

VOICE & VISION

The Newsletter of the Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministry Vol. 4 No. 3 September 1992

VOICES OF DISTINCTION BENEFIT BANQUET

You are all cordially invited to our fall gala Voices of Distinction Benefit Banquet November 7th at the Hotel Miyako, San Francisco. Our supporters have let us know that you want an opportunity to come together to celebrate what you did in helping to create VOICE & VISION two and a half years ago and what we have done together since.

At our post-ordination gala, a participant watching the dance floor reflected, "This is a chance to see what the Kingdom of God is really like. Look at all the combinations of people dancing with one another- pearls and pumps and sensible shoes out there on the dance floor swirling in happy abandon with no regard for gender differences. If only the Church could be like this!"

This is your opportunity to bring out your pearls and pumps to have fun as you help us fundraise for our ministry. In addition, it is a celebration with a serious side, for we are using this occasion to honor those whose voices have been raised for justice-love on behalf of lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

VOICE & VISION will give out five Voices of Distinction Awards: 1) The Voice of the Spirit to Ms. Anita Hill, formerly Ministry Associate and Co-Founder of Wingspan Ministry in St. Paul Minnesota, 2) The Voice of Courage to the Downtown Church of Rochester N.Y. for calling The Rev. Jane Adams Spahr, 3) The Voice of Affirmation to Adele Starr, founder of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, 4) The Voice of Faithfulness to Dr. Paul Egertson, formerly Director for The Center for Theological Study and 5) The Voice of the Future scholarship award to William Kunisch, Lutheran seminarian/activist.

Join us and our special guests at this gala celebration of all that God has done for us. For reservations and information, call: 415/553-4026.

YOUTH RESOURCE CENTER FINDS A HOME

St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Oakland has offered space for *Voices of Pride*, a program of support for sexual minority youth sponsored by VOICE & VISION: LLMG and the Fred Finch Youth Center in coalition with area congregations and the Oakland P-FLAG chapter.

The Youth Advisory Board to *Voices of Pride* will meet September 19th at St. Paul's for a BBQ picnic and planning session to assess how best to use the space offered to them. In addition to social events, drop-in counseling, and a support group, youth have expressed an interest in developing a resource and referral library to learn more about lesbian and gay culture and history.

The Resource Center will officially open this October. It will be staffed by three positions: 1) Project Coordinator/Spiritual Care Provider, 2) Project Clinician/Facilitator, and 3) Youth Outreach Developer. It is funded in part by a grant from United Way of Alameda County, benefit monies from MusicFest '92, the generous contribution of St. Paul's Church, and donations from you, our supporters.





Pastor
Jeff
Johnson

Growing up a gay boy, I remember many nights when I was driven from sleep by questions like "Am I the only one! Isn't there anyone else?" Even when I discovered "others like me" I dismissed "us" believing that we were part of a "modern accident in history" and I doubted the existence of our people throughout history.

One of the most rewarding aspects of my work with VOICE & VISION has been to rediscover pieces of our history and cultural identity which have been lost, hidden, and forgotten in our modern era. Discovering cultures and societies in the past whose public ethical codes promoted lesbian and gay visibility gives me courage to challenge our homophobic, social and cultural worldview which fosters invisibility and death for our people.

A couple of years ago, I came across the 12th century prayer from a same-sex marriage ceremony discovered by Harvard University's Dr. John Boswell. Boswell has discovered prayers and rituals in use throughout the ancient world as long ago as the 4th century and as recently as the 1940's and 50's among Christians in remote villages.

"For these two persons joining themselves in the loving union of

life,...For these servants, and for their union in Christ,... that the Lord our God unite them in perfect love and inseparable life, we pray to the Lord. O Lord our God, benefactor and friend to the human race, these two servants of yours who love each other with a sacred and holy love have come to your holy temple, wishing to receive your sanctification and blessing. Grant them unashamed fidelity and sincere love and all things needed for salvation in eternal life and union for the rest of their lives through the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

Boswell maintains, in a soon to be published book on same-sex marriages, that evidence of such Christian rituals predates that for heterosexual counterparts. What a wonderful historical fact to discover as we work with lesbian and gay couples seeking to ritualize their commitment.

Recently in my reading, I came across another example, this one from the second century — a fragment discovered in 1958 called the *Secret Gospel of Mark*, which, according to the ancient church patriarch, Clement of Alexandria, was appropriately read and studied by the most committed, learned, Christians of his day. The short paragraph description of a Lazarus-type raising, portrays a homoerotic relationship between Jesus and a "young man whom Jesus loved."

"Jesus went in where the young man was, stuck out his hand, grabbed him by the hand, and raised him up. The young man looked at Jesus, loved him and began to beg him to be with

him. Then they left the tomb and went into the young man's house. (Incidentally, he was rich.) Six days later Jesus sent him an order; and when evening had come, the young man went to him, dressed only in a linen cloth. He spent that night with him, because Jesus taught him the mystery of God's domain."

Many scholars maintain that this version of the *Gospel of Mark* is in fact more original than our present canonical Gospel and that passages like this one have been removed throughout history because of their esoteric and erotic content!

As a young gay boy, I experienced the death and denial of invisibility: being invisible to myself, my family and within my history and tradition. As a thriving gay man, I am moved to greater visibility and life as history and tradition come out in support of the existence of our vibrant people. Claim yourselves. Claim your history, culture and identity!



Clarification: In his last column Pr. Johnson wrote about youth who reportedly scribbled a note which said "Let's kill these fag-lovers." Johnson reported that these youth were "supported by their youth pastor, who read the note, chuckled and passed it on!" This pastor, after a meeting with Pr. Johnson and ELCA Bishop Lyle Miller, denies having seen such a note or having participated in such activity. In addition, he says he strongly condemns this type of hate language and violence against lesbian, gay or bisexual people and indicated that had such a note come to his attention, he would have taken appropriate disciplinary steps with the youth involved.



**Pastor
Phyllis
Zillhart**

Family bitterness which prohibited parents and grown children from speaking to one another for several years. A man in the late stages of AIDS, pondering the meaning of his life and the fragmentation of his family. A sister's devotion to her dying brother. A phone call to their pastor.

Jeff had been seeing "Steve" for months, reporting the all too familiar random pattern of AIDS: better and worse, dementia and clarity, anger and repose, near death and brief remissions. "Lisa", Steve's sister, and her partner, "Sarah", cared for Steve in their home, faithfully and lovingly. Steve's death was imminent. Jeff and Ruth were leaving for LC/NA's assembly in Philadelphia. I was to check on Steve, who might not last the week.

Bringing all of his will and yearning to bear, Steve asked every member of his family to gather from across the country to say good-bye to him. Steve requested pastoral leadership in a ritual, marking the beginning of his journey into death and eternal life. As I spoke with Steve about the ritual's purpose, he emphasized that it was for his sake, to gather his loved ones, say good-bye and leave this world in serenity. If, however, his family members found hope

and a basis for mending hostility in his passing, that would be a bonus. After an hour of hearing family history details, the lure of the secondary goal was clear. You can only exert the power of a deathbed request once per lifetime, and Steve's was for the reconciliation of his family. His peace and their peace were linked.

Silently I prayed that Steve could separate his needs from those of his family and receive what he needed in our impending ritual. I also prayed for a miracle of peace-making. I read I John 3:7-21, which urges us to love God by loving one another, to recognize our forgiveness through Christ's redemption, and to claim confidence in the day of judgment because "there is no fear in love; complete love casts out fear. Fear has to do with punishment and the one who is afraid has not been made whole in love." A mini-sermon on love and reconciliation flowed through me. Then I anointed Steve's frail body with oil and led a prayer asking the Spirit to bring Steve safely through the valley of the shadow of death and into the fullness of the light of Christ's own welcoming face. I also prayed for the family to let go of resentments and open to the love of God and one another that surrounded them. When the family and I layed hands on Steve and offered our parting blessings, tears flowed among them, tears of longing, of sorrow, of hope, of healing. It was my moment to depart and as I

turned to close the door I saw the children reach out to embrace their parents. No longer strangers of the heart, they embraced as wounded healers all.

Two weeks later, two days before he died, Jeff and I gathered with Lisa and Sarah to share communion with Steve, to voice gratitude for having known and loved him, to hear his parting words of wisdom and joy, and to remind him and us: "Lord, now you let your servant go in peace. Your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen your salvation." As a miracle, as a gift, my eyes are open - again.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Oct. 1

Voices of Pride Resource Center Opens - St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Oakland

Oct. 24

Grace & Comfort AIDS Banquet - Grace Lutheran Church, Palo Alto - Call 415 494-1212

Nov. 7

VOICE & VISION Awards Dinner/Dance - Hotel Miyako, San Francisco - Call 415 553-4026

Nov. 21

ELCA Human Sexuality Report Discussion - Resurrection Lutheran Church - 397 Euclid Ave., Oakland - 10am - 3pm

FREE TO CELEBRATE LC/NA

by the Rev. Ruth Frost

Gathering under the banner "Free to Celebrate, We are the Church," Lutherans Concerned/NA members assembled in Philadelphia in July to raise their voices as a gift to the Church and an expression of the Church. The mood was festive, communal and serious.

LC has become alternative family to many people throughout the U.S. and Canada. The statement of sanctuary spoken before each gathering assures people that somewhere in this dangerous world and this dangerous church, there is a place of refuge for those needing advocacy and comfort, and a place of activism for those needing to raise their voices against the status quo. For many members, LC has provided the welcome to come out and come home. It has also provided a place for our allies to make themselves known.

Gathered in this body, I was reminded of my own roots in LC before I became a "professional lesbian" associated with VOICE & VISION. LC/Twin Cities was my local chapter. I vividly remember going to my first worship gathering, which was also my first "coming out" experience. I had been dragged to it by a friend who knew my desperate need of support as a closeted seminarian. I remember protesting, "I'm so afraid I'll see

somebody there I know, and then they'll know." My friend pointed out logically that in that case they too would be "known" either as "one of us" or as one of our allies. Sure enough, no sooner had I taken my seat than I heard a voice say loudly, "Ruth Frost, you're here!" Looking up, I saw one of my very heterosexual and very pregnant seminary classmates who had come with her husband to offer support. While the etiquette of refraining from the use of full names had been lost on her, warmth of welcome had not. The first arms of welcome were those of a straight person. It is a memory that makes me smile each time I recall it.

Each assembly, somebody new gets welcomed or gives a welcome. This assembly was no different—except that the welcome has become more and more urgent as AIDS takes its toll in our community. This year LC adopted, by means of a resolution, a formal welcome of people who self-identify not as *lesbian or gay*, but as *bisexual*, *transgender* or "queer." LC is taking seriously the mandate of inclusivity in its own community. That's what I like about LC. It has moved from what could be described as a pretty "assimilationist" organization bent on proving to the Church that we're just like the girl or boy next door, to an organization that's becoming unafraid to claim its own, even when its own don't easily fit in.

Those of us at VOICE & VISION who find ourselves very

much on the fringe appreciate the ties we are forming with LC/NA. So do our congregations. We are grateful for the passage of a resolution calling for strategies of support for our two congregations in the event of their expulsion. We are also excited that LC is establishing a task force to study alternative structures and new ways to accomplish ministry by and on behalf of our community should the ELCA remain intransigent in its refusal to recognize that *we*—lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people and queers—are indeed the Church, free to celebrate our giftedness and our freedom in the gospel!



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can their stories be heard throughout a church notorious for suppressing information about lesbian and gay people? How can we all help them "get the Word OUT?" You can help us help them! Kunisch and Belknap are interested in doing a national speaking tour to talk about the plight of lesbian and gay seminarians in the ELCA today and to strategize with congregations ways they can offer their support. The office of VOICE & VISION can coordinate this effort if we hear from congregations interested in hosting these engagements. Please help Jodie and Bill get the Word OUT! Call 415 553-4026 with your invitations!



Get the Word OUT!

Part of the ministry of VOICE & VISION has been to advocate on behalf of qualified lesbian and gay candidates for ministry who have become casualties of a system which demands compliance at the expense of integrity. Many lesbian and gay seminarians are refusing to compromise their honesty by remaining closeted or by pretending to be in agreement with the ELCA "Vision & Expectations" guidelines requiring life long celibacy of its lesbian and gay candidates, even if they have loving relationships of commitment and fidelity.

Currently, there are two qualified people who have been "washed out" of ministry who would like to share their stories with congregations and church groups willing to listen. They are William Kunisch and Jodie Belknap. Kunisch was a student at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary until he had his certification withdrawn after he preached a sermon supportive of St. Francis and First United Churches. Belknap, a graduate of Luther Northwestern Seminary, had her approval for ordination withdrawn after the Metro Lutheran published an article which stated that she had accepted a position as Ministry Associate of Wingspan, a ministry on behalf of lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

Where can these otherwise well qualified candidates for ministry turn for support? How

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A Call to National Activists

The Alliance for Action, a coalition of Lutheran organizations committed to justice for lesbian, gay and bisexual people, will sponsor a 1 1/2 day **National Activists Conference** on April 20-21 in Washington D.C. in collaboration with Lutherans Concerned/D.C.

750,000 people are expected to participate in the Third National March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Civil Rights Sunday, April 25th. We expect this "pre-march" alliance conference to empower and strengthen 40-50 Lutheran activists working to dismantle discriminatory policies and structures of the ELCA.

Possible workshops include: non-violent demonstration trainings; creating parallel and alternative structures for ministry; community organizing; the new Lutherans Concerned Partnering Program for Congregations; the expulsions of St. Francis and First United; and support for openly lesbian and gay clergy. Conference organizers also plan to secure a meeting with Lutheran members of Congress and the Supreme Court and will hold a reception for all Lutheran marchers.

Plan to march in potentially the largest civil rights demonstration in U.S. history and sign up for this exciting pre-march conference for activists. Space is limited. For more information, please contact Pr. Jeff Johnson at 415-553-4026.

BRIDGE OF LOVE MEMORIAL FUND ESTABLISHED

"There is a land of the living and there is a land of the dead; the bridge is love- the ultimate meaning, the only survival," wrote Thornton Wilder in his play, "Our Town." VOICE & VISION: LLGM has been blessed by supporters who know the truth of these words and who have remembered our ministry in their bequests, their ongoing expression of love to us and those who are touched by this ministry.

James Berg, the beloved partner of St. Francis' parish administrator, Ken Noble, died July 8, 1992 of AIDS. Thanks to Jim's generosity, and the generosity of others over the past three years, VOICE & VISION has received memorial donations in the amount of \$9,000.00.

"The Bridge of Love" Memorial Fund is being established to further our work of affirmation, advocacy and spiritual care on behalf of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. These monies will be reserved to create scholarships for lesbian and gay seminarians, for capital improvements, for lecture series, for HIV support, and for other special projects adopted by the board.

We are very moved by the loving legacy of those who wish their support to live on after they have gone. Thank you, Jim. We will remember you in our hearts and carry your work forward!



"CLAIMING OUR VOICES" DOCU-DRAMA OPENS IN N.Y.

A docu-drama re-enacting the ecclesiastical trial of St. Francis and First United Lutheran Churches opened at Trinity Lutheran Church in Manhattan, June 14, 1992.

The playwright, Naomi Frost, used the transcripts of the disciplinary hearings in San Francisco to fashion the drama. The trial, which took place in July of 1990, was the response of the ELCA to the congregations' irregular ordinations of Ruth Frost, Jeff Johnson and Phyllis Zillhart. The congregations were given a sentence of five years' suspension from the ELCA, to be converted to expulsion in 1995 if the congregations remain in

"non-compliance" with current ELCA policies.

In an interview with the Westsider News, Naomi (Ruth's sister) said, "I myself am heterosexual, but my interest in the subject began before I knew that Ruth was a lesbian. I just think people like my sister- and many others- are such a gift to the ministry it would be a shame to have it lost. The church needs their ministry more than they need the church."

Why St. Francis and First United called the three, where they found the courage to

oppose Lutheran policy and how the denomination is responding is eloquently delineated in the play. The docu-drama is currently receiving the backing of the Manhattan Ministerium and has been scheduled for five more productions at area churches. It has been used as a catalyst for discussion of sexuality, ethics and the current policies of the ELCA with respect to gay and lesbian candidates for ministry.



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