

VOICE & VISION

The Newsletter of the Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministry

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March 1993

A GRAND START FOR VOP

The grand opening celebration of the Voices of Pride Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center February 7, 1993, was celebrated with an open house complete with donations of refreshments, beautiful floral arrangements, balloons, two decorated cakes, and a banner made for the event. The press was there in full force, interviewing youth and staff for coverage that ranged from network television to local radio stations and newspapers.

The approximately seventy five guests who attended milled about meeting youth and inspecting the site, which includes a lounge/library space, an office space and a large special events hall. The guests also were the first audience for a premiere performance of excerpts from *The Undergraduates*, an original musical dealing with societal homophobia, composed by Michael Fortunato (age 17), and written by Vince Arovola (age 17). Michael and Vince were in the cast as well, together with Kari Muldone. To the delight of the young artists, a couple of experienced theater people present at the event offered to help the youth with future productions of their work.

Thanks to financial contributions by the participants, the grand opening celebration raised \$500, which will be used to develop a resource library of books and videos. This library will enable youth to learn about the positive contributions of lesbian, gay and bisexual people to society and throughout history. It will also enable non-gay friends and family members to receive information for their support as well.

The guest of honor was Dr. Cynthia Harris, educator and advocate for Oakland's youth and the first person who helped *Voice & Vision*: LLGM dream about, and later develop, this project in support of sexual minority youth. She received the *Voice of Pride Award* for her efforts. A second *Voice of Pride Award* was given to Mr. Randy Holleschau and Mr. Jeff Johnson, who generously contributed a private grant to the project in its infancy.



LUTHERAN ACTIVISTS TO MARCH ON WASHINGTON

The first national strategy building summit for Lutheran activists on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues will be held April 20-21 in Washington D.C. just before the Third National March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Rights April 25th.

The conference will be held at the Center For Educational Design and Communication, a retreat facility in Washington, D.C. It is sponsored by the Alliance whose member organizations are Lutherans Concerned North America, *Voice & Vision*: Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministry (San Francisco, CA) and Wingspan Ministry (St. Paul, MN). Activists will gather under the theme, "Building Our Future" to focus on concerns and strategies for change within the ELCA and society.

Working groups will convene to discuss the following topics: • Covenants & Commitment Ceremonies • Working with Sexual Minority Youth • Organizing Lutheran Families & Friends for Activism & Affirmation • Strategies For Dealing With Pending Expulsion of St. Francis & First United • AIDS prevention, Support & Lobbying • Extraordinary Certification & Placement of Candidates for Ministry

Registration and Housing are limited. All reservations for this summit are on a first come/first serve basis. Call 415/553-4026 for further information. ▽

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, 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

Recently, Bishop Herbert Chilstrom of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) wrote to President Clinton: "I support your intentions to lift the ban on homosexual persons in the armed services. Your position is in many respects similar to that which this church and many other denominations hold regarding ordained persons. We do not ban gay and lesbian persons from becoming pastors in our church. We do, however, have a clear set of 'Standards and Expectations' for all who are ordained. We judge them by their behavior rather than on the basis of sexual orientation."

This suggests that the ELCA is a safe place to be lesbian, gay or bisexual when, in fact, a critical review of its policies would reveal that they:

- perpetuate a double standard for gay and non-gay people
- encourage gay people to retreat into the secrecy of the closet;
- are applied and enforced unequally across the church;
- define the loving, erotic intimacy of committed, faithful relationships as sexual misconduct, equating them with anonymous, compulsive sexual expression;
- are an embarrassment to committees charged with it's application;
- provide faggots of tinder for anyone wishing to fuel

their hatred against lesbian and gay people.

Despite Chilstrom's rhetoric, denominational insiders know the real story behind his politically correct bravado. We know the stories of all who have been cudgelled out of leadership positions in this church, simply because... Ask former Assistant to the Bishop Paul Johnson or seminarian Bill Kunisch or Wingspan Ministry Associate Jodie Belknap—each excluded or expelled simply because God created them lesbian or gay. Ask Jim, Joel, Ruth, Phyllis, Jeff, Anita, John, Kent, Dan, and the many others whose gifts have been easily dismissed simply because they were open about their orientation or relationship status.

Unlike cases of military discrimination, those who disappear within the church structure often have no recourse but to fade away. They cannot argue their cases in court. They cannot appeal to the ELCA's chief executive to advocate on their behalf. Chilstrom's letter suggests that the ELCA's stance should lead the way for the President's efforts towards justice for gays in the military. Recently St. Paul Dispatch reporter Clark Morphew, wrote:

"Many denominations have abdicated their right to speak in favor of allowing homosexuals in the military, because they have banned homosexuals from their own ordained ministries. Wouldn't that be a glaring example of hypocrisy, to have a church leader urging Congress to allow homosexuals in the military when they can't get ordained in most denominations?"

Shame. Shame. Shame.



TO OUR SUPPORTERS:

Even though many of you are not local and cannot personally participate in our programs, we want you to know how your financial support is spent. We're including a 1993 Program Calendar for you. Copyright ©1993 LLGM

1993 Program

Growth and Inquiry Series

Enhancing Our Intimacy

May 2-June 13, Sundays 4-6 pm

A 6-week series for lesbian and gay male couples who are not in crisis but interested in renewal and growth. Topics include: "Play and Leisure in Relationship," "Decision-making and Conflict Resolution," "Renewing Sexual and Romantic Intimacy," "Spirituality and Recovery Issues," and "Rituals in Relationship." Facilitated by Ruth Frost and Phyllis Zillhart.

Hometowns: Roots, Acceptance & Belonging

May 18-June 29, Tues., 7 pm

A discussion group for gay and bisexual men about hometown roots and the issues which affect living lives of authenticity, openness and connection. Facilitated by Jeff Johnson. **Texts:** *Hometowns*, an anthology of gay male writers.

Going to the Movies to Find God

July 6-27, Tuesdays, 7 pm

A four-week video study series examining spirituality in the movies with particular attention to the following themes: "Immoral consequences of moral choices," "Jesus: a twentieth Century interpretation," "Forgiveness: a healing force or a misguided imperative?" Movies to be viewed include *Strangers in Good Company*, *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, *Sophie's Choice* and *Jesus of Montreal*. Facilitated by Ruth Frost.

Embracing Our Pride

Sept. 7-28, Tuesdays, 7-8:30 pm

A four-week support and study series for lesbians working on self-esteem issues, body-affirmation, and sisterhood. Women share their stories and the

art and stories of gifted lesbians who enrich and provide role models for lesbian culture. Facilitated by Melissa Wyer and Ruth Frost.

Taking the Next Step

Sept. 9-30, Thursdays, 7 pm

A four-week coming out group for lesbians and gay men who are wrestling with their sexual identity and orientation. Topics to be explored:

- Coming Out--Self, Friends and Family
- Secrecy and Truth-Telling: Healthy Limits and Boundaries
- Steps of Action--The Path of Affirmation

Facilitated by Jeff Johnson and Phyllis Zillhart.

Single But Not Alone

Oct. 28-Nov. 18, Thurs., 7 pm

A four-week discussion support series for single gay men which will take up issues around intimacy, coming out, romance, dating, friend ships, self & body image, sexual expression, and creating family. Facilitated by Jeff Johnson.

LLGM Men's Group

Second Saturday Brunch

The LLGM Men's Group has begun a comfortable tradition of a monthly brunch on the second Saturday of the month.

Video Discussions

Once a month, we will gather in a private home to watch and discuss movies with a gay theme.

February 28: *Maurice*

March 28: *Apartment Zero*

April 18: *The Life and Times of Harvey Milk*



**Pastor
Ruth
Frost**

One of my delights these past few months has been getting an opportunity to work with youth through our new Voices of Pride Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center. When one of the youth, a seventeen year old named Vince, contacted me to let me know he had just completed a musical dealing with homophobia in a school setting, I said, "Great! Send me the libretto and let's see if we can do an excerpt for our grand opening celebration."

I read the libretto and thought, "Oh know, this reads like a youthful soap opera-written with passion and lots of enthusiasm but ending with a scene that makes the end of Thelma and Louise seem ho hum." I worried that it was so dramatic people would dismiss it as youthful hyperbole.

Gradually, I stopped worrying about what people would think. Instead, I began to walk a little in the shoes of the youth who have connected with us in the past months. One is struggling with whether or not to drop out of school because of the daily harassment he receives from peers for self-identifying as gay. Another is trying to find a stable home. Another wants to start a youth support group back in his home community but worries about redneck attitudes in a predominantly conservative, rural area. Yet another feels endangered by gang activity. These issues, in addition to all the normal concerns that attend the

healthiest, most fully supported path through adolescence, are a few of the issues the youth present in discussing what preoccupies them and challenges them. Vince's play no longer seems overly dramatic to me.

These youth amaze me. Many of them are willing to be public about the truth of their lives even as they live them. My truths have always been told after the fact, when it was less risky and I had more emotional distance from the truth and its meanings. As a youth, I grew up in a safe, middle class, WASP neighborhood. I attended a high school that had plenty of money for its programs and boasted that eighty-five percent of its graduates went to college. I was sheltered physically by the closet and by the culturally approved role known as "tomboy" which girls can safely assume for a few years. I was also living in a more conservative era sexually so I had less pressure to be heterosexually active. It bugged me some time to think. Unfortunately, I took too much time- thirty-five years to be exact! The public nature of this ministry is just vengeance visited upon one who hid for so long. But it's also just liberation.

I am inspired by the youth we connect with, even as the magnitude of their challenges makes me fear for them. Naomi Remen, in an interview with Bill Moyers, asserts that our obligations to life can be summed up in four steps: 1) Show up, 2) Pay attention, 3) Speak the truth and 4) Let go of the result. The great danger, she contends, is that too few show up. We know youth who have made it through step three and are asking us to practice step two.



NCC DENIES MCC OBSERVER STATUS IN WORLD COUNCIL

For the past decade, the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) has been lobbying for inclusion into the National Council of Churches (NCC). The MCC was founded some fifteen years ago by the Rev. Troy Perry as a denomination affirming of lesbian, gay and bisexual people, their friends and family members. Despite the fact that the MCC is currently the fastest growing church in the world and has congregations in four continents, the NCC has repeatedly denied the MCC's application for admittance into this ecumenical body. This year the MCC decided to apply for "observer" status and discovered they were unwelcome even in that limited role. Orthodox denominations threatened to pull out, and in the name of order, the NCC capitulated to their threats.

In response to this decision, the MCC held a protest worship of "Faith & Disorder" on the campus of Pacific School of Religion where the NCC's national conference was convening, and invited lesbian and gay caucus groups from mainline denominations to participate in solidarity with them. Pastoral staff of Voice & Vision: LLGM was asked to participate with other clergy and lay professionals

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Voices of Pride Youth Program

The Voices of Pride Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center offers youth 23 and under a safe, substance-free, affirming place to call their own. Housed in Oakland's St. Paul Lutheran Church at 1658 Excelsior Ave., VOP includes an office, lounge/library and special events hall, and is now open for the following services:

- Drop-in counseling support for youth, their friends and families, Tuesdays, 3-5 p.m.

- Referral information to assist youth and their families to learn about additional support services available in the Bay Area

- Professionally facilitated youth support group Sundays, 3-5 p.m.

- Special social events for youth and their families: Pizza & Video Night, a Bay Area Youth Dance, a Beach Party Picnic, a Beach Party Picnic, and a Theater Production.

- Sensitivity training for schools, youth service providers and religious communities to better understand the needs of sexual minority youth

- Resource library of books and videos to enable youth to learn about the positive contributions of lesbian, gay and bisexual people to our society past and present.

- Co-sponsored by the Fred Finch Youth Center of Oakland and Voice & Vision: LLGM, in partnership with a growing Oakland/Alameda County coalition • Funded in part by a grant from The United Way of Alameda County •



Life Issues in Community

Peer support groups are being formed to address a number of significant life-needs or issues arising from crisis. Groups meet once a week for four weeks and are support-discussion groups led by a trained peer facilitator. Such groups are being formed to deal with the following:

- Relationship Support
- Grief and Loss
- Single Parenting
- Security and Safety
- Divorce
- Sexual Harrassment
- Unemployment
- Coming Out
- Sexual Abuse

Heart to Heart Pastoral Care

Heart to Heart

Our program of pastoral care forlesbian, gay and bisexual people seeking support and affirmation during life transitions and crisis. We offer hospital visitations, short term pastoral counseling, and life rituals.

Celebrating Your Commitment

A four session counseling process with couples who are entering into a commitment ceremony, Marriage or Holy Union. Couples are encouraged to work with a VOICE & VISION counselor/pastor in creating their ritual and focusing on the following topic areas: "Sharing Your Spirituality and Planning Your Ritual," "Money and Power," "Conflict Resolution," "Sexual and Romantic Intimacy." Fee: sliding scale.

as Lutheran representatives in the service. Calling for people to risk disorder in the name of faith, the service opened with a powerful liturgical drama illustrating the effects of religious oppression on lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Then followed a litany which juxtaposed policy statements from the NCC opposing the inclusion of a "gay church" in the council alongside messages of liberation and justice from the Hebrew prophets. As one "observer" remarked, "It's easier to get into the Kingdom of heaven than it is to get into the NCC."

Guest preachers included the Rev. Jim Mitulski from MCC/SF and

the Rev. Jane Spahr, formerly Executive Director of Spectrum. Mitulski spoke eloquently of the need for MCC to be concerned with the mass of humanity outside unwelcoming mainline denominations. Spahr spoke movingly of how the MCC "took her in" and offered her an opportunity to serve in parish ministry when she first "came out" as a Presbyterian pastor and lost her parish. Spahr, an open lesbian, was denied a call to the Downtown United Presbyterian Church this year by its national judicial commission, despite the approval of the

congregation's local presbytery. Having been denied the right to call Spahr as their pastor, the Downtown Church responded by commissioning Spahr to be a "Lesbian Evangelist" to the national Presbyterian Church. Turning the NCC's decision around, Spahr called for the NCC, of which the Presbyterian denomination is a member, to be the observers, paying close attention to lesbian, gay and bisexual Christians as they went about their active lives of faithful service.



VOICE & VISION

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