

# VOICE & VISION



The Newsletter of the Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministry Vol. 4 No. 4 December 1992

## JEFF JOHNSON RECEIVES NEW CALL

With a unanimous voice, the congregation of First United Lutheran Church voted November 15, 1992 to call Jeff Johnson as their regular, solo pastor. Johnson has served as Assistant Pastor at First United since his "irregular" ordination January 20, 1990. He will be replacing Tony Harvey who has served as Interim Pastor for the past year and a half.

A Service of Installation and Celebration will be held at First United Lutheran Church Saturday, January 23, 1993 at 3:00pm. The service is open to all who wish to join Johnson and First United in celebrating this happy event.

Because of his new responsibilities at First United, Johnson is accepting a half-time position on the pastoral staff of Voice & Vision: LLGM in 1993 instead of his current full time position. Both Johnson and the congregation of First United remain deeply committed to the ongoing work of Voice & Vision: LLGM. We rejoice with Jeff in this new opportunity! ▽

*A Blessed Christmas and Happy New Year  
from the staff and board of Voice & Vision:  
LLGM to all our supporters. We give  
thanks for the Word made flesh in your  
embrace!*



## PRESBYTERIANS BAR LESBIAN PASTOR

The national Presbyterian church has rejected the call from the Downtown United Presbyterian Church of Rochester, New York, to the Rev. Jane Spahr to be their co-pastor. Spahr is an open lesbian pastor and the Director of Spectrum Center for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Concerns in San Anselmo.

By a vote of 11 to 1, the permanent judicial commission of the church's general assembly overturned both the Genesee Valley Presbytery's affirmation of Spahr's call and a regional judicial commission's affirmation of the call at a hearing in Irving Texas, October 30, 1992.

"We did not do this as an anti-gay kind of thing," said the Rev. Ronald Sallade, who led the opposition. "The Presbyterian church's policy has been very clear, that unrepentant homosexual practise is a sin." While a 1978 policy statement states that homosexuality is "incompatible with Christian faith and life," the Presbyterians also have a clause which "grandfathers" in all lesbian and gay clergy ordained before 1978. It was this clause which encouraged many to hope that Spahr's call would be upheld since she was ordained in 1974.

This decision may set a precedent for the entire denomination. Besides barring Spahr, the commission voted to instruct the

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# VOICE & VISION

Voice & Vision: Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministry (LLGM) is a ministry of advocacy, affirmation and spiritual care for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people in the Greater San Francisco Bay Area. We seek to assist lesbian and gay people to claim a spiritual voice which is life-affirming and self-authenticating.

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## Voice & Vision Team

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Voice & Vision, the newsletter of LLGM, is published quarterly. 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 are welcome and encouraged, and will be printed as space permits.

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**Pastor  
Jeff  
Johnson**

I was visiting my sister on the evening the congregation of First United met to consider my candidacy as their next regular pastor. Lisa, the Chair of the Call Committee, phoned to let me know of the vote to call. As I took the call, my sister and I, and my new 13 month old niece, received the news with great delight. I look forward to serving this congregation with the same type of energy and enthusiasm which I have devoted to this exciting ministry over the past couple of years.

For the past three years I have served the ministry of Voice and Vision: LLGM on a full-time basis. My call as the pastor of First United builds upon the work which we have all done together in this time. I look forward to continuing my work of advocacy and spiritual care with LLGM, and additionally am ready to confront the great challenges facing us in building up the community at First United.

When I shared with a friend that I had been called as the "regular" pastor at the parish, he congratulated me and chuckled, remembering that according to the ELCA, there is nothing "regular" about this call or about our "irregular" ordinations. But as my friend reminded me, there is everything regular, normal,

loving and caring about the way in which we have conducted this ministry.

I am excited about this new opportunity for ministry. The people at First United are excited as well. If you have a moment to express your solidarity with this community, please drop them a letter of appreciation and thanksgiving at: First United Lutheran Church, 6555 Geary Boulevard, San Francisco, CA 94121.

This Advent, with the traditional words of the liturgy, I pray: Stir up your power, O God to transform the hearts, bodies, spirits and wills of your people to create and institute love and justice among us.

Stir up the power of your promise O God! And Come.

## "VOICES OF PRIDE" WISH LIST

Macintosh Computer  
sofa

3 easy chairs

donations for  
gay-positive posters,  
books, periodicals and  
videocassettes



## Pastor Ruth Frost

Recently, we had our Voices of Distinction Awards Benefit Banquet at the Miyako Hotel. It was an evening of celebration and remembrance. Voice & Vision paid tribute to the past by conferring awards on several distinguished honorees and hailed the future through the presence of nine young people associated with our new "Voices of Pride" Resource center in Oakland. At the end of the evening the youth came up to me to say their good-byes and to thank us for asking them to be part of the banquet. Referring to the acceptance speeches of the honorees as they received their awards, one of the youth said seriously, "I liked *all* of the speakers. They changed me." "What do you mean, Danny?" I asked. He replied, "I didn't know there were people with those points of view." "Gay-positive and still Christian?" I asked. "Yes," he said. Danny's comment was a vivid reminder of what this ministry is all about: the dream of a just world for another generation and healing for our own.

While all of the honorees were special people, three of them have stories intricately connected to mine. I met Bill Kunisch three years ago when he invited me to speak to his

cross-cultural studies class at my alma mater, Luther-Northwestern Seminary, just after I had accepted the call to St. Francis. As the administration got wind of his invitation to me, I was promptly disinvited. However, Bill arranged for me to meet with his classmates off campus for a "voluntary" class session. Bill stood out to me among the students, both because I feared he might be gay in a totally unsympathetic system, and because of his pious trust in that system. I remember cautioning him in an undertone, "Get support outside the system. Sooner or later it will betray you." Bill had occasion to remind me of those words two years later when his certification was withdrawn after he gave a sermon in support of St. Francis and First United. Little did I guess that night that Bill would one day be such an ally to our ministry and the recipient of its "Voice of the Future" award.

I met Anita Hill ten years ago in St. Paul when she was working at Wingspan Ministry, in some ways a forerunner to Voice and Vision: LLGM. Anita had been hired as Ministry Associate at Wingspan and had applied to the LCA for "lay professional leadership" status. Because she was an open lesbian, Anita was denied this status. Anita was the first "professional Lutheran lesbian" long before I was even able to utter the "L-word." She was the first person I confided my identity to when I was a vulnerable

seminarian trying to figure out my path in ministry as a lesbian. She helped many confused and frightened seminarians, as well as clergy, over the next decade. As I received the stole from her at my ordination, I thought, "This ordination could have been hers. Only honesty and a decade stands between us." Anita long ago eschewed ordination to follow her path of integrity as an open lesbian. It was a thrill to finally honor her with the "Voice of the Spirit" award.

One of the high points of the evening was when members of the congregations of St. Francis and First United conferred Voice & Vision's "Voice of Courage" award on member representatives of the Downtown United Presbyterian Church of Rochester, New York. Only two days before they had undergone their own hearing for calling an open lesbian, Jane Spahr, as their co-pastor. (See article in this issue) The verdict from the hearing was negative and they were in need of our solidarity and support. I marveled that Janie, who had become a personal friend to Phyllis and me as we struggled to establish new roots in the Bay Area, would one day have her own experience with an extraordinary call, followed by the national trial of her calling congregation.

While I do not have a personal relationship with Adele Starr or Paul Egertson, I was moved by these two parents who have learned so much from their

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*Pastor Frost from page 3*

gay children and created such networks of advocacy and support for other families. As Adele Starr accepted her "Voice of Affirmation" award, she admonished all of us to get our parents involved in our movement. As Paul Egertson accepted his "Voice of Faithfulness" award he said, "We must continue to speak the truth, however controversial. What is controversial today will be commonplace tomorrow. But it will only be commonplace tomorrow if we speak it today."

The winds of change are upon us, even as oppressive systems stiffen against them. I am encouraged by the outcome of the national election, by the ecumenical ties we are making with other justice-minded communities, and by the ongoing bravery of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people and our

allies. Small acts of justice-love create the settings for large dramas on the stage of history. Individuals and their communities *do* make a difference, especially when driven by the winds of the Spirit.



*Grand Opening from back page*

providers, and the Oakland P-FLAG chapter. It is funded in part through generous donations from Voice & Vision supporters and interested community partners, as well as a grant from the United Way of Alameda County. *Voices of Pride* seeks to provide a safe, substance-free environment for young people to discuss their questions, hopes and fears in the company of peers and caring adults. For further information about *Voices of Pride*, contact Rick Aguirre or Ruth Frost at 510 530-8529.



*Presbyterians from front page*

churches of Genesee Valley in New York to stop encouraging the appointment of gays and lesbians as elders, deacons and ministers.

"I believe my sexuality is a gift from God," Spahr said. I am deeply troubled by this decision and by the church's encouragement to gay and lesbian people to lie about who they are."

Several years ago when Spahr first "came out" and was pressured to resign her job as executive director of the Oakland Council of Churches, Spahr's young sons comforted her. "These are the things that happen when you speak the truth," said Jimmie, the eldest. "Mommy," said Chet, "don't you know God made you gay so you can give other people freedom?" Assisting people to claim their freedom is exactly what Spahr has been doing ever since.



Rev. Ruth Frost, Rev. Coni Staff, Rev. Janie Spahr, and members of the DUPC, Mr. Chuck Lundeen and Mr. Scott Miller

# Letters to Voice & Vision

Greetings to Jeff, Phyllis, Ruth, and all our new friends at LLGM, St. Francis and First United:

How much easier to write letters now that I have faces to write to! As I sit here I can see all your shining eyes and sparkling smiles and I can feel the warm love of your hugs coming across the miles as we continue our struggles here in Rochester. A huge thanks from the Downtown United Presbyterian Church for your loving recognition of our efforts to bring Janie Spahr here as one of our co-pastors. We'll present the award you gave us to the congregation during worship this Sunday.

As we began to process our grief in Rochester following the hearing, it was hard to leave our family members- even to come to San Francisco. There was so much pain here, and Scott and I were suffering with them. But our contact with you, and the love you communicated, helped us work through that grief very quickly. You have all been where we are and have survived- even flourished. Could we ask for better role models? As a result of our time together, I feel fully equipped to fight the battles ahead.

What will those battles be? We're not sure yet, but things are happening coast to coast. Janie has a group gathering with

her and another group will be gathering in New York, some of them very savvy strategists on Presbyterian polity. Our co-pastors were very pleased with Rev. DeLange's offer to come to Rochester to share his experiences in justice ministry.

Letters and phone calls are pouring in from all over the country- including some that are not supportive. The conservatives have apparently felt much empowered by the decision in their favor, and many now feel they've been given permission to start attacking with fervor. I'm fully confident the Holy Spirit is with us, but a few prayers from all of you would help too! The struggle is taking place everywhere. It feels good to be in the fight and I'm grateful to all of you for the inspiration you provide for all of us.

God Bless You All!  
Much love from DUPC of Rochester,  
Chuck Lundeen

*Ed. Note:* Voice & Vision, together with the congregations of First United and St. Francis, held a Service of Solidarity for the Downtown Church and The Rev. Jane Spahr following their hearing. If you would like to stand in solidarity with the Downtown Church in protesting the decision to bar Spahr's call, write: *The Rev. John Fife*,

*Moderator, Presbyterian Church USA, 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville Kentucky, 40202-1396. Encourage the Downtown Church by sending them a copy. Send to: The Rev. Rose Mitchell, Co-Pastor, 121 North Fitzhugh St., Rochester, NY 14614.*



Dear Jeff, Phyllis and Ruth,

How can I ever thank you for your incredible care, support and solidarity? I hope you can feel the tremendous gratitude and love coming to you from my partner Coni, myself, my son Jim, and the Downtown Church. What a service of solidarity honoring DUPC and your wonderful ordinations. You put so much time and effort into making it so meaningful. How grateful I am to you, to St. Francis, and First United.

The Voices of Distinction Gala celebration was beautiful! You deserve so much for the incredible gifts you give to the entire Bay Area Community. What a beautiful tribute to your ministry and to the people who deserved such beautiful recognition.

Please take care of yourselves. I am so thankful for you and celebrate each of you and your magnificent gifts.

Janie Spahr

## 'VOICES OF PRIDE' RESOURCE CENTER GRAND OPENING

*Voices of Pride* Resource Center for sexual minority youth will celebrate its grand opening Sunday, February 7 1993 with a reception from 1:00 to 4:00pm. The center is housed in St. Paul Lutheran Church, 1658 Excelsior Ave., Oakland. All are welcome! The center is currently open for drop-in counseling 3:00 - 5:00pm on Tuesdays and peer group support 3:00 - 5:00pm on Sundays. However, much work still remains to be done before its grand opening to the public.

Books, videocassettes and publications are needed for supplying a small resource and referral library for the youth, and bookshelves and a wall partition still

need to be built for the lounge/library space. The office is open and furnished. *Voices of Pride* supporters have an opportunity to help us develop the library by your attendance at our grand opening reception. Suggested donations for the reception are \$15.00 - \$25.00 to be used towards the purchase of library resources.

The first support group just met with seven youth in attendance. They decided they wanted to discuss specific topics in their next meetings, ranging from HIV education to religious issues to how to be "out" as lesbian, gay or

bisexual youth. They are planning a special Christmas/Hanukah party to celebrate the season by decorating their lounge space with symbols of their religious traditions and meeting to offer one another support through a sometimes difficult season.

*Voices of Pride* is a program co-sponsored by Voice & Vision: LLGM and The Fred Finch Youth Center in collaboration with an Oakland coalition of interested individuals, congregations, youth service

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# VOICE & VISION

**LLGM**

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