Where Can I Take My Kids To Church?
by Rev. Carl Davis

“Where can I take my kids to church?” Sandy asked me a few weeks after the bishop removed me from the pastorate of her church because I’m gay. “What do you mean?” I asked. “Your family has been a part of your church for generations.”

“But, I can’t keep taking my kids to a church that treats gay people that way. What if one of my kids turns out to be gay? Or even if they aren’t, I can’t raise them in a church that teaches them that it is okay to discriminate. Where can I take my kids to church?”

I didn’t have an answer. The sad truth is that there were no churches of any denomination within driving distance of Sandy’s small town where God’s love for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people was openly proclaimed in policy and practice.

I am hurt and angered by the anti-gay policies of The United Methodist Church which cause damage and destruction not only to LGBT people like me, but also to people like Sandy and her children. Sandy deserves to have a congregation in her town where she can take her children without worrying that they will experience homophobia from the pulpit or from the practice of the church. The babies I baptized while serving as a United Methodist pastor deserve to be raised in churches where they are

Easter Hope
By Sally Sparks, RMN Board Member

This past Easter morning I woke to a spectacular sunrise; bright, warm, and cloudless. The daffodils are popping, and a bird is busily tucking a nest on a beam under the roof. This is my first Easter in my native deep south since I left Alabama 28 years ago. Things were different then. I had an easy upbringing, taking for granted my privileged position as white, male, affluent, and being fortunate enough to grow up in a loving home. No one saw the struggle I kept to myself. As I child, I would go to bed dreaming I would wake up and be a girl. I succeeded at boyhood, but it didn’t feel right. This southern Easter morning reminds me of a recurring nightmare that haunted me when I was very young; only about 8 or 9. In the dream I woke to a glorious Easter very much like today; but this time my wish had come true, I was that little girl I longed to be. Laid out in my bedroom was a new Easter dress; that Easter daffodil and downy chick yellow. I put it on and was quickly out the door, eager to go to church. I walked down to the main road looking for someone to take me to worship. Cars streamed past full of people decked out in their Easter finery. Cars slowed, but didn’t stop. Some laughed. All stared. No one would take me to church. I looked in a mirror and saw what was wrong. Although I got my wish and was a little girl, I was completely bald! The details of the dream changed over time, by Rev. Carl Davis

I remember when I used to call church home. I most regretfully resigned from the candidacy process for ordination in the United Methodist Church, not because I am not called to serve, but because I am not allowed to serve as God has created me.

-Joseph Allen Kyser

Continued on Page 6

Continued on Page 6
Woodlawn UMC, Birmingham, AL
By Rachel Harvey, Deaconess

On May 31, 2009 a fire began in the basement of Woodlawn UMC that consumed its historic sanctuary and pipe organ. While this fire may have displaced some faith communities and stifled their voice, the community at Woodlawn UMC decided to pick up the pieces, open their doors and sing a new song.

A Believe Out Loud training hosted by Woodlawn early in 2010 fanned a flame of inclusion that had been burning at Woodlawn for generations. “When I arrived at Woodlawn UMC in 1994, I discovered that one of the church’s former pastors had already sown the seeds of love and acceptance of all God’s children. I simply continued to preach that same love and acceptance that the community had been hearing for generations” Larry Horne, Woodlawn pastor shared. The Believe Out Loud training provided a catalyst for Woodlawn to envision what it means to be the church. After the training, Matt Lacy, new outreach minister, and his wife Katie Gilbert led a visioning team with the specific task of developing a vision and mission statement for the church. Woodlawn’s mission and vision statements are inherently reconciling, which is a reflection of both who they are, and who they seek to be as a community.

As news of Woodlawn’s decision to join RMN spread throughout the movement it carried hope, courage and joy with it. For weeks the RMN office received phone calls verifying that the information in Flashnet was correct, “Do we really have a church in Alabama? That’s amazing, maybe I can really get my church to start the process...if they can do it in Alabama, we can at least try!” Woodlawn’s bold Reconciling identity not only lends courage to churches in the process, it also sends a clear message that all are welcome. Norm Osland, a Reconciling United Methodist in Toledo, Ohio shared his excitement via Facebook saying, “I once attended the first (Reconciling church) in Texas...know how important your faithful witness is even to those you have never met, and may never meet. Every time I have been in Alabama I have kept on drivin’, now it is so wonderful to know that there is a place stop and worship.”

The phone calls and Facebook posts Woodlawn have received mirror Larry’s hope for their witness as the

New Reconciling Communities

Churches:
UMC of Merced of Merced, CA
Walnut Hills UMC of Urbandale, IA
Woodlawn UMC of Birmingham, AL
St. Andrew UMC of Highlands Ranch, CO

Communities:
The Friends of Trinity of Salina, KS
United Methodist Laity & Retired Clergy of the Rochester, NY Area

Continued on Page 6
How You Can Get Involved

By Rev. Carl Davis

As you read this edition of Katalyst, you will hear the stories of people who have been hurt by the discriminatory policies and practices of The United Methodist Church - effective pastors removed from pulpits (often against the wishes of their congregation), children taught that God’s welcome didn’t extend to them because they were different, a promising seminary student denied ordination because it was rumored that he was “a queer”, a straight pastor denied ordained standing in The United Methodist Church after preaching a sermon condemning anti-gay violence in his community. Many of you reading this have similar stories from your own life and interactions with the Church.

Hearing these stories reminds us of how broad the problem of discrimination is and causes each of us to ask ourselves the question “Can I do anything to fix this problem?” The answer to that question is YES. Yes, each of us can, MUST work to fix this problem. But how?

First of all, we must remember that it is God alone who has created us, redeemed us and sustains us – not another person, or group of people – not even if that person is called a pastor or a bishop and not even if that group of people is called a denomination or a board of ordained ministry. Our value and worth come from our identity as children of God and we are ALL God’s children solely because of God’s choosing – no one and nothing can ever change that. Always remember, YOU are of sacred worth no matter what. All of the work we do for change is rooted in that reality.

Next, we can be the change we wish to see. Let each of us examine the way we think about and treat others to be sure that we aren’t ourselves causing harm. Let each of us strive to live by the golden rule each day.

Finally and very importantly, we can work together to end this culture of discrimination by sharing and investing our resources according to our inclusive values.

For the last 25 years RMN has been working to end discrimination against LGBT people in The United Methodist Church. While our mission is not yet accomplished we are nearing the tipping point. For instance, while the last General Conference voted to retain the “incompatibility clause” it did so by the smallest margin ever – only 54.6% in favor of discrimination, down from a high of 80.9% back in 1988. This progress is only possible because people like you and I make financial contributions to RMN. As we continue to share, we
OUR STORIES

Within a four month period the RMN office received six stories from people who have been excluded from participating in the life of The United Methodist Church because of discriminatory policies in the Book of Discipline. Here are a few of their stories.

Violet

Growing up, I was taught that being gay or lesbian was “sinful and immoral.” After I became an adult and joined a UMC church, I became more open-minded. I began to explore my own sexuality and gender issues.

When I began my gender transition in the summer of 2008, in the midst of all of the uncertainty that comes with such a huge change, the one certain aspect that I had was the fact that I would be loved and accepted in the church I was attending. That all changed in June of 2009.

I had attended Boston Avenue UMC for nearly five years and had been living full-time as myself for six months. One Sunday, I brought a friend of mine who was also transgender to church. The following Friday, I was asked to attend a meeting in the office of one of the Associate Ministers. There, I was asked to leave the Sunday School class that I had been a member of for over four years. I was told that there were many who were uncomfortable with me and I was blamed for the decline in class attendance. Rather than allowing me to remain in the class, I was asked to leave simply because ten other members threatened to leave. The Senior Minister refused to do anything.

I was shocked and hurt deeply and I felt betrayed. The open-minds and acceptance that I had before were no longer there. Now, I am a Reconciling Methodist in exile because there are no open and affirming congregations anywhere near me. Despite this, I remain optimistic and know that with time and hard work, the UMC will become a Reconciling denomination.

James

When I settled into the panhandle of Florida I found myself amongst small Methodist Churches one every five miles. One day over coffee, I told a Pastor my regret that I never became a Pastor. He asked me why I had not pursued the ministry. I replied, “I never felt good enough.” Again he asked why? I said, “Because I’m a recovering alcoholic.” His reply was “so what” he was one too and it was one of his assets as a pastor and not a liability. Then he asked what else? I told him I was gay. After a long pause he told me that we would keep that information between him and me. Then he urged me to send a letter to the District Superintendent regarding my willingness to serve.

Things were happening fast. Within a year I was attending seminary, I had quit my job and was appointed as an Associate Pastor to a larger church. The next year I was appointed full time as a local pastor while attending seminary. Halfway through the second year, I was having dinner with a friend and a gay friendly couple from my church. This sparked rumors at the local hardware store that the pastor at the Methodist Church was queer. In January 2010 I was voted out. Within two weeks the church board asked that I resign immediately. My career as a licensed local pastor and a candidate for probationary elder was over in one hostile meeting without my presence. I have tried to look into other denominations but my heart is aching for the denomination I have the greatest passion for. To take me out of the ministry is like amputating one of my arms. Being gay has always been such a small part of my life that being “celibate in singleness” was painful but tolerable.

The Chairperson of the District Committee on Ordained Ministry asked why I wasn’t open about my sexual orientation as I had been about my recovery from alcoholism. My answer was “FEAR!” The board went against the bishop’s wishes and gave me the best status they could as “a Candidate in Good Standing without an Appointment.” Their hope is that another conference would accept me just the way I am—a faithful pastor, making sacrifices to serve the church I love.
This moment I’m trying to find out or get the call of God in my life that is slipping away from my hands. I will have to say good bye to the church I came to serve leaving family and country behind because I believed there was a chance to fulfill my call in this place. It was in this United Methodist church where I found the grace and love of Christ that I never received in Latin American Protestantism. This faith that I rediscovered took me to finally accept myself as a gay man last May 2009. I know I am called to teach others different ways to encounter the magnificence of Christ. I am called to be real, open and vulnerable. A year ago I started to write an online blog about being open and vulnerable; well I could not live a double life anymore if I was teaching that. I have talked to other denominations. I do not want to go to another denomination, but I think I am giving up on the idea of serving the church, even in general. I know that God has called me and it does not matter where I am serving, in or outside the church, I am still serving Him. I do not know what to do now; I have lost friends that I loved dearly, but my ex-wife is one of the most supportive friends I have and she does not live right so I can be raised up (amazing woman!) and my family is for me. My D.S. was a great support for me but on July 1, 2010 my license as a pastor is not going to be renewed and the reason given was that they cannot appoint me as a “phantom” ministry. Yes maybe we do not have the numbers to become a self-sustaining church, but we have the many voices that we have helped throughout these 9 years serving this conference, and the many ministries we helped start. Ironically even though the slogan of the church is open doors, I feel that they have closed the doors for me, and without their support we have lost the hope to keep working for our community. People will think that I did not try enough to change, but they really do not know my journey. This journey took me to an ex-gay ministry who took me to fall into a cycle of self-destruction, depression, not acceptance, guiltiness, and emotional instability. So my question will be? Is it better to deny who you are and live a pretend life? Because for me coming out saved my life, and took me out from this unhealthy cycle into a search of my true self. I know that finally I am who I am as a person, and as a child of God.

David

My name is David Jenkins and I was recently discontinued from probationary membership in the Kansas West Annual Conference just months before becoming a full elder.

A short time after I was appointed to the Sharon Springs, KS United Methodist Church a high school student, alleged to be gay, was savagely beaten by another student who intended to blow him up inside his own home. Fortunately, the bomb did not function. Several students in our community said that if he were gay, he got what he deserved. I felt it necessary to preach on the love, grace, and compassion of Christ for all people and that no one ever deserves that type of treatment. Many in the congregation felt it was the best sermon I had preached and requested a copy of it.

A few folks, strong adherents to Focus on the Family, decided it was too liberal for them and “their” church. Unfortunately, the District Superintendent decided, in my opinion, that it was easier to remove me than bear the brunt of their anger and filed a complaint against me. In contradiction to the reports from PPRC members, the DS alleged that they voted to remove me immediately. I was never allowed to be present at any of these meetings.

As a result of all this injustice, the Sharon Springs charge has lost about 20-25% of its membership and the Weskan charge is in the process of officially withdrawing from the UMC. My wife and I were forced to leave the parsonage at the end of January and are now paying rent in public housing while living on a part-time teacher’s salary. We are now without health insurance and I have lost my pension. All the hard work I did to become a full elder was for naught. As this door closes in Kansas West, I pray God will help me find the door opening for a pastor who dares to preach a sermon against violence.
treated with equal value as they grow up no matter what their sexual orientation or gender identity may be.

That is why I work for and support Reconciling Ministries Network today. After my service as a local pastor in The United Methodist Church was ended following a call to my bishop’s office made by the pastor of a different church in our community, reporting that I was one of God’s gay children, I initially planned to return to my home denomination where I held ordained standing and serve a congregation in that tradition where my sexual orientation would not be an issue. But Sandy’s call broke my pastor’s heart and changed my mind. I knew I had to do something so that other pastors and other parishioners wouldn’t be hurt like this in the future.

This situation is not unique. There are many people like Sandy all around the country, especially in our many rural communities - people who just want to go to a church that treats all people the same no matter what their sexual orientation or gender identity may be, people who want to have a church in their community where their children learn about God’s love for ALL people, period.

Reconciling Ministries Network is doing more to make that dream a reality than any other agency I know of. By working to end the codified discrimination against God’s non-straight children in the second largest Protestant denomination, RMN is working to share God’s inclusive love in small towns and big cities as far as The United Methodist Church stretches so that one day, Sandy will have a church in her town, where she feels comfortable taking her children to learn the love of Jesus, a church that transforms the world by living out the Gospel’s teaching of justice and inclusion.

WHERE CAN I TAKE MY KIDS TO CHURCH, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

WOODLAWN UMC, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

first Reconciling church in Alabama, “I certainly hope and pray that our actions will embolden others to be more intentional in speaking out and working for the day when all of the children of God, without exception, are welcome at God’s expansive and inclusive table of grace.” Whether you find yourself traveling through Alabama or reaching electronically across the miles, know you are welcome at Woodlawn UMC where daily they answer the question… Who will build the church? We’ll build it together!

EASTER HOPE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

but the theme was always the same: If people know the real you, then YOU ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE, especially in church!

I left Alabama in part for the adventure of life overseas, and in part to try to escape the anguish of hiding. Now, 45 years after that first nightmare, I’ve come back. My gender angst resolved years ago, I return to the south as a middle-aged woman looking for peace and community. Sadly, if you are different it is still hard to find. Reconciling communities in this part of the world are few and far between, and strides for equality less visible than in some other places. I’m saddened that my childhood nightmare is still alive. Where are the communities of believers who will accept all people as part of their own?

The Easter message of hope is punctuated with the buds and nesting birds, assuring me that our brutal, record-breaking winter has been served notice, and the fierce time of hate and exclusion wanes and will not prevail. There are new green shoots in our movement. The first reconciling congregation in Alabama has been established. Clergy from my former home church, Dumbarton United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C. have declared that they would conduct same-sex marriage ceremonies after Congress failed to override D.C.’s new law permitting them. With the health care vote behind us, focus in political circles turns to employment rights through ENDA. The spring thaw has come, and now is such a critical time to be planting seeds of change. Even in difficult places, you can make a difference. Help sponsor a BOLD gathering in your community. Connect with RUMs in your Annual Conference to take action. Everyone counts and anyone can help.

I’m dreaming of a time where no 8-year-old child will have nightmares about rejection from the church. And I dream of an Easter morning where a middle-aged lesbian, bisexual, gay or transgender person can walk into any United Methodist Church and know that acceptance, fellowship, love, and all opportunities await. It’s spring. Let’s plant some seeds.

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

will continue to see progress resulting in the day when all of us are treated equally.

RMN’s faithful witness and grassroots organizing is having a positive impact. Change is coming because of the support and donations from people like you and I made not only on behalf of ourselves, but on behalf of the people whose stories appear in this newsletter and the many like them throughout the Church.

I invite you to join me in creating a Church for ALL God’s children through a financial gift to RMN today.

Please visit donate.rmnetwork.org or send your check to:

Reconciling Ministries Network
3801 N. Keeler Ave. Floor 3
Chicago, IL 60641

Also remember that many employers match their employee’s charitable donations so be sure to ask your employer about this option. If you would like to speak with someone about ways you can support RMN (ranging from hosting a dinner party to making a planned gift, or a gift of stock or real property) please call me at (773) 736-5526.
Take Action
By Audrey Krumbach

Now that you have heard these stories of exclusion, are you ready to take action? Here are a few simple ways you can work to end discrimination in our church and world. Find a friend to help you, choose one of the below action items and begin today in your home to make a change that helps our church and world move towards God’s fully inclusive vision where all people are welcome at the table.

BEGIN A CONVERSATION ABOUT FULL INCLUSION IN YOUR CONGREGATION:
• Meet with a few supportive friends
• Share why each of you are committed to working for full inclusion
• Together, offer education for your congregation. RMN recommends:
  Claiming the Promise, a Bible study on what the Bible really says
  Talking about Homosexuality, a Wesleyan study on church and sexuality
  For the Bible Tells Me So film, or the Reconciling Voices DVD.
• Call RMN and ask about next steps

SUPPORT THE “EMPLOYMENT NON-DISCRIMINATION ACT” (ENDA)
• This bill extends federal employment protections against discrimination based upon race, color, religion, sex or national origin to include “sexual orientation and gender identity.” Right now, it is legal to harass or fire employees based on gender identity in 38 states, and sexual orientation in 29 states.
• To support this law, call your congress people at (202) 224-3121 and ask for them by name and district/state. Ask for the staffer in charge of labor issues. Say, “I am a constituent calling about the Employment non-Discrimination Act (Senate bill # 1584/ House Resolution 3017). I want you to fully support the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. No qualified person should be discriminated against or fear harassment at work. I strongly urge you to support the speedy passage of this bill.”

ADD GENDER IDENTITY (TRANSGENDER) TO YOUR CHURCH’S RECONCILING STATEMENT:
• Study gender diversity. RMN recommends:
  Made In God’s Image by Ann Thompson Cook
  TransAction curriculum at www.welcomingresources.org/transgender
• Invite the congregation to add gender identity by voice-vote in worship; update church media and publications.

CREATE A CULTURE OF INCLUSION AND SUPPORT FOR RMN IN YOUR AREA:
• Write a letter/article in your church newsletter about full inclusion.
• Call your bishop and ask her/him to preach about the sins of racism, sexism, able-ism, ageism, heterosexism and homophobia.
• Wear your RMN pin/buttons to events. When people ask say, I believe Jesus would not exclude gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

BELIEVE OUT LOUD: BE PART OF A NATIONAL HOUSE-GATHERINGS CAMPAIGN
• Order a Believe Out Loud House Party Kit from RMN
• Invite 12 friends or church members
• Share stories of full inclusion.
• Invite participants to sign up as BOLD RUMs.

SAVE THE DATE!
Reconciling Ministries Network is excited to announce the dates for Convocation 2011 at Sawmill Creek Resort in Huron, OH. So get out your calendars and save:
August 25th - 28th
For more information visit:
http://convo2011.rmnetwork.org

Together Our Small Actions Make a Big Difference!
Dear Bishop,

I am a Reconciling United Methodist.

I believe when Jesus said “love your neighbor,” he meant the church should include whosoever believes in Christ.

At my baptism, I accepted the freedom and power God gives to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. As a Reconciling United Methodist, working to end exclusion, I live out that vow.

Today, I call for the full inclusion of all gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Christians in participation and leadership of The United Methodist Church.

Please take part in God’s transforming work by teaching about the sin of homophobia and preaching the inclusive gospel of Jesus Christ at Annual Conference next year.

Cut out and mail to your Bishop after Annual Conference