

VOICE & VISION

The Newsletter of the Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministry

Vol. 5 No. 3

November 1993

ELCA ASSEMBLY UPDATE

Item 1: The Network to End Sexual Discrimination in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) made its public debut at the 1993 National Assembly of the ELCA in Kansas City. The Network of clergy and lay professional leaders held a press conference August 27th to unveil its roster of over 600 members who have publicly "come out" on behalf of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in the ELCA. About 150 people attended the news conference, after which Network members marched from the conference to the assembly and presented a framed copy of their roster to Charles Miller, Director for Church and Society in the ELCA, and the designee for Bishop Herbert Chilstrom. They also presented Miller with a letter inviting Bishop Chilstrom to meet with them and representatives of Lutherans Concerned/North America. The Rev. Kelly Denton-Borhaug, chair of the Network, has since received word that Bishop Chilstrom has consented to meet with the group. The Network gained forty new members at the churchwide assembly.

Item 2: Lutherans Concerned/North America held a reception at the ELCA churchwide assembly and invited former Navy Lieutenant Dirk Selland to share his story with other Lutherans. Selland was dishonorably discharged from the Navy when he "came out" as a gay man. Simultaneous to his discharge, Selland and his partner sought to join Messiah Lutheran Church, Virginia Beach, VA. This generated considerable controversy within the congregation. However, with the support of its pastor, Fred Guy, the council voted to receive their membership. Twenty-five families withdrew their membership as a result of this decision, leaving the congregation financially weakened by their withdrawal.

However, as one new

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Wingspan Bids Farewell to Ministry Staff

After failing to obtain the grant funding necessary to sustain its ministry, the congregational council of St. Paul Reformation Lutheran Church, St. Paul, Minnesota, made the difficult decision to lay off the staff of Wingspan Ministry, effective September 15, 1993. For over a decade, Wingspan, a ministry of St. Paul Reformation Church, has ministered to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons in Minnesota and throughout the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The congregation bade farewell to its staff, Ministry Associates Leo Treadway, and Jodie Belknap, at a reception October 17th, 1993.

Treadway was the first staff person for Wingspan Ministry twelve years ago. His accomplishments include serving on two Minnesota Governor's Task Forces on gay/lesbian concerns, successfully advocating for the most comprehensive statewide gay rights legislation in the United States, and establishing a support center for sexual minority youth in Minneapolis/St. Paul. Recently, Treadway had established networks of support with the still largely closeted, and aggressively discriminated against, gay population of Brazil, where he lived for a time. Treadway plans to remain in Minnesota, stating that he wants to continue in his

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Voice & Vision: Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministry (LLGM) is a ministry of advocacy, affirmation and spiritual care for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals in the Greater San Francisco Bay Area. We seek to assist lesbians, gay men and bisexuals 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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Assembly from front page

member to Messiah exclaimed, "I've been looking for a church where you not only preach the Gospel but live it." Letters of support to Pastor Guy and the church council are welcome. Send to: Messiah Lutheran Church, 4136 Holland Road, Virginia Beach, VA. 23452-1906

Item 3: Voice & Vision: LLGM staff, Pastor Jeff Johnson met with national representatives of the Network and Lutherans Concerned/North America (LC/NA) to report on the work of the Extraordinary Candidacy Committee (ECC), Western Region. The ECC has been created to evaluate for ministry those lesbian, gay and bisexual seminarians who have been excluded from normal candidacy processes solely for reasons of sexual identity. The ECC endeavors to match qualified seminarians with congregations willing to recognize their gifts for ministry and extend them calls. As a result of Johnson's meeting with representatives from the Network and LC/NA, regional candidacy committees are being organized across the country on the same model as that of the ECC Western Region.

Item 4: "Voices of the Faithful," a worship and chancel drama, was a highlight of the assembly activities. It was organized by Mahyra Munson and produced by a local dramatist at Grace and Trinity Episcopal Cathedral of Kansas City. Based on the 1990 trial of First United and St. Francis Lutheran Churches, following their calls to Pastors Jeff Johnson, Ruth Frost and Phyllis Zillhart, the drama eloquently conveyed the

tension between maintaining church discipline and the call of the Gospel to enact justice and liberation on behalf of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in the ELCA. Four hundred people were in attendance at the drama, including several bishops and their associates. Many in the audience were moved to tears by the power of voices seldom heard in the ELCA. One listener, long estranged from the church exclaimed, "I know now that I've found my people!" Another said to Pastor Johnson, "Let the members of your church know how courageous we think they are!" Yet another said to him, "Were it not for your congregations' strong stand of integrity, justice wouldn't have a chance in this church!"

Wingspan from front page

role as "professional homosexual" helping to "transform Minnesota into a place of sanctuary for sexual minority people."

Belknap joined the Wingspan staff in 1992 having graduated from Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary in St. Paul. Her approval for ordination was rescinded when it became known that she was joining the Wingspan staff and when she came out to her Wisconsin Candidacy Committee. Belknap established Uncommon Call, a support network for lesbian and gay clergy and seminarians. She also worked with lesbian youth and served as an educator and small group coordinator of sexuality and spirituality issues at Luther Northwestern Seminary.

Wingspan Ministry was a support to Voice & Vision staff member, Pastor Ruth Frost when



Announcing *Joy Noelle Hart*

October 3, 1993

Weight: 6 lb. 13 oz.

Length: 20 1/2 inches

Parents: Phyllis Zillhart and Ruth Frost
Ched Hinger and Jay Beatty

It is 3 a.m. as I write this, and all is still in our house. Our two week-old daughter has stopped crying and is peacefully snacking at her other mother's breast. By two weeks she is smart enough to have figured out that when I pick her up, she's not going to get the goodies from me- only changed diapers and a pacifier she knows is

a scam and which insults her dignity. So I have become the family chronicler of baby development and "precious moments." In this case, the precious moment is peace and quiet, and an opportunity to work on a past due newsletter issue!

While we have had this sweet terror in our household only two

weeks, it feels like two months. We already know that we have, as the hospital nurses so kindly and euphemistically put it, a very "alert" baby with "spirit" (*whose spirit, I wonder*). She decided to serve notice of her immanent arrival at our October board meeting, when Phyllis began to have regular contractions. We



from left: Ruth Frost, Pr. James DeLange, Phyllis Zillhart, Ched Hinger, Jay Beatty, Joy Noelle

drove from the meeting to the hospital where our daughter was born a week early on St. Francis Day. The congregation of St. Francis regards this as right on time, of course, and as evidence that she knows she is being welcomed into the world by a community which will positively dote on her.

This little girl has the good fortune to have two moms and two dads, as we are parenting with a gay male couple, Ched Hinger and Jay Beatty. The four of us took Lamaze class together and were all present at her birth. Phyllis had an entourage of coaches at her delivery and Joy Noelle had many arms to catch her wet, new little body as she "came out" to her gay parents.

As any parent knows, but is never fully prepared for, our lives have been fundamentally altered. Not only the present, but the future has shifted. The four of us now think concretely in terms of life beyond our own span of years as we care for this new life which hopefully will outlive all of us. "Family values" has a whole new meaning as we contemplate what we want this little girl to receive from us. To inaugurate this new family of five with friends and community, we are holding a special ritual, **"In Celebration of a New Family,"** 2 p.m., November 27, 1993 at St. Francis Lutheran Church. *Joy Noelle Hart will be received into the family of God by baptism during this ritual celebration.* All who wish to are welcome to celebrate with us. We ask your prayers for our new family at this time.

When I returned to work I was told that someone from the religious right had called three times to ask if it was true that we

were parents and that we had artificially inseminated with a gay male couple. When asked the motivation for his inquiry by Sarah Hall, our protective office manager who took the call, he said he just wanted to check the facts to make sure that this wasn't a "grand hoax being perpetrated on the gay community." Well, it isn't a hoax and it isn't something being perpetrated on anybody. It's a miracle, a gift which is being

celebrated by our gay and straight community of St. Francis and now with all of you across the miles. We rejoice that our daughter will one day know that so many stood by ready to receive her into their love as they have already received her parents. And given the challenges she may face in her young life, we are glad she is an "alert" child with "spirit." *Thanks be to God!*

Pastor Ruth



Happy parents with their less than happy baby