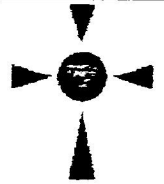


Affirm!

TABLE MANNERS



Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Concerns
GC 2000 Daily Newsletter

May 8, 2000

Affirmation Statement

The following statement was adopted at the general membership meeting Sunday May 7:

That Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Concerns supports its members and others who, as an act of conscience, take part of the Soulforce witness.

Look At Our Hearts – Fasting For Truth

Affirmation invites you to join us in a fast for truth, a bodily prayer that the General Conference might hear God's pleadings for justice and truth.

The United Methodist Church has proclaimed a lie for 28 years, that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. This lie undergirds violence against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people. It is profoundly evil, untrue, and a deadly sin against our brothers and sisters.

While the special prohibitions that curtail our full participation in the United Methodist Church may be understood as "internal" business, the lie is not. It destroys life far beyond United Methodism. It must stop.

We are United Methodists. We have chosen a very United Methodist witness – to fast from food until the General Conference either repudiates the lie or adjourns. We will fast in your midst, witnessing to our deep conviction that God is calling the United Methodist Church to change its language at this point.

We ask you to pray about joining us in this witness as you are able. We insist that those fasting with us must take special care of their health. We provide a column with advice in this newsletter and have a physician available to consult about your special health circumstances.

Our hunger for truth aches in our hearts and growls in our bellies. Please, talk to us, talk to each other, pray for guidance, and join us in our determination that we will remove this deadly language.

Fasting Guidelines

Fasting and feasting are nutritional extremes. Methodists have a long history of fasting dating back to John Wesley and the early Holy Club at Oxford. The Holy Club practiced absteminy -- the withholding of both food and fluids. Modern day fasters such as Ghandi and Martin Luther King, Jr. would withhold food while ensuring fluids were maintained.

Medical concerns center around fluid status with preservation of kidney function and maintenance of the blood sugar levels. Our Methodist fasting must include plenty of water and possibly some fruit juice.

Methodists with diabetes have special considerations due to the need to maintain the proper blood sugar levels. The focus for diabetics is on making adjustments in their medications to compensate for reduced food intake. We advise all United Methodist that are participating to speak with their private medical doctor before beginning this fast. We can offer suggestions on an emergency basis only when a conversation with your private medical doctor is not possible.

Before doing the fast, check with your doctor.

Make sure you drink plenty of water.

If you're a diabetic, check your blood sugar often.

It is not right that fasting witnesses should become permanently injured as an outcome of this high act of this moral conscience.

We recognized that there will be pain involved. It is that pain which we will present to the church.

Rainbow Armbands

Beginning this morning, United Methodist delegates, volunteers, visitors and friends will begin wearing rainbow ribbon armbands. This represents our steadfast commitment to the free inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered people in the life of the church, and to the reversal of the church's discriminatory policies against them. The ribbon used to make the armbands is taken from ribbon which surrounded the Convention Center with love at the conclusion of the RCP Rally and Communion Service last Saturday.

A Lifelong Methodist: Ramona's Story

I didn't expect to run into Larry here at GC. There are so many people spread over so many hotels and there's just so much work to be done. He handed me this copy of his mother's story. He's here to hand copies to delegates. I read it and asked him if we could run it in the newsletter.

I thought the story was moving, but I didn't start to cry until I typed it. There's a woman in my church that could tell the same story.

Larry told me that one person refused to take a copy of his mother's story. He told that person, "You can ignore me, but don't you ignore my mama's story!"

Please don't ignore Larry or his mama.

Ramona was baptized at the altar of First Methodist Church 70 years ago. She married Stan in this sanctuary, and in the fellowship hall she celebrated her 50th wedding anniversary. She taught Sunday School, spent a decade as MYF Sponsor, and served uncounted terms on church board. She baked 10,000 cookies for fund raisers and rolled out miles of noodles for church dinners. First Methodist has been the spiritual center and anchor of her life and she has supported it with her prayers, her presence, her gifts, and her service. It was there for her at difficult times: the sudden death of each of her parents, the automobile accident that took her closest friend, her husband's heart attack.

That was then, but this is now. Now Ramona withdraws from every conversation that becomes personal and avoids classes or discussion groups that might be probative. She no longer raises her prayer request and never answers truthfully when asked, "How are you?"

She feels uncomfortable being hugged by the pastor. Ramona needs the church now more than she ever has. Unfortunately, it's not available to her.

The church has put her between the ultimate rock and the hard place. She is aching, incredibly sad, and wants help from her God. But to have any help, any understanding, she must start by telling the pastor her son is gay. Her sweet son who also was baptized at this same altar, who grew up at the pipe organ bench, youth leader and president of MYF, who loves and is loved by this church. All her life, she has protected her children's emotions and lives with her own. She cannot tell her pastor. How can she open her boy up to the condemnation and judgment the pastor has preached as the church's stand for "the danger of moral decline" and "respect of family values." What about the value of her family? Her child is nothing like those portrayed in her pastor's sermons. His is gentle, a school teacher, and serving in a Methodist church. He comes home to play organ at church. That would end.

Christ, through the ministry of the church, offers comfort and peace. But this grace is not free. Not for Ramona. The Methodist Church has exacted a price for God's grace. A price Ramona cannot pay. And although she is alone in her isolation, so are eight more families at First Methodist.

Ramona and Stan now discuss leaving their church of 70 years. In many ways, they have already left. They probably won't leave. They probably should.

God's Healing Love: A True Story

By: Mary Padilla

The story I want to share is that of my spirit-brother Michael Jacobino. A gay young man with all of life ahead of him. He had AIDS, and I capitalize it to stress the point of its impact on many lives, including mine. While Mike was sick, I would visit and take him to his doctors appointments. He could barely walk. He was stubborn to a fault and tried to keep living all the way till the end. He called me at work to tell me he had chosen to take final sacrament and let Jesus in his heart. He never really believed but something changed his mind. I'd like to think it was

the power of the love he received from us his friends. Prior to Mike dying, I had asked him if he could do me a favor. That favor was to come back and tell me that my belief wasn't in vain. That the good work of love is all that matters on this sometimes very cold planet. Well about a month after Mike died, I had a serious car accident; I had bruises that the doctors said would take months to go away. My car was totaled. I shiver as I think of what happened, three days later. Mike came to see me, he kissed my forehead and grasped my hands. He said he loved me in unspoken words. I jumped up and ran around the whole house looking for him. Then the still small voice within reminded me of what I had asked him to do. I had forgotten by then. I cried for hours, but what happened in the next two days was even more of a miracle. My bruises had disappeared. God had sent Mike to remind me of what I asked him to do and to heal me at the same time. This is my story; Mike was gay as I am. God chose to use Mike to bring me healing and love. If being gay is so sinful, how did Mike get to come back and show me what I asked of him, God is love and love has no barrier, love has no face, no sexuality, love is all of us together working to proclaim it as it is, unconditional, never failing and always there.. This is why I continue in this struggle for total inclusion. I want to be a minister, ordained as I am. I just can't see myself being ordained and lying to my God and my Church about my sexuality. Many have done this and I feel for them. This Church has got to change and I believe it will. I love being a Methodist. I love the teachings of John Wesley. I will always be a Methodist! I wear Mike's ring as a reminder of what happened. I wanted to bring something of Mike with me in his honor. I am presently Lay Leader and Lay Delegate to Washington Square UMC in NYC. I am also a member of the National Affirmation Council. I love what we do and I will continue to do it until the day I can say I am a gay ordained Methodist Pastor.

Enlightenment: It Can Happen To Anyone

*by Jack Hooper, former pastor of the largest UMC in the Southwest Texas Conference, Alamo Heights UMC in San Antonio. First printed in **The Spark**, the RCP at Trinity UMC, Austin, Texas. April/May 1999. Used by permission of the author*

It's been a long, exhausting journey. Is it over? I don't know. All I can say is that I have at last accepted homosexuality as a given portion in the diverse mix we call humanity. Viewing my past in the most favorable lot, I would say that I have not been as accepting of homosexual men and women as I might have been, and I now regret that.

What brought about this change? Taking the time to observe and then admitting the obvious difference in people. Conversations with those who were for and against, especially Sid Hall. But most of all, my friendship with a gay man since retirement.

He and I accidentally met one day, and I discovered that he had the gift that the little church, which I was serving as interim pastor, so desperately needed. When I asked if he would be interested, he replied, "Only if I can meet with the PPR Committee and tell them who I am and that I am gay." He did, and in a very honest way told them the story of his life, answering every question in the most forthright manner. The committee was so impressed with him that all their anxieties were allayed.

He not only became my coworker, but my friend as well. I admire him greatly for his honesty and integrity and most of all for his deep, deep faith in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. He is a loving person who refuses to harbor animosity towards anyone.

For me, he is a mirror in which I see myself as the needy one and the window through which I have come to view all other homosexual men and women. I no longer find a homosexual person threatening or unacceptable, but like all other human beings, some with whom I can connect and we easily become friends and others with whom it is difficult.

Having arrived at this place, I feel so happy to be able to relate to gay men and women as fully human and to love them just as they are, as I pray they are able to relate to me and love me just as I am.

With good humor some of my friends ridicule me because I'm always saying, "Why can't we just love one another?" Simplistic? I don't know. But that's O.K. I know when I am my best self. It's when I

remember God loves me-- my unlovable self-- just as I am, and forgives me every day of all my sin and invites me to go forth and "love everyone as I have loved you." So what right do I have to judge anyone? Next time you see me, will you remind me of that? I never want to be without that truth foremost in my mind and heart.

Silenced Witnesses

The Silenced Witnesses Project is a exposition personalizing those who have been killed by acts of violence towards the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered community or those who committed suicide. This exhibit will be shown throughout General Conference at different locations and times. From now until the end of General Conference we'll list each day several names from the *Silenced Witnesses* display.

Tracy Thompson
33, transgendered woman.

Tracy was beaten to death with a baseball bat on a dirt road in Cordele, Wilcox County Georgia, March 30, 1999.

Melissa Mertz, coordinator for the Victims of Violent Assault Assistance Program of Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan observed that "...attacks against gay men were the most heinous and brutal encountered. They frequently involved torture, cutting, mutilation and beating, and showed the absolute intent to rub out the human being because of his [sexual] orientation."

Billy Jack Gaither
39, Gay man.

Gaither's throat was slashed, his skull was cracked open, and his body was burned on kerosene-soaked tires in Doosa County, Alabama on Feb. 20, 1999.

Gaither was killed by Charles Monroe Butler and Steven Eric Mullins Mullins said, "Homosexuality is wrong. I have found peace with God, but he's [Billy Jack Gaither] in hell.

Henry Edward Northington
Richmond, Virginia.

Henry was decapitated. His head was placed on a bridge leading to gay bars, and his body thrown into river. He was killed March 6, 1999.

Murder and mutilation, assault and suicide are being justified by our words. As a church, we must take responsibility for the violent social consequences of language we retain.

Gary Matson
50, gay man and
Winfield Scott Mowder,
40, gay man
Happy Valley California.

Matson and Mowder were shot in their bed, July 1, 1999. Both were active in civic affairs. They founded the local Farmer's Market and Children's Museum.

Murdered by brothers Benjamin Matthew Williams (31) and James Tyler Williams (29). Matthew Williams said to his mother, "My brother and I are in jail for our work in cleansing society. I just plan to defend myself from Scriptures. . . . I had to obey God's law rather than man's law. I didn't want to do this. I felt I was supposed to, though. . . . I think God put me here as a witness. A lot of people will hear. They call what I have done bad. . . . I have followed a higher law. . . I see a lot of parallels between this and a lot of other incidents in the Old Testament. They threw our Lord Savior in jail . . . Our forefathers have been in prison a lot. Prophets, Christ."

Scott Amedure
Michigan

Shot twice with shotgun at point blank range in his own home by Jonathan Schmitz on March 9, 1995.

Sense of father's testimony: "Better to be a killer than a gay boy."

Its Right in the Bible!

Ecclesiastes 7:13

CEV:

Think of what God has done!
If God makes something crooked,
Can you make it straight?

NIV and NRSV:

Consider the work of God:
Who can make straight what he has made
crooked?

Communion Service

You are invited to a daily RCP Communion Service on the Mall outside the front of the Convention Center. The daily services are at 12:30 PM.