Two Stories—Two Families Embrace Freedom at Convo

Convocation•••A Family Affair!
By Faith Geer, St Paul’s UMC, Allison Park, PA

Are you wondering who should go to the ChurchQuake Convocation in August? Based on my experience, I’d take the whole family... kids and all! With program resources and activities for every age, the worship services inspire and the workshops teach. It’s a great time to learn together and share a unique experience as a family.

My son, Nathan, came out in 2003 when his younger sister, Natalie, was 10 years old. Although we have many gay relatives, never used derogatory language or joked about gays, we really did not feel it was something to share at that age. After consulting our pastor, we decided to wait until Natalie asked a question about it.

Convocation 2005 was at Lake Junaluska, NC. I wanted to go and took Natalie with me. What a great place to help her experience LGBT folks and learn! Our first night we walked into the dining area and got to eat with one of the transgender presenters, a lesbian couple and a straight man.

My First Convo
by Helen Andrew, Memorial UMC, White Plains, NY

I attended my first RMN Convocation in 2001 in Tacoma, Washington. Our daughter had come out to us seven years earlier. While we were immediately and unconditionally accepting of this news personally, I found myself in a deep, dark closet as far as sharing. I shared only with those I knew without question would be accepting. By 2001, I had begun to take tentative steps out of that closet, so when Elizabeth invited me to attend Convo with her, I considered going. She had been asked to co-lead a workshop on bisexuality—in addition she shared that the mother of a newly found friend would be attending and I think she thought it would be good for me to meet another parent. I took the leap and agreed to go.

(Continued on page 6)
On March 20, the Reconciling Ministries Network Facebook page showed a photo of Mister Rodgers with this very inclusive quote: "Knowing that we can be loved exactly as we are gives us all the best opportunity for growing into the healthiest of people". By the end of the day, there were 550 likes to this post, and 467 shares. Going viral, these shares exposed 56,000 persons to this message.

Similarly, a video of Hillary Clinton explaining her support for Marriage Equality was posted on the RMN Facebook page on Mar 18. As of March 27, there were over 800,000 posts of this video around the world.

When was the last time you got to spread the word of God’s inclusive love to 800,000 persons?

We who seek to "transform our church and world into the full expression of Christ's inclusive love" need to be speaking to the world in these powerful ways.

If you're like me, evangelism by knocking on doors or even phoning unchurched friends to share a faith story is well beyond your comfort zone. On the other hand, if you're like me, you would really love to share your beliefs that God's inclusive love for all includes LGBT persons. You would like to shout out that large parts of the United Methodist Church are committed to Biblical Obedience, extending full church participation to LGBT persons. Facebook and other social media outlets offer opportunities for you to do all that in a very big way, to a very big audience. There are over 1 billion (yes, with a "b") active Facebook users. One in 9 persons use Facebook worldwide. The fastest growing group of Facebook users is in the over 30 year age group. Accessed on computers, ipads, and cell phones, Facebook has the ability to reach millions of readers. If Facebook were a country, it would be the fourth largest country in the world.

Yikes! I have been very hesitant to embrace Facebook. I don't know how. I worry about my privacy. It takes too much time. These are some of the excuses I have been using, but when I hear about the power to speak to others around the world both in and outside the church as evidenced above, I realize that I need to get out of my comfort zone, overcome my own personal obstacles and move ahead.

How? If you have a Facebook presence already, use it. Use it more. Use it daily. Use it especially effectively on weekends. If you don't yet have a Facebook account, go to www.facebook.com/signup/ and www.facebook.com/help/. Many websites offer easy tutorials. A friend or family member might be willing to coach you. With or without all this help, the only real way to learn to use Facebook is to simply get started and do it.

Google offers this definition of evangelism: The spreading of the Christian gospel by preaching or personal witness or zealous advocacy of a cause. Once you are on Facebook and have just a few Facebook friends, you can start evangelizing. You can offer personal witness that may change the hearts of many. If a friend posts something that touches you, you can "like" it, "comment" on it or "share" it--all for free--and your opinions will show up on your friends' Facebook pages. Your other friends will see that you care about this item and may also "like," "comment" or "share" it and their actions will go out to all their friends and so on. When you are responding to items that reflect your core beliefs "Liking" something is a profession of faith, "Comment" is starting a holy conversation and "Share" is evangelism. When you look again and see who has commented on your post, you may realize that you share common beliefs, starting a conversation for justice.

RMN needs you to share your core beliefs with others, even those you may not know, and with whom you do not yet have a relationship. RMN needs you to take a risk now.

by Carol Waymack, MD, Woodland Park, UMC, Seattle, WA
Parents Reconciling Network is proud to announce that Sister Jeannine Gramick will be the keynote speaker for PRN’s Pre-Convo day, August 30th, at CHURCHQUAKE.

Several years ago, when my daughter told me she had arranged for me to have dinner with Sister Jeannine, I was ecstatic! She is one of my heroes! As hard as it is for us to change our United Methodist Church, I thought, it must be even harder for Catholics to change theirs. Yet Jeannine remains persistent, determined, and hopeful.

In 1999, the Vatican officially silenced Sister Jeannine Gramick and Father Robert Nugent for their work with gays and lesbians. Father Nugent agreed to abide by the prohibition on speaking or writing about homosexuality. Gramick politely declined. In a statement that has become a mantra for those who seek reforms in the institutional church, she responded, “I choose not to collaborate in my own oppression.” To follow her conscience, she risked all that had been important to her.

Jeannine Gramick, SL, a Catholic nun, became involved in pastoral outreach to lesbian/gay Catholics in 1971 as a graduate student. She co-founded New Ways Ministry, a Catholic social justice center working for justice and reconciliation of lesbian/gay Catholics. She engages in writing, research, speaking (throughout the English-speaking world), retreats, and consultation on sexuality and Church reform issues. Despite the Vatican order to cease pastoral work with lesbian/gay persons, she believes that God continues to call her to a ministry of education and advocacy on their behalf. Many groups have recognized her work in this pioneer ministry including the National Coalition of American Nuns with its 2002 Margaret Ellen Traxler Award for prophetic leadership. She received the 2005 Peace Prize from the Santa Claus Foundation in Turkey for her work with sexual minorities. She was named a 2006 Laureate of the International Mother Teresa Awards for her role as a human rights activist. She is committed to justice and peace for humanity and all of creation.

Jeannine is the subject of “In Good Conscience: Sister Jeannine Gramick’s Journey of Faith,” a documentary film by Peabody and Emmy award-winning director Barbara Rick who calls her, “the closest thing to Christ I’ve witnessed” and “a fiercely gentle warrior doing God’s will with humility and humor!”

“I choose not to collaborate in my own oppression.”

by Joy Watt, Uniontown UMC, Uniontown, OH

Sister Jeannine Gramick
Steering Committee Adds New Member

Jim Waugh grew up in Wellston, OH and graduated from Otterbein College ('71) and United Theological Seminary ('75). As an ordained pastor in the West Ohio Annual Conference, he is serving as the Assistant to the Superintendent of the Capitol Area South District. He will retire at annual conference in June.

Also in June, Jim and his wife Carol will celebrate their forty-second anniversary. Their oldest daughter Lisa lives in Portland, OR with her partner Melissa. Lisa is the Coordinator of Volunteers for the Learning Garden for the Oregon Food Bank. She manages one site in Portland and another site in Beaverton, OR. Their youngest daughter Laura is married to Jason, and lives in Cincinnati with two-year-old Madeline, Jim and Carol's only grandchild. Laura is a Vice President in Investor Relations at Fifth Third Bank in Cincinnati.

Jim and Carol enjoy babysitting for their granddaughter, travel, hiking, reading, and photography.

Currently serving on a steering committee of Reconciling United Methodists in central Ohio and organizing training events there, Jim plans other events to encourage and support inclusion of LGBT persons in the church in West Ohio and at the West Ohio Annual Conference session. Jim will now put his experience, passion and skills to even greater use on the national PRN Steering Committee.

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 LGBT children (children both 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 emails keep them working year round for PRN.

As you can see, there are large areas of the country not represented on the Steering Committee—specifically someone from the deep south, desert southwest and California. If you know of a United Methodist parent (or other family member) of a gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer person who might like to contribute to this work, please contact Bob Swing (rjswing@tds.net or 865-777-4668).

Steering Committee Members:
Helen Andrew, Memorial UMC, White Plains, NY—Recording Secretary, and Reconciling Stoles Chair
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
Beverly Cole, Trinity UMC, Salina, KS
Rev. Leigh Dry, Lexington UMC, Lexington, MA
Faith Geer, St Paul’s UMC, Allison Park, PA
Dave Nuchols, Minnetonka, MN
Carolyn Pennington, Wesley UMC, Eugene, OR—Financial Secretary
Bob Swing, First UMC, Oak Ridge, TN—PRN Steering Committee Chair
Joy Watt, Uniontown UMC, Uniontown, OH
Rev. James Waugh, West Ohio Annual Conference
Carol Waymack MD, 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
Your Steering Committee sent a formal letter to Senator Portman citing his courage and leadership for announcing on the floor of Congress, his support for full equality of LGBTI persons. The essence of the letter follows:

"Thank you for the courage and your understanding of parental and congressional responsibility to do the right thing for your son and thousands of his brothers and sisters across our nation, when you boldly endorsed marriage equality.

We pray that other congressmen and congresswomen will follow your lead in presenting bills, encouraging floor debate, and voting for the equality and inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people. While we understand that some Christians do not interpret some scripture as we do, we believe that Jesus' commandments to love transcend all other biblical writings."

Many other Steering Committee members also sent notes on PRN stationery. Your Steering Committee at work.

Growing support for Marriage Equality

The following US senators and representatives publicly support marriage equality. They support our children’s civil rights. Find your legislators and send them a thank you note. Better yet, thank them publicly on Facebook.

**US Senators**
- Majority Leader Harry Reid
- Majority Whip Dick Durbin
- President pro tempore Patrick Leahy
- Tammy Baldwin
- Max Baucus
- Mark Begich
- Michael Bennet
- Richard Blumenthal
- Barbara Boxer
- Sherrod Brown
- Maria Cantwell
- Ben Cardin
- Tom Carper
- Bob Casey, Jr.
- Chris Coons
- Mo Cowan
- Joe Donnelly
- Dianne Feinstein
- Al Franken
- Kirsten Gillibrand
- Kay Hagan
- Tom Harkin
- Martin Heinrich
- Heidi Heitkamp
- Mazie Hirono
- Tim Johnson
- Tim Kaine
- Angus King
- Mark Kirk
- Amy Klobuchar
- Frank Lautenberg
- Carl Levin
- Claire McCaskill
- Bob Menendez
- Jeff Merkley
- Barbara Mikulski

**US Representatives**
- Minority Leader and Former Speaker Nancy Pelosi
- Minority Whip Steny Hoyer
- Former Majority Whip Rob Andrews
- Karen Bass
- Joyce Beatty
- Xavier Becerra
- Ami Bera
- Tim Bishop
- Earl Blumenauer
- Suzanne Bonamici
- Bob Brady
- Bruce Braley
- Julia Brownley
- Cheri Bustos
- G. K. Butterfield
- Lois Capps
- Mike Capuano
- Tony Cardenas
- John C. Carney, Jr.
- André Carson
- Matt Cartwright
- Kathy Castor
- Joaquin Castro
- Judy Chu
- David Cicilline
- Yvette Clarke
- William Lacy Clay, Jr.
- Emanuel Cleaver
- Steve Cohen
- Gerry Connolly
- John Conyers
- Jim Cooper
- Tom Udall
- Mark Warner
- Elizabeth Warren
- Sheldon Whitehouse
- Ron Wyden
- Joe Garcia
- Alan Grayson
- Al Green
- Raúl Grijalva
- Michelle Lujan Grisham
- Luis Gutiérrez
- Janice Hahn
- Colleen Hanabusa
- Richard L. Hanna
- Al A. Hastings
- Dennis Heck
- Brian Higgins
- Jim Himes
- Rubén Hinojosa
- Rush Holt
- Mike Honda
- Steven Horsford
- Jared Huffman
- Steve Israel
- Sheila Jackson Lee
- Hakeem Jeffries
- Eddie Bernice Johnson
- Hank Johnson
- Marcy Kaptur
- William R. Keating
- Robin Kelly
- Joseph P. Kennedy III
- Dan Kildee
- Derek Kilmer
- Ron Kind
- Ann Kirkpatrick
- Ann Marie Kuster
- James Langevin
- Rick Larsen
- John B. Larson
- Barbara Lee
- Sander M. Levin
- John Lewis
- David Loebbecke

(Continues on page 7)
from Kansas. What delightful conversations we had! The presenter specialized in using appropriate language to address transgender individuals. It was a simple example of how we learned to be more sensitive to others. The opening worship service was fantastic...full of singing and colorful banners...just what every ten-year-old girl loves, like Natalie did.

Following worship we broke into groups. Natalie went to meet her kids’ group. For the next three days she was in and out of the group, planning and creating all sorts of things. We still lovingly use the tie-dyed pillowcase from one of the sessions. Natalie got to experience the new “normal.” She was able to play, hike, talk and share bible studies with the group. She came back to our room at night full of stories to share. Meal times were a great time to exchange stories of what we’d just experienced. We chatted about people we met, dropping the sexual orientation labels. We were all just part of the family living together, discovering what really matters is the person and relationships.

On Saturday night as we were getting our clothes ready for worship, my little “princess” realized that we’d forgotten her favorite sandals to wear with her skirt. After pouting a bit, she turned to me and said, “Mom, it really doesn’t matter what I wear to worship tomorrow, my friends will still think I am special. This is a place where everyone is accepted.” I responded with a tear-filled smile and realized that this experience was one of the best things that she could ever learn.

The 2013 Convo will be the first one Natalie has missed in ten years. She lovingly calls it “Gay Camp” and fondly remembers speakers, bible studies, and friends who shaped her faith. Thanks to Facebook she still has contact with many! Natalie has blossomed into a staunch ally for LGBT issues, proudly carries or wears rainbow attire whenever she can. She learned so much from the Convocations. She has written in school about the people and stories she’s learned. Constantly questioning, she seeks justice and inclusion of all. I hope you’ll give it a chance for all of your family to come and learn, too. It may just be that life-changing moment you never knew was there.

It was a wonderful, joyous, spirit-filled weekend where I met parents who were not only accepting of their children, but also passionate about working for justice for all God’s children. The weekend accomplished what I think Elizabeth had hoped it would—it made me comfortable with my role as the parent of a gay child and ready to begin the journey of becoming an activist—a role I had never really played before.

But little did I think that this journey would lead me to serving on the Steering Committee of PRN for the last eight years, chairing the PRN reconciling stole project for the last six, and active in the reconciling movement in the New York Annual Conference—all of which have introduced me to amazing new friends and helped me grow. Nor could I have possibly known on that weekend that Elizabeth’s “new friend”, Emily, was to become her life partner, that, in 2005 we would celebrate their ceremony of commitment to one another, or that in 2008 we would rejoice in the adoption of their daughter, Gwyn. And, ironically, I had met Emily’s mom even before I met Emily—at Convo 2001 in Tacoma!
PRN Steering Committee Meets in Washington D.C. in February

The PRN Steering Committee (PRN SC) met in February to set at new course for the UMC quadrennium. The SC welcomed a new member to the committee, Mr. Dave Nuckles from the Minnesota Annual Conference. The committee accomplished three major pieces of work. The PRN SC Operating Guidelines were revamped for size and clarity and to more accurately reflect current organization and practices. Significantly, the previous job descriptions for Jurisdictional Contact Persons were eliminated and those of Annual Conference Contact Persons were made more realistic. The Guidelines now ask Conference Contact Persons to help RMN/PRN communicate and coordinate meetings within their Conferences and to further the PRN Mission locally.

A new Strategic Plan for 2013-2016 with broadened goals and implementing objectives was developed. The plan will be available on the RMN web site in the near future. The SC also began planning for the upcoming RMN Convocation, ChurchQuake which promises to be a vibrant gathering August 30-September 2.

The PRN SC always welcomes your input to rjswing@tds.net.

(Continued from Page 5)

Zoe Lofgren
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Nita Lowey
Ben R. Luján
Stephen Lynch
Dan Maffei
Carolyn B. Maloney
Sean Patrick Maloney
Ed Markey
Doris Matsui
Carolyn McCarthy
Betty McCollum
Jim McDermott
Jim McGovern
Gloria Negrete McLeod
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Send donations to: Parents Reconciling Network, c/o Reconciling Ministries Network, 3801 N Keeler Ave Fl 3, Chicago IL 60641
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In This Issue

Two Stories—Two Families at Convo 1
RISKING EVANGELISM—embracing freedom thru Facebook 2
Sister Jeannine Gramick to Speak at Convo 3
New SC Member 4
Committee Applauds Sen Portman 5
Legislators for Marriage Equality 5
SC Meets in Wash DC 7
Convo for Parents 8

Come to Convo 2013—ChurchQuake
Join hundreds getting involved in the movement for full LGBT inclusion in The United Methodist Church through worship, conversation, and action. For more information and registration go to www.rmnetwork.org.

Special Events for Parents at Convo
The PRN Steering Committee has three special activities at Convo specifically for parents of LGBT children.

1. A Pre Convocation event, August 30, providing opportunity for more intensive community-building and strategizing—PRN Pre-Convocation Day features Speaker Sister Jeannine Gramick (see separate article, page 3)

2. A workshop with Transgender Extension Ministry: Creating Safe Space in Our Congregations for Transgender Children and Youth during the workshop time on Sunday, Sept 1

3. A workshop with MOSAIC: Sharing Family Experiences during the workshop time on Sunday, Sept 1

Among many excellent workshops, these three events will be especially helpful to parents and other allies.