

# VOICE & VISION

The Newsletter of the Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministry

Vol. 4 No. 1

February 1992

## 1991 IN REVIEW: *Highlights of LLGM's Year*

Thanks to you, our supporters, we have been able to offer a wide variety of spiritual care, advocacy, and programmatic support both in the Bay Area and in our national church. These are some of the many expressions of this ministry:

### **VOICE & VISION Programs:**

*"Creating Our Sacred Space:"* Support for lesbians exploring feminist perspectives in spirituality and ritual formation.

*"Hot Dish:"* Potluck dinners for gay men desiring to network and share their stories in a gay-positive milieu.

*"Living in Hope With HIV:"* Spirituality Support group for persons affected by AIDS.

*"Embracing Our Pride:"* Study group for lesbians in search of their history and culture and the creation of positive identity.

*"Single But Not Alone:"* Series for single gay men on dating, sexual expression, intimacy, friendship, HIV concerns, etc.

*"Celebrating Your Commitment:"* A counseling process for couples entering a commitment ceremony or Holy Union.

*"What Good People Do In Bad Situations:"* Discussion series on Sexual Ethics with Dr. Marty Stoetz of PLTS.

*"When Love Creates A Family:"* Congregational Series exploring creating and affirming a wider family of faith than traditionally defined as the nuclear family.

*"Faith On Trial:"* Lenten drama based on Jesus' own trial before the Sanhedrin and the experience of congregational witnesses during the 1990 trial of First United and St. Francis which resulted in the congregations' suspension and pending expulsion from the ELCA.

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## LSM VOTES "YES!" TO RIC MEMBERSHIP

The Lutheran Student Movement roundly passed a resolution calling for it to become a Reconciled In Christ member organization at its national conference in Phoenix, Dec. 28-31, 1991. RIC is a program of Lutherans Concerned/NA, in which congregations and organizations are invited to adopt a policy of affirmation and welcome to lesbian, gay and bisexual people in their midst.

The resolution, which passed with resounding support, capped two days of discussion and workshops on "Sexual Diversity," the theme of the conference. Ruth Frost, participated as a panel presenter in a workshop on Sexual Identity, attended by most of the 350 students.

Dr. Timothy Lull, Dean of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, gave a thought-provoking keynote address, closing his remarks by relating a conversation he had had with a young man who was his flight seatmate en route to Phoenix. After long and animated conversation about his own life struggles, the young man asked Lull what his occupation was. When Lull told him, the young man looked startled. "I wouldn't have believed it," he said. "Why?"

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# VOICE & VISION

Voice & Vision: Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministry (LLGM) is a ministry of advocacy, affirmation and spiritual care for lesbians and gay men 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, the newsletter of LLGM, is published every two months. 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

A friend of mine recently married. We had been good friends through college and seminary; but lately hadn't been in touch. As I heard about the wedding from an acquaintance, I was happy for my friend, remembering with fondness our past and the significance of our friendship in my life.

This friend was the first person I came out to. During college, he was the one person I trusted with this private information. At that time, he was the only other person with whom I had the guts to share my feelings, fears, joys and longings around being gay.

Before even my mother and father, brother or sister, before even coming out to the ELCA was a glimmer of an idea in three seminarian's heads, I shared who I was with this friend one afternoon at a Donut Shop on Skid Row, L.A. I was spending semester break our senior year working and studying with the Missionaries of Charity. I had called him the previous day: "I had something very important to share with him," I said. "Could he come down right away?"

I was frightened. He was wonderful. Just telling him was wonderful. And his response was all I could have hoped for. This wouldn't affect our friendship, he assured me. He

didn't know a lot about being gay; but promised to read. No, he didn't want or expect me to move out of the dorm room we shared. We could talk whenever I wanted. Whatever fear, confusion, sadness, betrayal or anger he felt (and he did "fall apart" and was able to feel these things with a friend once he returned to the campus dorm), he spared from me that day in L.A. In my vulnerability, he was supportive, understanding and encouraging.

I credit his affirmation and understanding that day and through the upcoming months with my being able and willing to take many more steps as I continued to come out to other friends and family.

Our relationship did change. We remained good friends for a time—we talked about my being his best man someday at his wedding; he at mine—but we began to drift, to spare each other the day to day details of our lives and struggles, and my increasingly endless preoccupation with matters gay. As we graduated, entered and left seminary, we went separate directions. However, the memory of our shared trust and honesty remains for me a beacon of hope that each of us may continue to experience life-giving, truth-nurturing, creative friendships and relationships.

I give thanks for my friend—for the new life he bestowed to me through his support and integrity. ▽



Pastor  
Phyllis  
Zillhart

"I'm clear about what I offer the church but I question what I bring my lesbian community." Many heads nodded when a lesbian seminarian publicly voiced the agony of her faith dilemma.

Lisa is challenging the church to acknowledge her presence, to accept her gifts and desire for ministry, and to live up to its message of reconciliation and liberation in Christ. But how does her Christian affiliation translate into good news for women who perceive and experience the church as an instrument of patriarchy, reinforcing women's low self-esteem and modeling uses of power that encourage dominance rather than mutuality?

This fall 72 women braved the early snows of Minneapolis for the first national conference of CLOUT - Christian Lesbians OUT Together. Carter Heyward of EDS and Mary Hunt of WATER were among those who inspired and challenged us with their stories and their lives. But none of us could answer Lisa's question fully.

We spoke of the inevitable complicity in women's

oppression that feminist Christians experience. We told of our frustration with the limited workability of our root metaphors and the reluctance of our tradition to enfold the female in what we name as sacred. We spoke of how lesbians are leaving the church both because of the negation of the closet and because of the negation of femaleness in a male-affirming tradition.

Wouldn't it be wonderful, we wondered, if a lesbian could look in the mirror and experience her image as a window to God and a reflection of the embodiment of God? For males, the mirror can become that window, for

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**"Violence is not episodic, it's contextual. Justice is at best episodic,"**

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Mary Hunt, WATER

females the mirror becomes a wall. "God is man writ large," someone said, "and Man is god writ small."

Who are we, and what do we name as sacred when we are not reacting or accommodating to patriarchy? What rituals would become primary, what metaphors would we use if we could embrace the earth, our

bodies and our sexuality as shame-free and sacred?

In speaking of the centrality of the Eucharist in Christian worship, we agreed that crucifixion worked as a central image *only* if we meant that NOW all crucifixions must stop. Emulation of suffering and selfless sacrifice as inherently holy and good have disempowered women and other oppressed people for centuries, and have allowed those who would abuse to inflict their violence unchecked.

"Violence is not episodic, it's contextual. Justice is at best episodic," commented Mary Hunt of the United States in this decade. When we are committed to the end of brutality and violence for ourselves and others, *then* we can reckon the place of suffering and giving.

As we enter the season of Lent, let us not sacrifice our ability to tell the truth about ourselves. We must persist in asking critical and uncomfortable questions of our Christian faith and practice for we dare not abandon the *experience* of good news for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, feminists, people of color, and the poor. Let us not offer the thirsty world a polished but empty cup; together let us raise the chalice, overflowing with the gospel's new wine, bursting old containers, emptying the tombs of our piety, awakening us to resurrection. ▽

### Advocacy in the Church:

*"The Alliance For Action:"* In coalition with Wingspan Ministry of MN and Lutherans Concerned/NA, VOICE & VISION has formed an activist alliance on behalf of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals in the Lutheran Church. The Alliance was present at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, advocating our common agenda.

*Christian Lesbians OUT Together (CLOUT):* we presented a workshop on "Creating Sacred Traditions" at the first national conference of CLOUT, an ecumenical activist and solidarity movement of "out" Christian lesbians.

*The Network:* we have been an effective voice in a new national movement of ELCA clergy and lay leaders organizing to end discrimination against gay and lesbian people in the Church. Ministry staff involved the Network in its support and advocacy on behalf of seminarian William Kunisch and the Rev. Paul Johnson, formerly Assistant to a Wisconsin Bishop.

*Holden Village Retreat Center:* Ministry staff spent two weeks at Holden as teaching staff offering a series of workshops on sexuality and spirituality issues in the church.

*Lutherans Concerned Regional Retreat:* Ministry staff led a three day retreat, "In the Image of God Am I Made," for lesbian and gay Lutherans hosted by

Holden Village.

*Lutheran Student Movement National Conference:* Speaking on a panel on "Sexual Diversity," ministry staff provided a positive role model for many young people.

### Community Action:

*Domestic Partners Legislation:* Celebrating the passage of Domestic Partners legislation, Ruth Frost and Phyllis Zillhart registered as Domestic Partners on Valentine's Day and arranged for VOICE & VISION to sponsor an ecumenical, ceremony of commitment for 350 couples at S. F.'s City Hall.

*National Gay and Lesbian Task Force:* Ministry staff participated in a panel discussion on "Managing and Using Anger Creatively" at the "Creating Change" conference in L.A.

### Voice & Vision Pastoral Care:

Ministry staff has counseled dozens of people with respect to HIV support, coming out issues, grief and loss, chemical health issues, abuse issues, and partnership and family issues. We have also been busy with Holy Unions, funerals, and hospital visits.

We have presented forums, preached, and presided at churches in the Bay Area, the Twin Cities, Chicago, Orlando and Holden Village, Chelan, WA.

Our thanks to all of you for making this work possible through your encouragement, prayers and financial support! ▽

responded Lull, "because I'm dressed informally?" "No, man," rejoined the young fellow, "not because of that, but because you just don't seem that, well, *mean*." It was Lull's turn to be surprised. Apparently this young man's primary impression of the church and its leaders was that of meanness. Lull concluded his address by suggesting that there was no other issue in the church which had elicited a greater spirit of sheer meanness than that regarding homosexual persons. This will have to be accounted for, Lull said, in that moment of judgment when each heterosexual person stands before their Creator and hears their Creator ask, "What behavior justified such treatment of my (homosexual) children?" ▽

## "VOICES OF PRIDE" RECEIVES GRANT

VOICE & VISION: LLMG and The Fred Finch Youth Center have received a \$20,000 grant from United Way of Alameda County to develop "Voices of Pride," a program of spiritual and social support for lesbian, gay and bisexual youth in Oakland! It will provide:

- 1) interfaith spiritual and social support youth groups,
- 2) sensitivity training to people in youth services, schools, congregations and community centers, and
- 3) adult "mentors" for youth.

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-Flag), congregations, community centers, and social service agencies in the East Bay will also be involved. ▽

# PRAYING FOR A HUKILAU

William Kunisch, Intern Pastor, Lutheran Church of Honolulu

So much has happened in little over a year: Since my request to complete my Master of Divinity Degree was denied after the withdrawal of my endorsement, I have left Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and transferred to Pacific School of Religion. I am now half way through my "irregular" internship at the Lutheran Church of Honolulu.

During this time, I have had the opportunity to meet and correspond with many gay and lesbian Lutherans who are either in seminary or who are considering seminary in the hope of becoming ELCA pastors. All of them know well the policy of the ELCA requiring life-long vows of celibacy from gay and lesbian ministers and candidates for ministry, and they are afraid. All of them know what happened to Jeff, Ruth and Phyllis and their congregations. They even know what happened to me only a year ago. They also know that the ELCA has no intention of even studying the ordination of gay and lesbian people in committed relationships in the near future. Yet they have come, and odds are, will continue to come.

The obvious question is "Why?" Why do so many gay men and lesbian women go to seminary knowing they may never be ordained or will be consigned to a life of secrecy if they are? Why do you, Bill, stay with a church

whose leadership has made it clear that you are not welcome? Why do any of us who know the gifts that gay and lesbian people bring to the church align ourselves with an institution that fails to affirm these gifts and those who offer them?

Perhaps the Gospel for the fifth Sunday after Epiphany offers some insight. It is the story of Jesus calling the first disciples. Jesus meets them as they are cleaning their fishing nets after a long, unproductive day of fishing. They are tired and ready to go home. But Jesus suggests that they put their boats out one more time, casting their nets on the other side. To the people's surprise, they are met with a miraculous catch of fish. The disciples leave everything and follow him.

For the disciples, as for us, there

is a time to call it a day and go home, and there is a time to cast our nets one more time. It takes courage to do both. Fishing, in this story and in our lives, is not motivated so much by a "political agenda" as it is by our faithfulness to God. Our faithfulness is political whether it leads us into the boat again or bids us to rest on the shore.

Today God is calling you. Perhaps it is a call to sources of healing and renewal. Perhaps it is a call to be a Reconciled In Christ congregation, a supportive internship site for lesbian and gay interns, or a community ready to call a lesbian or gay pastor. Perhaps it is a call to ordained ministry. In Hawaiian, the word "hukilau" is used to describe the act of throwing out and pulling in the fishing nets together. Let's pray for a hukilau. ▽

## ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ASSISTANCE NEEDED! ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

### ♦ Office Volunteers ♦

♦ We need administrative assistance to help maintain our computer database and financial records. If you are a local person who can volunteer 2-4 hours a week, check this box.

### ♦ Gay Men's Retreat Weekend ♦

♦ April 24-26

♦ Donations appreciated to help scholarship those who wouldn't otherwise be able to attend this retreat at Camp Cazadero in Guernville, CA. (Openings available to anyone who would like to participate in this retreat experience. Call 415 553-4026 for Reservations or Info.)

# MUSICFEST '92—Sun., May 17, 1992

On Sunday, May 17, 1992, at 5:00 p.m. VOICE & VISION: LLGM will sponsor, with a coalition of leaders, organizations and community groups in Oakland, a musical extravaganza to benefit youth at risk and on the rise in this city.

MusicFest '92, will be held at 6:00 p.m. at the Calvin Simmons Auditorium and will feature such special guests as the Marlon Jordan Quintet and the Richmond Youth Choir.

Proceeds from this first annual event will benefit VOICE & VISION'S program for youth, *Voices of Pride*; the *Black Adoption Agency*; *La Clínica de la Raza*; and programs for youth sponsored by *Children's Hospital, Oakland*.

Mark this exciting event on your calendar and watch for future announcements. For more information, tickets, invitations to special events surrounding this concert, please call VOICE & VISION: LLGM at 415-553-4026.

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