

## IN YOUR FACE WITH GRACE:

A BRIEF ANNOTATED AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF  
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**GRACE:** Fasten your seat belt with this one! Here's an United Methodist who's has been around the block more than once: Personally, I'd read those footnotes. God's Spirit often rides with the footnotes.

Dr. Rick Huskey was the first Editor for the gay and lesbian caucus newsletter at the Portland Oregon, 1976 General Conference, *Blair's Blurbs*. Dr. Huskey now returns to the Cleveland Ohio 2000 General Conference to be Editor of *Table Manners*. Rick is co-founder of Affirmation, and our national council historian. Rick is delightful to speak with at General Conference. Our Church's 1972 Social Principle's Big Lie about its gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender children has directly affected Rick's life. Dr. Huskey contributes his thoughts on medical issues for aging gay men in *Men Like Us: The GMHC Complete Guide to Gay Men's Sexual, Physical, and Emotional Well-being*, published last week by Ballentine Books. Rick's parents, Fred and Phyllis Huskey are here with the U.M. Parents and Families of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) caucus. Be sure to say hello to them all!

Some will say my life exploded when I was defrocked. Others say I imploded. Whichever way, my path has been marvelously filled with incredible moments of ministry. I grieve the absence of the pulpit in my life activities. The interval time has been devoted to a medical career and teaching geriatric medicine. An urban geriatrician who also Attends older patients with H.I.V. disease, I love Jesus Christ more and more each day. By daily measure I serve the vineyard's most important temple, the human body; replete with health and disease, promise and decline. I keep the faith.

My current journey began in spring 1975 when I spoke with my bishop. A rank rookie less than a year out of the Garrett Theological Seminary M.Div., and Chicago Theological Seminary D.Min. degrees, I hardly had time for my theological placenta to dry before speaking to my bishop. Via the appointment process I asked to include outreach to gay and lesbian Christians in Minnesota. I was convinced I was following in John Wesley's "method," as I learned in the United Methodist *License to Preach Course* on the History of John Wesley.



United Methodists will recall that in 1732<sup>1</sup> John Wesley spectacularly ministered in Oxford's Bocardo Jail to the famous homosexual, Tommy Blair.

<sup>1</sup>The *Wesley Works Editorial Board*, and the Deans/Presidents of *Boston University, Drew University, Duke University, Emory University, and Southern Methodist University* who comprise the editorial board, inflict injury upon the Church by not hastening the translation and release of *John Wesley's Oxford Diaries*. Academic freedom is thwarted and the church remains both clueless and ignorant regarding the fantastic nature of Wesley's method. His *Oxford Diaries, II* provides vivid documentation. It breathes life into the nature and method of pastoral ministry.

The Editorial Board needs a shower of letters requesting release of these translations. These entries detail the *Who, What, Where, When and therefore the Why* of Wesley's method and ministry. Granted, the *Oxford Diaries* are tedious works to translate, and even for us to read. But it is a marvelous read if you are a United Methodist who is GLBT living in this new millennium; or lay and clergy persons trying hard to understand how to minister to us in the new millennium.

An obviously obsessive-compulsive man, John and other members of the "Holy Club" by faith activity, jotted and titled their days in diary documentation designed to account for every hour of their lives and ministries. These *Oxford Diaries* place Brother Wesley in ministerial predicaments equal in terror to the predicaments of Brothers Creech, Dell and many GC ministers in our time. John's own robust documentation would bear ridicule even condemnation upon the regressive and punitive nature of the Judicial Council and the Council of Bishops for failing to embrace ministries to GLBT people in our time.

Every minister engaged in equal ministry with gay/lesbian/ bisexual and transgender (GLBT) United Methodist parishioners in our time will find Wesley to be a friend. His method is genius, rich in the description of eighteenth century ministry. John's inclusion of a homosexual in his ministry becomes a perfect template for ministry today. Wesley's own witness ~~already~~ establishes the historical precedence of ministering to the gay community among pastors' constituent venues.

The *Diaries II* will substantiate that 1732 was a benchmark year for Mr. Wesley. The 1732 *Oxford Diaries, II* give clear insight into Wesley and the Holy Club's developing "method." What is known is Mr. Wesley included ministerial service to a known homosexual at the time of his Oxford ministry and talk. John Wesley held numerous meetings with this forever-grateful young queen. Senior Church historian, Brother Reverend Doctor Richard Heitzenrater has identified over 30 entries regarding Thomas Blair in Wesley's *Oxford Diaries*.

We know 1732 was a real *annus horribilis* for Wesley. Three times John Wesley faced his Bishop in 1732...and three times he left the Bishop's office with his orders intact. Father Wesley had to explain the great triad experiences of the death of Holy Club member Morgan in springtime, the pro-active and busy



This ministry, as documented in Wesley's *Oxford Diaries*, was a very busy ministry. Among the diary listings are John's private visitations, running errands, teaching religious catechism, and serving as legal defense in young Blair's "buggery" charge. Clearly, ministry to gay and lesbian United Methodist Christians had historical precedence. As I read the facts, John's method for ministering was palpable in my thinking.

Strengthened by Jesus' own inclusive ministry to society's outsiders, Wesley's own exemplary ministry to a variety of people, my own life experience, and security

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summer and fall ministry to the young homosexual Thomas Blair, and finally to respond to the anonymous risqué opinion published in the Fleet Street *Fogg's Weekly Journal* accusing Wesley and Holy Club members of fostering an odd theology and group practices with possible sexual overtones. These are known facts. Sisters and Brothers, you must realize that The Rev. Mr. Wesley's sermon on Sunday, January 1, 1733 was his gut-wrenching *Circumcision of the Heart*, a sermon forged in the refining fire of vibrant, vital and fabulous ministries to real people in the Holy Club's immediate world.

John Wesley was called on the carpet by his Bishop three times in 1732 and walked out with his orders intact. What a difference a few hundred years of distrust between a bishop and a pastor can mean. UMC ministers must hold empathetic fear with Wesley's multiple visits to his bishop's office to explain ministry. All you have to do is recall the horror of blocking Brothers Creech and Dell's pastoral ministries with ministerial expulsion. The difference is that Wesley experienced neither persecution nor prosecution for extraordinary acts of pastoral conscience. We need the *Oxford Diaries* translated now, not tomorrow!

For those United Methodists who believe that a truly inclusive Church is probably as close as we Christians will come in our lifetime to the *imago dei*, we report that 1732 is the year in which John Wesley becomes a role model for inclusive ministry. From the crucible of these ministries John found his ministry free of restrictions. Wesley's bishop was pastoral and accepting of his ministries. \ Father Wesley's own ministerial witness precedent provides both beacon and pastoral safe harbor for those journeying in ministry with gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered United Methodist members (GLBT) in the twenty-first century.

John Wesley's bishop practiced basic principled pastoring, trusting that the Church's work is never fixed in stone, but is ever yet to be revealed. We dare to speculate that Wesley's bishop ascribed to the belief that works of faith guided by the Holy Spirit renders no door, or prison bars; barriers to the simple knock of a humble priest. Wesley's 18<sup>th</sup> Century bishop was different from the bishops today. John Wesley's eighteenth century bishop had faith in ministry and would not place restrictions upon ministry. Bishops must have been primarily pastors who loved pastors who pastored.



that both the bishop and I were reasonable Minnesotans, I spoke with my bishop. Ever the administrator,<sup>2</sup> my bishop shared three options. The first option was the

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<sup>2</sup>By my analysis, the bishop acted administratively and avoided the pastoral basis to his Episcopal call. Hello! Hello! Hello! What is that crosier, that nasty hook for anyway? Bishops on the Council of Bishops (COB) function first and foremost as administrators. While there are fabulous saintly pastors in their midst, they appear in group decision-making as an administrative blob and thereby miss the mark of ministry. Their outpouring of unrequited love for GLBT parishioners is just not happening. Like trying to stuff me into some tight fitting, eight sizes too small, red lame dress accessorized with ruby slippers, pearls and a clutch purse, it just is not going to happen. It would require a major Eschaton, or theophany event before these bishops magically and deliciously act in love and acceptance and not from an agenda of fear. Heterosexual church members do not have a monopoly on Christian morality, and bishops just *do not get it* that we too are United Methodists and are quite tasteful at that. *De gustibus, y'All!*

For my take on the situation, it would be as absurd for me to relinquish my spirituality, as it would be to give up being a Methodist! It is my church too, my baptism as well, my membership as assuredly as yours. Here my sins are forgiven as are yours. God's unrequited love is poured out for me as convincingly as it is poured out for you. We are equal by all of life's measures. Created equally, we share a common humanity. Equally loved we are called jointly from our common pew into the ministry of our one and only Lord Jesus Christ.

When it comes to GLBT United Methodists our late twentieth century bishops choose to be adversarial. In the pastoral vacuum bishops have created, GLBT people struggle to comprehend how long the COB will continue to act as prosecutors and persecutors toward us.

We ask why the COB acts out of fear of the unknown? Must the COB continue to know of no other way to function and behave with us? How good does it feel in the hearts of bishops to deliberately remain deaf to our voices, blind to our presence and ministry and sarcastically and deliberately withhold God's sweet, sweet blessing upon our relationships? And where are the bishop's anniversary prayers thanking God for the ongoing commitments we make with our lovers? How long will *what Jesus would do* continue to elude the bishops and our Church?

Bishops' mean-spirited avoidance of us is pure folly. The COB fails a simple theological test. Hard-heartedly our bishops refuse to break bread with us. With hearts fulminate with cowardess and active hatred the bishops refuse to speak in dialogue with us. We are their charges and children, but they abandon, abuse and exile us within the Church family. Breaking bread and really dialoguing with us GLBT United Methodists about ministry would be a fabulous beginning for the COB and the entire Church to do what Jesus would do with us.



worst, "I was to leave the United Methodist Church." Recognizing a conversation going horribly wrong and clearly seeing that my call was unwanted, I responded, "Bishop, what you are saying to me is that if I am honest and speak truth, that I am a gay man with a call to ministry, I am unfit for ministry. But, if I lie, I am fit?"

Dear Lord Jesus, why such a dilemma? I cannot lie, is a basic principle derived from the repetitive lessons of my family and church upbringing, my education and training. Ethically, what does it mean for the Church if it expects me to lie in order to become a pastor whose primary teachings would include the importance of not lying and to always tell the truth? How can a lie make me fit to minister in my Church? What other lies exist in a Church when it allows any lie? Where does the Church draw the line on lying?

Why this dilemma came at me and not to other colleagues was not obvious to me. To the core of my being there was hurt and harm. I felt utterly emptied and destroyed. I want to speak truth always and in my vulnerability to truth telling my shepherd was rushing me out the door of our Church. I was herded out from the church of my youth that promised each baptized member to be raised to his or her full gifts and graces. I received no prayer, no blessing and no best wishes. Nothing good could emanate from my mouth, and my prayers were best kept unuttered. This was neither a right nor reasonable end to ordained ministry.

Great adventures are called for when one is placed on ice and set to drift in an ice flow. One's crisis of faith takes second seat when one has poor work preparation for absolutely everything except ministry. When the Church exiles its children, survival is essential. In this different world the key for me continued to be what Jesus would do. Apparently, Jesus was a fantastic teacher and healer, the Son of God and Savior of humankind, the Redeemer of the sins of humanity, a thorn for the religious establishment, and he had to keep a day job as a carpenter.

So I followed a sure thing: Jesus. I remained faithful to my call to ministry. Within a month of beginning ministerial exile I was co-founder of the United Methodist Gay Caucus at Wheadon Church in Evanston in June 1975. Over the next years I participated in the caucus's spectacular transformation into our United Methodist Affirmation group. Over time I attended Affirmation's creation of the Reconciling Churches Program, beautifully birthed by Affirmation and helped establish a Reconciling Congregation at Wesley United Methodist Church, my home church in the heart of Minneapolis. For a day job I pursued medicine.

Pursuing gifts and graces in science in combination with a strong compassionate and ministerial nature lead to a medical career.<sup>3</sup> The route was

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<sup>3</sup>I thank God daily for not making me the dumbest rock under the bridge! I had to exchange theology for the language and practice of medicine: instead of teleology, eschatology, phenomenology, ontology with work and prayer to spectacularly save souls I concentrated on medicine and the saving of lives. "We are yet alive," is very



arduous. And *everything that is* became so amazing and wondrous for me, and my incredible family. I participated in the delivery of babies, spent time in surgery through every body cavity and cul-de-sac of our physical being. In settings without clergy present at patients' deaths, I would pray God's blessing upon those beyond needs and wants of this plane of existence. I have done varied research in immunology, killer diarrhea, and the role of clergy in advance directive decision-making.

My world is now much less encumbered with guilt and shame-based work. I am a geriatrician who teaches geriatric medicine on the faculty of the George Washington University. Now in a third term as Chairperson of the District of Columbia Board of Nursing Home Administration, I also sit on a National Board of Governors. Of 8400 licensed physicians in the District of Columbia I am one of three physicians making regular house calls, which I teach to third-year medicine residents at the Georgetown University-D.C. General Hospital Internal Medicine Program. I love visiting older people. The home care done in my D.C. practice is learned behavior from traveling as a Deacon, and enjoying visits to church shut-ins starting in seminary in the Wisconsin, West Michigan and Minnesota Annual Conferences.

If it pleases the good Lord, I have many viable physician years ahead. It's a shame that the church cannot get real with GLBT persons in order to utilize gifts and graces in geriatric care and ministry, educational and policy issues with aging concerns, development of ministries to our congregations' older GLBT members; or related global Church concerns for the treatment of all older persons.

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true after medical school, V. A. hospital internal medicine residency in Pennsylvania, <sup>WV</sup> a geriatric medicine fellowship at Einstein in Philadelphia with visiting fellowship at Oxford University's John Radcliffe Infirmary and The John Radcliffe Hospital. I served in medical clinics at the Minneapolis Indian Health Board, Hennepin County's Chest Clinic tuberculosis control with homeless, Southeast Asian refugees, and immigrant Hmong in Minneapolis. Being an advocate of life-long learning, I do part-time MBA study for physicians at Johns Hopkins Medical School, and in recent years I have been a part-time MTS student at Wesley Theological Seminary in D.C. (great ethics course Dr. Wogamann!). While living within a mile of the White House and all that District medical energy, I restore myself at a 250 year-old farm in Lost River, West Virginia. In the backyard runs a westward creek that forms a tributary to the Potomac River. Lost River is a tiny town where Frances Asbury preached in the 1700's. Colonial period maps plot Lost River, but D.C. is absent. George Washington surveyed my road at ages 16-17. A self-described "City Billy" I feel joy at seeing the sun rise each day, and go to bed at night with faith, and having helped other human beings. All these activities are done with tremendous love of Jesus Christ, and service to Him.

Yet I grieve the pulpit's absence in my life! God found it good and right for me to be created as a good, gay man. My family saw to it that I was raised a fourth-generation Methodist Christian. I really love my Church. I still have a Call to ordained ministry and cannot see why I should take flight to another denomination to take on the trappings of ordination. The Call to ordained ministry is the Holy Spirit's gift in the Church, equally coming to all, gay and straight alike. That fantastic *still small voice within* still calls me to word, ~~order~~ and sacrament in our Church. I thank God for the gifts and graces to serve the Church. I am thankful for being created to be the healer and gay man I am. *Gay-ito Ergo Sum.*