

# VOICE & VISION

The Newsletter of Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministry

Vol. 3 No. 4

October 1991

## ALLIANCE PROTESTS ASSEMBLY *LLGM, Wingspan, LC/NA United in Orlando*

Calling for "new shepherds who care" about lesbian, gay and bisexual people, the Alliance for Action coalition held a liturgical protest at the 1991 ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Orlando. The Alliance, a coalition of Lutherans Concerned North America, VOICE & VISION: Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministry and Wingspan Ministry, protested the absence of lesbian and gay issues on the assembly agenda, and the unresponsiveness of ELCA bishops to lesbian/gay concerns.

Working in partnership with the Justice Network of the ELCA, the Alliance held a joint reception for the supporters of their ministries and leafleted the delegates of the assembly with pamphlets entitled "What is the ELCA Not Talking About" and with The Independent Lutheran Press whose lead article reports on suppression of information by the ELCA regarding lesbian and gay issues in the church. Passing out stickers with their literature, members of the Alliance invited supporters to wear them and soon bright pink triangles with the letters H.U.G. (Humans Unafraid of Gays) dotted the assembly floor.

Security at the assembly was tight, consisting of armed police, hotel security and ELCA security guards positioned to "maintain good order" and see to it that no voices outside the assembly process could be heard. When a gay delegate to the assembly tried to announce where and when the Alliance protest would take place, he was cut off in mid-sentence by Bishop Chilstrom.

With no other recourse for voice or visibility, Alliance members decided to symbolically signal the beginning of their liturgical protest, which was held outside the assembly doors, by a Gospel processional on the floor of the assembly

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## DANGEROUS CURVE AHEAD!

*Changes to ELCA Constitution*

"DANGER! CURVE AHEAD!" Every driver knows the meaning of road-side hazard signs. LLGM would like to post such a sign regarding the "road-work" which is changing the shape and scope of the ELCA's Constitution.

With little discussion, delegates to the 2nd National ELCA Assembly in Orlando approved substantial changes to the constitution and bylaws of the church. These changes will significantly increase the ELCA's ability to silence dissent, to command obedience to an emerging centralized structure, and to intimidate into invisibility those individuals and congregations organizing against current ELCA policies which discriminate against openly lesbian and gay people.

Here are some of the approved changes:

- While the synods of the ELCA still bear responsibility for certifying and authorizing ordinations, the synodical Bishop now shall solely exercise the church's power to ordain. (10.31.a.9)

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# VOICE & VISION

Voice & Vision: Lesbian, Gay and Clergy 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

This past weekend I moved in with my boyfriend, Michael.

"Finally" said some of our friends! "What have you been waiting for? You two have been dating for a whole year!" Well, call us old fashioned, but we have given ourselves lots of time to move through the various stages of our relationship. With each stage, it seems I develop a new label which could appropriately describe a new level of our commitment and love.

At the beginning, he was just "that 2nd tenor" sitting in my section of the chorus. Then he was "the cute guy who used to sit next to me." Soon the cute face had a name and Michael and I were "interested" in each other.

Quickly, "interested" became "seeing," "seeing" became "dating," then we became "boyfriends," followed by "serious." Now--"living together."

With each label, came a new set of questions? "When do we tell others?" "When does he meet the folks?" "What will my friends think of him?" "Where are the models for our relationship?" "When should we have sex?" "Do we both get tested for HIV?" "How well to I really know him?" "How well have I let him into my

life?" "Are we going to live together?" "Do we want to be "out" to the landlord as or after we are looking for an apartment?" "Where do we go on holidays?" "What about joint accounts?" "Who will do the cleaning/cooking/garbage" ...

"What about getting married?" This was raised only by my sister in law, who upon my telling her that Michael and I were moving in together, paused for a moment and then somewhat confused asked, "But, shouldn't you be married first?" I knew that this stage would be breaking with the expected family/heterosexual tradition; but then so was my coming out as a gay man

As with most gay couples, Michael and I are setting our own path into the future without many models, traditions and examples to follow. It will be different for us than it has been for our siblings. But the love which is between us and our care in moving deeper into new stages of commitment in expressing this growing love, will light for us the way.

"Hello, you have reached the home of Michael and Jeff" announces our new machine. While I trust that someday we will be able to joyfully and publicly announce our decision to marry/partner, I am content at this stage to live together as just one more step along our joint path. Blessings to each of you in your sacred relationships! ✓



**Pastor  
Ruth  
Frost**

While attending the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Orlando this past August, I decided it was time to retrace some of my past. When I was twenty seven, I did what many lesbian and gay people do when they aren't able to love themselves and claim their spiritual and sexual wholeness. I got married. It was the ultimate "mind over matter" effort to act as if I was heterosexual in order to "fit in" with family, church and society.

**This decision was truly ironic** in that I married a man who was trying to do the same thing I was. Three years (and no children) later, we divorced. At the time that we parted, we both knew that our sexuality issues hadn't been "fixed" by heterosexual marriage. They had simply been derailed and detoured at great cost to our self-esteem and our individual happiness.

Fifteen years and many lifetimes later, I found myself in Florida at our ELCA Assembly not far from where I knew my ex-husband lived. From the vantage point of self-love and self-acceptance, I returned to wish my ex-husband every happiness and all my good

will. Call it closure, I guess. I hoped I would find a gay man as happy as I am and that we could erase any lingering hurt from our shared past.

It was not to be. Yes, we did meet briefly, but it was clear that our lives had taken us in such different directions that there could be no connection today. He related how, after our divorce, he had struggled with guilt about our failed marriage and spent many years abusing drugs and alcohol. He then went through "Exodus," a notorious "reparative therapy" program to help gay men and lesbians repent and "convert" to heterosexuality or, failing that, to become asexual. He spoke of his efforts to keep sexual feeling and expression separate from his identity. I asked him if he had ever had a significant relationship with a male lover. He thought a minute and then said no. He admitted that sometimes, when he couldn't help himself, he would act out sexually but he could not permit himself to fall in love because it distanced himself from God too much. Then he added, "It's easier to repent of lust than of love."

I tried to communicate to him the joy of finally being able to claim my own sexual and spiritual wholeness, but it was clear that he could not hear it as anything but a threat. Driving back to the assembly with Phyllis by my side, I felt immense gratitude for

our life together as open, self-affirming lesbians. I also felt enormous anger and sadness on behalf of my ex-husband, a kind, creative, gay man who deserved so much more.

Back at the assembly, standing in the visitors' section without voice or vote, I thought of all that I had witnessed at this assembly: no gay or lesbian representation, no lesbian or gay issues on the national agenda, amendments to the constitution which will further restrict dissent in the church, Bishop Childstrom cutting off at the microphone a gay delegate who simply wished to announce the time of our liturgical protest outside the assembly, suppression of distribution of the Discipline Committee's Open Letter, thick security to prevent other avenues for lesbian and gay people to be seen and heard, and the "business as usual" mentality of our church leaders in the face of daily violence to lesbian and gay lives, all the while denying that ELCA policies have anything to do with this violence.

I stood there thinking of my ex-husband, a gay son of the church who has been taught by that church to hate himself and to deny himself the love of a gay partner. And I wondered, "How long will this church continue to perpetrate spiritual and sexual genocide upon our community in the name of Jesus Christ?"



## LLGM Staff to do Workshop at National CLOUT Conference

Christian Lesbians Out Together, CLOUT, is a newly formed international, ecumenical coalition of openly lesbian clergy and lay church leaders. This coalition of "sisters with Clout," as members affectionately refer to themselves, is committed to empowering lesbians to claim spiritual and sexual wholeness, challenging oppressive policies within their respective denominations, and exploring structures and liturgies for women's spirituality.

Ruth Frost and Phyllis Zillhart, two of the eleven openly lesbian clergy in mainline Christian denominations, will be among the "CLOUT of Witnesses" who gather in Minneapolis for its first national conference Nov. 1-3, 1991. As CLOUT members and workshop leaders, they will present material from their ministry with lesbians who are creating their own "sacred space" through the work of LLGM. In a workshop entitled "Discovering & Creating Our Own Sacred Tradition" Frost and Zillhart will present with other women who are asking the question, "What does it mean to create our own 'womanchurch' placing women's experience and women's sexuality at the center of the Sacred instead of on the periphery of what men have named as Sacred?"

As Frost commented, "Women spend so much time struggling to accommodate to or modify

patriarchal tradition that we don't really ever experience fully empowering spirituality. What kind of perception of ourselves would we have if it were as that were being challenged to include our centuries old 'Goddess language' and open up our centuries old patriarchal tradition to include men's stories and men's experience? I think we would see ourselves in a very different light! While no tradition should function oppressively for anyone, women could spend the next several hundred years

tipping the scales towards our own lives just for balance."

Keynote speakers for "A CLOUT of Witnesses" are: Rev. Carter Heyward, professor at Cambridge Divinity School, Ms. Mary Hunt, Executive Director of Women's Alliance in Theology, Ethics and Religion, Rev. Irene Moore, Ph.D. candidate at Harvard, and Rev. Jane Spahr, Executive Director of Ministry of Light. Registration information can be obtained by calling Jane Spahr at 415 457-1115. ▽

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## Lesbians Embrace Pride: A Series

"When I was a little girl, I liked to wear a tool belt and carry my father's old checkbooks to write play checks with under the name of "Charlie Jim Roger." Even though I was only five, I guess I had figured out that men have both money and power. I thought if I could play with their "toys," that is, checks and tools, and if I exchanged the name "Melissa" for *three* boys names, I'd get noticed. That was my power. As little lesbian "Melissa" I was powerless and invisible and had no way to describe my feeling of difference. As "Charlie Jim Roger" I could feel good about myself and my difference."

These were the words of one of the women in an LLGM support group called "Embracing Our Pride." It was a group for lesbians who are

working on self-esteem issues engendered from living in a culture which does not affirm them either as women or as lesbians. Through reparenting exercises, the women became re-acquainted with the "baby dyke" or inner child inside each of them. They affirmed the small lesbian child who grew up aware of feeling "different" but with no language for that difference.

Through shared stories, self-affirmations, music, poetry, symbols and rituals, these women explored their own giftedness and learned about the contributions of lesbians to American history and culture. Through tears and laughter, they discovered that pride is something you can't give yourself, but can receive by giving to one another. ▽

Carve out from Page 1

**Implication:** This precludes any congregational ordinations (permitted in the Lutheran Church in the past in cases of emergency). It also gives the bishop power to overrule a candidacy committee's determination of a candidate's qualifications for ministry.

- The basic standards for admittance to and continuation in the ordained ministry of the ELCA have been expanded from those listed in the Constitution (items like "commitment to Christ; acceptance of and adherence to the Confession of Faith; a life consistent with the Gospel;" etc.) to include policies developed by the Division for Ministry, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and adopted by the Church Council. (7.31.1.)

- In the provisions for discipline in the former constitution, an open or public hearing was required at the request of the accused. Now all hearings will be private unless both parties agree otherwise. (20.13.) **Implication:** Drastically lowered accountability to outside witnesses such as the press or other concerned Christians.

- In the prior constitution, while ordained ministers could be censured or suspended for "willfully disregarding the provisions of the constitution or bylaws" of the ELCA, they could not be removed from the roster of ordained ministers for this type of violation. This exception has now been removed. **Implication:** Clergy who choose ecclesiastical disobedience with the current

practices and policies of the ELCA now may risk their own ordination status. (20.17.02.)

- The bishop of the synod may appoint an advisory panel (non-elected, ad hoc) to assist in consultation, mediation, and the examination of witnesses during the trial. *No such authority or panel existed in the old constitution.* (20.17.04.) **Implication:** Bishop gains more control over the discipline process.

- The bishop of the church shall select the non-voting chair of the discipline committee. (20.17.14.) **Implication:** Previously selected internally by committee members themselves, the bishop gains increased control of the committee even though the bishop may be the accuser.

- The discipline committee must publish its decision in two parts: a presentation of the facts, and a determination of the discipline to be imposed. **Implication:** The Open Letter and perhaps even the Dissenting Opinions written in the last Report would not be allowed in future reports. (20.17.21.)

- Previously only the accused could appeal the decision to the Committee on Appeals which had the authority to overturn a ruling if due process had been violated. Now, either party may appeal the decision to the Committee which can overturn a decision for an expanded number of reasons including a determination that the "discipline committee abused its discretion," because it's decision

"was not supported by any evidence in the record," or its finding's were "clearly erroneous." (20.32.01.)

**Implication:** Church officials still hold a trump card if they don't like the outcome of the hearings.

- With the approved changes, clergy of suspended congregations would lose all rights, and the congregations would lose the additional rights of serving on councils, boards, committees or any other groups of the church. Furthermore, in a state of suspension, authority may be granted to the local synod to assume administrative responsibility of the congregation. *If it resists such control, it may be immediately expelled from the ELCA.* (20.18.02.)

In the case of St. Francis and First United, the Discipline Committee imposed a period of suspension precisely because it wanted to give the members of the ELCA and the two parishes time to work together and to dialogue for 5 years before an expulsion would occur. It also gave the congregations voice and vote through their pastors. Under the new rules, congregations would be "muzzled" by synodical control and no recourse to voice or vote.

In a church born out of the courage of its dissenting founder, these changes signal a dramatic departure from what it means to be Lutheran. We are not constitutional authorities, but are clearly interested in those who are organizing to look at these changes and their effects on our struggle for justice in the ELCA. If you are interested in organizing a response or in researching the potential effects of these changes, please call us at 415-553-4026. ▽

## "Voices of Pride" Youth Group LLGM Supports Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Youth

Recall what it was like for you as a youth of thirteen struggling to understand your emerging feelings of attraction for your best friend or your favorite teacher. Who did you talk to? Who understood? *VOICE & VISION: Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministry* knows it's not easy for lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth, or youth too scared to use any labels to describe their feelings and experiences, to grow up self-affirming in this culture.

It's no accident that lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents are three times more likely to be at risk for suicide than their heterosexual counterparts. It's no coincidence that a third of the lesbian, gay and bisexual adult population resorts to chemicals to "self-medicate" personal pain and low self-esteem. We live in a culture in which too often church is the place lesbian, gay and bisexual people experience rejection and the gay bar is the place of welcoming sanctuary.

*VOICE & VISION: LLGM* is working hard to counteract these negative effects. The ministry is forming a coalition of support for lesbian, gay and bisexual youth in San Francisco's East Bay. Working in partnership with the Fred Finch Youth Center, and in partnership with P-FLAG members, pastors and their

congregations, LLGM is developing a plan which will provide threefold support to youth at risk: 1) "Voices of Pride," an ecumenical spirituality support group for lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth; 2) adult "mentors" or role models to lend personal, spiritual, and family support to youth who are without models or support from their own families; and 3) sensitivity training for congregations, community centers and schools to educate mainstream society to the needs and issues of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth.

LLGM is confident that if necessary financial contributions and grant monies are obtained, a site could be confirmed and all three programs in place by spring of 1992. ▽

### Alliance cont from page 1

immediately beforehand. Since the assembly was crawling with security personnel, this took some ingenuity. A Bible, a collapsible cross and a smuggled in red chasuble with an immense pink triangle on it enabled Leo Treadway of Wingspan Ministry and Ruth Frost of LLGM to enact the Gospel procession. (No one other than anxious security guards followed them.) After processing up the main aisle in silence, the little Gospel procession rejoined the rest of the Alliance members outside the doors of the assembly to complete the liturgical protest. The liturgical protest charged ELCA Bishops with indifference to lesbian and gay lives and acclaimed those clergy who have publicly risked careers in their pleas for justice on behalf of lesbian and gay people. About one hundred assembly participants gathered to watch or participate in the action. ▽

### FINANCIAL ALERT!

*In our last issue, we highlighted financial support needs for our travel to ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Orlando and an office computer. You helped us fundraise one ticket to Orlando and we thank you. We are currently leasing an office computer but are still hoping to own one. This issue we are highlighting the following:*



#### "A CLOUT of Witnesses"

First national Ecumenical conference of Christian Lesbians Out Together (CLOUT) in Minneapolis Nov. 1-3. Help send Ruth and Phyllis (see article this issue).



#### Office Volunteers

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

*Please designate where your check should go (feel free to include both) and mail to *VOICE & VISION: LLGM 152 Church st., S.F., CA 94114.**

## Kunisch Update

William Kunisch, Pacific Lutheran Theological seminarian who had his endorsement for ministry in the ELCA withdrawn for preaching a sermon supportive of St. Francis Lutheran Church, sends his greetings from the Lutheran Church of Honolulu, Hawaii. Scheduled to do his internship at this congregation before his endorsement was withdrawn, Bill assumed the congregation would no longer want him. He was wrong. Understanding Bill's case to be a miscarriage of justice antithetical to the Gospel, the congregation voted to take Bill as an irregular intern.

Meanwhile, PLTS has denied Bill's request to allow him to continue his Master of Divinity work at that Seminary. Consequently, Bill is transferring to Pacific School of

Religion, which has accepted him for the fall of '92. Perhaps by the time Bill completes his seminary training, there will be another courageous congregation who will issue a call to Bill. ▽

*Shepherds cont from page 5*  
proclaim the names of these faithful shepherds aloud and in our hearts. We give you thanks for their faithful witness to the Gospel and their vision of the Heavenly Place of Belonging here on earth.

L: We give you thanks for Pastors Aguirre, Anderson, Barndt, Boom, Bouton, Burt, Christiansen, Crary, DeLange, Denton-Borhaug, DePorte, Deppe, Dishno, Duensing, Ellwanger, Flak, Flores, Frost,

Frykman, Gaye, Green, Hulden, Hansen, Harms, Hausor, Hoeserberg, Hiller, Hoch, Hooper, Hoy-Bianchi, Irons, Jacobson, Jesska, Johnson, Jones, Kaldahl, Kragthorpe, Kolin, Larsen, Leonard, Lewis, Løkken, Merkle, Miller, Mueller, Murphy, Nelson, Oberdorfer, Olson, Peterson, Pihl, Ramsdell, Renquist, Richmond, Rohrer, Rollefson, Root, Rostedt, Ruehle, Ruth, Sauerma, Schieman, Schultz-Ackerman, Schultze, Sea, Smith, Swanson, Teidemann, Theisse, Thompson, Tobias, Torgerson-Bell, Virgil, Voss, Wagener, Zoesch and Zillhart.

P: These are Shepherds who care! Let them be acclaimed! ▽



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