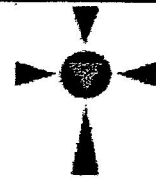


Affirm!

TABLE MANNERS



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

May 6, 2000

Our Common Pew

Dr. Rick Huskey, M.D., D.Min., M.Div. was the first editor for the Gay and Lesbian caucus newsletter at GC1976 at Portland, Oregon, Blair's Blurbs. Dr. Huskey now returns to GC2000 to be co-editor of Table Manners. Rick is co-founder of Affirmation, and our National Council historian. The 1972 Social Principle's Big Lie about its Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered children has directly impacted Rick's life. Dr. Huskey contributes his thoughts for aging Gay Men in Men Like Us: The GMHC Complete Guide to Gay Men's Sexual, Physical, and Emotional Well-Being, edited by Daniel Wolfe and published last week by Ballentine Books.

My current journey began in spring 1975 when I spoke with my bishop. A rank rookie, filled with Christ in my heart, and 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 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 John Wesley spectacularly ministered in Oxford's Bocardo Jail to the famous homosexual, Tommy Blair. This ministry ultimately documented in Wesley's Oxford Diaries, and confirmed by the diaries of other "Holy Club" members, was a very active and 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. As I read the facts, John's method for ministering was palpable in my thinking.

Strengthened by Jesus' own inclusive ministry of the rag-tags of his society [no three-piece suit wearers among them], Wesley's own exemplary ministry to a variety of people, my own life experience, and security

that both the bishop and I were reasonable Minnesotans, I spoke with my bishop. Ever the administrator, my bishop shared three options. The first option, the worst one, was that 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? That I cannot lie is a basic principle derived from the repetitive lessons of my family, church, my education and training. And what does it mean ethically 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 this Church I love? And what other lies exist is a Church when it allows any lie? Where does the church draw the line on lying?

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 away from the church of my youth that had 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 Child 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 continued to follow 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' spectacular transformation into our United Methodist Affirmation. Over time I attended Affirmation's creation of the Reconciling Churches Program, beautifully birthed by Affirmation, and helped to 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 with a strong compassionate and ministerial nature lead to a medical career. The route was arduous. And everything *that is* became so amazing and wondrous for me and my incredible family. During training, I participated in the delivery of babies, spent time in surgery through every cavity and cul-de-sac of our physical being. In settings without clergy present at patient's deaths, I would pray God's blessing upon those beyond wants of this plane of existence. I have done varied research in immunology, killer diarrhea, and the role of clergy in advanced 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 George Washington University faculty. Now in my third term as Chairperson of the District of Columbia Board of Nursing Home Administration, I also sit on a National Board of Governors. Of 8,400 licensed physicians in the District, I am one of three physicians making regular home calls to homebound, frail older persons, which I teach to third-year medical 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 with seminary field education in the Wisconsin, West Michigan and Minnesota Annual Conferences.

Yet, I grieve the pulpit's absence in my life! God found it good and right for me to be created to be a good, gay man. My family saw to it that I was raised a fourth-generation Methodist Christian. My bishop's demand twenty-five years ago that I leave the Church is as absurd as the concept of me relinquishing my spirituality. I can never give up the United Methodist Church for it is my Church too, my baptism as well, my membership as assuredly as any other child of God's. 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. *Gay-ito Ergo Sum!*

INCARNATION

Truly

Thirty to forty percent of homeless youth are thrown out or had to leave their homes because they are homosexual.

I tell you,

Homosexual youth commit suicide at a rate that is two to three times higher than the rate for other adolescents.

just as you did it

Parents lose custody of their children and visitation rights because they are lesbian or gay

to one of the least of these

Men and women are evicted or burned out of their homes because someone thinks they are gay or lesbian.

who are members of my family,

Gay men and women are routinely beaten up, or murdered, for being homosexual.

you did it unto me.

*Jeanne G. Knepper
November 10, 1998*

Silenced Witnesses

As you entered the convention center, did you see the blue figures on the plaza? 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. The exhibit display is life size with a blue bust -- attached to it is the name, date and how the person was murdered. This exhibit will be shown throughout General Conference at different locations and time. Be prayerful to these folks who died. All were murdered by people who thought their actions were in God's name.

The silenced witnesses will be on display again today from 1:45 PM to 2:15 PM.

An Open Letter to My Fellow United Methodists Delegates

James M. Lawson, Jr. is retired United Methodist clergy. He is widely regarded as the architect of non-violence within the Civil Rights Movement. Rev. Lawson is the national chairperson of the U.S. Fellowship of Reconciliation, an interfaith peace organization founded in 1914. He worked in Martin Luther King's movement for 17 years, including serving as Director of Nonviolent education for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference from 1960-1968, and as President of the SCLC Board of Directors for 13 years.

Back in the 1960s I discovered that one of my peers, a very young preacher was insisting that the Bible demanded a separation of the races; that the Bible cursed Black people; and that the Bible insisted that you cannot marry across racial lines. He was using the same Bible that I used, but he was using it against me and against my Black sisters and brothers. He was distorting the Bible to preserve segregation and racism.

Now that very same preacher is using the Bible to attack Gay and Lesbian people as being "sick and sinful," "immoral," "wanting special privilege," "undermining family life" and "threatening traditional American values." He says that Gay and Lesbian

people are among "the most dangerous people in the country," and demonizes Gays and Lesbians in the same way he demonized Dr. King and myself in the 1960's, calling us "Communists," "immoral," "over-sexed," "lazy," and "inferior to whites."

How is it possible that after thirty years this same preacher, thinking himself a voice of God, is still seen as a leader in our nation shaping the morality of our society? I've even heard fellow United Methodists quote him in this matter of Gay and Lesbian people. They have been convinced that because baptized Methodists happen to be homosexuals instead of heterosexuals that we should separate them from the rest of us. Even worse, they insist that the Bible is guiding them.

The story of Sodom is just one example of how the Bible is being misused to condemn homosexuals unfairly. Early in my ministry I took the time to look up every reference to Sodom in the Bible. I sometimes believe that one of the problems in the Church with understanding the Bible is that we really don't read it. To my astonishment, I discovered the Ezekiel, at least four other prophets and Jesus Himself speak of Sodom, but say nothing about, let alone against loving, faithful same-sex relationships. In chapter 16, Ezekiel says boldly that Sodom was destroyed because of the people's arrogance. They were rich and refused to care for the poor.

The point I make here is simple. If we read the Bible carefully, we would not have this growing divide over homosexuality in the United Methodist Church. Review the life of Jesus in the Gospels. Recall the love he showed to every man, women, and child that He met. Remember how He lived God's compassion and grace in every circumstance. Realize that He didn't say one word about homosexuality, the issue that is threatening the very soul of our faith communion.

In going to General Conference as a delegate in these last two decades, I have been persistently dismayed that a relatively small group are willing to divide the Church over the issue of Gay and Lesbian persons. Let us end this issue by accepting our homosexual sisters and brothers as full members of the community of faith and get on with God's work. Here we are in a

nation where racism, sexism, violence, militarism, and materialism dominate the electronic media, dominate our politics, and indeed de-humanize and undermine human life.

Why is the Church not more concerned for the 60,000 babies in our land who will die this year before age one? Why is the Church not more concerned for the 40 million people who have no health care? Why is the Church not more concerned for the fact that racism is still a yoke of oppression upon White, Black, Latino, and Asian Americans alike? Why is the Church not more concerned that women are still treated unequally?

At this moment, our Church can be described with these words of Jesus: "You strain out a gnat while you swallow a camel." When will we United Methodists get back on the course of the main business of the church of Jesus Christ, and no longer allow splinter groups to derail us in ideological discussions that cannot heal or strengthen either the United Methodist Church or the world in which we live? These efforts by a handful of folks to deny the reality of baptized homosexuals moves nations down the road to a new-style Jim Crow law. Let us move back to a Methodism that is proud to be a movement that embraces all people. Let us be a life form of God's massive, unconditional grace for every boy, girl, man, and woman.

The United Methodist Church has always retained a fellowship in which we were in disagreement with each other. I never went to a General Conference demanding that, because of their support of segregation, certain members should be expelled from the church, no longer allowed to be pastors, no longer allowed to receive communion, or shunned by the rest of us.

The strength of the church and its fellowship has always been that we were willing to try to love one another in spite of our differences. We must stop this endless squabble about sexual orientation and learn to love each other without qualification. Jesus commanded it. Some of our members want the General Conference to be more and more restrictive in their understanding of the Christian Gospel. That

would be a tragic mistake. We must continue to insist that the United Methodist Church demonstrate God's loving, inclusive vision for the whole human race.

If there is any United Methodist spirit that is the anchor and heart of our fellowship it is this, "Whosoever will may come."

Shame on us. Fighting about whether or not Gay and Lesbian people are human beings for whom Jesus Christ died and who God loves, and therefore whom God knows full well are in the healing context of his communion. We must do better.

Reconciling Worship Service

Sunday 7 May at 1:30PM

First United Methodist Church

3000 Euclid Ave

Sermon preached by Rev. James M. Lawson, Jr.

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.

Affirmation General Membership Meeting

The Affirmation general membership meeting will be 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm Sunday May 7 at the AMAR

Hospitality/Resource/Meditation (Dorothy Fuldheim)

Room at the Sheraton Cleveland City Center Hotel.

The first meeting of the newly elected council will follow.

Drew University Alumni/ae, faculty, staff, and friends breakfast

7:30 to 9:30 a.m.

Saturday, May 6, 2000

Sharaton Cleveland City Centre Hotel

Ritz Room

\$11,00 at the door

e-mail: Drew@General Conference 2000