



The Kindred Connection

Newsletter of the Parents Reconciling Network
3801 N. Keeler Avenue, Chicago, IL 60641 773-736-5526
Winter, 2006 Edition "Without a Vision the People Perish"

Parents Reconciling Network--PRN, an extension ministry of the Reconciling Ministries Network, is an Outreach program for United Methodist parents and families of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons. "We envision a United Methodist Church which in both policy and practice accords all persons, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, full participation in the life of the church."
Editor: Reg Olson

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JUDICIAL COUNCIL MEETING IN CINCINNATI

The Judicial Council heard oral arguments on Thursday, October 26 on the Kansas East Annual Conference resolution prohibiting clergy from discriminating against self avowed practicing homosexuals in welcoming new members. More than 30 Reconciling UMs were present for the hearing. Rev. Mark Holland of Kansas East Annual Conference challenged the Judicial Council to respect the place of the annual conference in our connectional system naming the 90% majority vote of Kansas East passing the resolution.

Rev. Holland clearly distinguished between the authority given to an individual pastor and the accountability that pastors have to their Annual Conferences in our connectional system. "*The Church gives pastors authority, but not autonomy.*" Holland said that each one must function within the process and structures of our UMC. He concluded, "*Not allowing an annual conference to speak where the General Conference is silent, violates the fundamental polity and organization of the UMC. Using 'self-avowed, practicing homosexual' as a litmus test for membership is unacceptable. It violates our United Methodist understanding of salvation in Jesus Christ. It violates our United Methodist understanding of the church that we are all moving on to perfection. I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and I am not ashamed of the United Methodist Church. Please join me in preserving the integrity of both today.*"

Over 75 reconcilers gathered in prayer, singing, silence, and communion at Clifton United Methodist Church Wednesday evening October 25, lifting concerns and hopes for the deliberations of the Judicial Council. The Kansas East Annual Conference sought clarification as to whether their resolution is in compliance with the *Discipline*. The Judicial Council's decision was that "Annual conferences are free to express their ideals and opinions so long as they do not attempt to negate, ignore or contradict the *Discipline*."

Report from Nashville

The Parents Reconciling Network Steering Committee had its semi-annual meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, at the West End United Methodist Church. The church staff, its members, and its host families showed us great Southern hospitality.

Rodney Pickett, a member of West End, and the church staff, made the arrangements necessary for our meetings, group visits and most importantly, our host families. We were all made very comfortable at the church and in the homes of our hosts. We also enjoyed many of the

restaurants in the area. Being at West End Church, across the street from Vanderbilt University, made possible our

seeing the location of the August 2007 RMN Convocation. We fondly anticipate our return to Nashville and seeing the friends we made at West End. The Church is working on being an inclusive congregation and hopefully our presence will help with this decision.

During its three day meeting the Steering Committee welcomed two new members— Bob Swing, of Knoxville, Tennessee, our new Southeast Jurisdictional co-Coordinator, (with Helen King); and Lee Schubert, of Madison, New Jersey, our new Northeast Jurisdictional

Co-Coordinator, (with Helen Andrew). Each brings special skills and commitment to the Committee. Both were very involved in all the business and discussions of the Committee. We also decided to invite Joy Watts, of East Ohio to join our ranks.

Helen Andrew and Jerry Longwell led the group in three devotions. In addition to the usual committee reports the Steering Committee members considered the following: PRN informational brochure revisions; plans for impacting Annual Conferences in 2007 (where delegates to General Conference will be elected); preparations for Convocation 2007 and General Conference 2008; fund-raising plans; and selection of new leadership for the Steering Committee.

Betty Dorr and Faith Buss will continue to be PRN Representatives to the RMN Board; Faith will start new duties as the PRN Treasurer; Helen Andrew will assume new duties as Secretary and will continue to welcome new “members” to PRN; Helen King will assume some of the technical duties relating to the publication of the PRN newsletter, and will also function as the Official Public Spokesperson of PRN; Bob Swing will solicit articles for the newsletter; together Lee Schubert and Jerry Longwell will draft the next finance letter; Barbara Olson will be a Co-Coordinator for PRN, and will continue to be PRN Registrar for on-site meetings; and Reg Olson will function as a Co-Coordinator for PRN, and continue as Editor of the *Kindred Connection* newsletter.

Committee members are eager to begin working in their new positions and to prepare for Convocation and General Conference, with the ultimate goal of reforming the United Methodist Church so it “accords all persons, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, full participation in the life of the church.”

The Steering Committee sends its heart-felt condolences to Betty and Bob Dorr on the occasion of the death of their beloved son Mike.

We all wish the best for the two faithful Steering Committee members, Jerry Longwell (facilitator) and Larry Fox (treasurer) who have retired from the PRN Steering Committee. We know they will continue to labor to achieve the goals of PRN in their respective churches and conferences.

A KEY

An editorial by Reg Olson

When I first read Bishop Timothy Whitaker’s article¹ that invited readers to respond to his assessment of the church’s stance toward lgbt people I felt somewhat optimistic.

Although he said that the church should not follow the agenda of the culture he indicated that sometimes a **new revelation** from scripture can help the church amend its position on a cultural issue. As an example, the bishop cited Paul’s injunction that “there is no longer slave nor free, male nor female” for we are all “one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28), as the reason why some Christians have reinterpreted the church’s position on slavery and women’s rights. Whitaker asked, “But where is there an antecedent in Scripture for a ‘new illumination’ about homosexual practice?” My gut-level response was, “Maybe we could find a scriptural passage which clearly demands acceptance of homosexuals! Maybe this could be the key to unlock the door of exclusion in the church.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I asked colleagues for help in this quest. I needed positive statements, not a rehash of the arguments so widely used to discount the six or more so-called “anti homosexual passages” that are used as clubs against homosexuals.

Most scholars agree that **nowhere** in the Bible are same-sex committed and loving relationships condemned. The scriptures do not really say anything about homosexuality! Never-the-less, here are seven passages we found that can challenge homophobia: **1. Ezekiel 16** -- The allegory of the unfaithful wife; **2. Matthew 22:37-40** (verse 39 “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”); **3. John 3:16** Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life; **4. Acts 8:26-40** the *Ethiopian Eunuch* who symbolizes those who were sexually different, and were barred from the Old Testament community, (it may be that the category “eunuch” included gay men!); **5. Acts 10:45-46** The Jews believed that *Gentiles* were sinful and unclean, but Peter noted that God pours out the Spirit *even* on Gentiles; **6. Matthew 12:32b**, “whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven,” having met so many godly, spirit-filled homosexuals, I have concluded that their life and ministry are evidence of the power of God at work in our midst; and **7. Psalm 139: 1, 13-17**, “you formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb... Wonderful are your works; that I know very well,” -- this may support the view that homosexuality is genetically established, and is a part of God’s plan.

Many pastors and scholars have suggested that two biblical stories about same sex-relationships might provide some basis for acceptance of lgbt folks. Those passages are, Ruth 1:16 and 2:10-11 regarding the relationship between Ruth and Naomi; and I Samuel 18:1-4, 20:41-42 and II Samuel 1:25-26, about David and Jonathan. Perhaps these two relationships were not sexually active relationships, but they referred to special associations that might even have exceeded sexual relationships. The Bible reports these relationships in a positive light.

The search for specific texts has a major shortcoming, for the Bible was not meant to be quoted simplistically

when dealing with difficult ethical issues. It is to be interpreted **in the light of** our understanding of the Gospel. **Nowhere** does Jesus condemn homosexuality. He tells us to love our neighbor, even the outcasts of society, as did the Good Samaritan. The Apostle Paul calls for inclusion and radical newness (Galatians 3:28). And Peter says in Acts 10:28 that God has shown me that "I should not call anyone profane or unclean." The Gospel is inclusive.

The God of Jesus was greater than any **words** we could use to understand the Divine, or God's demands. A biblical literalist might be challenged to deal with the injunctions in Leviticus against eating rabbits, pigs, and shellfish, such as oysters, shrimp, lobsters, crabs, clams, and others that are called "abominations." Furthermore, Leviticus forbids mixed breeding of various kinds of cattle; sowing various kinds of seeds in your field, wearing "a garment made from two kinds of material mixed together"; "rounding off the side-growth of your heads, [or] harm the edges of your beard." Why don't fundamentalists organize protests and picket seafood restaurants, oyster bars, church barbecue suppers, all grocery stores, barber shops, and stores that sell suits and dresses made of mixed wool, cotton, polyester, and other materials?

SOCIAL FACTORS

If there is no simple biblical text which directly tells homophobic persons to accept homosexual persons, are there any social insights that can promote dialog between the Christian *Right* and *Left* regarding lgbt persons?

So much of the discussion about whether or not the church should accept lgbt persons is based on a confusion of issues. The *Right* says that they do not hate, or wish to hurt homosexual persons. They do believe that gay folks can be saved, if they repent of their "sinful ways." It is their **behavior** that they find repugnant. Conservatives do not want lgbt people or any others to defend homosexual sex acts or relationships.

The *Left* says that what goes on in one's bedroom is no one else's business (unless it is abusive behavior). They say that what is hurtful is the fact that gays and lesbians are rejected as **persons**. Homosexuals are denied common civil rights in many states and are victims of discrimination in the society, the work-place, and in the church, where they have been denied the privileges of membership, baptism, marriage and ordination.

To say that one hates the sin but loves the sinner implies that we can be separated from our sexuality. If it is really possible to "love the sinner" why does the Church continue to exclude lgbt folks from its privileges and why do gay-bashing criminals cite biblical passages and conservative clergy as the basis of their violent behavior? Can we isolate sexual **behavior** from the very **being** of a person? Social scientists note that we are all sexual persons. Heterosexual behavioral themes dominate in the entertainment, sports, and advertising Industries. Few people can be categorized as "a-sexual."

Very few heterosexuals have been able to take and keep vows of celibacy. Why should we expect lgbt folks to become sexually "trans-formed?" They did not choose their sexual orientation any more than heterosexuals did.

So one side is talking about **behavior** -- the homosexual sex **act**, while the other is talking about the the **person**—the very **being** of the homosexual. The *Right* says that the Bible condemns the act of same-sex interaction, with a focus on six passages. The *Left* says that those scriptural references are taken out of context, that the Bible says nothing about being a homosexual, and that scripture urges the acceptance of everyone as a child of God. One side reads specific **words** they think relate to homosexuality and the other reads an **ethic**, an attitude toward persons.

What is it about homosexual behavior that causes such a stir among some church people? Why do they place so much emphasis on homosexuality as a terrible act? What is it that homophobic people fear?

Church leaders may feel that their ethic is the last bastion of morality in an immoral society. Over time adultery, drunkenness, and gambling have become less repugnant to civil society. Sometimes people who are involved in these behaviors even get leadership positions in society and in the church. However, a person who confesses to having practiced homosexuality is still seen as being beyond the pale of leadership and acceptance in many churches. Perhaps homosexuality is still feared because the civil society is beginning to accept it!

Another reason why homosexuality has become such a hot button issue is that the Christian *Right* has chosen to **use it as a wedge issue** to polarize the Church. This is a thesis of the book *United Methodism at Risk*.²

But, I think there is another reason for the Church's focus on homosexuality. It may be that **male dominance** is the central issue here. Perhaps homosexuality itself is taboo because it challenges male superiority, especially in a church that has often been dominated by males.

One wonders if churches and denominations (such as the UCC, and the Unitarian-Universalists) where the role of women is one of equality with men, react as harshly to homosexuality as those who enforce male superiority. I guess they probably do not. Is it just a coincidence that the two members of the United Methodist Judicial Council who disagreed with the majority's defense of the Virginia pastor, Ed Johnson's right to deny church membership to a gay man, were women?

BACK TO THE BIBLE

We must remember that the scriptures reflect a culture that was male dominated. Their prevailing sexual ethic was not one which would be deemed acceptable in today's churches. In his article "Homosexuality and the Bible"³ Walter Wink concludes that polygamy and concubinage

were regularly practiced in the Old Testament. He notes that, "The Old Testament nowhere explicitly prohibits sexual relations between unmarried consenting heterosexual adults, as long as the **woman's economic value** [editorial emphasis] (bride price) is not compromised, that is to say, as long as she is not a virgin." Furthermore, "In the Old Testament, a man could not commit adultery against his own wife; he could only commit adultery against another man by sexually using the other's wife."

Wink continues, "Social regulations regarding adultery, incest, rape and prostitution are, in the Old Testament, determined largely by considerations of the **males' property rights over women**. Prostitution was considered quite natural and necessary as a safeguard of the virginity of the unmarried and the property rights of husbands (Genesis 38:12-19; Joshua 2:1-7). A man was not guilty of sin for visiting a prostitute, though the prostitute herself was regarded as a sinner... Part of that heritage was the use of female slaves, concubines and captives as sexual toys, breeding machines, or involuntary wives by their male owners... " These are behaviors ..." which 2 Samuel 5:13, Judges 19-21 and Numbers 31:18 permitted--and as many American slave owners did some 150 years ago, citing these and numerous other Scripture passages as their justification."

It can also be argued that the passage from Leviticus 20:13 "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death" **does not condemn** homosexuality. "It is grounded in the old Jewish understanding that women are less worthy than men. For a man to have sex with another man 'as with a woman' insults the other man, because women are to be treated as property." ⁴

And what do we make of the story about the townsmen who demanded that a visiting outsider from Ephraim, be brought out to have sex with them. When the owner of the house refused to surrender his male visitor but instead gave the men his concubine, they ravished her to death. The master of the concubine then cut her body into twelve parts, and sent them to the twelve tribes of Israel as a summons to warring vengeance upon the townsmen.

This is not the Genesis 19 story of Sodom. It is the Judges 19 account of the sins of the men of Gibeah. Instead of a punishment of fire and brimstone falling onto Gibeah, as it did on Sodom, the punishment for their sin was a war waged by the men of Israel against Gibeah. The moral of this story seems **not to be** that the Gibeahites, like the Sodomites were immoral in asking for sexual relations with a male visitor, but that they defiled the property of the master of the concubine! This is another example of sexual bias in the Bible.

The Bible does provide a key to why the issue of homosexuality is such a hot button item in the church. Especially today, when women's rights have been

proclaimed but not fully implemented, homosexuality is feared because it seems to compromise male dominance.

Perhaps Galatians 3:28 "In Christ there is no longer slave nor free, male nor female" **is the key** to unlocking the sin of **homophobia**. People do not fear homosexual **persons**, necessarily, but their **behavior** which, seems to challenge male dominance. I believe this is what has prompted the charge that homosexual marriage is a threat to the "sanctity" of marriage! Gay unions clearly challenge the subservience of women to men, even in heterosexual marriage. Women are not meant to be slaves, and men should not be free to practice dominance over women. When we come to understand this we will strike down homophobic barriers and welcome gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender persons into full participation in our church. We pray that this will happen soon.

- (1) Bishop Timothy Whitaker, "The church and homosexuality", e-Review Florida United Methodist News Service.
- (2) Leon Howell, *United Methodism @ Risk; A Wake-up Call*, Information Project for United Methodists (IPUM).
- (3) Walter Wink, "Homosexuality and the Bible" *Christian Century Magazine*. ©1979
- (4) Fred Tasker, quoting the Rev. Jill Nelson, associate pastor of the Sunshine Cathedral Metropolitan Community Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in an article entitled, "What does the Bible say about homosexuality?" published 7/13/97, in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.)

**Mark your calendars now ... RMN
CONVOCATION August 2-5, 2007, at
Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.**

Holy Relationships Conference

Address by Betty Dorr

The Holy Relationships Mid-west Regional Conference on Theology and Sexuality, held in Iowa City, Iowa, October 19-21, 2006, was sponsored by the Human Rights Campaign, in association with several churches and communities.

Thank you for inviting me to speak. It is an honor to be here. I am a wife, a mother and a grandmother. My husband Bob and I raised three sons and have three grandchildren. We live in Omaha, Nebraska, where I worked for 20 years as a teacher's aid in public school special education classrooms. Fourteen years ago, because several people in our family are gay, Bob and I joined a group called PFLAG, which stands for Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Later we became active in Reconciling Ministries Network, a group of United Methodist churches and individuals seeking full equality for gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgender people in the United Methodist Church. What I will share today are a few

experiences from the past 14 years. My story goes back to the 1950s. Shortly after Bob and I married in 1957, I learned that my brother was in trouble in the Army after being seen in a gay bar. He had performed honorably as a soldier, but entering a gay bar was evidence of homosexuality. And, in fact, my brother is gay. He received a dishonorable discharge from the military. Bob's brother also is gay. He has lived most of his adult life in San Francisco, and now lives in Oakland, California. My brother-in-law loves living and working in the Bay area, where he is accepted as an openly gay man.

With both my brother and my brother-in-law being gay, it was no surprise that our youngest son Michael told us, at age 27, that he was gay. We had wondered about Michael's lack of enthusiasm for dating girls. He had many friends in high school, did well in his classes and took part in theater productions and musical events. Some gay youths lose self esteem and become self destructive. Others become overachievers, Mike was an overachiever. He graduated near the top of his class. He played the flute, won piano competitions, sang and was drum major of the high school marching band. At Northwestern University, Michael continued to excel. When Mike came out to us, we told him we had always loved him, and that wouldn't change. As a computer specialist for a Chicago-based advertising agency, he experienced considerable success, rising to a senior management position. However, a few years ago, when he was in his 30s, he seemed to change, and during the last few years especially, he struggled with the triple whammy of bipolar illness, alcoholism and drug use. Ten weeks ago, he died in his Chicago apartment at age 41, a tragic death that may have resulted from mixing alcohol and his bipolar medications. We haven't yet received the results of the autopsy and don't know the cause of death. We are devastated, even though we knew about his struggles, tried to help and realized that he might die young.

We do know that we have received many wonderful blessings because of our gay son. We treasure our friendships with people in the gay community that we probably never would have gotten to know if Mike hadn't been gay and we hadn't gotten involved in the work we are doing.

After Mike told us he was gay, Bob and I became active in PFLAG. I was president of the Omaha PFLAG Chapter for five years, and Bob has been president the last five. We hold monthly support meetings. We operate a telephone help line. As a help line answerer, I talked to parents who were ready to jump off a cliff after their child said, "Mom and Dad, I'm gay." The parents wanted to know, "what did we do wrong?" The answer, of course, is they did nothing wrong. Their child still is the same person they had always loved. Being gay is not a choice any more than having blue eyes is a choice.

When a child musters the courage to come out to his or her parents, a closer and richer relationship can result.

Unfortunately, that often doesn't happen. Even though gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are becoming more visible, it still isn't unusual for parents to react with anger and threats when a child comes out. We know GLBT people who have no relationship with their parents, or only a bad relationship. One young gay man told us that after he came out to his parents a decade ago, they disowned him and all contact ceased. It blows my mind that any parents would reject their own child and give up all the wonderful things that the future might hold. We can only imagine what goes through the mind of the son or daughter who has been rejected. A friend of ours in Omaha underwent three exorcisms at his church in an unsuccessful effort to become straight. Today he has a committed gay partner and he is a happy and productive member of society. He has accepted himself as a worthy child of God, just as he is, without having to change to something he isn't. That good outcome doesn't always happen. The rate of attempted suicides is three times as high for GLBT teenagers as for the general population of teenagers.

After I began to get involved in efforts within the United Methodist Church to win equality for gays and lesbians, I decided to go to my denomination's 1996 General Conference in Denver, Colo., as part of an effort called Open the Doors. This was a group of people who wanted to let the delegates know that there were United Methodists who wanted full rights within the church for them-selves, or for their children or friends. We didn't win anything in 1996 and, in fact, we suffered a huge defeat when one sentence was added to the Social Principles of the *Book of Discipline*. That sentence reads: "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches." Also in 1996, my church in Omaha welcomed a new senior minister, Jimmy Creech, who came from North Carolina. As Jimmy was preaching his third sermon, I realized to my amazement that I was hearing a sermon on love and acceptance of gays and lesbians. I felt he was talking just to me as he told how he believed gays and lesbians were being rejected by the church. I asked Jimmy to speak at a PFLAG meeting, which he did. He said it was important for people who were committed to each other to celebrate their love for one another with a covenant service. Two women in PFLAG who had joined First United Methodist asked him to perform the service for them. He did that on Sept. 14, 1997, in our church sanctuary. Bob and I couldn't attend the service because it was held while we were attending the national PFLAG convention in Orlando, Fla. When we returned home we learned that some church members were upset. A complaint was filed against Jimmy, and that led to a church trial in 1998. I was among those who testified in his support. By a one-vote margin, he was acquitted by the jury of his fellow Nebraska ministers. However, the Nebraska bishop declined to reappoint Jimmy to our church, and he returned to his native North

Carolina where he later performed a ceremony uniting two gay men. That resulted in a second complaint and a second church trial in Nebraska. I attended the second trial in 1999 and was arrested and fined as a member of a group that briefly blocked the entrance to the doorway of the church in Grand Island, Nebraska, where the trial was held. The group that conducted the symbolic door-blocking action was Soulforce, which includes members of many religious groups. At that second trial, Jimmy was found guilty and he was stripped of his ministerial credentials.

At my church in Omaha, the membership split, and it was the anti-Jimmy Creech group that ultimately left. Our membership of nearly 2,000 when Jimmy came dropped to about 700. I led a task force that arranged for study programs and discussions among church members about homosexuality. In early 2000, just 29 months after the ceremony uniting two women, our congregation voted 85 percent to 15 percent to join Reconciling Ministries Network. First United Methodist of Omaha remains the only church in Nebraska that belongs to RMN. Our congregation's vote was a huge step forward. It was a step that the gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgender community welcomed as a sign that maybe, just maybe, they are loved as children of God by some of us in the United Methodist Church.

In 1999, I attended Rev. Greg Dell's church trial in Downers Grove, IL, for performing a holy union service uniting two gay men. During the second day of the trial, I reached the point that I couldn't listen to another word of testimony. A man from another United Methodist church was on the witness stand. He said the unity service had harmed his church in the Chicago suburbs. People were leaving and his daughter was very upset that same-sex people were being united in marriage. What sinners those gay people were, the witness said. I left the trial and went outside, and as I almost fell to the ground I saw the outstretched arms of a young man on crutches. We stood there and held each other and cried. Greg was found guilty but, unlike Jimmy, he wasn't stripped of his ministerial credentials and eventually was able to return to his Chicago church.

I have attended the last three General Conferences of the United Methodist Church—1996, 2000 and 2004. At the 2000 conference in Cleveland, I joined a newly formed parents group within the Reconciling Ministries Network called the Parents Reconciling Network and am a member of that group's national steering committee. We staffed a table containing our literature and talked with many parents. It was wonderful to share our stories. We helped with communions, rallies and other events. I was very proud to wear around my neck a badge with a picture of my son. The badge said, "My Child Is of Sacred Worth." The badges drew attention, some favorable and some not. I was told by one man while the two of us were in an elevator that the picture on the badge showed a good-looking young man and surely couldn't be the picture of my gay son.

"You must have gotten it out of a magazine," he told me. At that conference, I met a mother who had accepted her gay son but had told no one at her church and was so glad to be able to talk to another mother who accepted her gay son. Also in Cleveland, I was arrested a second time — again with a Soulforce group engaged in a symbolic door-blocking action. As in Grand Island, authorities were given ample notice, no harm was caused and we had the opportunity to express publicly our opposition to the church's discrimination against GLBT people. I spent that day in a holding cell before we were taken into court late in the day to be fined and then released. I will struggle until there is justice and equality for all, even if it means spending a day behind bars, which is a small sacrifice. When one reflects on the bashing of GLBT people for fun, the demeaning jokes, the separation of parents and their children, I pray that those in the gay community will find it in their hearts to forgive the rest of us.

When Bob and I served as grand marshals of the Pride Parade in Omaha in 2003, Bob gave a short talk that ended with these words, "We are speaking on behalf of all accepting parents of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender children when we say this, If your parents for whatever reason don't love and accept you just as you are, think of us as your parents. We are honored to be your parents." As we walked away from that stage, a young man approached me and said, "I heard what you said and I would like you to do just one thing. Would you give me a hug? I came out to my parents five years ago, and since then they haven't permitted me to be part of the family. I really miss the hugs I used to get from my mother." Right there, he got one long, enthusiastic hug.

At the 2004 United Methodist Church General Conference in Pittsburgh, we wore rain-bow stoles as a visible sign of our desire for full inclusion of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender persons in the life and ministry of the church. Our group of parents made 1,000 stoles, and all were gone after a few days. They were taken by people who made donations so we could make more. The best we could do was to get pieces of material and tear them into strips. We saw stoles around the necks of delegates, bishops and visitors. They were everywhere. We were on Cloud 9. We knew God was in that place. However, as predicted, the votes on the GLBT issues went against us in Pittsburgh, which was discouraging. Immediately after those votes, we attended a noontime communion service. At that service, a pastor who is a friend of mine threw the empty chalice on the floor in anger and pain, and it broke into many pieces. After a bit, he and several others knelt and picked up the pieces. Over the next few days, the pieces of the chalice were glued back together—an act of symbolic significance. When we returned to our prayer vigil in a skywalk, we saw signs of love. People stopped to say, "Thank you for being here. Bless you for being here." A few hugged us or gently took our hands. A mother from

Georgia hugged me and said, "I am so sorry for what we did in there. I just wish I had your courage."

On the last Wednesday of the 2004 General Conference we received word that we would be allowed to stage a peaceful demonstration inside the hall where the delegates were meeting. Our United Methodist groups did this demonstration walk with members of the interfaith Soulforce group. It was a peaceful interruption of the conference. A single voice called out, "Those who want to reconcile, those who want justice, come out and join us." It was the voice of Jimmy Creech. We sang as we walked through the aisles. Some delegates stood to show support. Hundreds came from the stands where the visitors sat and joined us in our walk. Some bishops were standing—we were told the number standing was 30. A few bishops walked with us. A gentleman who was 92 years old and had been to all the general conferences but was not sure he would make the next one said he would join us if he could hold onto my arm. The two of us walked together the rest of the way.

We in PFLAG and in the Reconciling Ministries Network hope that in 10 or 20 years there will be no more need for our organizations. By then, we hope and pray, everyone will have equal rights in our churches regardless of sexual orientation. By then, we hope the bias against GLBTs in our culture will have largely disappeared. Certainly in America, that is possible. Let's all work towards it.

Betty Dorr is a member of the Parents Reconciling Network Steering Committee, and a PRN Conference Coordinator for the Nebraska Annual Conference.

Are you going to be a delegate to **Annual Conference**?
Can **YOU** elect progressive delegates to **General Conference**? **YOU can make a difference!**
DECISIONS ... DECISIONS

WELCOME LEE SCHUBERT AND BOB SWING!

The PRN Steering Committee is a national leadership team of conference coordinators and at-large members. We welcome **Bob Swing**, of Knoxville, Tennessee, our new Southeast Jurisdictional Co-Coordinator, **Lee Schubert**, of Madison, New Jersey, our new Northeast Jurisdictional Co-Coordinator, and **Joy Watts**, our East Ohio Conference Coordinator. Welcome aboard Bob, Joy and Lee!

Central Conference Initiative

Do you know any parents or other contact persons in the central conferences in Africa, Europe, or the Philippines who might be interested in a PRN presence and witness in their region? Please contact Reg Olson at reginald.olson@sbcglobal.net.

A Holiday Prayer

You keep us waiting, You, the God of all time, want us to wait for the right time in which to discover who we are, where we are to go, who will be with us, and what we must do. **So thank you ... for the waiting time.**

You keep us looking, You the God of all space, want us to look in the right and wrong places for signs of hope, for people who are hopeless, for visions of a better world which will appear among the disappointments of the world we know. **So thank you ... for the looking time.**

You keep us loving, You, the God whose name is love, want us to be like you—to love the loveless and the unlovely and the unlovable; to love without jealousy or design or threat; and, most difficult of all, to love ourselves. **So thank you ... for the loving time.**

And in all this, you keep us. Through hard questions with no easy answers; through failing where we hoped to succeed and making an impact when we felt we were useless; through the patience and the dreams and the love of others; and through Jesus Christ and his Spirit, you keep us. **So thank you ... for the "keeping time," and for now and for ever, Amen,**

By John Bell, Iona Community, in Dorothy Stewart, *The Westminster Collection of Christian Prayers*. 2002

"There are homosexuals in heaven."

... God

[What do you think of this message?]