



The Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists

Associational

An Ongoing eNewsletter from the Executive Director

Issue 49 ~ November 2008

From the Executive Director

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

On Sunday, Oct. 26, 2008, Rev. Dr. Richard Groves retired as pastor of Wake Forest Baptist Church (W&A), Winston-Salem, NC, where he served as pastor for the past twenty-three years. The Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists congratulates you, Richard! We are so very grateful to you for your many years of service in the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

You are a hero of the welcoming and affirming movement! Despite much resistance, you led your congregation through a discernment process to become welcoming and affirming. Though institutional leaders advised you not to go public with an affirmation of LGBT Christians and threatened to cut you off, you demonstrated the courage of your convictions and you "obeyed God rather than humans" (Acts 4:19). You opened your hearts and arms to lesbian and gay Christians who have found a place of hope, healing, and belonging at Wake Forest Baptist Church. As a result, God has brought great blessing to the congregation through LGBT Christians who have joined the church and used their gifts for ministry and leadership.

For twenty-three years, "the joy of the Lord has been your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10) as you have served Wake Forest Baptist Church as pastor, preacher, teacher, prophet, activist, and administrator. On my first visit to your church last October, I was a bit in awe of you because of your impressive credentials and accomplishments. But you greeted me with warmth and compassion, and I knew in an instant that you were humble, authentic, and approachable. After worship, we walked out of the sanctuary into the vestibule, and you jumped up, clicked your heels together and gave me a "high five." I was amused and delighted by your joy, energy, and enthusiasm, and I immediately identified you with King David dancing before the Lord with all his might at the return of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (II Samuel 6:14).

As you transition into retirement, Richard, I know you will continue dancing before the Lord with all your might. AWAB wishes you the richness, fullness, and, bounty of the Lord in all your future endeavors. May God do immeasurably more than you may ask or imagine, according to the divine power that is at work within you (Ephesians 3:20)!

With great love and appreciation,
Rev. Ken Pennings

INSIDE

- **From the Executive Director** – pg 1
- **First United Church of Bloomington Joins AWAB** – pg 1
- **Volunteer Acknowledged** – pg 2
- **Connecticut Court Rules in Favor of Same-Sex Marriage** – pg 2
- **"Hope not Hate" Candlelight Vigil Held** – pg 2
- **Ugandan Lesbian Receives Asylum** – pg 3
- **Church News** – pg 4
- **Bits 'n' Bytes** – pg 4
- **Upcoming Events** – pg 5

About Associational

Associational is published monthly by the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, an organization of churches, groups and individuals that advocate for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons with Baptist churches.

© 2008, The Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists,
All rights reserved

Barbara Hulsing, Editor

608-255-2155, mail@wabaptists.org
PO Box 259257, Madison, WI 53725

First United Church of Bloomington Joins AWAB

The First United Church of Bloomington, IN, was recently accepted into membership in the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists. As stated on their web site (www.firstunitedchurchbloomington.org). "First United Church is an inclusive community of Christian faith. We are a unified congregation proudly affiliated with two denominations – American Baptist Churches USA and United Church of Christ – but our

congregation includes persons from many different religious backgrounds. Both denominations are committed to the principles of congregational independence and freedom of the individual believer to interpret scripture in the light of his own experience of God. As we value diversity on the one hand, on the other we are united in our faith in Jesus Christ. That faith is central to our witness as a congregation. Our purpose is to help each other live out this Christian commitment through worship, study, and service, as we are also committed to invite others to share the good news of Jesus Christ." First United's Pastor is the Rev. Dr. Jack Skiles. We welcome them to AWAB and wish them blessings upon their ministry.

Volunteer Acknowledged

For the past 3 years, Ms. Bessie Woodward (First Baptist Church, Madison, WI – W&A) has processed the quarterly mailings of ten copies of AWAB's journal *The InSpiriter* to every one of our member congregations. Thanks Bessie for your dedication and commitment to this ministry! Bessie can be contacted at bew356@aim.com.

Connecticut Court Rules in Favor of Same-Sex Marriage

from courant.com, October 23, 2008, with contributions by Bill Leukhardt

The [Connecticut] Supreme Court on Friday [October 17] delivered gay and lesbian couples the validation they have long been seeking — the right to marry. In a 4-3 decision, the court ruled that same-sex couples cannot be prevented from marrying — and that civil unions, those marriage-like legal arrangements that Connecticut has offered to gay people since 2005, are not an acceptable substitute. "Interpreting our state constitutional provisions in accordance with firmly established equal protection principles leads inevitably to the conclusion that gay persons are entitled to marry the ... same-sex partner of their choice," Justice Richard Palmer wrote. "To decide otherwise would require us to apply one set of constitutional principles to gay persons and another to all others."

Connecticut will join [Massachusetts](#) and [California](#) as the only states to permit gay partners to wed. Meanwhile, high courts in [New York](#) and [New Jersey](#) have opted not to expand the legal rights of same-sex couples. Friday's landmark decision was met with cheers and tears of joy from gay activists throughout the state and nation. . . The ruling culminates a long march toward acceptance for gay and lesbian couples, a journey that has shifted from the halls of the state Capitol to the chambers of the state's highest court. Through the years, legislators held countless hearings, and political support kept building — but gay rights activists decided last year to wait until the courts had weighed in.

“Hope not Hate” Candlelight Vigil Held

On Sunday, October 12, University Baptist Church hosted "Hope Not Hate," a gathering on the 10th anniversary of the hate killings of James Byrd, Jr. and Matthew Shepard. Equality Texas Foundation, The African American Diversity Ministry of MCC Austin at Freedom Oaks, Soulforce, Church of the Savior, and University Baptist Church invited the public to attend a candlelight vigil where Central Texans gathered in support of hope not hate and to honor and remember the victims of hate crimes in Texas and across the country. The keynote speaker for the gathering was Rev. Dr. Stephen Sprinkle, Associate Professor of Practical Theology at TCU's Brite Divinity School. Austin Police Chief Art Acevedo also offered his remarks.

"It is important that we not let our lasting images of these two men, James Byrd, Jr. and Matthew Shepard, be images of them as the victims of hate. Rather, we are called by their memories to do all we can to ensure that hate will never be the final word. We are called to join our hope for a more just, fair, and compassionate world with our actions in a way that brings about true and lasting change," stated Rev. Karen Thompson, Senior Pastor, MCC Austin at Freedom Oaks. Paul Scott, executive director of Equality Texas Foundation added, "We continue to educate Texans that hate crimes still occur across the state and that our fellow citizens are targeted for physical harm because of prejudice, ignorance, and fear."

Fact: From 2001 through 2006, 1,862 hate crimes have been reported, but only 9 prosecutions obtained.

Ugandan Lesbian Receives Asylum

from *Other Sheep East Africa eNews*, October 21, 2008

Prossy Kakooza was granted asylum in the UK on Friday, October 17, fifteen months and three court cases after applying. She is now able to live, work, and study in the United Kingdom on the same basis as any UK National for the next five years. After that, she will be allowed to apply for permanent residence and then citizenship. Prossy has been amazed at the level of support from people, including:

- 5200 people from countries and church congregations all over the world who signed her petition to the Home Office asking that she be allowed to stay
- Hundreds of people who wrote or emailed the Immigration Minister
- The eighty members and friends of MCC Manchester who supported her with their love, prayers, money, and concern
- The nineteen friends who went to court with her and helped her collect signatures at Pride festivals all over the country
- The ten friends who gave evidence in court on her behalf
- The three amazing lawyers who drafted and prepared her case

But, most of all, Prossy has faced this ordeal with quiet dignity, humor, and faith!

Church News

Good Shepherd Community of Faith, an American Baptist and UCC congregation and an AWAB member church located in Buffalo, NY, recently conducted a “Trans 101” course and opened it to the public. Led by a locally well-known Transgender woman, Camille Hopkins, the presentation covered information on how to respect a transsexual person, resources for transgender topics, understanding transsexualism, and frequently asked questions about transgender and intersexed people.

In November, Good Shepherd will host a community forum on marriage equality. Several local politicians have been invited to speak as hopes are high that New York will soon join the ranks of Massachusetts, California, and Connecticut in allowing same-sex marriages.

Tell us what is happening at your church! You can send the information to bhulsing@timeposition.com so that it can be included in AWAB’s e-newsletter.

Bits ‘n’ Bytes

- **Santa Fe, New Mexico**—The National Board of Directors of More Light Presbyterians is pleased to announce that it has named **Toby Rogers** as its **Associate Director for Marketing and Development**. This is a new position created through the generosity of **The Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, San Francisco, CA** and donations from More Light Presbyterian churches, chapters and supporters. "We are excited that Toby is joining the national MLP team. His commitment to LGBT equality, experience in working for other justice causes, and his proven track record in communications and fundraising make him an ideal leader for this new position. We give thanks to God for the ability to increase our national staff and to expand our outreach, advocacy and service around the country," said **Vikki Dearing**, Co-Moderator. .
- Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, author of *Omnigender*, and one of the foremost theologians writing today, has just published a beautifully revised and expanded edition of the classic text, *Sensuous Spirituality*:

Out from Fundamentalism. This is a must read: At once wise and accessible, provocative and holy, this new edition offers fresh wisdom on transgender experience combined with the paradigm shattering analysis of the original version. Whether you are new to Mollenkott's work or know her work intimately, you'll want a copy for yourself and for those in your community.

- The Jewish organization *Keshet* announces the availability of *Hineini: Coming Out in a Jewish High School* on DVD. This film explores the potentially explosive topic with sensitivity and intelligence. All sales support Keshet's powerful mission "to ensure that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Jews are fully welcomed and included in all parts of the Jewish community." To order, go to www.hineinthefilm.org.
- When film maker Macky Alston's fellow seminarian, Alan Smith, died of AIDS, Alston had a crisis of faith that caused him to make a new documentary, *Questioning Faith*. Alston sought out Smith's partner and family and tried to answer the question "Why does God permit such senseless tragedies." At stake here is not only whether or not Alston can maintain his faith, but also how human beings navigate their way through the darkest hours of seemingly senseless loss. The DVD is available through Docurama Films at (646) 259-4113 or jbrantley@newvideo.com.
- **Arkansas** – The Arkansas Department of Human Services has announced it will repeal a rule banning same-sex couples and unmarried people from being foster parents. Governor Mike Beebe supports the repeal of the ban and has cited the need for more foster homes to look after children in need. On any given day about 3,700 foster children are in Arkansas state custody, with only 1,100 foster homes available.
- **Texas** – The Dallas Independent School District has reached an agreement with Lambda Legal to make Dallas schools safer for LGBT students, teachers and parents. The new non-discrimination policy will include training on LGBT issues as part of diversity training for staff members; allow LGBT groups to provide in-service training for teachers; use LGBT-friendly permission slips referring to "Parent 1" and "Parent 2"; provide and make visible LGBT-friendly materials in libraries, instead of held behind school library counters; make Lambda Legal materials on the rights of LGBT youth available to all middle and high school Counseling Offices; and allow access to websites of educational LGBT organizations that had been blocked.

Upcoming Events

Towards a Welcoming and Inclusive Church Trainings

Independence, MO — Towards a Welcoming and Inclusive Church

November 7 - 9, 2008

Cornerstone Community of Christ

Independence, MO

These trainings are relevant for Baptist churches that are already W&A as well as for churches just beginning the conversation. Please get the word out to your networks about these trainings. Can you possibly register for one of the trainings yourself? Can you possibly get folks from your own local church to attend one of the trainings as a group so that you can return to your own community and work as a team to increase the number of W&A Baptist congregations? Info and registration materials at www.welcomingresources.org.

Equality Ohio Luncheon

On Thursday, November 13, Equality Ohio and Faith and Equality are sponsoring an Ohio Progress and Faith Luncheon at the Ohio State House in Columbus. Religion Council member Bishop John Selders will be the keynote speaker.

The organizers ask Ohioans to "explore with state legislators a faith-based rationale for ending discrimination in Ohio." Visit www.equalityohio.org for more information.

Associational is a periodic e-newsletter of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, a network of 71 churches and hundreds of individuals who have joined together to advocate for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons within Baptist communities of faith. Please forward this e-newsletter to interested friends. Copy relevant information into your organization's bulletin and newsletter. To subscribe, send an e-mail to subscribe@wabaptists.org with SUBSCRIBE in the subject line. To be removed from this list, send an e-mail to unsubscribe@wabaptists.org with REMOVE in the subject line. To read back issues of Associational, go to: www.wabaptists.org/associational.htm.

To learn more about the Association, go to: www.wabaptists.org