Ubuntu: A Zulu word and concept that captures the concept: I am human because you are human.

We in the Reconciling movement are inextricably connected to one another in ways that we often don’t realize or consider. Under layers of culture, language, class, age, identity, and ability that differentiate us from others, there are bonds of personhood and divinely-sparked humanity that draw us together. We cannot work for LGBT equality in the United Methodist Church without working against racism and classism and sexism. To work for LGBT equality without working against racism is to cut out members of our own community. Our ability to be whole is profoundly linked to the freedom of our global brothers and sisters and all of God’s creation. (from Churchquake Embracing Freedom Convocation program, page 24)

A Hope-Filled Convo

It never ceases to amaze me how comforting it is to be in an environment of compete acceptance where open doors, open minds and open hearts are practiced. ChurchQuake was such a place. From the moment we drove in and saw the rainbow banners to the time when we packed the car to go home, it was a place to “just be.” The doors were “open” and welcomed everyone! There is hope!

Selecting a workshop and Ubuntu GoGroup was difficult...so many good ones from which to pick! Each one gave an opportunity to learn; presenting challenges to old models of thinking. Learning from each other as we traveled and then participated in the off-site event was a chance to open our minds to even greater possibilities. Seeing actions that make a difference in the lives of so many challenged us to become sponge-like and absorb a much as possible! There is hope!

Sharing stories was most fascinating. To hear about another’s struggles, helped us understand and gain insights into another’s life. The pain, the strife, the resolve to find a better way...all were present in various stages as individuals shared. Although many are still weaving their way through the maze of life, there were enough who had found their way, and were able to enjoy life and be fulfilled. As we opened our hearts we helped each other with the journey. There is hope!

It is with this renewed sense of hope that I returned home to my life’s journey. It is in my local church that we continue to strive to keep our doors really open to all. It is my challenge to help others open their minds to new ideas. As we create the environment of acceptance, hearts open and lives are changed. Thanks to all at ChurchQuake who took the risk to share their story and helped shape a new one.

by Faith Geer, St Paul UMC, Allison Park, PA

Fall 2013
Reflections on “I Have a Dream” – Meanings for Our Cause Today

By Rev Jim Waugh, Grove City Trinity UMC, Grove City, OH,
(Delivered at close of PRN Pre-Day, shortened)

I still remember the experience like it was yesterday although it took place more than fifty years ago. I was twelve years old in the summer of 1961. I grew up in small town in southeast Ohio with one African American family in our town of 5,000. Back in those days, the big vacation trip every summer for my family was to travel to Buckeye Lake, OH. By the time we vacationed there everything was just a bit on the tired side, but we enjoyed it. One of the highlights of the week was to go to the amusement park. What I remember about that night in '61 is that everyone in the amusement park was African American. Needless to say this made quite an impression on me, growing up in my small town in southern Ohio. As I recall, my brother and I went about having our fun – riding the rides, going into the arcade, doing what young kids usually do.

About fifteen years ago, I spoke with someone about the history of the park. I described my memory of the park that night when I saw all the African American folks there. She told me, “Oh yes, that was ‘colored’ night. One day a year the park was open to black persons. That was the only night they were allowed in. The swimming pool was closed on that day.” So there in '61, about a year before Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke at the Lincoln Memorial as a part of the “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom,” I witnessed segregation and discrimination first hand in central Ohio. While more overt in the South, events like “colored” night at Buckeye Lake Park showed that racism and discrimination were alive and well in the North was well.

So, we gather for “Church Quake” just a few days after the 50th anniversary of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr’s powerful, “I have a dream...” speech that has marked the era. In that speech, Dr. King talked about the great harm that had been done to African American people across the history of this nation. King warned against the “drug of gradualism.” He said, “Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy.” “Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.” He said this was not the time to “wallow in despair.”

And then Dr. King began to talk about the dream, referencing the text that you heard today from the prophet of Isaiah, “I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low. The rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.” And so the racial divide in this nation began to crumble. It would be naïve to say that it does not exist today, but it is not like it was then.

As persons who support the full inclusion of LGBT persons in the life of the UMC and all society, we are aware that other barriers besides racial ones do exist.

- Forty-one years ago the United Methodist General Conference (GC) declared that our church does not “condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.”
- In 1976, the GC prohibited the funding of any gay/lesbian support groups.
- In 1980 the GC denied ordination for any self-avowed practicing homosexuals.
- In 1996, the GC declared, “Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.”

On the one hand, I do not want take anything away from the epic struggle of African American persons in this nation for justice and equality. Their struggle is one that is marked with
shame on our nation. However as LGBT persons, and allies, as clergy and laity, and as parents of LGBT sons and daughters, we have struggled for the end to the harmful language and rules. Our wait is too long! Harm has been done to countless persons across these last forty-one years because of these policies.

Now we watch the sea change taking place in our culture on LGBT issues:
- The Supreme Court rulings on DOMA and Proposition 8.
- The end of “don’t ask, don’t tell” and now the opening of marital rights and privileges to same gender couples in the military.
- The continued string of states that have voted to recognize marriage for same gender couples.
- Even Walmart extending health benefits to employees who are in same gender relationships.

Yet in the United Methodist Church, one of our bishops says that LGBT persons are to be “patient.” Just as the Methodist Church maintained the segregated Central Jurisdiction until 1967, the church has historically lagged in eliminating sources of discrimination. The ability of our church to hold the line on this issue will become increasing irrelevant. We are frustrated.

Dr. King often used a quote that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice, many times almost imperceptibly.

In the years that I have left to live in this world, I fully expect to see LGBT persons and their families welcome in our church, to see the day when LGBT persons go forward into ordination as the children of God that we already know them to be, to see the day that my daughter or your LGBT sons and daughters will celebrate their marriages in UM churches. I expect to see the day when those younger than me will look back on these days of injustice for LGBT folks with the same mix of curiosity and horror as we looked on those signs that said “whites only” or when amusement parks would sponsor an annual “colored night” and close their swimming pool.

You see our aim is to make the world a different place. We seek the transformation that the prophet proclaimed, the fulfillment of the dream that Dr. King declared, and to bend the arc of the moral universe toward justice! So be it! Thanks be to God!
Welcoming Our Newest Steering Committee Members—Sue and Don Childers

"U"ntil Convocation at Chevy Chase, Maryland we had no real knowledge of the Parents Reconciling Network as an extension ministry of RMN. We are honored to be a part of the PRN family and to serve on the Steering Committee."

Sue is a retired elementary school educator and administrator. Don’s life work has been relationship counseling. Presently a majority of his client base is made up of LGBTQ families and individuals. The Childers have been allies of the LGBTQ Community for many years—since college friends came out in the ’70s, long before their daughter came out three years ago. They both have a passion for social justice. Don marched for racial equality in the mid 1960s and now they march with members of their church family at North United Methodist in the Indy Gay PRIDE parade each year.

The Childers’ professional experiences and their commitment to their church community led them to join with LGBT friends and allies to start a Sunday morning class called The Affirming Group where all are welcome. The church had made the decision to be a Reconciling Church, but needed to take the next step. Each Sunday LGBTQ individuals, families, and allies come together to share faith stores: the pain of coming out, the joy of acceptance. The Childers have worked with this class to sponsor church-wide forums, host the RMN dinner during Annual Conference, plan a film night, and be active in the state RMN. Don and Sue look forward to continuing to share in the work of PRN.

Steering Committee Members:
- Helen Andrew, Memorial UMC, White Plains, NY—Recording Secretary
- Blair Barbour, Euclid UMC, Oak Park, IL
- David Braden, Chicago, IL—RMN Staff Member
- Barbara Carter, Foundry UMC, Washington DC
- Vernell Carter, Foundry UMC, Washington DC
- Don Childers, North UMC, Indianapolis, IN
- Sue Childers, North UMC, Indianapolis, IN
- Beverly Cole, Trinity UMC, Salina, KS
- Rev. Leigh Dry, Lexington UMC, Lexington, MA
- Faith Geer, St Paul’s UMC, Allison Park, PA—PRN SC Chair
- Dave Nuchols, Minnetonka, MN
- Carolyn Pennington, Wesley UMC, Eugene, OR—Financial Secretary
- Joy Watt, Uniontown UMC, Uniontown, OH
- Rev. James Waugh, Grove City Trinity UMC, Grove City, OH
- Carol Waymack, Woodland Park UMC, Seattle, WA—Newsletter Editor

Advisory Group:
- Paul and Betty Beeman, Des Moines, WA
- Faith Buss, Minneapolis, MN
- Bob and Betty Dorr, Omaha NE
- Larry Fox, Freeland, WA
- Helen King, Lake Junaluska, NC
- John and Linda Lewis, Great Falls, MT
- Jerry Longwell, Southlake, TX
- Margaret Mallory, Toledo, OH
- Bob Swing, Oak Ridge, TN—past PRN SC Chair

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. PRN is dedicated to bringing the voice of parents of LGBTQI children (young and adult) to the movement. The Steering Committee meets at a central location once or twice yearly. Additionally, it conducts 2-hour conference calls 3-4 times yearly in between regular meetings. Otherwise, phone calls and frequent E-Mails keep them working year round for PRN.

We are always looking for new people to serve on the Steering Committee. If you know of a United Methodist parent (or other family member) of a gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer person or a parent who is LGBT who might like to contribute to this work, please contact Faith Geer (fgeer@stpaulsumc.com) or Carol Waymack (carolwaymack2@yahoo.com).
2013 Convocation
“Churchquake—Embracing Freedom”, attended by over 500 United Methodists, opened with a challenging sermon by Rev. Vicki Flippin, pastor at The Church of the Village, NYC. She described the Jailer in the story above as one bound to strict obedience to the rules of the empire. She likened the jailer to those loyal to the Book of Discipline, but who refuse to heed the overwhelming message of Jesus to love one another. Rev Flippin went on to note that Paul and Silas did not flee from the now opened prison, but rather stayed to preach the good news to the jailer, baptizing him and his family and spreading a table before them. We are challenged to do likewise.

Convo included field trips to monuments, museums, justice ministries and agencies in Washington DC to increase awareness of how our work at RMN intersects with other human rights causes. Workshops offered training in cultural competencies to better reach youth, transgender persons, multiple ethnicities and racial groups. Two same sex weddings were celebrated. Folks were trained in coaching congregations through the reconciling process and in using social Media to advocate full inclusion. Bible study with Peterson Toscano, theatrical performance activist, taught positive stories about the lives of sexual minorities in the Bible.

Bishop Melvin Talbert capped off Convo when he preached about "doing the right thing". Admitting that many of his bishop colleagues have expressed support in private for an inclusive church, he announced that the entire College of Bishops of the Western Jurisdiction have proclaimed at a recent meeting that they stand solidly in support of Bishop Talbert’s call to Biblical Obedience. He preached "...it's time for clergy to refuse to convict their colleagues for doing the right thing... In the midst of struggle, we celebrate because we are privileged to be part of Gods' reign of justice, peace, reconciliation and love and we are having a party to celebrate the same sex marriages of those performed here this weekend and those who married elsewhere." We celebrated freedom.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened,” Acts 16:25

By Carol Waymack, Woodland Park UMC, Seattle, WA

Ubuntu GoGroup to African American Civil War Museum and Monument
The Rebel Nun, Sister Jeannine Gramick Speaks at Convo PRN Pre-Day

By Joy Watt, Uniontown UMC, Uniontown, OH

At PRN’s pre-convo day, we got to meet Sister Jeannine Gramick, one of the go-to people in the Catholic Church when homosexuality is being discussed. She has done so much work for and with LGBT Catholics that the Vatican built up dossiers on her and officially silenced her from any speaking or writing on matters related to homosexuality or related issues. Her response? In good conscience she chose not to collaborate in her own oppression! She found a way to continue. She is co-founder of New Ways Ministry (NWM), headquartered in Mt. Rainer, MD. NWM is a gay-positive ministry of advocacy and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Catholics and of reconciliation with the larger Christian and civil communities. She is leading a LGBT-friendly trip to the Holy Land in February. See http://www.newwaysministry.org/

Here’s more about Jeannine from past encounters and the documentary In Good Conscience by award-winning director Barbara Rick. I think you can see how we can be inspired by her—and apply her thoughts to the United Methodist Church too.

"Since knee-high to a grasshopper Jeannine Gramick thought that God was calling her to a religious life. She became a nun and taught school and "was a good little nun" until she met a gay man. That friendship really changed the direction of her life. The question he kept asking her was, "Sister, now Sister, what is the Catholic Church doing for my gay brothers and sisters?"

When she sent a copy of one of her books to the Vatican, she knew it could draw ire. But she believes we need to forge ahead, to do things that are liberating for others. After all, somebody has to do it. The church has neglected these people. We should not be treating them as second class citizens. LGBT people have a rightful place in the church just like everyone else.

Once when asked how she could do so much under such intense criticism, how she could continue to be so gracious to others, she said people are like pieces of cloth. Different kinds of cloth can absorb different intensities of heat. Linens can take much more than silks. Some people can change a little, but can't make the whole journey. We have to be grateful for where they have traveled.

To the idea that it's okay to be homosexual, but the practice of homosexuality is a sin, or "a be, but don't do theology" she quoted one theologian as saying that's like saying it's okay to be a bird, but don't fly.

She has said, it seems like gay and lesbian people are accepted by the church as long as they are silent. Often the message is we don’t want to hear about your experience, your conscience. But that's not right. Each of us needs to speak our truth, each of our voices needs to be heard. Only when each person's piece of the truth is laid out, can we arrive at where the Holy Spirit is calling. More conversation is needed, not less.

When questioned more about conscience, she said that in the Catholic community there is the teaching of the primacy of conscience—that you have an obligation to follow your conscience. You take into account human knowledge, human wisdom, science—and then after all this study and research is done, you must go where you are alone with God, to your sacred space. You talk things over with God. You wrestle with God. You come to a conscience decision. What you do, you do in good conscience.

When asked why she remains Catholic she says that the church is her family—the religion of her birth and childhood. It's within her, part of her bones. So, if there is something in the family she disagrees with, she's going to say it, to try to make the family better instead of walking out on it. But to LGBT people who have been so hurt by the church, she says, your relationship with God is the most important thing. If the Catholic Church does not nourish your relationship with God, then it is not good for you to be there.

As for being "The Rebel Nun," Jeannine says she doesn't see herself that way. She thinks of herself as following where God calls her to go.
**The Joys of “Being Out”—Two Stories**

**By Helen Andrew, Memorial UMC, White Plains, NY**

One of the most poignant moments for me at Convo was when, during introductions at the PRN Pre-Convo Day, Joyce shared that she had come out to her mother the day after her mother had died. Though not a parent herself, she was proudly wearing a “My Child is of Sacred Worth” badge and had chosen to join us because it affirmed for her that her mother would have been accepting of her had she only had the courage to come out to her while her mother was still alive.

Joyce’s story kept coming back to me as Carol Waugh and I shared our stories over lunch one day. Our stories were similar. Carol’s daughter had come out at a slightly earlier age than mine. Carol didn’t comprehend Lisa’s words of being “lesbian” at first. Everything was a blur. Neither of us suspected that our daughters were gay. But both families were immediately accepting, though we both found ourselves grieving that our daughters would not give us grandchildren (something we now know is not necessarily true). Carol shared a beautiful story about her mother who had embroidered beautiful tablecloths to be given to her grandchildren at the time of their marriages. She gave Carol’s daughter her tablecloth one day, noting that she wanted her to have it even though she might never be married (something else we now know is not necessarily true).

Carol and I are both grateful that our daughters have come out to us. Knowing who they really are has strengthened our relationships. And by working with so many other wonderful people for the acceptance of our children within the church has greatly enriched our lives. And I also thank God that PRN has helped Joyce know that her mother loves and accepts her, as well.

**By Carolyn Pennington, Wesley UMC, Eugene, OR**

An RMN Convocation is a time of renewing friendships, meeting new people and remembering what is important. One of those is family. A couple of wonderful gentlemen I had the privilege of meeting, both in their 40s, brought this home to me again. Both had been out to themselves as gay men since their teens and neither was able to have an open relationship with his family. One knew he was unable to tell his parents because it would be the end of his relationship with them. The other had shared his orientation with his parents but it was never again acknowledged by them.

As parents of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children, we have a tremendous responsibility to talk proudly about our children in casual conversation to normalize their lives and loves. These parents/all parents need to repeatedly hear that homosexuality and transgender identity are normal, accepted ways of being. When my husband and I first spoke of our daughters’ sexuality in church, an elderly couple took us far into a corner to tell us they had a gay son. Never, in 50 years as members of our church, had they revealed this “dark secret” to another member of our congregation. After that Sunday, we were pulled aside for an update on their son’s activities after church at every coffee hour! We had helped to open a great longing in their hearts and their son later shared with us a renewed relationship with his parents. It makes a difference when we speak about our children and let other parents know their kids are ok, too. A casual conversation may just help open a door.

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**BEVERLY COLE CHALLENGES PEOPLE AT CONVO**

“Damn the torpedos...full speed ahead!”

Telling stories from her experience as a parent, Beverly Cole challenges those attending the Parent’s Forum to be active, to step out and work at all levels for inclusiveness in the United Methodist Church.

Using water vessels as an analogy, Beverly said one could just easily float along in the mainstream like a canoe; or, you could be like a tug boat, driving upstream, pulling, pushing, and feeling very slow; or, you could put on the steel and armor of a battle ship, drive ahead into the conflict and be a winner for the movement. Which boat are you in today?
Help keep these inspiring stories coming to you by making a donation today to the Parents Reconciling Network.

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