

VOICE & VISION

The Newsletter of the Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministry

Vol. 2 No. 6

October 1990

AN OPEN LETTER IN A CLOSED SYSTEM

The "ecclesiastical trial," the ordinations preceding it, and the "verdict" following it have been well publicized. What has been conspicuously lacking is wide distribution of the Open Letter from the Discipline Committee to all members of the ELCA. To date, it appears to have been distributed only to ELCA pastors in the Sierra Pacific Synod, to the conference of Bishops and to some of the "power elite" of Chicago Headquarters. That leaves about ten thousand congregations and seventeen thousand pastors in the dark as to its contents, and possibly its very existence.

"The Lutheran," a publication of the ELCA with distribution to nearly all Lutheran households, chose not to publish the letter in its coverage of the trial. Kathy Kelly, Co-Chair of the Discipline Committee indicated that she has written "The Lutheran" urging its publication of the letter. In the interim, we are publishing it in *VOICE & VISION*, hoping that this will not be its debut and finale.

An Open Letter From The Discipline Committee

We know that many of you have watched this process carefully because you believe it will determine whether or not this church lives up to your expectations. We have good news for you. Throughout our process, every participant has

PROGRAM UPDATE

Our "fall fashions" are in and programs have begun! The following is a brief description of our program offerings (see calendar also):

"Building Bridges For Understanding"

Curriculum series for churches deepening their dialogue with lesbian and gay people of faith. Topics include: "Coming out" issues, the church as spiritual abuser or healer, same-sex relationship commitments, parenting and family issues, gay culture and spirituality. If are interested in being part of LLGM's Speaker's Bureau, call 553-4026 for information.

"Single But Not Alone"

Intimacy series for single gay men exploring: family relationships, friendship, safe sexual intimacy, power dynamics, ageism, self/body image, fantasy, gay male play, coming out, setting limits/boundaries, dating, touch/affection, relationship types, HIV concerns.

"Enhancing Our Intimacy"

Enrichment series for lesbian and gay male couples exploring the following topics: "Show and tell: Sharing Our Stories," "Play and leisure: Discovering

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Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministry (LLGM) is an emerging coalition of laity, clergy, congregations, and other faith communities committed to the Gospel, to Lesbian and Gay pastoral leadership, and to a progressive ministry with, by, and for the Lesbian and Gay community.

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Voice & Vision, the newsletter of LLGM, is published every four to six weeks, God willing. The mailing list for *Voice & Vision* is composed of individuals who have indicated interest in the ministry, as well as those recommended for inclusion. If you have names to add, or if you wish to be removed from the mailing list, please let the editorial office know. *Voice & Vision* will be mailed in plain envelopes to anyone requesting it. Letters to the Editor and welcome and encouraged, and will be printed as space permits.

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displayed through word and deed a paramount commitment to the Gospel and complete respect for others who struggle to give that commitment expression in daily life. Our church is healthy. We are convinced that the fellowship of this church will enable its members to faithfully worship and work toward lives that comport with God's plan.

Our brothers and sisters within the congregations of St. Francis and First United have brought grave concerns to us. We do not find that those concerns are matters we can act upon in the limited context of this process. We feel, however, they must be summarized and commended to you.

The accused congregations express concern that, in their experience, people do not choose to be homosexual; that perhaps as many as ten percent of any typical population find they are attracted to persons of the same gender and cannot alter this orientation; that homosexuals have long felt rejected and condemned by institutional religion; that the Guideline prohibiting practicing homosexuals from the ordained ministry communicates a judgment that all homosexual expression is immoral; that this treats exploitive, brief encounters the same as loving, committed relationships; that suggesting all homosexual expression is immoral communicates to gays and lesbians that an immutable part of their being is evil and cannot be expressed in any way possessing sanctity; that requiring a homosexual pastor to remain celibate and exclude even the prospect of loving, committed relationship diminishes the effectiveness of that pastor's ministry in the gay/lesbian community; that in this instance, the pastor's unhappy adherence to the Guideline serves to remind other homosexuals that the church sees any expression of their given sexual orientation as a bad thing; that this impedes homosexuals from hearing the Good News of grace and reconciliation; that there is an urgent need to enable that message in the face of a crisis causing untimely death for frightening numbers of young people; and that if homosexual pastors were able to pursue monogamous commitments, they could serve as models for responsible relationships in the gay/lesbian community.

These concerns raise profound Biblical questions. To achieve a unified understanding within our church will require careful study and open discussion with hearts receptive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To facilitate such open discussion, we must stress to our

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**Pastor
Phyllis
Zillhart**

You are: twelve years old, confused by same sex attraction, absorbing messages of derision: faggot and lezzy jokes. Who are your positive role models? Who contributed to the arts, politics, science? Who is like you in the world? Are you alone?

To prevent life-threatening isolation, lesbian, gay and bisexual communities and our supporters have rallied behind Project 10 - funding an affirming

high school counselor for the public school system. We support Project 21 - the effort to present positive lesbian/gay images in school curricula by the 21st century. We support Proposition K - legislation recognizing same sex couples.

Primarily since the Lesbian/Gay Freedom Day Parade, Jeff, Ruth and I have been asked by our larger community - i.e., those outside of the church - to give voice to their concerns and ideals. Our community is expecting us to be leaders for justice and

wholeness, to be pastors in their midst. We have spoken at rallies and given witness before the state board of education.

It is a great honor from our community so often abused by the church. When will the church at large recognize its power to heal and support? Perhaps the same day it recognizes its practices that thrust people under heel and suppress. The embrace of authentic power comes to all of us when we cease the illusion of purity, mend our ways and work for justice and peace. ▽



**Pastor
Jeff
Johnson**

This fall, students have returned to Lutheran seminaries throughout the country to begin and to continue their preparation for the ministry. Many of these students are lesbian and gay and for them, seminary can be a very oppressive context to learn about ministry.

In this context, not only is it often dangerous for lesbians/gay men to even let others know you exist, but it is vocational suicide to fall in love with another, and to express this love in front of other students, faculty and seminary officials. What would

the president of PLTS do if he saw two of his male students holding hands as they walked to the refectory following mid-morning chapel? We have seen what bishops and church disciplinarians do with such audacious displays of "illegal" affection. Can we expect any less of those who train the church's pastors?

There is no protection for lesbian and gay seminarians. Discrimination is officially the policy of the ELCA, and openly lesbian and gay students are sitting targets for verbal, collegial, academic, vocational and institutional abuse.

There is no protection . . . except that which students create for themselves, and which

supporters organize to provide. If we expect students to enter the seminary process openly, we must assist and support them in their process. For openly lesbian/gay students to continue, we must:

- Assist them to officially form student groups;
- Establish a scholarship fund for financial support;
- Encourage congregations to call openly lesbian and gay students; and
- Prepare to ordain candidates when the ELCA unjustly refuses to provide for this ministry.

The struggle has only begun. With our help, the celebration will continue! ▽

Across Our Desk: Your Letters

Dear Ruth and Phyllis,

I'm 48 years old, happily married and grandmother to three wonderful little boys. I've never been an activist to any cause, which makes me wonder why at this late date I find myself writing letters of inquiry concerning the disciplinary proceedings in S.F. I read articles in The Lutheran and in the Mpls. newspaper, but I didn't feel that they were completely covering the issue. I wrote to Pastor DeLange and asked him about it. He sent a copy of the decision of the Discipline Committee which I have read and re-read many times over.

Because I had a lot of ques-

tions, I decided to talk to my father, a retired Lutheran pastor, and my former pastor who just retired. Neither one seemed willing to discuss the issue. I decided to write Pastor Roger Olson who was on the Discipline Committee. He wrote back with some suggestions and mentioned that my letter was the first he had received concerning the proceedings. He had expected much more response. Most people in this area either don't know or don't care and I think that's really sad. I've found that most people don't want to discuss homosexuality and if they do, it soon turns into a heated argument.

I have trouble with the ELCA policy that says you can be

ordained if you are a homosexual, but not if you're a practicing homosexual. It just doesn't make sense. I guess my problem is that I've heard too much of the negative and not enough positive. Since you're from the Mpls. area, I'm hoping that you might know of someone I could talk to concerning these issues. I'm a great listener and I think the church needs more listeners and fewer talkers.

God bless you both in your ministry. There are people out here who care. We just need help showing it. Don't give up on us.

Sincerely,
Betsy Holmquist
Grove City, MN



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members that the church is a safe place to share experiences, hopes and perspectives. We implore all congregations to be safe havens for frank discussion. Encourage all to put aside assumptions and listen to competing views without harsh judgment. We thank you for the prayers you have offered during our deliberations. They have comforted and strengthened us. We offer our continuing prayer that God's will might be done as the church at large continues to reflect upon the important issues raised before us.



the Child Within," "Decision-making and conflict resolution: Fighting Fair," "Sexual and Romantic Intimacy: Keeping the Flair In Our Affair," "Recovery and Renewal: Exploring Spiritual Journeys," "Blessing and Promise: Creating Rituals For Relationship."

"Creating Our Own Ceremonies of Commitment"

Workshop for gay and lesbian couples thinking of entering into a commitment or Holy Union. An opportunity to look over resources and talk to other couples who have created their own rituals of celebration.

"Living In Hope With HIV"

Support group for HIV affected persons who wish to explore spirituality issues, questions and concerns generated in living and loving with HIV.

"Creating Our Sacred Space"

Monthly spirituality gathering for lesbians exploring feminist spiritual perspectives which honor women's bodies and experience. An opportunity to create new rituals of healing and celebration, while drawing from past traditions and roots. ▽



EVENTS CALENDAR

Thur	Oct 4 7:00 p.m.	"Living in Hope with HIV" (Open Group) Bi-weekly HIV spirituality support group 152 Church Street
Sun	Oct 7 7-8:30 p.m.	"Single But Not Alone" Gay Male Intimacy Series (Closed Group) 152 Church Street
Thur	Oct 11 All Day!!	National Coming Out Day
Sun	Oct 14 7-8:30 p.m.	"Single But Not Alone" (Closed)
Thur	Oct 18 7:00 p.m.	"Living in Hope with HIV" (Open Group)
	Oct 19-21	Lesbian & Gay's of St. Francis Retreat Bishop's Ranch, Healdsburg, CA
Sun	Oct 21 7-8:30 p.m.	"Single But Not Alone" (Closed)
Wed	Oct 24 6:30 p.m. 7:30 p.m.	LLGM Executive Committee LLGM Full Board Meeting 152 Church Street
Sat	Oct 27	"Creating Our Sacred Space" Retreat (See program notes for description or call 553-4026 for information)
Sun	Oct 28 9:00 & 11:00 a.m.	Reformation Sunday Jeff Johnson preaches at MCC-SF 150 Eureka St., S.F.
Sun	Oct 28 7-8:30 p.m.	"Single But Not Alone" (Closed)
Sundays	Oct 28 - Dec 9	"Enhancing Our Intimacy" See program notes for description Call 553-4026 to register 190 Denslow Dr. at 19th St. SFU
Thur	Nov 1	DEADLINE FOR NEWSLETTER ARTICLES
Thur	Nov 1 7:00 p.m.	"Living in Hope with HIV" (Open Group) 152 Church Street
Sat	Nov 3 9:00 - 4:00	LLGM Full Board Retreat 7018 Bridgeport Circle, Stockton
Sat	Dec 8 10:00 - 1:00	Creating Ceremonies of Commitment See program notes for description Call 553-4026 to register. 6555 Geary Blvd., S.F.

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FINANCIAL FACTS FOR WHICH TO BE GRATEFUL

- We are pleased to announce that LLGM is the recipient of a grant of \$2,000. Thank you to Vanguard for their confidence in our work in the community!
- LLGM receives a 75% return on our pledges! Thanks to all of you who send those monthly checks!
- About 80 people pledged \$40,000 of our total 1989-90 budget. Thank you for your generous giving!
- LLGM has received a bequest from the estate of

Bryan Le Blanc in the amount of \$4,400. Thank you to Bryan who has given to our community even in his death as he gave in his life.

A reminder to all our supporters: LLGM's only means of support is a nationwide network of our friends. St. Francis & First United are small congregations and cannot fund staff salaries or program. You, our nationwide supporters, are co-ministers with us and the financial means by which this ministry lives. Pledges of any amount are needed and welcome!

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