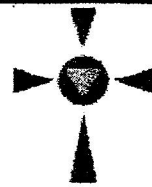


# Affirm!

## TABLE MANNERS



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

May 11, 2000

### The Silenced Witness of Greg Barnes

*Kristy Barnes, author of this piece, is here at General Conference.*

Please let me tell you my story. My brother Greg and I grew up in the United Methodist Church that my mother helped to found. Together we were active in choir, MYF, musicals, youth mission and worship. When Greg was a young man, he was devastated to discover that he was gay. Besides being gay, he was a kind, caring, hard-working young man with an enormous circle of cherished friends. He was known for his big heart and generous nature: He would give people whatever they needed - even when he didn't have anything himself (which was often). He was also known for his big smile and large laugh. All was not, however, happy for Greg. This sensitive, giving young man was heartsick that the church he loved, condemned him for simply being who he was. This rejection and condemnation ate large holes in the soul of this beautiful young man. These holes were large enough that he could no longer keep out the demon of alcohol. Shortly before his 35<sup>th</sup> birthday, Greg was hospitalized near death due to severe liver failure. This horrible time brought Greg the deep and abiding love of his entire family and large circle of friends. They cast out the demon of alcohol with their love and Greg began to heal in body and spirit. There was great rejoicing by all and thanks given for God's healing power of love.

Four months passed, Greg began to gather strength and celebrate the life that had been his true gift from God. Then came a knock at the door. Two men that Greg knew appeared at the door and asked if he had anything for them to eat. Greg was well-known for his generous hospitality (even though he was quite poor) and his good cooking. As he removed some chili from the freezer, the two men attacked him, dragged him into the bedroom, tortured and then

strangled him. In his frail condition, he did not have much chance to struggle. This beautiful person, who had decided that he had the desire and the will to drag himself back from the brink of death by alcoholism, was brutally murdered because he was gay.

The person (or persons) that murdered Greg had killed another gay man in the same way 3 months before. A couple of months after Greg was murdered, the same person tried to kill another gay man. For the last attempted murder, Greg's murderer is serving a short sentence for aggravated assault. He will soon be out of jail and will certainly kill other gay men until there is enough evidence to convict him.

I beg and implore you to remove the language from the Discipline that condemns homosexuality. Homosexuality is not a choice. My beautiful brother Greg would have moved heaven and earth to be straight. That was not possible and so he lived a life of beatings, fear, condemnation and self-hatred.

The language in the Discipline feeds the self-hatred and justifies the violence.

If we can save just one beloved brother or sister from this horror and spread the love and acceptance of God to all people, we will move one step closer to God's blessed and peaceful dwelling. Please let my pain move your heart and hear the call to God's gentle love and acceptance.

With the peace and love taught by Jesus,

Kristy Barnes

Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

## **To Be Gay and United Methodist**

*By Gil Caldwell*

As I was in the airport in Denver last Tuesday waiting for the plane that would take me to Cleveland for the United Methodist General Conference, I decided to purchase one of the weekly news magazines for reading on the plane. I chose the May 8<sup>th</sup> issue of Newsweek, because its cover story was titled "God, Sex, Race & The Future/What Teens Believe."

It seemed to be an appropriate topic, considering that the Church where I am Senior Pastor (Park Hill United Methodist Church in Denver) has a number of gifted, energetic and lovely teenagers from a variety of racial backgrounds.

As I leafed through the magazine I came to an article that attracted my attention for three distinctive reasons:

A) The article was titled "To Be Gay And Mormon – As a pious churchgoer, Stuart Matis prayed and worked to change his sexual orientation. He died trying"

Here I was going to lobby for a new openness in my beloved United Methodist vis-à-vis gay and lesbian lay and clergy members, and this article "jumps out at me" as I sought the get comfortable in my row 20C aisle seat on my Continental flight to Cleveland.

In every city I have lived in, I could not help but notice the young Mormon missionaries as they moved around the African American communities in which I lived. They were always white, male, wearing white shirts and ties, using bicycles as their means of transportation. All for this was especially starting in Harlem, where I pastored before I moved to Denver.

I had never thought about the Mormons and homosexuality. I was still struggling to comprehend why, until a few years ago, their rules of Order, denied black Mormons access to wherever they call their most sacred place and space in their temples. I was pleased when I read that their leadership had eliminated this racially restrictive barrier. My pleasure over their action of inclusion was almost as great as it has been as we United Methodists have taken actions that have made us more racially inclusive. But the Mormons (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) and it's "Gay Membership," made this article a must read.

B) The article took on added significance because it was written by someone whose name is Mark Miller. I knew they were different people, but I had just met a young African American musician who was among a group of "United Methodists of Color" who met to draft a statement calling for inclusion of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender persons in every aspect of the ministry of the United Methodist Church. The Mark Miller in our meeting had impressed me with his insights and spirit. I therefore wanted to read the word of Newsweek's Mark Miller.

C) His words were powerful and poignant and penetrating as he told the story of Stuart Matis and his painful journey as a devout Mormon who was gay. The sentence that tugged and tore a bit of my heart and spirituality, was this one: "Though Gays and Lesbians enjoy more rights and protection than ever before – last week Vermont approved same-sex partnerships akin to marriage – gays in search of spiritual support often find their church, synagogue or mosque to be far less accepting."

Martin Luther King, Jr. once raised the question that many of us have quoted, "Why is the Church so often the taillight rather than the headlight?"

In this General Conference, delegates are determining what it means "To be gay and United Methodist."

Will the decisions made here continue to frustrate and deny and demean Gay United Methodists? Or, will this conference rise to the challenge of inclusivity, rather than perpetuating a Gospel of exclusivity?

There has been too much pain and violence and death, aided and abetted by the Church of Jesus Christ. Let us be a church for all of God's children!

## **Ruminations of a Recovering Homophobe**

*Dick Best (presently of Salinas, California)*

Maybe you've seen me around? The guy with the beard, the vest, the rainbow suspenders, and the cameras? The multiple personality (AMAR-RCP-MFSA volunteer, Press Pass, and Parents' Reconciling Network nametags)? (I'm not wearing my Visitor's nametag, as I don't want to be a perfect square.) Guess I'm a born-again, dyed-in-the-wool lover (in agape terms, any way) of LGBT persons. Maybe I was born this way, and did not come to it by choice?

I have a confession. (Does this make me part of the "Confessing Movement?") I am a recovering homophobe. As a person of heterosexual orientation, I learned that all God's people are that way. It wasn't overt teaching, just a foundational "given." I remember a man in my home town who was pointed out as "queer." I now realize he was developmentally disabled; whatever else he was, I have no way of knowing. But "Willy" was my sole role model for people of difference. (I also remember, in my teens, a Black man getting on the bus I was riding, which tells you I am also, at best, a recovering racist as well, but that's another story. And a recovering sexist, recovering ageist, recovering economic elitist, etc., but those are also other stories.)

In 1965-66, I worked as a "Corrections Officer" (read "oppressor") at a "penitentiary" which had many inmates but very few "penitents." I fully enjoyed "shaking down" a cell and removing contraband, especially lipstick, rouge, and other items used by "queers." I enjoyed the power I had over these twisted wretches (my terms at the time, not theirs).

But I've changed... somewhat. (Yes, the Good News is that some of us can be transformed!) From 1981-86, I was part of a night time downtown street ministry. I fought involvement, because my only previous experience with street ministry was with "Grab them by the shoulder, shove the Bible down their throat, and run before they regurgitate." And my only picture of Gays was flamers, at whose actions I took offense. This ministry, I found, was different. So were the people with whom we dealt. Street kids, hookers, transvestites, bus travelers, tourists, cops; We met them all. And they were like us. Bus stations, Gay bars, straight bars, restaurants; We went everywhere. In the process, I changed. Not overnight. Not completely. But I changed. When my daughter came out to me, I was able to be supportive, and that support has continued.

I've been in RCP, MFSA, AMAR, and other groups for years; I've financially supported LLDEF, HRC, and other organizations. And I'm here for two weeks, mostly on my own dime and time. So am I totally in tune with everything happening around me? Well... no. More "true confessions." I have this tendency to look at those around me here at General Conference and ask "Is he? Is she?" No matter that it's none of my business. No matter that it's a question I almost never ask elsewhere. No matter that my concern, however slight, about another person's sexual orientation dehumanizes that person to that extent in my sight. As much as I hate to admit it, I still diminish others by the way in which I see them and relate to them. As much as I want, pray and hope to be otherwise, I am still trapped in some of my old patterns. As much as I

want to be totally inclusive, I still think (and sometimes act) in exclusivistic ways. My most recent "transformation," support for gay marriage, has only come within the last three months. And I will have other struggles. I have not reached perfection, but I am striving for it, I am going on to it. Pray for me that the struggle continues in helpful, positive ways.

## Phelps/Warrener Link

Dear Brother Phelps and All,

I am a United Methodist minister, the owner of the Unofficial Confessing Movement Page <http://ucmpage.org> for the United Methodist Church. This is an independently owned website that is dedicated to "contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints." I try to represent one of the many evangelical UM voices on the internet.

Unfortunately, many, if not most of my evangelical UM clergy brothers have been misled by our liberal pro-homosexuality counterparts and have allowed themselves to be influenced by the hate-filled "straw man" created in your image by the homosexual community's sphere of influence. They have "bought into" the propaganda regarding your ministry because, to my regret, they have apparently been too lazy to thoroughly read and prayerfully consider what you preach and publish on your website, and are unwilling to suffer the criticism and ad hominem attack from their pro-homosexuality liberal counterparts which is associated with your name and ministry. For my evangelical UMC clergy brothers who are only prepared to preach "in season" and with "shortsuffering", I apologize for their criticism of your ministry without due consideration. When I propose to my clergy brothers that they read what you publish and judge your ministry in terms of your biblical theology, I become the object of criticism and ad hominem attack as well. I have included links to your website and the "hatewatch" interview associated with the official United Methodist News Service report of your activity in Vermont to help my UMC brothers understand your ministry ([http://ucmpage.org/news\\_page.html](http://ucmpage.org/news_page.html)). Unfortunately our official news service is controlled by the pro-homosexuality forces in our denomination and most often promotes the gay agenda with its dishonest rhetoric.

Love in Christ,

Rev. John Warrener, M.Div., MBA  
Palmyra Road United Methodist Church  
1600 Palmyra Road  
Albany, GA 31701

## **The American Psychological Association's Policy Statements on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns:**

**Therefore, be it resolved. That the American Psychological Association opposes portrayals of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth and adults as mentally ill die to their sexual orientation and supports the dissemination of accurate information about sexual orientation, and mental health, and appropriate interventions in order to counteract bias that is based in ignorance or unfounded beliefs about sexual orientation. (Resolution on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation: August 14, 1997).**

Dear Church you cannot call us mentally ill, and it would be best to report honestly about our lives and our relationships. The Church should be proactive in affirming Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered parishioners in their pews; and honestly report our lives, our prayers, our experiences, and yes our relationships we form. The bias we fight is the bias of ignorance expressed by the Church which lies to itself and our hurting world by calling us incompatible with our Lord Jesus Christ's teachings. Have you not heard our prayers, our voices, and witnessed to our experiences? Why not break bread with us, as John Wesley did during his ministry.

### **Silenced Witnesses**

*The Silenced Witnesses Project is an 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.*

**Paul Meroski**  
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Meroski was found in his home with multiple stab wounds to his head from ice pick in April, 1999.

The U.S. Department of Justice has concluded that "homosexuals are probably the most frequent victims [of hate violence]." Moreover hate crimes directed against gay men and lesbians are reported to be particularly violent.

**Steve Goedere**  
West Palm Beach, FL.

Goedere was beaten to death April 29, 1999.

The United Methodist Church has repudiated verbal and physical violence and the denial of civil rights done in the name of Christ. By itself, however, that is not nearly enough. To be honest, we must either delete the language that destroys hope and life or be very clear that as a church we speak and act to encourage harassment, violence and suicide. 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.

**Emmon Bodfish**  
(aka Margaret Ingalls Bodfish)  
Orinda, CA

Bodfish was bludgeoned to death with a blunt object on June 24, 1999 (date approximate).

Ninety percent of adult gay men and lesbians have been verbally harassed, insulted or threatened with violence because of their sexual orientation. A large number, varying from 8 to 61 percent depending on geographic region, have also experienced anti-gay assault.

**Private Barry L. Winchell**  
Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Winchell was beaten to death on July 5, 1999.

The U.S. Department of Justice has concluded that, "homosexuals are probably the most frequent victims [of hate violence]."

**Kareem Washington**  
Hackensack, NJ.

Washington was stabbed to death on August 29, 1999.