

VOICE & VISION

The Newsletter of the Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministry

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BREACH OF CONFIDENCE FORCES RESIGNATION

On Wednesday, May 22, 1991, the Reverend Paul A. Johnson resigned his position as the Assistant to the Bishop of the La Crosse Area Synod, one of six Wisconsin synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Bishop Stefan Guttormsson requested Rev. Johnson's resignation shortly after receiving information that Johnson is gay and that he disagrees with the guidelines of the ELCA requiring lesbian and gay people to make a life-long vow of celibacy to be ordained, a vow not required of heterosexual persons who receive the benefit of recognized commitments in marriage. Rev. Johnson revealed his sexual orientation during a confidential small group session at an ELCA sponsored conference in Chicago.

Rev. Johnson has been an ordained pastor for nearly twenty years and is well respected within and outside the synod in which he has served. "I know Paul as a colleague in ministry and as the father of one of the students whom I serve on campus," commented Pastor Jan Tobias, of the Lutheran Campus Ministry in Milwaukee. "I know him to be a dedicated, faithful, committed pastor. Paul is a man of integrity struggling to reconcile his calling as a pastor with the intolerance of the church regarding his sexual orientation." In San Francisco, Rev. Jeff Johnson commented on this situation: "This is only the

BISHOP'S ASSISTANT PLEADS HIS CASE

Ed. Note: The following are excerpts from a press statement Rev. Paul Johnson released regarding his resignation as Assistant to the Bishop of the La Crosse Area Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

On Wednesday, May 22, 1991, I resigned as Assistant to the Bishop of the La Crosse Area Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. My resignation came in response to a request from Bishop Guttormsson...[who] told me he had been informed that I am gay. I revealed my sexual orientation to a small group at an ELCA Congregational Social Ministry event in Chicago in February. The conference encouraged us to share our stories and our pain with the others in the small groups to which we had been assigned. The trust level in my group was good and I believed my confidence would be respected. Two members of the group

Continued page 4

Continued page 4

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

Nancy Wilson the pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church in Los Angeles writes of lesbian and gay Christians that "we are sexual outlaws like those who are not and drank with. Ones who break rules about gender and roles, the trans-people, whose very existence exposes the lies of patriarchal ontology. We are very dangerous." (OUT-LOOK, summer 1991) Dangerous and threatening! Especially to the old ways of doing exclusive ministry; to the very systems and structures which would seek to bar seminarian Bill Kunisch and Assistant to the Bishop, Paul Johnson from ministry within this church. Dangerous—because for us it is not dialogue on abstract issues but a matter of survival. Wouldn't it be nice if Chicago and synod offices across the country were filled with enlightened bureaucrats willing to risk their political futures for the sake of our people? It's easy to despair waiting for this miracle. Meanwhile the wheels of the institution grind away, and people like Bill and Paul continue to be fed in, ground up, and spat forth by the machinery of oppression. Maybe together we can pull this machine's plug. LLGM has

clearly documented the oppression in these two most recent cases. Hopefully there will be communities and individuals who struggle with the call of God to make justice for Paul and for Bill within our church. Instead of waiting for justice from the institution, we need to make justice, in order to survive and to prosper!

Audre Lorde writes that "survival is not an academic skill." It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures, in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths.

Lorde continues: "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change."

The "master" would have us believe that passive education and the ELCA's interminable legislative process are the only acceptable means of change. The "master" keeps us busy with the one-way "dialogue" of forums, studies & church policies.

We must stop expending our lives on the "master's" agenda, wasting our stories on ecclesiastical voyeurism. With Wilson we can shout that we are very dangerous. Political change always follows genuine change.

Continued on page 3



Pastor Phyllis Zillhart

Ed. Note: Rev. Zillhart delivered the following address during a liturgical protest held at the 1991 Sierra Pacific Synod Assembly. One hundred fifty people gathered to protest the ELCA "Visions and Expectations" guidelines precluding lesbian and gay candidates in committed relationships from ordained ministry, and the recent withdrawal of seminarian Bill Kunisch's endorsement for ministry. (See April issue of VOICE & VISION.)

Who shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus? Shall oppression, injustice, or small-minded guidelines? Shall blurred vision or inhumane expectations? Shall the church's apathy or its rejection?

May the church never be God to us, holding the worth of our lives in the balance of an assembly vote or a meeting of white, middle-aged men—the Conference of Bishops. They have not the power when we give them; not the power. *We* claim the power to speak the truth of our lives and our love. *We* claim the power to move beyond the reach of the oppressor's rod. *We* claim the power to live in the heart of the gospel—in Christian freedom

and joy.

My lover, Ruth Frost, and I sat with her father, Gerhard, four days before he died of cancer. As he held each of our hands he said, "I don't worry about the two of you, because the things that will work against you are external to you and not internal." Who shall separate us from the love of God? Shall shame or fear? Shall internalized homophobia, heterosexism or racism? As we claim our empowerment, let us not be naïve. There is power in oppression. Primarily, it is the power to whittle away worth until you need no oppressor, until you routinely carry self-contempt in your heart and body.

Through the night of doubt and despair, we have wrestled for our blessing. Today, with Bill Kunisch, we receive Jesus' blessing for the time of persecution and peace-making. We eat and drink Jesus' blessing because we hunger and thirst for right relation in our world, our nation, our church and ourselves. Today we make no peace with any oppression, for it can, and too often does, rob us and others of the *experience* of God's love for us. For this the church needs to repent and we need to work. *None* must separate us from the knowledge and the experience of God's love!

The theme of this assembly has asked, "Where will the water

lead us?" My friends, I think I know. These are the waters of birth. The water sac has already burst. The waters stream down the legs of God's creative call. Soon the labor pains will begin in earnest. In the days and years to come, we do not look for comfort or acclaim. We expect to hear the cries of deliverance when love and justice are born among us. "Let justice run down as waters and right relation as a mighty stream." Amen.



Johnson from page 2

Genuine change is *happening* as lesbian and gay people come out within their communities; as pastors and councils decide to celebrate ceremonies of commitment, marriages and holy unions in sanctuaries across the nation; as congregations call and ordain openly lesbian and gay men to serve as pastors in their midst. For the sake of our survival, for the sake of our prosperity, for the sake of the community, for the sake of people like Bill Kunisch and Paul Johnson—we must build communities of resistance where the gospel can flourish. ▽

Please from front page

did not keep that confidence. When they returned home they shared what they knew about me with their Bishop. His concern eventually led to letters from those two persons to Bishop Gornhamson.

I submitted my resignation because I am not in agreement with the guidelines of the ELCA regarding the ordination of persons who are homosexual. For those of us who are gay the church requires a commitment to lifelong celibacy. I am unwilling to make such a commitment and I don't believe the church should require it. I believe the church should affirm faithful, committed relationships for gay and lesbian people as it does for heterosexual people in the institution of marriage.

I believe that I am a child of god, accepted and affirmed by our Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that sexuality is a gift from God—homosexuality as well as heterosexuality. The "Vision and Expectations" document of the ELCA affirms that human sexuality is a gift from God, but it makes it clear that there is no circumstance or context in which gay ministers may experience the fullness of that gift. Heterosexuality is affirmed as a gift. Homosexuality is clearly treated as a curse.

I am not ashamed of who I am,

but I am ashamed of my church which refuses to welcome and affirm me and my gay and lesbian brothers and sisters.

I was not aware of my sexuality either when I got married or when I was ordained. My struggle with my sexual identity caused me to be suicidal for many years. Fully accepting myself as a gay man nearly seven years ago was a "teen-again" experience in the best sense of that term. The years since then have continued to be difficult. I continued in my marriage even after coming out to my wife six and a half years ago. Those years have been very hard for her. But her love for me, my love and respect for her, and our love for three wonderful children has kept us going.

I am not alone. I believe there may be as many as 2000 homosexual clergy and more than a half a million homosexual lay people in the 5.3 million member Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. One of the important principles in this church is "inclusiveness." But the ELCA is doing nothing to make gay and lesbian people feel included, welcomed, and affirmed. The church is working toward a goal of ten percent minority membership. We already have ten percent minority membership. Ten percent of us are gay and lesbian. But the attitudes and oppression

both within the church and society keep us secret and hidden.

Many people in the church would prefer to believe that this issue only concerns those people involved in unauthorized ordinations in San Francisco and a few others who support them. It is a very large issue. There are people in every congregation and in every synod who struggle and suffer because even though they are faithful Christians they are also gay or lesbian. All of us need love and acceptance, not judgement and condemnation. ▽

Please from front page

latest examples of an increasingly virulent witch-hunt against

lesbian and gay clergy and seminarians. This is a man who has given two decades of his life in faithful service to a church which is willing to discard him for being who he is. The atmosphere is dangerous. Not only are men and women in Paul's situation at risk, but it seems that in many synods it is no longer even possible to speak out in disagreement with the current policy, or in support of lesbian and gay people. Why is being lesbian or gay more offensive than the violation of a person's confidentiality? What about the persons who violated Paul's confidence by disclosing what was to be privileged information in the first place? ▽

QUOTE OF THE MONTH FROM A RETIRED BISHOP

Former Bishop Stanley Olson of the Pacific Southwest Synod of the LCA made the following comment on the withdrawal of William Kunick's endorsement for ministry in the ELCA:

"Good Heavens! A seminarian who can preach one lone sermon and get the undivided attention of a Bishop, a pastor, a few lay leaders and a candidacy committee. Wow! That gift deserves ordination, not a lynching. How sad that a sermon in support of two troubled congregations can cause the ELCA homo-vigilantes to spring into action. Rooting out potential seminarian sinners seems to be the order of the day...The original name for the city I live in was 'Hangtown.' I bequeath the name to the ELCA. Will the word grace ever replace homophobic justice as the key doctrine of our church?"

GIVING CLEAR VOICE TO SHARED VISION

This summer's news headlines announce that major denominations are wrestling with homosexuality and ordained ministry. The Presbyterians voted decidedly against gay and lesbian pastors. An Episcopalian bishop in Washington, D.C. dared to ordain a lesbian priest. Their denomination is not likely to vote its approval at the upcoming national assembly.

Voice and Vision: Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministry has not accepted the Lutheran church's second-class status for gay men and lesbians. LLGM is willing to risk calling the church and all of society to forward-reaching, justice-minded actions and attitudes. For Voice and Vision to continue working on the cutting edge of lesbian and gay ministry within the American Protestant tradition, we need your support. Help us continue to give a clear voice to our shared vision of wholeness for all of God's people.

We need a contribution of \$25, \$50 or \$100 from you today. Mail your gift now so together we can sharpen our vision of the gospel's transformative power through this ministry's unique and challenging voice.

REFLECTIONS ON THE TRIAL - ONE YEAR LATER

Ed. Note: July 7, 1990, the congregations of First United and St. Francis Lutheran Churches were brought to ecclesiastical trial for calling and ordaining a lesbian couple and an openly gay man as their assistant pastors. The congregations received a five year suspension from the ELCA which will convert to expulsion, Dec. 31, 1995, unless the ELCA changes its policies regarding gay and lesbian ordination. The following statement by Rev. James DeLange, Senior Pastor of St. Francis, was handed out by supporters at the May 1991 Sierra Pacific Synod Assembly after he was denied permission to read it from the floor of the Assembly.

It has been a year since our congregations were put on trial by Bishop Lyle Miller and the Sierra Pacific Synod Council with the advice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Our congregations were tried for calling and ordaining a lesbian couple and an openly gay man. Ruth Frost, Phyllis Zillhart, and Jeff Johnson are all graduates of our Lutheran colleges and seminaries. All three were certified for ministry. All three were later disqualified for ministry solely because they are homosexual persons who have refused to take life-long vows of celibacy.

What has become clear in the months since the trial is how much Lutherans hate conflict and

want to forget this issue. More than most other Americans, Lutherans look at defiance of authority- even if the cause is just- as among the greatest sins. It is fine to disagree quietly as long as you are nice and don't break the rules- even if the rules are unfair and discriminatory.

It makes us pleasant church people. It also means we won't do much to advance the cause of the Kingdom of God if it means not being nice. Garrison Keillor described us well in a recent story in the *New Yorker* (October 29, 1990): "You're Lutherans and you go along with things. We know this from history. You're in danger and years will pass and it'll get worse, but you won't change your minds. You'll sit and wait. Lutherans are 15% faith and 85% loyalty. They are nobody to lead a revolt."

I believe that one day the Church will ordain gay and lesbian people and honor their relationships of love and commitment. One day an openly gay or lesbian pastor will be on the cover of *The Lutheran* with the headline "Gay and Christian." But that will happen only after the Episcopalians, the Methodists and Presbyterians have done it and after the U.S. Supreme Court hands down some major

decisions banning discrimination of gays and lesbians. Garrison Keillor is right: Lutherans "sit and wait."

He also knows us well when he says, "Lutherans go along with things. We know this from history. "It took the Lutheran church centuries, and the horror of the Holocaust, to acknowledge our participation in discrimination against Jews. Prior to that, anti-semitism was defended biblically: "Let his blood be on us and on our children." (Mt. 27:25) It was 40 years after women had the right to vote in our nation before they won the right to vote in our church assemblies. We defended that with the Bible too, "Let women keep silence in churches: for it is not permitted for them to speak." (1Cor. 14:34)

In the 1890's, the old Norwegian synod adopted a resolution saying that slavery was supported by the Scriptures, twenty-five years after the Civil War was over. In the 1920's the United Lutheran Church in America passed resolutions calling for justice for negroes but supporting the separate but equal notion, stating fears of interracial marriage. "Each after his own kind" was the Biblical cry. Twenty-five years ago, the letters to the editor in *The Lutheran*, *The Lutheran Standard* and the *Lutheran Witness* were filled with invectives against the civil rights marches and Martin Luther King Jr., regularly branding him a communist. Some of those letters were written by my

Continued on page 7

from previous page
seminary classmates. Should
there be any mystery why we are
a 98% white church? "You're
Lutherans and you go along with
things. We know this from history".

How long will institutional
discrimination against gay and
lesbian people like that which we
see in the "Visions & Expectations"
document continue? Probably for
quite a while. We haven't learned
much from our sordid discrimi-
natory past. Except for a few
individuals and a few congrega-
tions, I don't see the institutional
side of our Lutheran church
moving quickly to end its dis-
crimination against gay and

lesbian people. Since the trial, I
see a digging in. It's too bad,
because our Reformation heritage
should move us to be more
courageous. Instead we sit and
wait.

Bishops, bishop associates,
people in the Division for Minis-
try, and on candidacy committees
and others who vote to wait
should keep in mind that when
the history of this period is
written, you will not be treated
well. Your Lutheran need for
order and going along with
things may make the trains run
on time but your failure to
disobey these immoral guidelines
are loading the trains with gay

and lesbian people who are
moving away from the Kingdom
of God. For that, you ought to be
ashamed.

In the meantime, gay and
lesbian Lutherans, their families
and those of us who are con-
vinced that justice for gay and
lesbian people should come now
rather than later, are not going to
be nice and quiet. We are not
going to go along with things. As
my colleague Ruth Frost recently
wrote in an editorial piece for the
San Francisco Chronicle - "The trial
was the ELCA's first audit - there
will be others."



FINANCIAL ALERT!

We are continuing to highlight areas of needed financial support in Voice & Vision. Last issue, we highlighted Scholarship support for lesbian and gay seminarians and funds for staff travel needs. Thanks to your response, a scholarship fund for seminarians has begun and the staff will be going to Holden Village. This issue we are highlighting the following:



New Office Computer

Our current computer which was on loan will no longer be available to us. A new computer is vital for our administrative needs and for publication of this newsletter.



ELCA Churchwide Convention

Help LLCM be a voice of advocacy for, and a visible presence of, lesbians and gay men in the church by sending Jeff, Ruth and Phyllis to Orlando for churchwide assembly in August.

Please designate where your check should go and mail to VOICE & VISION: LLCM 152 Church st., S.F., CA 94114.

Kunisch Update

William Kunisch, PLTS seminarian who had his endorsement for ministry in the ELCA withdrawn for preaching a sermon supportive of St. Francis Lutheran Church, has asked the Division of Ministry Board to review his case. At the May 1991 Sierra Pacific Synod Assembly, Bishop

Herbert Chilstrom addressed the assembly, fielding some questions about Kunisch's case after his address. Chilstrom told the one thousand people assembled that there would be an appeals process for Kunisch. In a private conversation

afterwards, Kunisch asked Chilstrom to explain his comment on an alleged appeals process, showing Chilstrom a letter Kunisch had received from Rev. Joseph Wagner, head of the Division for Ministry, which explicitly stated that there would be no appeals process for Kunisch. Looking over the letter, Chilstrom replied, "Well, I guess I mis-spoke myself."



Inside this issue

Breach of Confidence	Front page
Resulting Plea	Front page
Pastor's Columns	Page 2& 3
Shared Vision	Page 5
Quote of the Month	Page 5
Reflections on a Trial	Page 6
Financial Alert	Page 7

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