The first sermon series our pastor preached upon arriving at Trinity UMC was based on Philip Yancey’s book *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* The congregation loved it and Pastor Barry was off to a good start. This January, seven years later, he started a new series based on Philip Yancey’s new book *Vanishing Grace—What Ever Happened to the Good News?* In his book, Philip Yancey relates that more and more people, even those who have grown up in the church, are disillusioned with the institution. Their main complaints are a mixture of how they are treated and how the church comes across as a community of faith.

*You don’t listen to me*  
*You judge me*  
*Your faith confuses me*  
*You talk about what’s wrong instead of making it right*

These complaints were confirmed when Philip went to a gathering and was asked to consider this question; “When have I felt loved?” He came up with this list: When someone listens to me attentively, makes me feel important, encourages me (and sometimes even challenges me), cares for me when I’m hurting, gives me an unexpected gift.

Philip Yancey says these are the things Jesus described as Living Water and that the world is experiencing Thirst. We might call these living waters grace.

So where do seekers go to get a drink? Where do they go to get their cups filled? Where do they go to find “grace dispensers” and a safe place to take their spiritual journeys? Philip Yancey devotes an entire section of his book to help shed some light on these questions. I think this is best expressed in his introduction to this section.

> While discussing the growing apathy toward Christians, a friend remarked to me, “There are three kinds of Christians that outsiders to the faith still respect: pilgrims, activists, and artists. The uncommitted will listen to them for sooner than to an evangelist or apologist.” Although nonbelievers do not oppose a spiritual search, they will listen only to those Christians who present themselves as fellow-pilgrims on the way rather than a part of a superior class who has already arrived. Activists express their faith in the most persuasive way of all, by their deeds. And art succeeds when it speaks most authentically to the human condition; when believers do it with skill, again the world takes note.

When I read those words my heart burst. I’ve been to a place like that, multiple times. I’ve seen people like that at work. It’s at RMN Convocation! Convo for short. Every two years I pack my cup and head for Convo. Never quite full when I start, I know it soon will be. This year, I have turned in my reservation and am ready to go. I am looking forward to a faith gathering where everyone is a pilgrim on a spiritual journey. I am headed for community, a diverse community. I will not be judged. My opinion will be welcomed. My journey has value, as does everyone else’s. Activists are welcomed and celebrated. Pilgrims explore questions of faith, grace and the ways of grace. Workshops, worship, preaching and singing are art...
As a pastor and as a parent of a lesbian daughter, I am aware of the confusion and questions that might arise when a son or daughter comes out to her/his parents as a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender person. While there are an increasing number of congregations that welcome LGBT persons and their families, in many congregations, parents still have a difficult time navigating their own faith and their relationships with their pastor or other church members when their children come out.

I was aware of groups such as PFLAG that offer support through ongoing sessions for parents and family members of LGBT children/siblings. However, I felt called to explore the possibilities of a short-term occasional class that I would offer for parents in the Columbus metro area. In the summer of 2013, I received an invitation from the Broad Street United Methodist Church (a reconciling congregation) in Columbus, OH to offer a class. Along with the publicity that the church put out, I put out an announcement/press release that could be used by congregations in the Columbus area. I also contacted the United Methodist district offices in the Columbus area, and they also promoted the class through their newsletters.

During the first class, one couple showed up. They lived in a rural area about thirty miles outside of Columbus, but they were looking for help and support after their young adult child had come out to them. We met for five weeks. After sharing our stories of our children coming out, I developed a “curriculum” that would respond to the questions and issues raised during our discussion.

Responding to the needs and questions of participants in the class has become the way that I develop the class content. I have tried not to come into the class with a preconceived notion of what those in the class are seeking. Rather I have let the concerns, questions, and conversation during the group sessions become the basis for the way we spend our time together. I use a variety of resources that I have found on the web including the Parents Reconciling Network, PFLAG, and a blog site by Susan Cottrell (www.freedhearts.org.)

Since that first class, I have led two other group sessions at the Worthington United Methodist Church. At a session I led during the summer of 2014, a total of ten persons participated. At a session in the fall of 2014, four persons attended the group. I will be leading another set of sessions beginning on Wednesday, April 8, at the Worthington United Methodist Church.

When asked what was most helpful about the sessions, participants reported:
- “Learning about how others have navigated ‘coming out’ (as parents).”
- “The brochures/readings as well as general discussion around these topics.”
- “Just being able to share and know there would be no judgment.

Here are some of my learnings from leading these sessions:
- Getting word out to parents about the class is the greatest challenge. Most folks who have attended report that they saw the class publicized in their church bulletin or newsletter. A few folks have come when their pastor told them about the group. A few folks have found the group on social media.
- Along with press releases and a poster/bulletin insert that I have developed, I am seeking to utilize social media and encourage word of mouth as ways to publicize the class. I am sending emails to clergy in the area asking them to share the information with parents who may be looking for support.
- Participants in the class are also resources based on the way they are working through any issues they may face in their own “coming out” as the parents of LGBT children. They tell their personal journeys. In addition they share books and information they have found on the web.

For more information either about the class or starting a class in your area, feel free to contact me at jwaugh3@mac.com.

Hilton Award Nominations Solicited
Parents are sometimes among the most passionate workers for the full inclusion of our lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer children and the PRN would like to acknowledge one of those special parents. The Hilton Award will be presented at the “Gather at the River” Convocation in San Antonio in August 2015. Please consider nominating a parent/parents who have had a significant impact on the understanding of full inclusion of LGBTQ individuals.

This award is named for the late Revs. Bruce and Virginia Hilton who were leaders in the formation of the Parents Reconciling Network. In their words, the award shall be made “to persons or groups, preferable United Methodist parents of GLBTQ children/siblings.”

Kindred Connection—Annual Spring Issue 2015
Brian’s Story
By Don Childers, North UMC, Indianapolis, IN

This article is the result of an interview with Brian Reeves, age 35. He has granted permission to use his full name. I am a member of the Steering Committee of the PRN and a member of North UMC, Indianapolis, IN, a Reconciling Congregation. Brian is a gay, African American, Christian male. He has never believed he could be out and have a “non-scripted” voice in his family, nor in the churches he has attended. A friend invited him to North about a year ago. Since he is the music director at another church, he attends the early service at North and stays for our adult Sunday School class, The Affirming Group.

This class at North UMC is composed of LGBTQ persons and supporting allies. Brian attends because it feeds his soul as no other church experience ever has. In this setting, Brian is free to talk about his life experience. He is out and has a voice. He reports “that he has experienced love, grace, and acceptance” in this fellowship. The amazing thing, Brian says, is that he is used to getting this from other LGBTQ friends; but to have this with straight allies who strive for a deeper understanding and offer him unconditional love is totally new for him. As a gay, black man this has not happened for him in his family or in his other church.

When I called and asked if he would agree to be interviewed, Brian was surprised and shocked that someone cared enough to hear his story. After we talked he hung up and wept. And he felt God’s loving presence. We agreed to meet a week later. We met over dinner at our home, and Brian shared more of his story with my wife, Sue, and me. I had several questions for him. His responses follow.

Since you came out to your parents a few years ago, what have you needed from them that you never got?

Before coming out, they were supportive of me being the person they wanted me to be: a Christian, college graduate, and active in my church. Since coming out, I’ve needed them to accept, love, and understand me as a gay man and not box me in by their limited religious beliefs, to accept that God does love me as a gay man even if they don’t.

What are your best hopes for the relationship you now have with your parents?

To be 100% for me as a gay man, to show up, and to ask me questions. I want them to be curious about who I’m in love with and to want to meet him. I want them to connect with me where I am in my life and not just be spectators.

What are your best hopes for other parents who have a LGBTQ child?

As is says in Proverbs, “with all thy getting seek understanding”. As a parent, learn all you can about what it means to be gay. Learn that it’s not just about sex (behavior). It’s about your child’s God-given nature. Learn that God loves your child as you must also.

What are your thoughts about marriage and family? Do you want to be a dad?

I believe that LGBTQ persons have a right to marry and not have to live in the shadows. We should have the legal and religious right to live intentional, normal lives. I have seen so many happy same sex couples with children and seen them fully involved in the life of North UMC.

I can now see it as an option for me. So, yes, I want children too.

What if some day you learned your child was gay? What would you do and say?

I would help them learn as much as possible and to help them love and accept themselves. I would love and connect with him/her because they are part of me.

As we ended our interview, I once again told Brian that he is truly a gift to all those who meet him and that North church is grateful that he is with us. We are part of his “family of choice.”

children, who through outstanding compassionate witness and work, give significant support to other parents and increased hope of a more inclusive denomination.”

Please send the names of your nominees, their contact information and church. Also provide a brief narrative about their compassionate witness and work for the full inclusion of LGBTQ persons in the UMC, community, annual conference and/or general conference. Please include your name, contact information and your connection to the nominee.

Nominations may be submitted to Carolyn Pennington, Hilton Award Chairperson, at gc_pennington@comcast.net.
Convocation is an event that just needs to be a priority this summer!

What would ever get you to come to San Antonio in August? The Gather at the River Convos will be a trip full of extraordinary meetings, memories, and mystery.

Meetings? Not just a presentation. Oh, there will be plenty of opportunities to select workshops, and be dazzled by our featured speakers. The extraordinary meetings are the ones that take place at meal times, or perhaps during a break when two people speak from their hearts in great conversation. Look forward to the meetings you will experience at Convos!

Memories? The ones you post on Facebook will be fun, but the ones you tell your family at the Thanksgiving dinner table will be extra special. Then there will be ones that just seem to last for a long time. My daughter and I still can laugh about the first Convos we attended in 2007 when she went off to be with the children’s program and came back with new friends that she still communicates with eight years later!

Mystery? The most extraordinary part of Convos is the amazing feeling that grows throughout the event. There is mystery embedded in the gathering as we sing, pray, and worship together in this almost heavenly environment. The Spirit thrives in this place! All are welcomed, accepted, and challenged to grow in relationship with others and God.

Sure, it’s going to be hot and humid, too; but that’s not going to matter as we gather at the river to experience the grace and joy of God’s love! See you at the river!
Dr. Caitlin Ryan works 15/7 to spread the word about the discoveries she and her team at the Family Acceptance Project have made studying families of LGBT children and youth. She has developed a user-friendly model for families of all religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds for reducing major health and mental health risks—such as suicide, dropping out of school, homelessness, substance abuse, and HIV—and for promoting resilience, health and wellbeing in LGBT young people.

As a clinical social worker, Dr. Ryan began working with LGBT people in health and mental health settings over 40 years ago. She did frontline work in the AIDS epidemic. She was aware of the suffering among LGBT people resulting from family rejection, often fueled by religious convictions. She noted a perception that families were the adversary, the enemy. But her work with families showed that the range of family responses was far more diverse.

She set out to conduct the first comprehensive scientific study of LGBT children and youth in the context of their families, examining their reactions to their LGBT children coming out. Then she studied the impact of those behaviors on the health and mental health of their children. She developed a new family-oriented approach to wellness, prevention and care for LGBT youth. Data was collected for over ten years, identifying over 100 specific accepting and rejecting behaviors that families use to express acceptance or rejection of their LGBT children. These behaviors were linked with physical and mental health risks such as depression, illegal drug use and suicidal behaviors and with self esteem and well-being.

The behavioral approach developed by Dr. Ryan and her team was designed to empower ethnically and religiously diverse families to decrease rejection behaviors that put their children at risk and to increase supportive behaviors that protect against risk and promote wellbeing. Dr. Ryan asserts "families that are struggling need to understand that they don't have to choose between their LGBT child and their faith".

"We start by meeting families where they are and showing them that the behaviors they thought were helping their LGBT child instead contribute to higher risks for health problems and family conflict," Dr. Ryan explains."Parents who reject their LGBT children are typically motivated by trying to help, not hurt them—to 'fit in,' have a 'good life, be accepted by others and uphold religious and cultural values. Too often, such families realize too late that trying to change, deny or use religion to condemn a child's LGBT identity pushes the child away, reinforces his or her isolation and increases the risk" of the young person thinking about or attempting suicide.

Indeed, the research showed a eight times higher likelihood of suicide risk among LGBT children and youth impacted by their family's rejection. Over ten years of data collection and analysis earned the Family Acceptance Project an important place in the Best Practices Registry for Suicide Prevention.

Dr. Ryan has taken her work on the road, reaching over 60,000 mental health and health providers, clergy, educators and others who work with LGBT youth and families in the US and other countries. Training videos and informational brochures are available at www.familyproject.sfsu.edu. Both videos Families are Forever and Always My Son will be shown during workshops at Convocation.

PRN is honored and excited that Dr. Ryan will be with us to share her knowledge and experience as we Gather At the River in San Antonio!
filled and carried out with divine inspiration. Love, peace and joy are everywhere.

This year’s theme is “Gather at the River.” This is the river of Living Water. This is where we get a drink. This is where we fill our cups to overflowing. This is where we get what we need to become God’s people and dispensers of grace.

There is hope for the Church and for a thirsty world. Join us at Convo and Gather with us at the River. Come on in. The water’s cool and refreshing and life giving.

Revs. Jim and Bonnie Parr Philipson join the PRN Steering Committee

We are a recently retired clergy couple who served 37 years in the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference. In 2008 our oldest child (then age 25) shared with us that she is transgender, and was beginning to transition from male to female. This was a surprise to us at that time. We were supportive, but as individuals and as a couple, we struggled to understand and accept. We read books, we talked, listened and prayed. Learning more about LGBTQ issues became a much more personal interest. Fortunately we had the strong support of our bishop, colleagues and close friends. In 2010 we were blessed to be appointed as co-pastors to a longtime Reconciling Congregation in Corvallis, OR where we were able to be open about our daughter’s story.

God also blessed our family with another Reconciling Congregation which our daughter and her wife attend in the Pacific Northwest Conference. It means so much to us as parents that these congregations accept and love our children. We hope that more local churches, ministry settings, annual conferences and eventually the wider United Methodist Church will share in this embodiment of God’s love for everyone. We also would like to offer support to other parents and families going through such times of transition. This is why we said yes to PRN. We are grateful for God’s grace and love which prevails!

Parents Steering Committee

The following members of the Parents Steering Committee direct the activities of the Parents Reconciling Network (PRN), an extension ministry of Reconciling Ministries Network. If you would like to contribute to this work, please contact Faith Geer or Carol Waymack.

Email addresses for steering committee members are included. We encourage parents or family members to contact us by email if they would like to connect with us for discussing the issues surrounding parenting LGBTQ children.

Steering Committee Members:
Blair Barbour, Euclid UMC, Oak Park, IL  blairbarbour22@gmail.com
Laura Young, Lubbock, TX—RMN Staff Member  laura@rmnetwork.org
Don Childers, North UMC, Indianapolis, IN  don@childerscounseling.com
Sue Childers, North UMC, Indianapolis, IN  don@childerscounseling.com
Beverly Cole, Trinity UMC, Salina, KS  bcole10@cox.net
Faith Geer, St Paul’s UMC, Allison Park, PA—PRN SC Chair  faithgeer@gmail.com
Rev. Leigh Goodrich, Lexington UMC, Lexington, MA  leighgoodrich@verizon.net
Dave Nuchols, Minnetonka, MN  dave.nuckols@gmail.com
Carolyn Pennington, Wesley UMC, Eugene, OR—Financial Secretary  gc_pennington@comcast.net
Rev. Bonnie Parr Philipson, First UMC of Albany, OR  revbonnie@hotmail.com
Rev Jim Philipson, First UMC of Albany, OR  revbonnie@hotmail.com
Rev. James Waugh, Grove City Trinity UMC, Grove City, OH  jwaugh3@mac.com
Carol Waymack, Woodland Park UMC, Seattle, WA—Newsletter Editor  carolwaymack2@yahoo.com
General Conference (GC) is the top policy-making body of The United Methodist Church which meets once every four years. The conference can revise church law, as well as adopt resolutions on current moral, social, public policy and economic issues. It also approves plans and budgets for church-wide programs. This conference is like our US Congress, but with voting legislators from around the world. This year, the total number of delegates has been reduced from about 1000 to 864. Half are clergy and half are lay folks. This GC, the proportion of US delegates has been reduced to only 58%, compared with 71% in 2008 and 61% in 2012 GCs. On the increasing delegates side are those from Africa which will comprise 30% of delegates in 2016, compared to 20% in 2008 and 29% in 2012.

It was at the 1972 GC in Atlanta that the first overtly anti LGBT language appeared in the Book of Discipline (BOD), a several hundred page book published every 4 years, containing the official documents for governance and theology of our UMC. Since then, more and more restrictions have been written into the BOD at each successive GC. Progressive United Methodists have tried valiantly for the past 43 years and RMN for the last 30 years, to stop this trend. But we have not been able to do so thru legislation.

At the end of GC in 2012, Bishop Melvin Talbert articulated a new strategy for RMN and the movement for inclusion known as Biblical Obedience. View a recording of that final session at rmnetwork.org/blog/2012/05/06/gc-2012-altar-for-all/. He stated “At the same time, I declare to you that the derogatory language and restrictive laws in the Book of Discipline are immoral, and unjust and no longer deserve our loyalty and obedience.”

So what is RMN’s general plan for GC 2016? How will we attempt to bring reconciliation to such a diverse and controversial conference, to make equal space for LGBTQ persons in the UMC and society? While supporting legislation that furthers full inclusion and strongly opposing any new legislation that further restricts full inclusion, the focus will be on demonstrating what truly following the ways of Jesus Christ looks like. During the 10 days of GC, there will be 10 demonstrations of Biblical Obedience. Details? As yet, unknown.

GC 2016 is at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland, the largest convention center in the Pacific Northwest, on May 10-20, 2016. Mark it now on your calendars!! Plan to attend all or a part of this conference. We need you. The UMC needs you. RMN needs you. Your family members and friends need you.

If you go, what can you expect?

You may go to simply observe. There will be engaging worship, wonderful music, probing theological discussions, and a chance to meet old and new friends from around the world. You will observe the process of legislation.

I urge you to do more--to be a part of the progressive coalition advocating and witnessing for what Jesus taught, loving our many and varied neighbors. Ways you could be involved:

- Advocate with delegates regarding issues you want to influence
- Observe and participate in 10 acts of Biblical Obedience
- Write articles and take photos to send home or to local newspapers
- Have 1-to-1 conversations with delegates, visitors and officials, testifying to your inclusive beliefs and stories.
- Offer solace, comfort and prayer to those who experience great pain at GC

The list goes on. We will be working with other United Methodist affiliated progressive groups. In 2012, the list included Affirmation: United Methodists, Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR), Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA), the National Federation of Asian American United Methodists (NFAAUM), the Native American International Caucus of The United Methodist Church (NAIC), and Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN).

At GC 2012, The Love Your Neighbor Coalition of groups above gathered daily at the Tabernacle for food, strategy sessions, assignments for action, communion and inspirational preaching. This gathering was the closest I have ever come to experiencing real church. At GC 2016, we won’t have a tent, but will have a something like it. Be There! Make your plans now.
**Parents Reconciling Network**

**An Extension Ministry of Reconciling Ministries Network**

123 W Madison St, Suite 2150
Chicago, IL 60602-4511

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**Gather at the River Pre-Day**

Thursday, August 6, the day before the official start of Gather at the River is set aside for extension ministries to meet together and separately. The morning will feature a combined gathering to learn about how RMN fits into the greater UMC.

Then, Parents Reconciling Network (PRN) is planning a 4 hour workshop to focus on parents’ needs and interests. Our featured speaker will be Dr. Caitlin Ryan, San Francisco State University. She will share her research-based discoveries about things families can do to provide a safe, nurturing environment for LGBTQ children and youth and how to keep them safe from the harm caused by some religious beliefs.

Following, we will spend time building our network with other parents, sharing stories, needs and learnings we’ve discovered over the years. There’s nothing better than hearing about a parent who has survived and grown through trying times. We’ll share our resource bibliography and a toolkit for churches to develop ways to be more welcoming and to help other parents when their kids come out.

The afternoon will be packed with information as well as inspiration. We hope you will be able to come a day early and grow with us!

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**PARENTS RECONCILING NETWORK—OUR MISSION**

Parents Reconciling Network unconditionally walks with the parents and families of persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities until all are fully accepted in their families, in their churches, and in society by advocating for acceptance, providing education, and promoting welcoming communities of faith.