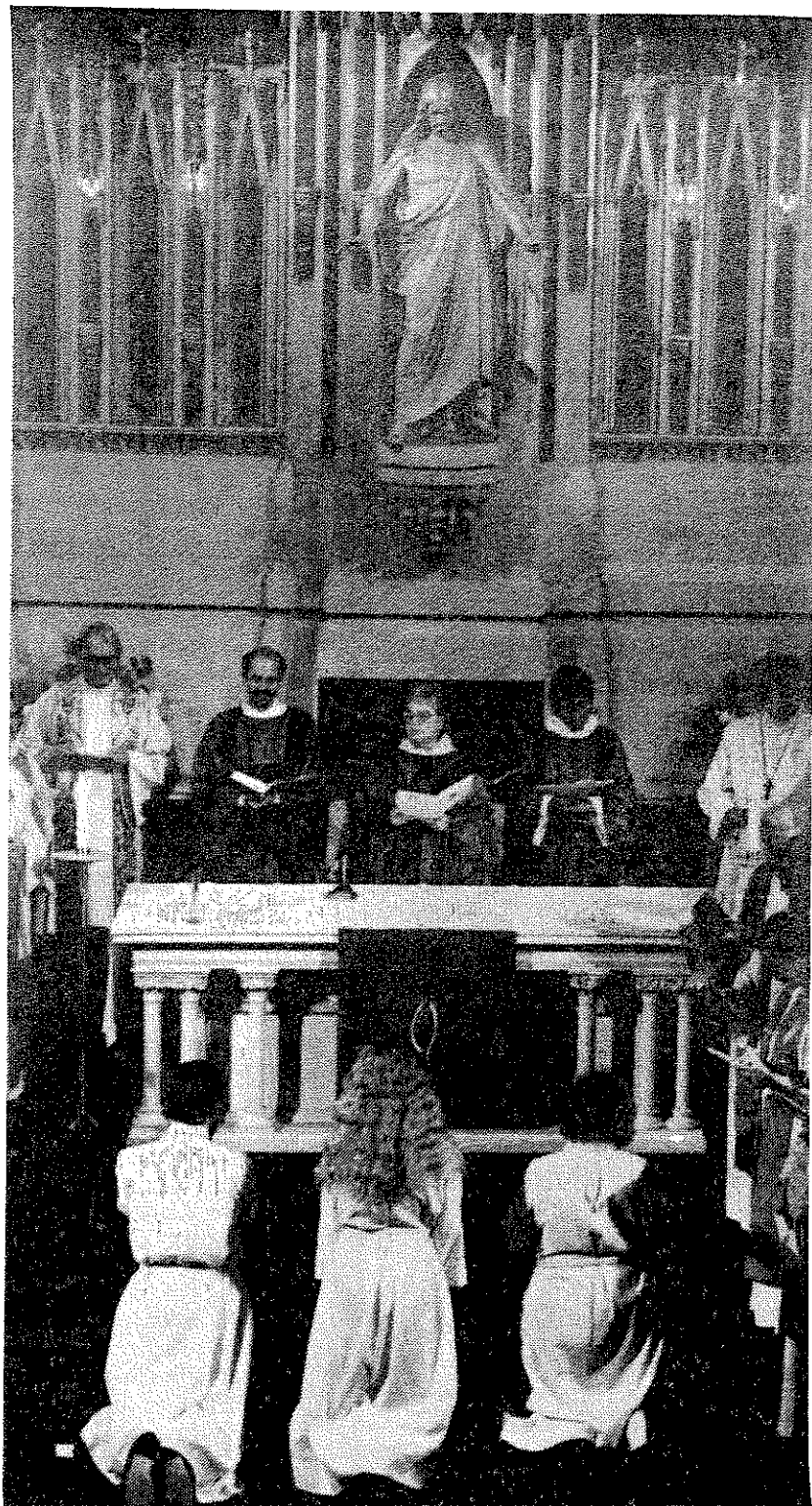
- Show and Tell: Sharing Our Stories
- Play and Leisure: Discovering Your Inner Child
- Fighting Fair: Decision-making and Conflict Resolution
- Keeping the Flair in Your Affair: Sexual and Romantic Intimacy
- Spirituality: The Breath of Renewal
- Blessing and Promise: Affirming Our Relationships.

Prayer for the Journey: A Spiritual Retreat—A day long retreat of discussion, meditation and prayer intended to explore the spiritual paths and perspectives of lesbians and gay men. For those who are seeking individual and communal growth and healing. Church affiliation is not required.

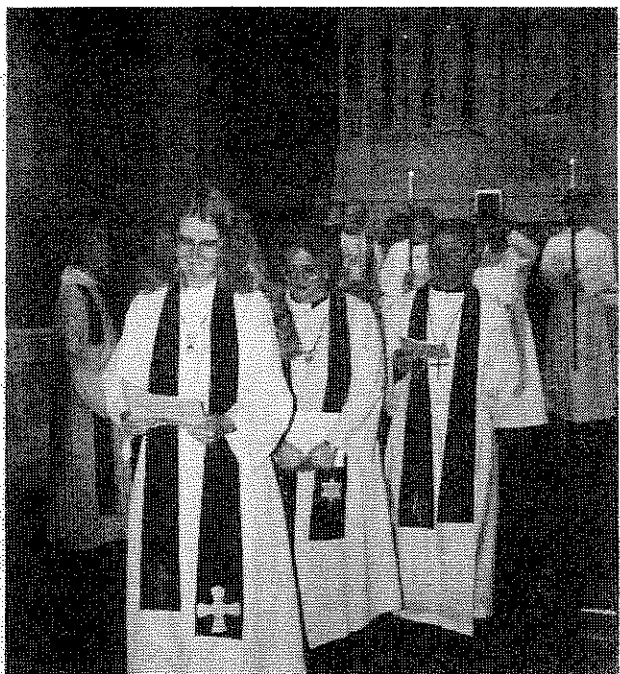
See the Calendar in this *Newsletter* for the times, places and dates for these events.

In our planning for the future, there will be a strong emphasis on supporting lesbians and gay men to recover from the injurious effects of religious abuse and to claim a spiritual path that is self-empowering, gay-affirming and life-enhancing. It is our conviction that lesbians and gay men are a gift to the Church and to society.

We ask your prayers, your suggestions and your financial help in shaping the direction of this ministry to be all that we are called to be.



Jeff Johnson, Ruth Frost and Phyllis kneel at the altar during the rite of ordination at St. Paulus Lutheran Church. Presiding Minister Lucy Kolin and Assisting Ministers Greg Egertson and Debbie Cote face the ordinands while ecumenical and Lutheran clergy surround them in the chancel.



At the conclusion of the service, Jeff, Ruth and Phyllis process out of the sanctuary as the congregation sings Donata's "Spirit of God, Unleashed on Earth."

which most surely is changing our lives just as it is the world and the Church which are our home. But we should be clear. To be blessed by God is a dangerous thing. It is in the very nature of blessing, of being touched by the power of love, of being strengthened by the wellspring of justice, that those who have the audacity to seek divine blessing, even to wrestle with angels and demand it, must take the consequences.

So I am here today to speak of what it means to be blessed by God, because my sisters and my brother, we have been blessed abundantly by the Sacred Spirit. Our presence here today bears this witness: the Holy One who breathes our only hope into the world, She whose tenderness and tenacity topples principalities and powers, She whose compassion and humor fortifies our lives, this God has gathered us today to celebrate a blessing we have been given already. A common blessing it is. Ours, not simply mine or yours. Not simply Ruth's or Phyllis' or Jeff's. Not simply theirs, but a blessing to be shared. Therein is its sacred power.

An Excerpt from Carter Heyward's Sermon: Being the Blessing

In the ordination sermon, Carter Heyward reflects on her own "irregular" ordination in 1974 before the Episcopal Church authorized the ordination of Women:

"I will not let you go unless you bless me." (Jacob wrestling with the angel in Genesis 32:26)

Ruth, Phyllis and Jeff-my friends, sisters and brother: Thank-you for having me be here today. I am touched and honored beyond words.

On the evening of July 28, 1974, Dan Corrigan, a retired, justice-loving bishop of the Episcopal Church, spoke quietly to the eleven women who were to be ordained priests the next morning at a controversial service in Philadelphia that would be declared invalid several weeks later by the Episcopal House of Bishops. Anticipating the trouble that lay ahead, Bishop Corrigan furrowed his grey brow and warned us that because our ordination was taking place without the Episcopal Church's authorization, many Episcopalians would probably consider it null and void. Not only was it likely that our ordination would be rejected by the Episcopal Church as premature and unacceptable at that time but we had to

realize that we ourselves might never be accepted as priests even long after women's ordination had been accepted.

We eleven would be stigmatized as pushy "broads," "trouble-makers," which, of course, we were. It was our call. It was our role at that time. We were ready to accept the stigma for awhile, but could we live with it forever? Could we begin to comprehend it as a dimension of God's blessing upon our lives?

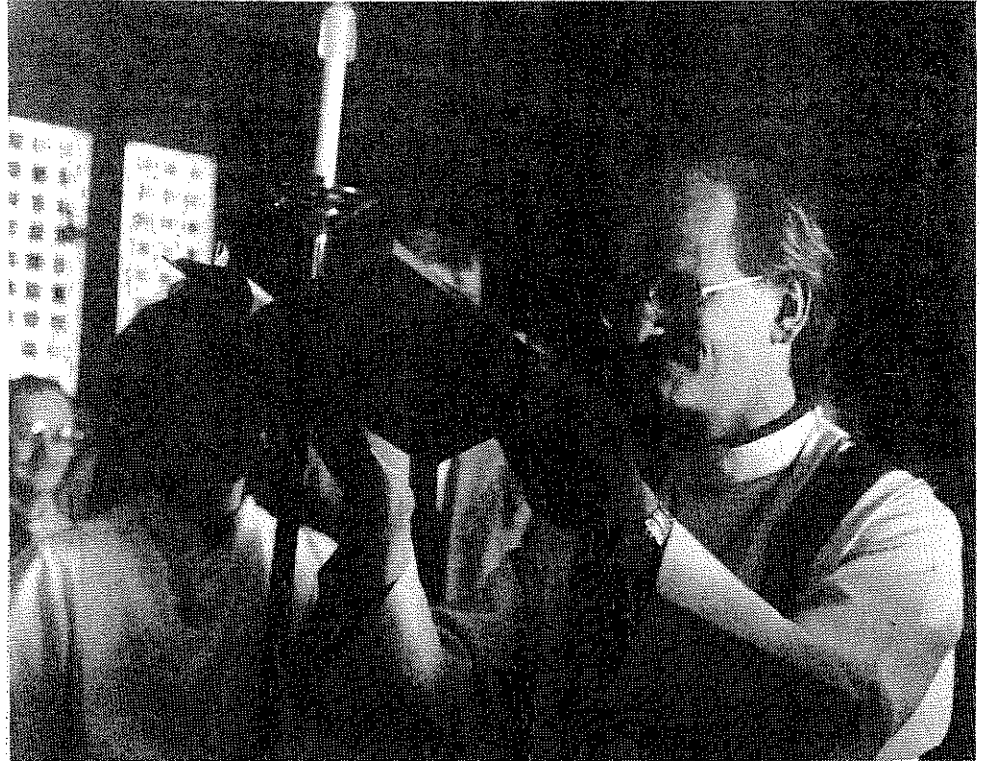
What I remember most vividly from Bishop Corrigan's meeting with us was his startling proclamation that we were already priests. "You must never forget it," he smiled and nodded, "You will always be priests. No one can take this away." This was a strong stunning assurance with profound theological, political and pastoral roots and implications. If the wise old man was right, and he was, we would not be marching into the sanctuary the next morning to receive a new blessing but rather to confirm something that had been given already. As Alice Walker suggests, we would not be going to church to find God but rather to share God.

And so also today, we gather to celebrate a blessing already bestowed. A blessing



The Rev. Jack Schieman
reading the Gospel for
the day—Luke 5:17-26
which concluded
with the words:

"They were all
astounded and praised
God, and were filled
with awe, saying,
"We have seen
wonderous things
today!"
Lk 5:26



Rev. Dr. Carter Heyward leaves the
sanctuary following service. (left)

At the Gala Benefit, Ruth and Phyllis
enjoy a dance together after dinner.
(below)



Gala Benefit Banquet Raises \$11,000 for LLGM

A Gala/Benefit following the ordinations was held at the Hotel Nikko in SF. Attracting 300 persons, this dinner raised over \$11,000 for LLGM's new ministry. *City Swing*, an 18 piece Swing/jazz orchestra led the crowd in dancing and evening. The dance floor with its mix of men/women; men/men and women/women couples, was further testimony to the events of the day and to the true inclusivity of the church. One person commented looking around at the mixture of people—"Isn't this wonderful. This is what the kingdom of God is all about—and it is happening as we speak!"

There were two goals. Because the ministry is self-supporting and the salaries of Jeff, Ruth and Phyllis must be raised through private donations, we wanted to raise significant funds to give this ministry a boost into 1990—thus the \$100/plate tickets. It was also important to hold a celebration to honor all who worked so hard over the past year to bring LLGM into being. We encouraged all our supporters to attend, and found adequate financial assistance to make that possible for those of limited means.

Thanks to those who donated tickets. Kudos to everyone who made this Benefit a smashing success! Especially to Kreg Eacret (St. Paul, Oakland), Wayne Strei & Ed Gray (St. Francis) and to their hard-working committee!

Women's Weekend Away at Yosemite! Creating Rituals of Healing and Self Empowerment

Join us for a spiritual retreat for rest, renewal and relationship. Ruth and Phyllis will facilitate the creation of women affirming rituals. Time for skiing, hiking, fireside conversation and meditation. Saturday evening: community fondue.

When: March 23-25

Where: Curry Village, Yosemite (Cabins with bath, sleep 4)

Cost: \$20/person/night to cover lodging. (food not included)

Call: Chrys Sykes 415-848-8739



Following the rite of ordination, Jeff, Ruth and Phyllis walk to the center of the sanctuary and the congregation is invited to lay on hands and pray.

ordination and supportive services held around the country.

•Over 900 persons attended the service in San Francisco filling the sanctuary to capacity. Many "out-of-towners" flew in or drove to the service from all over—Washington, L.A., Minnesota, Phoenix, etc.

•An additional 700 persons attended seven simultaneous worship services throughout the country.

•53 ELCA clergy and Associates in Ministry participated in the laying on of hands with an additional 50+ clergy and

representatives from ecumenical congregations in the Bay Area.

•The congregations listened to Bishop Krister Stendahl's letter of support and congratulations (see copy in this newsletter) and to Rev. Dr. Carter Heyward's powerful sermon.

•Worship was led by a 100 member choir, a 26 person drum corp—the Sons of Orpheus, a shaman dancer who "danced down the Spirit" of fire on the ordinands, Carter Heyward and all gathered.

•We have heard from a number of people about the ordination and support services. We share here just some of these comments.

"Rarely in my life have I felt an absolute sense of history. I experienced this sense of history at the March on Washington

and, again, at the ordination. I felt very proud. The service was magical, profound and deeply moving. The simultaneous service had its own power and energy; it was exhilarating." (Minneapolis)

"We are grateful for this opportunity for all members of the ELCA to recognize the sanctity of their own sexual relationships and to celebrate their own unique gift of sexuality." (Holden Village, Chelan, WA)

"I do know one thing: they are the pastors of those churches, and there's not a thing the ELCA can do about that." (Rev. David Jeske, MN)

"You will never be more ordained than you are today. It doesn't matter what the church powers do. You either saw the paralytic rise up and walk or you didn't. You either saw the stone rolled away or you didn't." (Ed Gray, SF)

"It's as though I was ordained myself! The service was Spirit filled and empowering for all involved." (Anita Hill, Wingspan Ministry, in SF)

THANKS BE TO GOD for the 20th of January, 1990! (For additional information about the ordination and possible disciplinary consequences see the article and Trexler's editorial (a fine piece indeed!) in *The Lutheran*, 2/14.

Disciplinary Update:

On a related note, disciplinary charges have been filed by the Sierra Pacific Synod Council and Bishop Lyle Miller against First United and St. Francis. The letter states the nature of the charges:

This letter comes as a result of actions your congregation has taken and also out of a process including much deliberation and prayer.

As the bishop of the Sierra Pacific Synod of which your congregation is a member, I must now notify you that disciplinary charges are hereby filed in accordance with Chapter 19 of the Constitution and Bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. [These congregations are] charged with willfully disre-

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Highlights continued from page 1

couple of weeks, headlines across the country announced this courageous justice action in an anything but secret manner. *National Catholic Reporter*—"Gay ordination no 'flash in the pan'" *Oakland Tribune*—"S.F. Lutherans ordain gay, lesbians as ministers" *San Francisco Examiner*—"Gays ordained as ministers in affront to ban." *New York Times*—"Milestone in Church: Gay Clergy Ordained" *Los Angeles Times*—"Churches Give Gay Clergy Emotional Greeting" *USA Today*—"Gay clergy 'struggle' to serve" *San Francisco Sentinel*—"Gay Lutherans Ordained" *Bay Area Reporter*—"Gay, Lesbians Ordained Despite Ban."

The service was deeply inspirational and moving for the many who attended. Here are some highlights from the service of



The Sons of Orpheus greet worshippers arriving at St. Paulus for the ordination service

LLGM's Wish List

Ruth, Phyllis and Jeff are setting up their office and counseling space and are in need of the following items.

Desperate Office Need!

- 2 office (swivel) chairs
- 1 4-drawer file cabinet
- 1 medium size wooden desk
- 1 telephone & 3 desk lamps

Desperate Need for Counseling Room!

- 1 8 X 10 Floor Carpet
- 2 chairs
- 1 small corner table
- 1 small couch/futon couch
- 1 floor lamp

Needed Soon for Office!

- 1 Apple SE Computer
- 1 Laserprinter

1990 Pledges Needed

LLGM and its staff are supported through your individual contributions. First United and St. Francis are small congregations with limited financial resources. Jeff, Ruth and Phyllis are not paid by these congregations, but instead receive their salaries through LLGM.

LLGM is responsible for raising its own funds, the majority of which have been made up through individual contributions. To date, almost 100 persons have made monthly pledges totaling over \$2,500/month to LLGM for 1990. To meet our monthly budget, to support the staff and to make the ministry a financial success in 1990, we need an **additional \$2,500 a month in individual pledges**. That's either: 10 people @ \$250

- 25 @ \$100
- 50 @ \$50
- 75 @ \$34
- 100 @ \$25.

Please consider the enclosed pledge card seriously, and return it to us as soon as possible. If possible, consider being one of 100 people to donate \$25/month. Help us to meet our budget for this year.

If you have already informed us of your intention to pledge monthly to the ministry, use the envelope to remit your pledges for the first couple of months of 1990. Thanks so much.

Calendar of Events/Meetings

2/26	Steering Committee Meets at LLGM, 152 Church St.	7:00 pm
3/4	Forum Presentation Christ Lutheran, San Lorenzo	9:30 am
3/24-3/25	Women's Weekend Away: Rituals of Healing and Self Empowerment Call Chrys Sykes for info: 848-8739	
4/3-4/24	Erotic as Power Study Group 4-wk series meets every Tuesday night. Begins with Dinner. Call LLGM for info about place.	6-8:30 pm
4/22-5/27	Couples Support Group Meet for 6 weeks on Sunday evening at LLGM--152 Church St. Limited space available!	4-6:00 pm
5/19	Prayer Retreat	All Day
6/3	Ritual & Reflection 152 Church Street Call for information	6:00 pm

Highlights continued from page 6.

garding and violating a criterion for recognition as a congregation of this church.

At the end of March a five-member Synod Consultation Committee will meet with representatives of both congregations to mediate the conflict and attempt to bring

about some kind of resolution between the congregations and the Bishop/Synod Council. If this meeting produces no resolution, the matter will be referred to a 12 member Discipline Committee. This committee will hold hearings to hear testimony from both the Bishop/Synod Council and the congregations and will then render a decision. Stay tuned for more information.

*First United Lutheran Church
6555 Geary Boulevard
San Francisco, California 94121*