

# VOICE & VISION

The Newsletter of the Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministry

Vol. 3 No. 1

January 1991

## 1991 ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

January, 20, 1991, 250 people gathered at the Alamo Inn, a Victorian Bed and Breakfast, to mark the first anniversary of VOICE & VISION: LLGM with tea and desserts. A string quartet and a gay men's choral group added to the festivities as guests strolled the premises, enjoying the ambience of Victorian elegance and friendship.

For the staff of Voice and Vision, it was an occasion to thank the many volunteers and supporters who have helped make this ministry possible. A special thank you in the form of a sculpture depicting Jacob wrestling for his blessing was presented to Rick Warren, the attorney who defended the congregations of St. Francis and First United at the church trial last July. The sculptor, Ruth Frost, said of the piece: "In the piece, I show Jacob wrestling to see the face of God, and in that struggle, discovering his own face, his own identity as a child of God. I think this closely parallels the struggle of lesbians and gay people contending with a church which would deny us the face of God when it denies us our identity."

It was also an opportunity for everyone to gather with friends at a time when the crisis in the Mideast is never far from anyone's mind. In addition to the joyful remembrances of the year, the group participated in a litany plea for peace, aware that, already, 1991 begs for our prayers and peace-making efforts. ▽

## CALLING ALL ACTIVISTS!

A group of Lutheran activists advocating for justice in the Church met last week in San Francisco to share their concerns about the plight of lesbian /gay seminarians and clergy / lay professionals who are trying to fulfill their calls in a Church which extends them an increasingly hostile environment.

In addition, the group discussed the growing numbers of "The Disappeared," that is, gay and lesbian professionals and seminarians who, frustrated by the Church's insistence that they stay closeted at the expense of their spiritual and emotional integrity, simply give up and disappear from seminary and clergy rolls, never to be heard from again. Out of this preliminary meeting grew a resolve to respond to what many consider an emergency situation in a Church which calls for more study but little action. Therefore, the group is calling for a national conference of justice-minded Lutheran activists to take place some time in the fall of 1991, location and date still to be determined.

The following groups are invited to form a conference coalition: Circles of Light, Reconciled in Christ congregations, Lutherans Concerned/NA, Wingspan

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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 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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## ACTIVISTS, from front page

Ministry, Voice & Vision:LLGM, The ELCA Lesbian and Gay Seminarian Network, The Lutheran Student Movement, The Justice Network, and an emerging coalition of clergy activists throughout the Church. The conference would offer each group an opportunity to discuss their own concerns and strategies for change and an opportunity to meet with representatives of other groups for a broader based network of support and activism. The following is a proposed agenda for consideration at this conference:

- Financial support for openly lesbian and gay seminarians

- Internship sites for

openly lesbian and gay seminarians

- Consideration of an inter-synodical certification committee for open candidates

- Inviting congregations to include anti-discrimination clauses in their by-laws

- Finding congregations willing to call open candidates, single or partnered

- Performing public Holy Unions for those seeking recognized, committed partnerships

- Public support and recognition for The Disappeared

All Lutheran activists welcome! If you are interested in co-sponsoring this conference or wish to discuss this further, call 415 553-4026. ▽



*Left: Ruth, Jeff, and Phyllis lead guests at the Anniversary celebration in the Litany of Peace. Prayers were raised in thanksgiving for the ordinations and for the hope that actions of conscience and creativity offer us now during these war-torn days.*

## Pastor's Column

Phyllis Zillhart

& Jeff Johnson

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." - Galatians 5:1

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." - Matthew 11: 28-30

One year. Those blazing red stoles went around our necks just one year ago. The dance of announcing fire, the preacher's words, the claiming weight of all those hands on our heads: these are among the images of that day etched on our hearts forever. Then we knew the calling. Then we could reach out and touch the vision of wholeness and justice. Our ordinations embodied the worth and ministries of all lesbian, gay and bisexual people of faith.

Now? The fire has cooled. The days are long. The budget is tight. We are drawn to descriptions of rest and an easy yoke. Haven't we worked hard? Haven't we accomplished much in one short year? Ahhh ... but a

*Continues on last page*

## 1991 Winter/Spring Calendar

Sun	Feb 3 - Apr 14 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.	"Single But Not Alone" Gay male intimacy group
Thurs	Feb 7 - Mar 14 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.	"Living in Hope with HIV" Weekly spirituality support group
Sun	Feb 10 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.	"Hot Dish" Monthly Brunch/potluck for gay men
Wed	Feb 13 - Mar 27	"In the Hour of Trial" Lenten drama for Lutheran congregations
Thurs	Feb 14	"Affirming Our Lives: Registering Our Love"
To be announced		Valentine's Day dom. partners celebration Harry Britt, featured speaker
Sun	Feb 17 5:00 - 7:00 p.m.	"Creating Our Sacred Space" Monthly lesbian feminist spirituality group 190 Denslow Dr. at 19th - SFSU
Sun	Mar 10	"Hot Dish"
Sun	Mar 17	"Creating Our Sacred Space"
Sun	Apr 7 - May 12 4:00 - 6:00 p.m.	"Enhancing Our Intimacy" Couples enrichment group
Thurs	Apr 25 - May 30 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.	"Embracing Pride" Lesbian self-esteem group
Call (415) 553-4026 for information/reservations.		

## VALENTINE'S DAY CELEBRATION!

Affirm your love by registering your partnership "en-masse" with Ruth and Phyllis and scores of other couples at S.F. City Hall February 14th. Join the mass liturgical ritual *Affirmation of Relationship* to be held in the rotunda that day. All couples may register, irrespective of place of residence. A notary public will be present to register couples who

are not S.F. residents and to register couples wishing to keep their registration confidential and private rather than a matter of public record. March down the grand staircase on the red carpet normally spread only for dignitaries! Gala reception to follow.



# WRESTLING FOR THE BLESSING:

*Ordination reflections with Mari Irvin and Dale Johnson, Co-Chairs of LLGM*

Mari: I would not have returned to the Church after a twenty year absence had it not been for the ordinations. That event showed me that I don't have to separate my spirituality from my sexuality. The image that stays with me from that day is the image of Jacob demanding his blessing from God by wrestling for it.

Ruth: I'm wondering what your blessing has been this year, Mari, and if, like Jacob, you have been injured in claiming it.

Mari: My blessing has been community- finding people who are coming not only to acceptance of themselves, but celebration of themselves. As to being hurt, I think that may be yet to come. I'm still experiencing the exhilaration of claiming my wholeness. I'm aware that as I become increasingly outspoken, things which I can't anticipate may happen. But I think we have to go out not knowing, and in doing so, live our questions, breaking through the fear to the open meadow.

Ruth: What is your vision for LLGM?

Mari: One part of the vision is the programs we offer people to affirm and support gay and lesbian lives and relationships.

The other part is the mission to the ELCA, to touch people who do not live in our world. We need to help them come to know us as loving, caring, spiritual people- a gift, not a threat, to the Church. We have been a hidden gift, a closeted gift. It's now time to come out into the sunshine and say, "Here we are among you. Let us know one another without deceit, without lies." It's time to unwrap the gift. I have this fantasy that some Sunday morning someone will give this sign, and in every congregation all over the country, gay and lesbian people will stand up and say, "Hi!", and then quietly sit down, and life will never be the same.

Dale: That's a wonderful fantasy! I hope it can happen one day. My struggle has been largely healing from church abuse, and most of my healing has occurred outside the church. When the charges were filed, and we prepared to go on trial, I was appalled by the fact that the Synod office and the ELCA had made no preparations for that event. In effect, we were expected to host our own trial and carry our own cross. Then, as the trial proceeded, I saw that each time we lifted up the Gospel in our

testimony, we just got the Law hurled back at us: "It says here in section so and so that you broke such and such rules." The vast majority of gays and lesbians have given up on the message of the Gospel because of the institutional messenger. But at the trial, we who were raised in the church said to the church, "We are here. We are whole. We're alive, and we ain't goin nowhere!"

Ruth: What would the two of you like to say to our supporters and to those who are thinking of supporting this ministry?

Dale: The first thing I'd say is "Thank-you!" to our supporters, because their financial support allows this ministry to happen. Their contributions help all of us claim our wholeness.

Mari: And to those thinking of supporting us, I would say, "Join the celebration! Come to the party! Come and experience freedom and wholeness whether you are gay or straight! This is not a gloomy ministry of sad, rejected and dying people. While that is part of our experience, this is a ministry of people who are looking at themselves and saying, "You know, I really like myself!" This is a ministry of joy!" ▽

## 1990 HIGHLIGHTS: INCLUSIVITY ON TRIAL

**November, 1989:** The congregations of First United and St. Francis Lutheran Church challenge national church policy denying ordination to openly lesbian and gay people by calling Jeff Johnson, Ruth Frost and Phyllis Zillhart as their assistant pastors. Though all three candidates were certified for ordination, they are not on the ELCA clergy roster because they refuse to comply with discriminatory guidelines requiring lifelong sexual abstinence of homosexuals.

**January 20, 1990:** The three are ordained by one hundred Lutheran and ecumenical clergy at St. Paulus Lutheran Church together with one thousand worshippers. A chorus of voices and drums and a liturgical dancer highlight the service in San Francisco at which the Rev. Carter Heyward preaches. Another thousand worshippers convene for seven other services across the country, offering solidarity and support.

**January 22, 1990:** Charges are filed against the congregations by the Sierra Pacific Synod and the national ELCA.

**June 16, 1990:** At its synod assembly, the Sierra Pacific synod passes a resolution to become a Reconciled in Christ Synod, welcoming lesbian and gay people into full congregational life.

**July 7, 1990:** The calling congregations are brought to ecclesiastical trial by the Sierra Pacific Synod and the ELCA.

**July 18, 1990:** The Discipline Hearings Committee issues a report containing the verdict: a five year suspension for the congregations which automatically converts to expulsion from the ELCA in 1995 if church policies remain unchanged. The report also contains an open letter to every member of the ELCA, urging the ELCA to initiate a churchwide study of homosexuality and ordination.

**July 20, 1990:** Lutherans Concerned national assembly stages protest of the verdict outside ELCA headquarters in Chicago, calling the ELCA to repentance and action instead of rejection and abstract study. The written verdict of the Discipline Committee is burned in a litany of protest while the dissenting view of the Committee is read aloud as a proclamation of hope.

**November, 1990:** Fragments of the open letter from the Discipline Committee to all members of the ELCA are finally published by *The Lutheran* magazine after the co-chair of the committee writes *The Lutheran* asking that it be published.

**December, 1990:** "Day of Dialogue" on lesbian and gay concerns, sponsored by the Sierra Pacific Synod and Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, is abruptly cancelled by synod appointed chair of the planning committee, though the work of the committee was finished.

**January 20, 1991:** Amid worldwide crisis, first anniversary of the ordinations is celebrated in San Francisco. Churchwide study on homosexuality and ordination still awaited.



*Dale Johnson and Mari Irvin thank the donors and volunteers of Voice and Vision: LLGM.*



## 1990 Highlights: Vision Finds Its Voice

**VOICE AND VISION: LLGM** concentrated its efforts in three major areas last year: community action, church relations and program development. Here are some of the activities of this new ministry in its first year:

**Community action:** We are actively involved as a public voice advocating for lesbian and gay rights, cultural inclusion and affirmation of relationships. Speaking at numerous rallies, Jeff, Ruth and Phyllis have appeared before the S.F. school board and the state board of education rallying for lesbian and gay counselors for gay youth and the inclusion of lesbian and gay history and culture in public school curriculum. The ministry is also active in the community, supporting domestic partners and AIDS education and prevention. In response to our visibility, Jeff, Ruth and Phyllis were honored by being selected as Grand Marshalls of the 1990 Lesbian and Gay Freedom Day Parade.

**Church Relations:** The ELCA is feeling the pressure of people claiming their wholeness through the power of truth-telling. The ordinations and subsequent trial gave voice to thousands who have been silenced and rendered invisible in the church through its discriminatory policies. The ministry conducts programs and forums at congregations, college

campuses and seminars nationwide. Working with other justice ministries, it has encouraged a "coming out" process in the church more aggressively political, while no less spiritual, than ever before.

**Program Development:** The following are some of the programs offered by VOICE AND VISION in its first year: "Building Bridges For Understanding" - for churches deepening their dialogue with lesbian and gay people of faith; "Coming Out Drop-In Counseling" - for anyone needing to explore sexual identity questions, "Single But Not Alone" - for single gay men;

"Living in Hope With HIV" - for HIV affected persons needing spiritual support; "Creating Our Sacred Space" - for lesbians exploring body-affirming rituals of their own making; "Enhancing Our Intimacy" - for lesbian and gay partnerships. "Creating Ceremonies of Commitment" - for couples entering into a commitment ceremony or holy union. In addition to its scheduled programs, the ministry is routinely involved in hospital visitation, union ceremonies, counseling services and spiritual care to lesbian/gay people and their families. ▽



*Die Maennerstimmen A Capella Quartet serenades the guests at the anniversary party.*

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The Board of Directors wishes to express its gratitude to all of our supporters, lesbian & gay as well as non-gay.  
Your contributions and prayerful support have made our official first year a stellar success!

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shoulders made bearable by the One who bears us up in time of need or despair. The weight of the stole, the presence of the yoke of faith is light only because it bears us to freedom.

We write on the eve of war, in a city torn by poverty and drugs. We write within a community wounded by rejection and shame. We write from congregations in exile. We write to you in the midst of your own struggles - and ours. Dare we settle into any rut of the status quo when we've been set free for freedom? ▽

actions if we could see beyond the tyranny of militarism or economics, racism and privilege. Like our leaders, we find it nearly impossible to believe in the reality of peace or justice or generosity.

In a wave of candlelight amid the night's drizzle, we joined 5,000 other peace marchers. Again we glimpsed the power of fire to kindle hope and commitment in a time of despair and dread. We cannot bow to the oppressive yoke of church or government policies that call us to unquestioning obedience rather than to the fullness of freedom. We have the burden of the world on our

vision is bigger than an agenda; calling is deeper than a full appointment book. We are set free for more than a day off, free from more than petty annoyances. Set free for freedom! We are not set free to prove our case to an indifferent church in the next four years. We are set free to live our worth now; to hold our heads high and our lover's hand firmly, to believe in life beyond a virus, to see the friend in the stranger and our neighbor in "The Enemy."

War is slavery to terror when you are the target of death's aim. But for most of us, war is slavery to indifference. We would keep the whole of the world in our hearts prayerful

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# VOICE & VISION

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