Love Makes a Family

My three-year-old daughter is fond of squeezing my partner and me around the neck and proclaiming, “I love my three moms.” For months I thought Gwyn was referring to Emily, me, and Annie, her birth-mother, who is a junior in college. Then I realized that Gwyn can’t count.

Open adoption frightens a lot of people: What if the birth family interferes? But research has shown that open communication between adopted children and their birth families, which eliminates some of the unknowns in an adopted child’s life, makes for healthier kids. As far as Emily and I are concerned, Gwyn brought her own set of in-laws into the family just like we did. The more people who love our ginger-curl daughter, the better.

Welcoming Gwyn’s birth family into our own has been a challenge (Gwyn has eight grandparents in five locations!) and a blessing. Gwyn’s birth family is culturally and economically different from ours; they struggle with addiction and mental illness in very different ways from our families; they have their own rough histories and dysfunctions. But Gwyn, whom we adore, is of them. And through Gwyn we’ve come to adore them, too.

When Gwyn’s birth-father’s parents learned a non-Catholic same-sex couple would be raising their granddaughter, they were furious. They refused to speak to their son for months. They didn’t communicate with us until after Gwyn’s first birthday, when we began receiving tentative letters from her grandmother. We faithfully sent pictures and videos. Then six months ago Gwyn received a strangely shaped box in the mail from her paternal grandfather; inside was a wooden spoon he’d carved which he called her “cookin’ sword” and a poem. I suspect videos of Gwyn dancing in a tutu and hula skirt won him over. Love in every form, I’m convinced, is God’s doorway into our world.

Elizabeth Jarrett Andrew is the author of Swinging on the Garden Gate, a memoir exploring the connection between bisexuality and Christianity, Writing the Sacred Journey, and On the Threshold. You can connect with her at www.spiritualmemoir.com or www.elizabethjarrettandrew.com.

Gwyn’s birth-parents chose Emily and me to raise their daughter. Can you imagine a greater gift? Annie had a cousin who was gay; he grew up in an unaccepting household and committed suicide. Annie wanted to be sure Gwyn had loving, open-minded parents. Now that Annie is exploring her own sexual identity, I suspect she needed to expand her own community of loving, permission-giving adults as well.

Love in every form, I’m convinced, is God’s doorway into our world.
New Steering Committee Members Bring New Skills and Fresh Ideas!

Beverly Cole

Beverly is a wife, mother, church woman, writer and community volunteer. Married to Dale for 45 years, she has two children Eric, 43 and Traci, 41 and a son-in-law, Joe, Eric’s partner for 13 years. Traci is single and lives in Kansas City, Kansas. For over 15 years, Beverly has been chair of the Inclusiveness Committee at Trinity United Methodist Church in Salina, Kansas. She is the Reconciling Parent Coordinator for the Kansas West Conference and also serves on the Conference Board of Discipleship. She is excited about joining the PRN Steering Committee. In connection with Beverly’s journey as the mother of a son who is gay, she wrote two books: Cleaning Closets: A Mother’s Story and Voices from the Kingdom: All God’s Children Have Keys. She enjoys giving talks in her community and around the country and to college sociology and sexuality classes locally. She volunteers at the Food Bank and serves on the Art Patrons Committee for a community arts festival.

For fun, Dale and Beverly travel and she is assistant to her photographer husband in finding good photos. She also hikes, reads, gardens, and enjoys holding her three cats and spending time with Eric, Joe and Traci.

Faith Geer

Faith is the mother of three grown children. Kelly is an attorney, Nathan is a teacher and Natalie is a senior in high school heading for Ohio.

Did you get a colorful stole at Sing a New Song? Are you going to General Conference in Tampa in April? If yes to both questions, please remember to bring your stole (or any previously used stoles) to General Conference. About 2000 new stoles have been made, but we want to have as many as possible to share.

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 GLBTQI 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.

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
Faith Buss, Richfield UMC, Minneapolis, MN—Financial Sec.
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
Rev. Jim Evans, UMC Fort Wayne, IN
Faith Geer, St Paul’s UMC, Allison Park, PA
Carolyn Pennington, Wesley UMC, Eugene, OR
Bob Swing, First UMC, Oak Ridge, TN—PRN SC Chair
Joy Watt, Uniontown UMC, Uniontown, OH
Carol Waymack, Woodland Park UMC, Seattle, WA—Newsletter Editor

As you can see, there are large areas of the country not represented on this steering committee. 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).

Advisory Group:

Paul and Betty Beeman, Des Moines, WA
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
Kindred Connection—Spring 2012

Wesleyan University in the fall of 2012. In the mid 80’s Faith began working with AIDS education groups, committing to a “new” group called Reconciling Ministries, and encouraging her local church to sponsor a community group called PFLAG. All of these groups gave her the opportunity to learn about the need for an inclusive church where all are welcomed! Being surrounded by a supportive community of faith gives her a strong foundation for parenting a gay son.

As the Administrative Director for St. Paul’s UMC, a 1200 member, suburban church in the North Hills of Pittsburgh, Faith’s days are filled with managing a church staff, solving building issues and coordinating the volunteer ministries. During a recent trip to Zimbabwe, Faith combined her teaching and organizational skills to establish a partnership with her son’s fourth grade class and the fourth graders at Nyadire Primary School.

Rev. Leigh Dry

Rev. Leigh Dry, an ordained elder in the New England Annual Conference, is also the mother of a gay United Methodist son. She has been active in the reconciling movement since 2006 when her ordination was threatened by conservative leadership that opposed acknowledgement of those excluded in the ordination process. She is active in MFSA and co-chairs the Reconciling Subcommittee of Church and Society in her Annual Conference.

MEETING AND TALKING WITH GENERAL CONFERENCE DELEGATES and…

By Robert Swing

One of the most difficult things I have done is starting conversation with a stranger. I’m sure I am not alone. At General Conference we must do this as we attempt to change minds.

Delegates will have studied the issues, read petitions, and discussed these things within their delegation. They come well informed and with a tentative position on issues. Our challenge is to convince them to listen carefully to the products of legislative committees and to discern what God asks them personally and individually to do.

The “Love Your Neighbor” training guides us to some starting points. You may join a(delegate(s) when walking between lodging and the conference center or during breaks in the agenda. A courteous opening might be “Hello, I am (name) from (home) and I would like to talk with you. Do you mind?” If invited you proceed. Ask if you could share a prayer of unity. If given a cold reception wish them well, something like, “I hope you will love all God’s people as you vote.” Or, “Have a loving conference.”

Here are some examples for continuing conversation:

“John 3:16 says Jesus’ love is for all. How do you see that as it applies to BOD 161 F.? There it says all people are of sacred worth but then causes many to believe they are not wanted in our Church because it goes on to state homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.” Then LISTEN! If they are affirmative, praise them and close with a supportive prayer. If negative, remind them of Luke, Mathew, and Romans that instruct that we must not judge, and ask them to reconsider when voting on change.

This is but one example. Each person will find their own comfortable choice of words. The general approach works for issues of marriage and ordination as well.

The “Love Your Neighbor” Training Manual and Campaign Guide on pages 3, 4, and 7 contain several examples to help you in selecting words and ideas that might work best for you.

If this guide is not immediately available to you, I can scan pages and send them to you. Request via rjswing@tds.net

If you are unable to attend GC, I encourage you to approach your Annual Conference Delegates. Contact your Annual Conference Office and they will provide names and contact mediums.

Blessings to you, and I hope to see you at GC.
Last night I witnessed love expanding in the state of Washington. We were sitting in an overflow room to witness the debate and vote of the Washington State Senate bill 6239 legalizing marriage equality for everyone in the state of Washington. In the process to getting to this moment, we were able to hear love from the mouths of a diverse group of people. God spoke through Republicans and Democrats, old and young, powerful and those without much power, gay and straight, churched and unchurched. We can hear God’s love in many voices if we only listen.

I had been listening closely during this process and this is just a sample of the loving and accepting comments I heard.

When Republican state senator Pfug announced her support of the marriage equality bill, she said "I have been a longtime supporter of human equality," said Pfug. "I do not feel diminished by having another human being experience the same freedom I am entitled to exercise. I would feel diminished by denying another human the ability to exercise those same rights and freedoms."

Governor Gregoire, previously not willing to state her position explained her more recent support saying "I have been on my own journey. I will admit that. It has been a battle for me with my religion," said Gregoire, who is Catholic. "I have always been uncomfortable with the position that I have taken publicly. And then I came to realize the religions can decide what they want to do but it is not OK for the state to discriminate."

Senator Brown, a Democrat from Spokane, the more conservative part of the state, spoke of her sister in a 20 year same sex relationship.

Senator Regala, a white woman, reminded us during the pre-vote debate that the definition of marriage is not static and many previous definitions of marriage would be found quite objectionable by current law and regard for equal rights. In 1968, just one year after the legalization of interracial marriage in this country, Senator Regala married her husband, who is Filipino, and many warned the couple about the terrible consequences of their marriage. "The fact of the matter is we have faced challenges and struggles over the past 43 years. But there have been no terrible consequences to us or to society."

An emotional Senator Ranker, speaking from the floor of the senate before his colleagues and the public, explained how growing up the son of a gay man, society dealt with his father’s long term same sex partner by ignoring the relationship, worse than outright hatred. "As the son of a gay man, I grew up with a strong value system nurtured by a father who provided me with a foundation to succeed and gave me unconditional love and support...

Growing up, I was taught that a family was not determined by the genders of the persons involved but by the love and commitment that they shared....Today I am proud. I am proud to stand on the right side of history. I am proud to fully support marriage equality. But mostly, Mr. President, I am proud of my father."

Senator Hobbs, a military man from a conservative district reminded us in his message of God’s second commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. "Mr. President, I rise in support of this bill. One of the main reasons I’m doing that and why I’m explaining my ‘yes’ vote is, this is really not a political winner for me. ... I’ve served in the Army for over 20 years and now I’m in the National Guard, and this weekend I have drill. And some of those soldiers that I’ve served with are gay. How can I look them in the eye Mr. President, this weekend, if I voted ‘no’ on this bill? How could I stand next to them if I voted ‘no’ on this bill? How could I deny a right that I enjoy to my fellow brothers and sisters that are willing to take a bullet for me?"

Finally, Senator Ed Murray, the pri- (Continued on page 5)
mary author and sponsor of the bill reminded us that we are to love and respect even those who vote against us, who disagree. Lawmakers who vote against gay marriage "are not, nor should they be accused of bigotry," he said. "Those of us who support this legislation are not, and we should not be accused of, undermining family life or religious freedom. Murray mentioned his partner of more than 20 years as he told his Senate colleagues before the vote "regardless of how you vote on this bill, an invitation will be in the mail" to their future wedding. Why would they bother to officially get married after 20 years? "Marriage is how society says you are a family."

By the time this article goes to print, Marriage Equality has passed both the Washington State House and Senate and the governor has signed the bill into law. It is expected that there will be a statewide referendum on the ballot in November. This state supported full civil rights and civil union for sexual minorities in 2009 and defeated the referendum that attempted to strike it down.

We pray for love to prevail in Washington State.

(Continued from page 4)

LEARNING HOW TO LOVE AND ADVOCATE
By Barbara Carter and Chris Hong, Foundry UMC, Washington DC

As General Conference 2012 quickly approaches, activity in the Baltimore-Washington Conference is moving at an excitingly feverish pace. Our Reconciling Congregations continue to be in the trenches welcoming and engaging all of God’s people.

Our Love Your Neighbor training took place on November 19. As expected, our session was engaging, empowering and sometimes quite emotional. Matthew Mustard, our (Foundry’s) Coordinator for LGBT Advocacy was the facilitator. We divided into small groups; and as we shared our stories, there were many common threads. It was heart-warming to witness the formation of supportive alliances. When we reconvened in the larger group, these common threads were woven into an empowering witness. There was a genuine sense of supportive community as we engaged in focused skill building. The talking points were under-girded with scriptures. With this, we prepared for our One-to-One meetings with General Conference Delegates.

We left the Love Your Neighbor training committed to action. We are empowered by words from the Acts of the Apostles: “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness” ~ Acts 4:31b

BWARM (Baltimore Washington Area Reconciling Methodists) affirms LGBT people and helps promote full inclusion in the United Methodist Church. We are men, women, parents and children; clergy, lay, members of reconciling congregations, as well as non-reconciling congregations. We meet every other month for a time of worship, fellowship, exploration and conversation. Our meetings begin with spirit filled worship. We support each other in sharing leadership responsibilities. Our community is open to all. Blessings and encouragement abound as we work toward full inclusion in the United Methodist Church.

Members of BWARM are very proud that Jen Ihlo, one of our leaders, is among the seven lay delegates from our conference. She is assigned to Church and Society 2.

We prepare for General Conference 2012, challenged and blessed. We pray for the delegates and for proceedings that will be pleasing to God.
Love...Marriage...Family

Family! Family is recognized as an important organizing structure in our culture. Much has been written about family values, the decline of the American Family, the definition of family, and religious and secular support of family. We speak of traditional families, broken families, single-parent families, blended families, extended families, intergenerational families, nuclear families, and others. To some extent, marriage is how society defines a family. Recent debate has focused on the effect of allowing same sex marriages on the success or failure of traditional heterosexual marriage and on the support or destruction of family. These stories provide a glimpse into both traditional and same sex families.

Love Unites
by Beverly Cole, Trinity UMC, Salina, KS

“I want to have a marriage like you and Dad have.”

These were words spoken by my single, daughter, Traci when she was in her thirties. My amused response was, “You didn’t know us the first five years we were married when we were immature and adjusting to the reality of being married to someone who we found out had not really hung the moon.”

What Traci and our son, Eric had seen growing up was the more mature version of our married relationship, enriched, yet tested by the challenges of adding children. They reveled in the joy of the good times, in extended family times, in times of successes and victories in all of our personal lives. We did our best to witness love and support for each other during times of failure, illness and depression. They learned about God’s love, as well.

Remember Eric from the paragraph above? Well now it’s Joe and Eric and in February they celebrate their eleventh wedding anniversary. How has that gone? They have found joy in the good times, in extended family times, in times of successes and failures in their personal lives. They have supported us and each other in times of failure, grief, illness and depression. They know a loving God.

On the front of Eric and Joe’s wedding program was a quotation. “The Union of Two Souls Unites the Universe.” It unites. It doesn’t tear apart. Our marriage is enriched by theirs and hopefully ours had something to do with the success of theirs.

Love Enriches
By Helen Andrew, Memorial UMC, White Plains, NY

When I hear others’ concern that same-sex marriage is a threat to traditional marriage, I shake my head in bewilderment. When our daughter, Elizabeth, met Emily, the young woman who was to become her partner, it was a joy to watch their relationship develop as they discovered the many things they shared in common—a concern for our planet, a deep sense of the spiritual, a love of the out-of-doors, a delightful sense of humor, a passion for the arts—and moms who were budding activists in the Reconciling Movement in the United Methodist Church.

Four years after they met, they publicly declared their love for one another in a beautiful commitment ceremony that was the culmination of a weekend-long celebration with nearly 100 friends and family members in attendance. Their life together since then has taken on the joys, challenges and routine of any married couple who love one another deeply and sincerely—the “everydayness” of working out the complex schedules of careers and caring for a home, the anxiety of serious illness, the utter joy of adopting a baby (and the lack of sleep that accompanies a newborn).

Our marriage has been greatly enriched by the happiness their shared life has brought to ours. They have found what any couple wants for their children—security, contentment, love. We are so very proud of them and know, without any question, that their love is blessed in the sight of God, just as our love has been.
Love Embraces
Anonymous

Have you ever wanted to be a fly on the wall? Have you wanted to know what goes on in someone else’s life? If so, today is your lucky day!

Lynn and I met on the street in the middle of Pride Fest in our home town. We were introduced by a mutual friend, and it was love at first sight. Lynn’s warmth and spirit captured my heart and never let go. During our first conversation, I knew that we would be together forever. We talked about God, what is was like being raised Catholic, and the importance of a relationship with Jesus and how being gay effects this.

Our day to day lives mirror the joys and struggles of all families. The only difference is the fact that we both happen to be female. We both have great careers, share household responsibilities, and take care of our wonderful pets. We spend a lot of time with our dogs, Macaroni and Flash. We love hiking in the woods, exploring new trails, and enjoying nature. This is what quality family time means to us. We are also similar to “traditional” families in that we have to compromise and keep the lines of communication open so that we can have a healthy relationship. We are committed to each other and celebrated our love in a ceremony last year. It was a chance for us to come before God, our family and friends to join our lives. Even though our denomination and state do not yet recognize our union, it was an important step for us.

Lynn and I are so blessed to belong to our local United Methodist Church, a church that not only welcomes us but embraces us. It is a place where we hear the good news – that God’s love is for everyone – that Jesus died for all. It is a church that prays for us, encourages us, and calls us to serve. Lynn is a leader of an adult Sunday school class, and I am a leader in the summer programs for children. We are so thankful to have these opportunities in our community of faith to serve others and build strong relationships.

We hope that learning more about the lives of gay and lesbian couples will take away the mystery and the sense of “otherness” that many seem to have when thinking about our relationships. We believe that through understanding, equality for all can be achieved.
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Connect at www.rmnetwork.org

NOTES FROM

THE PRN STEERING COMMITTEE COORDINATOR (Chair)

Who are PRN Members?
While our Operating Guidelines briefly only mention Parents and Families of LGBT persons it has been our practice to include friends (allies) of Parents, Families and LGBTI persons in our data files, mailings, and other correspondence. We welcome all who want to associate with the Parents Reconciling Network. We do limit membership of the Steering Committee to parents.

What are PRN Members doing?
We are witnessing to families, churches, and friends and helping others to understand true unconditional love. Some are participating in RMN Convocations, Annual Conferences, and the UMC General Conference where they make our voices heard. Some are seamstresses who fabricate the beautiful stoles that appear in the convocations and conferences. Some are able to contribute financially to support the stoles and to publish our quarterly newsletter, The Kindred Connection, and meet other administrative costs.

That brings me to finances. We have experienced some diminishment of donations recently and ask that members help with printing, administrative and advocacy costs as we prepare to go to UMC General Conference in April 2012. We will have a significant presence there to hopefully make Church policy more fully inclusive by modeling our love of neighbor as Jesus has led us to do. Your prayers and continuing support are important.

Bob Swing, Coordinator, PRN Steering Committee