“Coming Out” in a Reconciling Congregation

By Nancy Speer, Wallingford UMC, Seattle, WA

Wallingford UMC was already a Reconciling Congregation when, 25 years ago, my husband and I joined this church. Six years later our daughter, Elaine, was born and quickly enveloped by the love of this special community. She was both embraced by and embracing of, all this community offered. Even before she could read, Elaine would stand on the pew next to us loudly singing along with the hymns. She came to know both traditional and non-traditional families. And, she learned to see the gifts and talents of all God’s children.

Fortunately WUMC had, and still has, a strong program for Youth and Children. Elaine chose to participate in Sunday School, the Kids’ Choir, and the Christmas Pageant, and eventually the middle and high school youth programs. She embraced her Methodist heritage and became a member of WUMC. Somewhere along the line she must have begun to be more fully aware of what Reconciling meant. Perhaps, she started by personalizing it with the faces of our dear friends at Wallingford. Eventually, she knew it had a more intimate meaning for her.

Elaine eventually “came out” to us in middle school. I remember the conversation, her telling us that she wasn’t quite sure, but thought she was bisexual. And that was about it. Just a level of awkwardness that accompanies any conversation about sex with one’s parents, but handled, on her part, as simply the sharing of who she was, without any fear of judgment. Frankly, as a mom, I was more taken aback by my “little girl” having any sexual awareness, regardless of her orientation. As time passed, and Elaine became president of her high school’s GLBTQ club, I became reconciled to this growing awareness and maturity in our daughter. Elaine’s activism on GLBTQ issues grew – she participated in panel discussions, joined WUMC’s Reconciling Team, and the summer before her graduation attended the Reconciling Conference in Estes Park (and wrote in her college admissions essay, about attending a drag show with her mother, pastor and youth pastor – which must have impressed the admissions committee because she was accepted!). The amazing thing is that all this was done without her actually “coming out” at WUMC. Her orientation wasn’t a big deal – she knew it didn’t matter to anyone who loved her, and whom she loved and respected. Elaine was gay, just like Elaine had brown eyes and loved history. And the congregation made no assumptions about Elaine. She was a young woman, who took on leadership opportunities and was particularly proud of our church’s position as a Reconciling Congregation. No questions, no assumptions, no judging.

(Speer, continued on page 4)
Much of the ministry of Jesus was conducted in the streets, or in other public places. In our attempts to be faithful followers of Jesus, the Reconciling Committee of Langley United Methodist Church has decided to take some of our Reconciling ministry beyond our church walls into public places. Among those efforts is our film ministry carried out in The Clyde Theater of our Langley community on the south end of Whidbey Island.

A word about the geographic and social context of our community is in order. Whidbey is a fifty mile long, relatively narrow island in Puget Sound; its southern tip is about 25 miles north of Seattle. The southern portion is reached by car ferries which run every half hour for 16 hours of the day. About a third of the way up the island is a narrowing about a mile wide, providing a natural boundary to what we locals call south Whidbey. The only other public access to the island is over a two-lane bridge built in the 1930’s over breathtaking Deception Pass at the island’s northern tip.

South Whidbey is the name of the public school district which unites this geographical area into a social unit. One of the goals of the county government is to preserve our ‘rural character’. South Whidbey is populated by a significant number of retirees, some ferry commuters, some families with children, a high proportion of artists of all sorts, a visible segment of gays and lesbians, and a remnant of ‘60’s people who came here with the ‘back to the earth’ movement—making for a unique culture. Langley, a small sea-side village with a population of about 1000, is the only incorporated town and the location of our United Methodist Church. All of this affects to whom and how we publicize our film ministry.

Telling the stories of our lives is the most powerful tool for changing hearts and minds. So in choosing films to present in this public venue, we are concentrating on documentaries which contain stories of LGBTQ persons, told thru their own voices.

The first film, shown in April, 2010, was Inlaws & Outlaws, the work of Seattle-based filmmaker, Drew Emery. In October we presented For the Bible Tells Me So, a documentary that examines the Bible and homosexuality thru the experiences of five Christian families. For our next showing we are considering documentaries on the very timely subject of bullying. One possibility is Out in the Silence, shown as part of our recent PNW-RMN gathering; another is a production of the Southern Poverty Law Center, very simply titled Bullied.

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Many line up for Langley’s Clyde Theatre Showing. Photo by Lynn Willeford
At last there is a wealth of children’s picture books that celebrate the diversity of families and portray same-sex parents as a given. The books listed below are only a sampling. A good website for additional titles and reviews is www.booksforkidsingayfamilies.blogspot.com.

**Daddy, Papa and Me**  
Leslea Newman

**Mommy, Mama and Me**

These two board books for pre-schoolers describe the affectionate child-centered days of toddlers—one with two dads and one with two moms.

**The Family Book**  
Todd Parr

An appealing book that promotes self-acceptance and an appreciation for the diversity of families. In particular, bi-racial, adoptive and alternative families will find this book special.

**In Our Mother’s House**  
Patricia Pollaca

This book touches on many topics—the unconditional love of mothers for their children, lesbian parenting, adoption, trans-racial families, homophobia and the comfort families find in the traditions they create.

**10,000 Dresses**  
Marcus Ewert

A finalist in the 2008 Lambda Literary Awards, this book gives young gender non-conforming children a fantasy world where their dreams do come true.

**King and King**  
Linda di Haan & Stern Nijland

The perfect story to open a family discussion that ends with both “In our family we respect all kinds of different families” and “I want you to know I’ll always love you and support you, no matter what.”

**The Different Dragon**  
Jennifer Bryan

An enchanting book, told as a bedtime story by one of Noah’s two mothers. She weaves a tale in which Noah and his cat go on an adventure and run into a dragon who no longer wants to be mean.

**A Tale of Two Daddies**  
Vanita Oelschlager

When questioned by a friend on the playground about her two daddies, a young girl responds—“Daddy is my soccer coach. Poppa cooks me eggs and toast…….”

(Andrew continued on page 4)
Raising our daughter in a Reconciling Congregation has been a gift in so many ways. One that I treasure most is what has given to our daughter. It has enabled her to embrace fully who she is, and it has shown her how to be fully loving and fully loved. Thanks be to God.

**OUR KIDS NEED A CHURCH!**

By Bob Swing

Lesson: Teach and expose them early in their lives, then honor their “sabbaticals.”

How many times have we experienced the time when our offspring felt that the Church that they were brought up in was not a good place for them. Too many times!

But why? Perhaps because of their understanding that they are somehow different from the “expected” norm, as they become aware of themselves, gender and sexuality, and their surrounding culture.

The good news is that their early Church exposure most likely sticks with them in the form of values and a moral compass, even if that takes a while to emerge.

Joyce and I are blessed that our daughter and her partner searched until they found a Church (congregation) that took them in. The Church nurtured them as a couple, grew with them as they tried to conceive a baby and then provided support as they adopted a baby at birth offering that baby the experience of a huge family of loving people not possible by her birth parents.

The Church, in a suburb of Denver, CO happens to be associated with the Presbyterian, Methodist, and United Church of Christ faiths.

Lesson: Teach and expose them early in their lives, then honor their “sabbaticals” as they mature, and then encourage them to find the “niche” that feeds their souls, and keeps them close to God.

(Andrew, con’t from page 3)

**Anna’s Aunts Get Married**

Amanda Hamlin

Aunt Sara and Aunt Amanda are getting married. The ceremony is seen through the eyes of a young flower girl.

**A Pet of My Own**

Ursula Ferro

Eight year old Gabe asks his two dads for a pet of his own.

**At My Hose What Makes a Family is Love**

Dee Dee Walter-Goodspeed

What makes a family—a single mom? Two dads? All families should be embraced and celebrated.

These books can be found online. Better yet, ask your local book store to order these books for you. Your request will speak volumes. Give them as gifts. Take them to church or give a copy to the church library. Keep them in your own house to read with your own children, grandchildren or visiting children.
A Note from the Editor
By Carol Waymack,
Woodland Park UMC,
Seattle, WA

It’s spring in Seattle, or so they say. The calendar says it’s spring, but it doesn’t feel like it. It’s not so much the rain that gets us down in Seattle. It’s the grey. By this time of the year, we are all really tired of grey. The weather report is boring: overcast, drizzles, overcast, and spring showers, more overcast. Lots of folks on Prozac, trying to shed that heavy cloud that hangs above them. But not gardeners, who know rain is what makes our city the Emerald City. Last weekend, I bought fuchsias, my little act of faith.

Sometimes it seems like prospects for change in the United Methodist Church are like spring in Seattle, cool, with heavy clouds hanging above us. We approach General Conference 2012 with a kind of dread, fearing the pain that we have felt every four years at previous General Conferences, needing a kind of spiritual Prozac. Some feel hopeless that change will ever come. Some feel we have to force change: work hard to bring about new legislation, lobby central conference delegates, get elected as GC delegates ourselves and educate those who are already elected. Some simply leave the church.

It’s good for me to remember that despite all the digging in the dirt and planting spring flowers, it is not me that causes spring to come in Seattle. The Earth has its own timetable. I really only need to have faith. My efforts should be regarded simply as faithful acts to bring glory to our Creator.

For the church, my hope is that this newsletter can serve as fuchsias to those feeling the impatience for change, providing you, our readers with glimpses of hope, glimpses of a spring yet to come.

Please also remember, that each of you has a story of hope to tell. Send your comments and articles, poems and songs and longings to me at carolwaymack2@yahoo.com.

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
Faith Buss, Richfield UMC, Minneapolis, MN—Financial Secretary
Barbara Carter, Foundry UMC, Washington DC
Vernell Carter, Foundry UMC, Washington DC
Carl Davis, Chicago, IL—RMN Staff Member
Rev. Jim Evans, UMC Fort Wayne, IN
Carolyn Pennington, UMC, Eugene, OR
Bob Swing, First UMC, Oak Ridge, TN—PRN Coordinator (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
Our main goal is to declare publicly that God loves sexual minority people just as they are and that both churches and society must eliminate discriminatory practices that marginalize these persons. That message is aimed at members of our local GLBTQ community, many of whom would not cross the threshold of churches who have either harmed them or whose actions and words are perceived to be harmful. To them we bring the message that there are faith communities who will welcome them into our fellowship and advocate for their full civil rights.

Another goal is to educate other churches and the community in general about this message of grace. These showings also serve an educational purpose for people in our church and other supporting congregations who still experience some uneasiness with the subject. Hearing and seeing these stories can also reinforce already held positive attitudes about equality, perhaps moving some people into advocacy. At the most elemental level coming together in a public place creates a sense of community, of a common interest in developing a general sense of tolerance and affirmation.

People of faith come to realize that there are persons in other congregations who share their interest in this ministry of equality. And, straight and gay people meet in an atmosphere where they can be more fully aware of their common humanity.

We wanted to make these screenings as accessible as possible; accordingly, we offered them free of charge. The financial cost of these screenings was roughly $500 for the first and $400 for the second, the difference being a $100 fee to have the producer-director, Drew Emery, present for post-screening Q&A. Major costs were for theater ($150-75) and film rental ($100); on each we spent about $100 for publicity, mainly for production of large colored posters which were distributed to sponsoring organizations and community bulletin boards.

To help offset these costs, we sought out contributing sponsors. For Inlaws & Outlaws, we secured the support of the Unitarian-Universalist Congregation of Whidbey, whose pastor, Rev. Kit Ketcham, has been an activist for several years, at one time serving in the founding leadership core of the Religious Coalition for Equality. After our initial successful experience, we were able to greatly expand the list of sponsors to include other faith communities—Episcopal, Unity, Quaker—, the local chapter of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Pride Foundation and its local affiliate, the Whidbey Giving Circle, and a local business owned by a gay couple, Tree-Top Baking.

At our second event, we left a plastic punch bowl with a small sign—“donations gratefully accepted”—in the lobby. We were surprised to discover $239, which, when put together with sponsor fees (LUMC’s part was $63), allowed us to donate $200 to the Whidbey Giving Circle. They in turn will use those funds in funding post-high school scholarships for GLBTQ youth and support of the local GSA’s.

Ministry can happen in a variety of ways. In this case, it involves taking it outside the church walls and into public places. We send this description, not in the expectation that someone will duplicate it, but in hopes that hearing our story will stimulate your creative imagination as to what kind of public ministry might work in your particular setting. And should you happen to visit Langley for a weekend respite, look for the Clyde. You never know what documentary might be showing on a Sunday afternoon.

If you would like to consult about any of the details of this ministry, feel free to contact Larry Fox (larryleefox@yahoo.com/360-331-1950)
Blair Barbour –
Newest Member of PRN Steering Committee

I began attending Euclid Ave UMC shortly after my daughter was born. At that point the church was in the process of becoming a Reconciling Congregation. My only child, Alex enjoys telling people that her 5th grade Sunday School teacher was gay. At 12, she joined her dad and me holding hands with many others in a circle of love around Broadway UMC in Chicago where the beloved pastor of her earliest memories (Pastor Greg “Kermit the Frog” Dell to the kids) was being denounced by a group carrying hateful signs. He would soon be tried by the UMC for conducting a holy union ceremony for a gay couple, and “defrocked” for disobeying the Book of Discipline (his indefinite suspension was later reduced to a year).

It means a lot to me that Alex, now 24 years old, grew up in a Reconciling Congregation, where all were welcomed, and All Means All, and the sign in bold letters on the side of our church reads, “Jesus Was Radically Inclusive”. It was in her junior year of high school, as I was leaving for the Ash Wednesday service, that she disclosed to me her belief that she was a lesbian. I remember feeling so touched, thanking her for trusting me enough to share this with me, and expressing my abiding love for her. Twenty minutes later I was at church, weeping tears of mixed emotions. I am so grateful that I have been able to truly celebrate with her this very central part of her identity. I am sure it would have been a different story, a process that would have been so much more difficult, had I not belonged to a Reconciling Congregation.

I look forward to hearing about your experiences. I want PRN to be available to support every parent of an LGBTQI and gender-nonconforming child. We need each other! As a licensed clinical social worker for nearly 30 years, I’m aware of the struggles parents have within themselves and in relation to family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, church -- not to mention in relation to their child. I know what a difference it can make in people’s lives when they are able to connect with others who face similar challenges. I am in the process of starting up a PRN chapter in the Northern Illinois Conference. I appreciate also having the opportunity to serve on the Parents’ Steering Committee with a great group of committed people. I look forward to being a part of the important efforts of RMN at General Conference in 2012.

Hope to meet you at our Sing a New Song gathering this August in Ohio! If you’ve never been to one of these gatherings, and you are able to make it, you are in for an amazing experience.

PRN is honored to have Rabbi David M. Horowitz join us at the Parents Reconciling Network special All-Day Forum on Thursday, August 25, 2011 just before Sing a New Song begins. Rabbi Horowitz serves as the national president of PFLAG, Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. He is also a past president of PFLAG Akron, Ohio. Rabbi David M. Horowitz is the rabbi emeritus of Temple Israel in Akron, Ohio. He has served congregations in Indiana and in Queensland, Australia.

Rabbi Horowitz is married to Toby (1963) and has two children, Wendy (married to her life partner, a transgender man, Julian) and Daniel and three grandchildren. He lectures widely on issues dealing with GLBT concerns, the challenge of the radical right, a variety of Judaic subjects, to academic and religious institutions, and corporations throughout the United States and abroad. He is frequently a presenter at the Academy for Spiritual Formation sponsored by the Upper Room.

You won’t want to miss this opportunity to hear Rabbi Horowitz’s story and to learn how he helped his faith community become one that welcomes all.
A special time for parents
On August 25...

Parents Reconciling Network
All Day Forum

Come, meet and share with parents who have lived, learned, loved and nurtured a GLBTQQAI child. Our All-Day Forum will feature:

- Key note speaker, Rabbi David Horowitz, National President of PFLAG
- Interactive panel with Dr. Carol Waymack, a family doctor Blair Barbour, a clinical psychologist and some LGBT youth/young adults to share “what parents should know and do in parenting.”
- Lively interaction and story-ing to enable us to meet other persons more intimately and learn from each other.

For more information and registration, go to: www.sans2011.org
phone 773-736-552