

VOICE & VISION

The Newsletter of the Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministry Vol. 2 No. 7 December 1990

A Christmas Greeting From the Front of the Bus



As we ponder the meaning of the Thanksgiving/Christmas season once again, I think of the theological wisdom of Jessica, Phyllis' four year old niece. While riding in the back seat of our car following Thanksgiving dinner, Jessica reflected on the night sky from her window: "Look up there! See all the beautiful stars? I wonder which star is Jesus' star? I wish I could go up there and ask God. But if I could ask God, I suppose I'd be dead... But if I were dead, God would tell me where Jesus' star is, so that would be all right. You know," (confidentially to the two of us in the front seat) "God is like slush- no, God is like ice melting. You can't see God. God is nowhere, and God is everywhere. God is sitting right here with me." (Pause. Enthusiastically:) "And I suppose God is up front with you too!"

How I wish I'd had her

authorship of some of my seminary papers! I've read theological treatises that are worth far less. When I think of Jessica's musings, I am reminded of Joel Workin, a seminary friend of Jeff's and one of the three openly gay seminarians certified and then decertified by the system. Responding to the question of why ordination is such a big deal to us, Joel answered by using the image of an ordination "bus." He said, "If the ordination bus is big enough and good enough to carry uncloseted heterosexual white male believers as pastors, then it is big enough and good enough for the rest of us believers as well. Give the lesbians of color and all the rest of the believers a window seat, up front. And don't stand in a cloud of diesel exhaust and try to explain the fine points of walking to an uppity once-back-seater-now-pedestrian who was slapped off the bus for sitting toward the front. If walking is so

great, then stop the bus and we will all go for an unordained stroll. But don't hand lesbians/gays a pair of Buster Browns while the Americruiser rolls on by." I think Joel and Jessica would understand each other!

Like Jessica, we lesbian and gay people who have been riding in the back of the ELCA bus for years, do know that God is sitting back here with us. But we also know that it is time to move up and God will be with us in the front seat too. A four year old has assured us. And we know of such is the kingdom of heaven! The January 20, 1990 ordinations were a call to all lesbians and gay men to claim our wholeness, the goodness of our bodies and our loving relationships. The response from the ELCA? An ecclesiastical trial with a five year back-of-the-bus ride ending in a permanent exit with no more passenger service for First United and St. Francis or anyone else who dares struggle to the front.

The excitement generated from the ordinations has waned.

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Euphoria fades in the face of further abuse. Neither Jeff, Phyllis nor I expects that our "irregular," "illegal" ordinations will ever be legitimated by the ELCA. The trial opened our eyes to the poverty of the law and the poverty of an institutional response embedded in Law rather than Gospel. Nevertheless, we are emboldened by the words of black, feminist writer Barbara Smith who says to her lesbian sisters and gay brothers, "You must ask yourselves in everything you do, in all your actions for freedom and justice, Is it legitimacy you are working for, or is it liberation? If it is legitimacy, what will you end up with by trying so hard to be accepted and good, rather than just and free?" No, the ELCA will never legitimate these ordinations. They will never "let us" be ELCA pastors. But then, anyone who is in a position to "let" you do anything, whether it

is to "let" you have some rights, or "let" you into an inner ring of power, or "let" you be ordained, *owns you*. It is sad to be excluded, but it is wonderful not to be owned. And therein lies the freedom of the Gospel! It is always too big for the Law to contain it!

So, with our little sister Jessica and our brother Joel and all of you who called us to claim our/your wholeness, we go forward. We move up to the front. We get kicked off the bus. Or the bus refuses to stop for us. But we are on the move! We give thanks this year for all of you who are moving with us. We give thanks for the God who is "right up front" with us and in the back with us and on the move with us. We give thanks for the

network of people and prayer all across the nation riding and picketing this bus with us.

Finally, this Christmas we give thanks for the "illegitimate," "irregular" babe born of a virgin who was homeless. We give thanks for the man, Jesus, who devoted his life to liberation before he was murdered for it. Who can legitimate the work of liberation except those who have known oppression and are now free? Institutional powers cannot legitimate liberationist movements. They can only embrace them or give way before them. This Christmas we give thanks to all of you who called us to join you in embracing wholeness, justice and joy.

A blessed Christmas to you all and a joyous New Year from the staff of VOICE AND VISION: Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministry!

Ruth Frost, Jeff Johnson and
Phyllis Zillhart ▽



*To commemorate the ordinations...
Set aside this date!*

**Sunday Afternoon January 20, 1991
Sunday Afternoon Victorian Tea and
Desserts to benefit
LLGM's ministry
Alamo Square Inn**

Watch for invitations to be sent out soon!