

Jeff Johnson, Ruth Frost & Phyllis Zillhart Receive Congregational Calls

LLGM, St. Francis & First United Lutheran Set Ordinations

Finally after almost a year of preparation and diligent hard work, two congregations in San Francisco have voted within the past two weeks to call openly lesbian and gay persons as pastors.

In an unprecedented action, on Reformation Sunday, October 29, 1989 St. Francis Lutheran Church voted to call a lesbian couple to be assistant pastors. Ruth Frost and Phyllis Zillhart presently live in Minneapolis, are graduates of Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, and have been together as a couple for five years. They were called as a team to fill one of the pastoral positions for *Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministry*.

Frost and Zillhart made two trips to San Francisco to meet with the members of St. Francis and the LLGM Steering Committee. They were "amazed at the vision and the boldness of the dream" in this area. As Zillhart commented, "It's a shock to have that in the Lutheran church, and to have a congregation risking discipline for something so new. Our church faces a great challenge to integrate sexuality and spirituality."

In deciding to call a lesbian couple, the congregation of St. Francis has fully declared themselves in support and solidarity with lesbians and gay men, our lives and intimate relationships. Frost and Zillhart "are being called without the requirement of sexual abstinence," said Rev. James DeLange, pastor of St. Francis Church and Dean of the San Francisco conference of ELCA churches. "Gay people are achieving their just rights in the workplace, in educational establishments and in the courts. It is long overdue that the church afford gay people and lesbians who wish to serve as pastors their rights to have their domestic partnerships respected and honored."

In a second action a short two weeks later, on November 12, 1989, First United Lutheran Church voted to call Jeff Johnson as



assistant pastor. This was the culmination of a process at First United which began a little over a year ago, when Rev. John Frykman approached Johnson with the offer of a call. The church council at that time had voted to proceed with discussion around extending a call in direct challenge to the ELCA's position. Significant discussion ensued over the course of the year, and upon unanimous recommendation of the church council last Sunday, the congregation voted overwhelmingly to call Johnson as assistant pastor assigned to work with Frost and Zillhart as the pastoral team for LLGM.

Like St. Francis, First United has placed the sanctity and first-class status of lesbian/gay lives and intimate relationships over the importance of the arbitrary and interim institutional regulations. Committed to justice for lesbians and gay men, both congregations risk church discipline for calling openly lesbian

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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.

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

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women and gay men in direct violation of the ELCA's policy requiring sexual abstinence for all persons outside of a heterosexual marriage.

Bishop Lyle Miller of the Sierra Pacific Synod of the ELCA has indicated that he will begin disciplinary proceedings against the two congregations as they proceed with their intentions to call and to be apart of the ordination and installation of these candidates. In an interview with the *San Francisco Chronicle* shortly after Frost and Zillhart were called, Miller commented, "St. Francis Lutheran would be in violation of their own constitution, along with the constitution of the entire ELCA. If (Frost and Zillhart) are not in compliance with the ELCA, or if they are practicing their homosexuality, their call cannot be recognized."

Discipline could take many forms. After an investigation by a church disciplinary committee, the congregations could be formally censured by the bishop, suspended from the denomination or permanently expelled from the ELCA. "It seems highly paradoxical that the church of Martin Luther is responding in this manner to an issue of Christian liberty," explained Rev. John Frykman, pastor of First United Lutheran, and chair of the Sierra Pacific Synod's Leadership Support Committee. "What really set the Lutheran church apart from other reform movements of the 16th century was Luther's commitment to the radical freedom of the Christian person. It seems that the ELCA's response to our congregation's reaching out to lesbian/gay people is all too similar to the Holy Roman Empire's response to Martin Luther. The issue here is not really church polity but one of gospel values and justice. The gospel compels us in conscience to reach out and to embrace all people."

Johnson, 27, is currently residing in San Francisco and is a graduate of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley. His call marks the end of a long process which began when he, Joel Workin, and Jim Lancaster came out to their seminary certification committees, were certified for ordination as openly gay men, and were subsequently denied

ordination when they refused to pledge a life-long commitment to sexual abstinence. "These are courageous actions by two Lutheran congregations on behalf of the lesbian/gay community," explained Johnson. "By their action, each congregation is saying to us (lesbian and gay persons), that our lives and intimate relationships are to be honored, blessed, supported and respected. They have committed themselves to our very lives, over the denomination's interim and arbitrary rules and regulations. These two congregations have only taken the first step. Lesbians and gay men continue to enter and come out of our Lutheran seminaries prepared to be pastors in our churches. These congregations are not waiting any longer for church policy to change. We are now finding places for openly lesbian and gay pastors to serve!"

For the past eight months, Johnson has served as the Mission Developer for LLGM.

Frost, 41, has been working in the Twin Cities area as a substance abuse counselor with Pride Institute. Zillhart, 31, has been working in ministry for people with AIDS and their children as well as in the insurance business. They plan to move out to San Francisco to begin their work in January. A joint ordination/installation of the three candidates will take place in San Francisco early in the new year.

Leo Treadway (Wingspan Ministry, St. Paul, Minnesota) is coordinating a network of simultaneous worship events to occur across the country on this day. It is hoped that these worship services will be linked via conference call with each other. If you would like to help plan a service in your area or have ideas about the simultaneous hook-up, please call Leo at (612) 224-3371.

This part of the continuing LLGM saga has once again hit the national press. An article in *Time Magazine* (Nov. 13, 1989) featured the action at St. Francis. In addition, papers in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Minneapolis, Chicago, and elsewhere throughout the nation have followed these unfolding developments. Stay tuned for more exciting news from the San Francisco/Greater Bay Area!

LUTHERAN LESBIAN & GAY MINISTRY

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

November 16, 1989

Dear Friends,

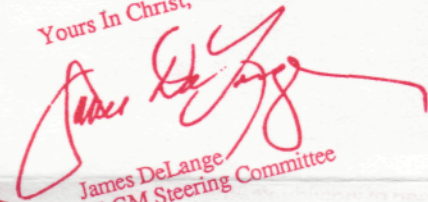
Well, the months of hard and sometimes agonizing decision making are behind us. Now the work of ministry begins. Jeff and Phyllis and Ruth are going to need the support of all of us. If this ministry to, with and by the first openly gay and lesbian clergy in the Lutheran church is to succeed, it is going to require money.

Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministry will require at least \$6,000 a month just to function at a minimal level. Jeff will be paid \$24,000 a year plus medical insurance. Ruth and Phyllis as a clergy couple will receive the same. That's not very much. Because of the nature of this ministry, they will have program expenses, significant travel expenses, as well as the on-going administrative expenses of a telephone, publishing a newsletter, and securing educational materials. While a few congregations plan to include LLGM in their 1990 budgets, LLGM will continue to be dependent on individuals such as you and me to keep this ministry afloat in the face of pressure from those who will work to make it fail. St. Francis and First United have voted. An openly lesbian couple and a gay man have been called as pastors. Now it is time for all of us who have been working for the ordination of openly lesbian and gay persons to vote with our checkbooks.

In 1989, I personally supported LLGM with a \$50 monthly pledge. Maybe you can do more than that, maybe it will have to be less. Whatever it is, Jeff, Ruth and Phyllis and the lesbian and gay people they will serve need our support now more than ever. Please fill out the enclosed pledge card and send it in today.

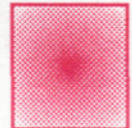
Thanks.

Yours In Christ,



James DeLange
LLGM Steering Committee

Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministry
1990 Pledge Appeal



Friend of LLGM
Friend of lesbian/gay people
San Francisco, California