



The Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists

Associational

A Ongoing eNewsletter from the Executive Director

Issue 16 ~ November 14, 2005

INSIDE

- Dr. Stephen Jones Receives HRC Equality Award
- AWAB Congregations Welcomed Into the Rochester/Genesee Region
- Difficult and Painful Meeting in Mid-American Region
- West Virginia Baptists Reject Proposal to Split
- Report on the Ninth LGBT Baptist Retreat, Austin, TX
- Beth Stroud Denied Call in the United Methodist Church
- Maine Voters Reject Anti-gay Ballot Initiative
- Texas Voters Approve Anti-marriage Amendment
- Wisconsin's Proposed Anti-Marriage Amendment
- Sermon By Harry Knox, Director of Religion and Faith Program, HRC
- Ken Sehested Recommends New Book
- John Shelby Spong Recommends New Book
- First Baptist Granville, OH, Seeks Pastor
- Calendar of Events

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.

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

From the Executive Director

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The Council of The Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists (AWAB) met October 28-30, 2006, in Madison, Wisconsin, for a Strategic Planning Retreat. To say that we picked up momentum for our ministries of inclusion would be an understatement. We're pretty much moving full speed ahead!

I hope you'll be as excited as we are about our plans for 2006. We're calling this initiative, **"Expanding the Welcoming Church" Twelve-Stop Tour**. Many of our AWAB pastors have already expressed great interest and energy for this **Twelve-Stop Tour**. We envision the following twelve outcomes:

- 1) 12 community-building events throughout the United States
- 2) 12 prospective new member congregations
- 3) 144 new individual members (including 24 people of color & 24 youths) (\$50 x 144 = \$7,200)
- 4) 12 local chapters
- 5) 12 major donors (\$10,000 x 12 = \$120,000)
- 6) 12 local coordinators (clergy or lay leaders)
 - coordinate local chapter (12 individual members)
 - coordinate local participation in regional & national events
- 7) 12 "welcoming church" stories for The InSpiriter (winter 2007 issue)
- 8) 12 new individual and/or congregational ministries of inclusion
- 9) 12 appeals for Progressive Baptist partners (preparation for a Progressive Baptist National Conference)
- 10) 12 new resources (for instruction, worship, advocacy, etc.)
- 11) 12 prospective new council members
- 12) 12 media blitzes (to increase visibility and name recognition for AWAB)

Our council has already gotten the word out regarding the following possible itinerary (notice the "baker's dozen" – one extra):

February – Ohio and NY, NY, **March** – San Francisco Bay Area, **April** – FL/GA/TN, **May** – DC, **June** – Chicago, IL and IN/KY (National Gathering), **July** – MA/ME, **August** – Upper Midwest (WI/MN), **September** – Seattle, WA, **October** – Austin, TX / Houston, TX, **November** – NJ/PA, **December** – NC

Yes, this is an ambitious schedule, but this in a time of tremendous opportunity for expanding ministries of the full inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People in the life of Baptist congregations! We hope to "make hay while the sun shines!" Please contact me with your suggestions for planning these twelve regional AWAB gatherings in 2006!

Lovingly,
Rev. Ken Pennings
Executive Director, ken@wabaptists.org

Dr. Stephen Jones Receives HRC Equality Award

The Human Rights Campaign is the nation's largest LGBT organization, and the HRC, at its Pacific Northwest Dinner on September 17, 2005, presented the HRC Equality Award, the highest award given in any year, to Dr. Stephen D. Jones, for his work as co-founder and co-convenor of the Religious Coalition for Equality, for his work as President of the Church Council of Greater Seattle, for his pastoral ministry at one of the city's leading Welcoming and Affirming Congregations, and for his advocacy on behalf of sexual minorities throughout his career. Jones serves as Coordinating Pastor of Seattle First Baptist Church, a member of the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists!

AWAB Congregations Welcomed Into the Rochester/Genesee Region of the ABCUSA

From Steve Hammond, Peace Community Church, Oberlin, Ohio:

Dear AWAB Sisters and Brothers,
If you haven't heard the wonderful news already, I wanted to let you know that Peace Community Church was received into the American Baptist Churches of the Rochester/Genesee Region on November 6 (along with our sister AWAB congregation the Good Shepherd Baptist Church in Buffalo NY). It was, indeed, a joyous event in the life of our congregation and marks a new chapter in our life. We have moved from an Association that could not accept and celebrate our mission and ministry, to a Region that has generously welcomed us to its table. This is a wonderful feeling, particularly given the past nine months where there has been a move in our now former Association to remove and/or punish us for our decision to become an AWAB congregation.

Throughout this ordeal, we have made it clear that our decision to join AWAB was one led and inspired by the Holy Spirit, and we were not about to turn from God's leading. It is a shame that our former Association was unable to trust our congregation's understanding of its mission and ministry. Though we regret the break in our relationship with our former Association, we have no regrets about joining AWAB. Like the ABCRGR, AWAB is a wonderful family whose wisdom and faithfulness and love gives us strength. We are glad to be partners in the Gospel of Jesus Christ with each of you.

Some of you have made it to the other side of the struggle, like we just have. Others of you are in the midst of it. We will continue to pray for the mission and ministry we are all about as we seek to live out the call to follow Jesus Christ in our own congregations and our own lives.

A Difficult and Painful Experience at Mid-American Regional Meeting

Reported by Doug Donley, Pastor – University Baptist Church (AWAB), Minneapolis, MN

The Annual Gathering of the Mid-American Baptist Churches in Harlan, Iowa was a difficult and painful experience. The events of the weekend did not live up to the title of the program "Building up the Body of Christ".

There were fine workshops led by our own Don Dresser on the situation in Nicaragua. I attended a workshop on the concerted efforts we do on behalf of those displaced and traumatized by Hurricane Katrina. But by far, the focal point was the votes on who would lead our region in the future and how we would deal with gay men and lesbians in our midst (bisexual and transgender folk aren't even on the radar screen). The Board of Region Ministries proposed a resolution to continue dialogue on issues of human sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular. Included in this resolution was a recommendation to not recognize the ordinations of openly gay and lesbian people at this time.

At most Regional meetings there are maybe 100 voting delegates. This time, there were over 200, most of whom had never attended any regional function. The resolution was amended to add the sentence, "We affirm the 1992 American Baptist Resolution which states, "The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching." They also amended the resolution to take out the words "at this time" regarding the denial of recognition of gay and lesbian pastors. This amendment was passed by a vote of 151-51-2. Another amendment was offered to recognize Lynn Welton's and Ross Aalgaard's ordinations, since they had followed all of the rules in place at the time. This amendment was defeated 37-159-7. The final resolution was passed by a vote of 143-53-2 (the text is reprinted below).

Jean Lubke, Jim Moravek, Don Dresser and others made articulate, impassioned pleas. Jean Lubke's powerful statement equating gay and lesbian folk to previous discrimination against African Americans and women was shouted down repeatedly before the

President of the Region intervened. The exclusionist group also presented their own slate of officers who were easily voted into office, above those selected by the Nominating Committee who worked hard to get a balance of gender, experience, location, clergy/lay, rural/urban, even theological perspective. The urban folk were voted out in favor of rural folk. All of the women were voted out of office except one, including Nadean Bishop. The moderates to progressives were voted out in favor of largely white male pastors. It was a sad day. As I left the church, one person said to me, "Shame on you for bringing this in to my church."

It felt abusive. I feel angry, sad, frustrated and ashamed of the ways my sisters and brothers acted on Saturday. I felt shunned and I felt that our church's ministry was marginalized in the minds of many. I had the opportunity to speak with one of the pastors who led the rally against the GLBT community after the vote. I told him that he now has a responsibility to set the tone as one of inclusion and respect going forward. I told him the ball is in his court to make this organization truly Christian and just. More than one of us wondered what would happen if we got this many delegates to address issues of poverty.

We now need to decide what we will do in the aftermath of these decisions. We need to never forsake our GLBT sisters and brothers. We need to always look to Jesus for inspiration for our ministry. We need to continue the long-term hard work of reconciliation. We need to make sure that all of this does not become our only focus. There is so much ministry to do. Please pray for our region and for all of those bruised and bleeding as a result of the actions by the majority of the delegates at the meeting in Harlan.

Here's the text of the amended resolution passed by the Region in Harlan, Iowa, on October 22:

- Whereas the 1992 resolution on homosexuality is held in tension with the 1993 American Baptist Resolution Calling for Dialogue on Human Sexuality.
- Whereas we as Mid-American Baptist Church's recognize that we are not of one mind in matters pertaining to human sexuality.
- Whereas there is a wide spectrum of Biblical and theological views represented within our region and within our churches.
- Whereas many churches may want the opportunity to continue to dialogue as called for in the 1993 American Baptist Resolution calling for Dialogue on Human Sexuality.

Therefore we as Mid-American Baptist Churches affirm the 1992 Resolution on homosexuality, "Homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching" call upon individuals and churches to stay open to dialogue and to continue to implement the 1993 American Baptist Resolution Calling for Dialogue on Human Sexuality. Therefore we will not recognize the ordinations of openly gay and lesbian persons.

West Virginia Baptists Reject Proposal to Split

By Associated Press - October 19, 2005

CLARKSBURG, WV. -- West Virginia Baptists voted Wednesday to reject a proposal to split from the American Baptist Churches-USA over its stance on homosexuality.

The proposal failed on a 391-325 vote at the West Virginia Baptist Convention's annual meeting, said the Rev. David Carrico, the convention's executive minister. He opposed the resolution.

"I see (the vote) as a message that the homosexual issue deserves careful and continued consideration. It is a deep concern for our denomination," Carrico said.

Jay Wolfe, chairman of West Virginia Baptists for Biblical Truth, which introduced the resolution, said the group objects to what it sees as a more moderate stance on homosexuality taken by American Baptist leaders.

The group's resolution said the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the affirmation of the homosexual lifestyle by some Baptist churches is contrary to biblical teaching.

Carrico said the West Virginia convention addressed homosexuality in 1991 when delegates voted for a resolution that said homosexuality is not acceptable for Christians. American Baptist churches have the same policy, he said.

Baptist churches in the Pacific Southwest announced plans earlier this year to break from the American Baptist Churches-USA over issues involving gays.

American Baptist Churches-USA has 1.5 million members in 5,800 congregations.

Report on the Ninth Annual Gay and LGBT Baptists Retreat in Austin, Texas

By Retreat Coordinator and AWAB Council Member, Bill Cox:

"One highlight of the 9th Annual Gay and Lesbian Baptist Retreat, Austin, Texas (hosted by AWAB's University Baptist Church, Austin, TX) was hearing a testimony from Paul Dodd at the Friday night service. He is involved in Soulfource and is a UBC member who was assaulted in September. The assault is being investigated as a hate crime. The play *Deep in the Heart* was read on Saturday, and it was very moving! I hope that the players or someone else can perform it again in the future. It dealt with a couple's 50th wedding anniversary and the homecoming of their lesbian (prior married with a daughter of her own) daughter. The play was based on an actual family who came to watch the play. We followed the play with lunch and a discussion about how the family dealt with each other over the family business, and the actual family members also participated. It was very moving!

There was a buzz about AWAB and the Joint National Gathering: "Tapestry" June 26-29, 2006. Many of the attendees hope that somehow AWAB can be a part of a 10th annual retreat next year, keeping in mind that AWAB is also participating in the Indianapolis event. "

Beth Stroud Denied a Call to Ordained Leadership in the United Methodist Church

An Open Letter to United Methodist Congregations: Grace and peace to you from the Reconciling Ministries Network

Like many of you, we find ourselves grieving for our church and yearning for a sacred reminder of God's dependable love and grace. Pain, alienation, and anger are being felt in response to the recent decisions made by the Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church. Know that you are not alone in your feelings. Know, as well, that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who remind us of God's Spirit, alive within us.

The Judicial Council responded to two situations that set disturbing precedents. In one situation, it reversed an appellate court decision, ultimately resulting in the denial of Beth Stroud's call to ordained leadership in

the United Methodist Church. Beth's deep integrity and her gifts for ministry were affirmed through all of her church trials. Yet, she has been denied her ordination based solely on her openness about living in a committed and faithful partnership with another woman. In the other decision, the Judicial Council supported a local pastor who denied membership in a United Methodist Church to someone because a gay person would not promise to live a life of celibacy. For the pastor, this signaled that the man was "unrepentant."

These events are calling us to rediscover the depth of our faithfulness to be a sanctuary for all of God's people. Around the nation, people in the United Methodist Church are awakening, arising, and reaffirming our common commitment to open hearts, open minds, and open doors. There is a new urgency for local churches to be unwavering in their commitment to the full inclusion of all persons in the United Methodist Church, as signaled through our baptism and membership vows. We are mindful that there are persons this day who do not feel that they have a sanctuary to call home. Every local United Methodist Church needs to boldly proclaim that we are a place where all are welcome!

Now is the time for churches that have always been active as welcoming sanctuaries to remain faithful and true to the gospel. Likewise, now is the time for churches that have been silent or quiet to find their voice and to join in this struggle for the soul of our church. We invite you to join us in three specific ways.

First, continue to pray for the saints of our faith who stand with courage, integrity, and strength. Let us remember Beth Stroud and Chris Paige, their families and friends, and the First United Methodist Church of Germantown, Pennsylvania in our prayers. Let us remember as well all of those who have been denied ordination in the past, who have left ordained ministry because they were not welcomed, and all who currently live as ordained leaders in ways that are less than whole.

In prayer, let us remember those who have left the church or who feel as if they can no longer remain in the church, those who have no church to call home, those who struggle everyday to find a way to live and be at peace with the church. Let us remember all of the Reconciling Congregations among us and their ministries of welcome, as well as all of those churches that express the open call of the gospel. Let us be in prayer for those who seek sanctuary, hoping to experience the grace of a living God.

Second, we encourage you to continue to be a local United Methodist church that proclaims the grace of

God and that welcomes all into its sanctuary. The Bishops have clearly spoken and empowered churches to be open and affirming. We encourage you to draw upon the resources of Scripture, tradition, reason and experience to live out the gospel in your place. Take extra steps this day to ensure that people feel welcomed to your sanctuary and community.

Third, we invite you to actively witness to the gospel by standing boldly in solidarity with those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, their families and their friends. Join the Reconciling Ministries efforts, keep updated through our website, www.rmnetwork.org, and remain allies with those who are working to express God's grace to all. We will actively work to change the Church structures and to address the ambivalent attitudes expressed through our church's polity and practice. In particular, the language of incompatibility must be eradicated. Take stands where you can and make bold decisions with faith.

We are United Methodists of all sexual orientations and gender identities making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world!! We remain in one another's prayers as we work to live out the gospel.

On behalf of the Reconciling Ministries Network Board,

Troy Plummer, Executive Director
Sue Laurie, Outreach Coordinator
Jeff Spelman, Board Chair
Joretta Marshall, Board Chair-elect

Maine Voters Reject Anti-gay Ballot Initiative

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

Much-needed victory for the national movement

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force praises stellar grassroots organizing campaign; contributed more than \$170,000 to fuel the fight

PORTLAND, Maine, Nov. 8 -- Voters in Maine today defeated a ballot initiative seeking to repeal the state's new law protecting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people from discrimination. With 35 percent of the precincts reporting, 57 percent had voted against the measure, with 43 percent in favor of it. Twice before, in 1998 and in 2000, voters

rejected similar nondiscrimination laws by narrow margins.

Maine is the 17th state to ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and the 7th to protect transgender people from discrimination.

"Today's win proves that dogged, grassroots organizing can overcome the lies and smears of anti-gay zealots and the profound unfairness of having minority rights put up for a popular vote," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. "After the marriage amendment losses we've experienced over the last 12 months, this is a much-needed victory for our national movement -- it proves we can win statewide contests. Every lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender American is deeply indebted to the staff and volunteers of Maine Won't Discriminate, and to the people of Maine for embracing fairness and rejecting bigotry."

The Task Force made significant investments to identify pro-LGBT voters and defend the anti-discrimination law, including cash grants of \$169,500 over the last two years (including \$94,500 to Maine Won't Discriminate), sending seasoned staff who took key roles in the campaign, and operating phone banks in New York and Washington D.C. (This work is detailed below.)

"The Task Force has been an integral part of our efforts to keep this law on the books from the beginning. They provided critical organizing expertise and generous financial support," said Jesse Connolly, campaign manager for Maine Won't Discriminate. "With their help, we grew the campaign's volunteer capacity, which was the fuel that brought us to victory on Election Day."

Margin Proves the Value of Voter Identification & Get-Out-The-Vote Work: Because the last two contests in Maine were so close (the measure in 2000 lost by less than 5,000 votes), voter identification and get-out-the-vote work was considered crucial.

Starting in 2003, Equality Maine began an ambitious program to identify pro-LGBT voters through door-to-door canvassing in Portland. This work has been funded by three successive \$25,000 Community Impact Fund grants from the Task Force. That effort resulted in more than 8,000 new pro-LGBT identifications, which were made available to the Maine Won't Discriminate campaign. In turn, the campaign focused on these voters and others identified from previous campaigns and identification work, encouraging them to vote early. This clearly paid off: more people voted early than in any prior off-

year election in the state's history, and appears to have provided the margin of victory. Campaign by Repeal Proponents Called "Reprehensible:" The Task Force called the tactics of the proponents of the repeal effort, including the Christian Civic League of Maine and the Coalition for Marriage, "reprehensible." Written Materials claimed the nondiscrimination law meant that "a pedophile cannot be barred from a job as a public school teacher." Television and radio ads asked voters to repeal the law to keep it from "from forever changing the innocence of our children" and to "protect your right to protect your children."

"These overt attempts to link gay people with child abuse are disgusting, reprehensible and immoral," Foreman said. "While we are gratified the people of Maine rejected them, these kinds of smears cause long-lasting damage. If Michael Heath or Paul Madore had one shred of decency, they would beg for forgiveness, but they do not." (Heath and Madore were leaders of the campaign to repeal the law and longtime Maine anti-LGBT activists.)

The Task Force's investments in Maine included:

- \$75,000 in grants to Equality Maine to identify pro-LGBT voters.
- \$94,500 in cash contributions to Maine Won't Discriminate to fight the repeal effort.
- Sending seasoned staff to work on the campaign, some of whom took key roles in volunteer recruitment and the GOTV campaign.
- Intensive training of more than two dozen Maine activists.
- Operating 19 phone-bank sessions from New York and Washington, D.C., involving 198 volunteers and live contacts with 3,656 pro-LGBT voters in Maine.

Roberta Sklar, 917-704-6358 (cell)
rsklar@theTaskForce.org

Texas Voters Approve Anti-marriage Amendment

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force denounces continuing campaign of putting minority rights up for popular vote WASHINGTON, Nov. 8 -- As expected, Texas voters today approved a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage and any other form of legal recognition for same-sex couples. With the vote, Texas became the 18th state to adopt an anti-marriage constitutional amendment in the last seven years. With 47 percent of precincts reporting, 76 percent had voted in favor of the amendment, and

24 percent against it, greater than the 70 percent to 30 percent average of the other state votes. Statement by Matt Foreman, Executive Director National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

"All that today's results show is that it is profoundly wrong and profoundly un-American to put the rights of a small minority of Americans up for a popular vote. This is not democracy; this is tyranny of the majority. No one would tolerate this being done to any other minority, but it's still open season on gay people.

"Like every campaign in the past, the tactics of our opponents have been reprehensible and distinctly un-Christian. Texans for Marriage, for example, centered its message on the claim that marriage equality for gay people would 'hurt children' when, in fact, there is nothing anywhere to substantiate that slanderous assertion. Instead, the truth is that this amendment will hurt tens of thousands of Texas families and their children.

"We at the Task Force are extremely proud of the television ads we produced for the Texas fight that showed couples and their families talking from the heart about why marriage matters. Many other good things came out of the campaign, including recruiting new volunteers and winning new allies. Our community, its infrastructure and its relationships with other causes and communities are stronger now than when the campaign started, and that's the most important thing. We thank No Nonsense in November, its campaign manager Glen Maxey, Rev. William Lawson and our many friends and supporters in the Houston area for their hard work.

"We're in this for the long haul, and even our most ardent opponents recognize that it's not a question of whether we will win equality, but when. Tomorrow, the fight resumes."

What the Task Force did in Texas:

* Created and ran in the Houston market a groundbreaking series of television commercials that presented real people talking about why marriage matters. The ads, which can be viewed at www.theTaskForce.org/media/epress.cfm, spotlighted couples and families speaking poignantly about what marriage means to them -- and how the lack of equal access to marriage hurts them, their families and society. The Task Force spent \$225,000 to develop the commercials, which garnered both statewide and nationwide media attention, including a lead story on the National Report page of The New York Times.

* Organized an intensive training in Houston focusing on building campaign skills among people of color,

including door-to-door canvassing on marriage in African-American neighborhoods.

* With members of Texas' Hispanic community, releasing in Houston (on Nov. 1) a national study on Hispanic same-sex couple households that found that marriage inequality specifically hurts Hispanic same-sex families. Three of the top 10 metropolitan areas with the highest number of Hispanic same-sex households are in Texas. The study received widespread media attention in Texas and nationally. Available at:

www.thetaskforce.org/media/release.cfm?releaseID=885

MEDIA CONTACT: Roberta Sklar, 917.704.6358 (cell), rsklar@thetaskforce.org

Wisconsin's Proposed Anti-Marriage Amendment

The Capital Times, Madison, WI - October 11, 2005

Marriage Ban Is All About Exclusion By Guest op-ed, Anne Enke

The deeper exclusionary principles behind the proposed anti-gay amendment to the Wisconsin Constitution are becoming increasingly clear. This presents an opportunity for people to think beyond questions of gay marriage and domestic partnership and to coalesce around the values of democratic citizenship against those who would exclude minorities from basic civil rights.

The proposed amendment is not simply about "gay marriage"; its proponents explicitly echo white supremacist notions of civic leadership and belonging.

For example, Julaine Appling, executive director of the Family Research Institute of Wisconsin, recently told Isthmus: "I think we are being extremely tolerant. We let (gays) live wherever they want, unlike with the African-Americans before the civil rights movement." Just who is this "we"?

Appling has since clarified her meaning in a letter to Isthmus: "My response about being 'tolerant' of homosexuals was in direct response to a question about whether today's marriage issue is analogous to the civil rights movement of the 1960s, when we were truly intolerant of people of a different race."

"We" apparently are not of a "different" race,

sexuality or religion for that matter. This "we" is at the heart of the so-called "culture wars."

The term "culture wars" has a long history in the United States and Europe, and it is no coincidence that those in favor of legislating discrimination against GLBT people and people of color have repeatedly invoked it in their campaigns. In specific reference to gays, Justice Antonin Scalia first used the term in its original German, "Kulturkampf," in his dissenting opinion on Colorado Amendment 2 (Romer v. Evans) in 1992. Amendment 2 sought to repeal statewide ordinances that prohibited discrimination on the basis of "homosexual, lesbian or bisexual orientation" and would have prohibited any future nondiscrimination ordinances, even making it illegal for anyone to campaign against discrimination.

The Supreme Court ruled that the amendment was unconstitutional, with the majority concluding, "Amendment 2 classifies homosexuals ... in order to make them unequal to everyone else." Scalia opened his dissenting opinion with this line: "The court has mistaken a Kulturkampf for a fit of spite."

Kulturkampf translates as culture conflict or culture war, but it has a very precise historical meaning in German. It came into use during the late 19th and early 20th centuries when Germans debated whether or not Catholics and Jews were real Germans: Were Jews and Catholics part of society or a threat to it? Should they be participants in society, or removed from it?

As history has shown, these questions may be answered to further democratic inclusion or to support fascist supremacy.

To those who believed that homosexuals did not belong in society, legislating discrimination against GLBT people was simply democracy at work: As Scalia argued, "the public" and "tolerant citizens" needed protection from excessively powerful GLBT people.

Pat Buchanan also used the term Kulturkampf in his 1992 presidential campaign, translating it into English as if to mask its historic roots in exclusion, hatred and violence against Jews and Catholics. Since that time, fundamentalists in this country have freely tossed about the term "culture wars," and over and over it echoes its foundation in fascist conceptions of citizenship.

Like the white supremacists who imposed Jim Crow laws after the Civil War and like those who have resisted civil rights, there are those who continue to assume that U.S. citizenry ("we") is composed of people who are not "different" - not of a "different"

race, not of a "different" sexuality, and not of a "different" religion.

As in the German Kulturkampf, the issue in the proposed amendment to the Wisconsin Constitution goes far beyond whether or not GLBT people are excluded from the privileges of marriage and domestic partnership.

The issue is whether or not the people of the United States will allow the "not-different" to decide who shall enjoy the rights of citizenship and who shall be excluded from them.

Anne Enke teaches in the women studies program and the department of history at UW-Madison. E-mail: aenke@wisc.edu

<http://www.madison.com/tct/opinion//index.php?ntid=57217&ntpid=11>

Sermon By Harry Knox, Director of Religion and Faith Program

Human Rights Campaign Foundation

Harry's recent sermon at Chicago Theological Seminary:

<http://www.hrc.org/Template.cfm?Section=Religion4&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&PLID=23&ContentID=21843>

Harry Knox, Director of Religion and Faith Program, Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 1640 Rhode Island Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20036, 202.572.8948, harry.knox@hrc.org

Ken Sehested Recommends New Book: *Exile or Embrace? Congregations Discerning Their Response to Lesbian and Gay Christians*

Mahan Siler, a member of Circle of Mercy Church, Asheville, NC, has a new book out that will be of interest: "Exile or Embrace? Congregations Discerning Their Response to Lesbian and Gay Christians" (Pilgrim Press).

Mahan is the retired pastor of AWAB's Pullen Memorial Baptist in Raleigh, N.C., which went through a very public controversy when two of its members asked Mahan to do their union service. That began a congregation-wide discernment process, more than a little bad publicity, the departure of a number of long-term members and

expulsion of the congregation from one of its denominational affiliations.

The book has two particular strengths. The first is the very human and personal tone of a pastor experiencing the pathos and the joy of this tumultuous journey. (Two-thirds of the book are excerpted from the journal Mahan kept during the period.) Instead of simply issuing an edict, he worked diligently to involve the entire congregation in the decision-making process. The second strength: In the latter part of the book Mahan offers hard-won pastoral wisdom for congregations considering such matters. -- Ken Sehested, Co-pastor, Circle of Mercy Congregation, Asheville, NC.

John Shelby Spong Recommends New Book: *Born Gay*

A new book co-authored by Dr. Qazi Rahman, a lecturer in psychobiology at the University of East London and Dr. Glenn Wilson, a member of the faculty of the University of London, has just been published in the United Kingdom. It was reviewed in The Guardian, one of the United Kingdom's four major daily newspapers last month. Entitled, "Born Gay," this book lays out in a quite public way the consensus today of both the scientific and the medical communities in their attempt to understand homosexuality.

In a nutshell, these authors state the widely accepted conclusions that homosexuality is not something "that can be caught, like 'flu'," it cannot be "learned from people who make it look really cool and fun like those chaps on 'Queer Eye for the Straight Guy'" and it has nothing to do with smothering mothers and distant fathers." All of that, they assert, has now fallen by the wayside. Those ideas are now completely dismissed in intellectual circles.

Drs. Rahman and Wilson write: "It is quite clear now that homosexuality in gay men and lesbians is caused by biological factors." This conclusion, they assert, is "so widely accepted" in academic circles that many colleagues asked why they had bothered to write this book at all. "They tell us," they said in the Guardian interview, "that all we are doing is pointing out what everyone already knows." Everyone, that is, who is not homophobic and therefore not open to the data that so deeply and significantly challenges this ancient, deeply held emotional prejudice.

I welcome this book precisely because it is not written for the academic world of science and medicine, where this issue is no longer debated. Rather, it is written specifically for those people who still operate

out of an uninformed definition of homosexuality as either a sickness or a deviant, sinful, unnatural and depraved choice. More importantly, it is written for those who somehow think that this issue was settled when the Book of Leviticus was written in the sixth century before the Common Era or by St. Paul, who wrote between 50 and 64 C.E. It is written to resource the churches of the world that are increasingly seen as the bastions of an undying homophobia, which causes them to be at war over an issue that outside those churches has largely been settled. It is written to place in the clear relief of its own ongoing ignorance the embarrassing rhetoric that still emanates from people like Benedict XVI, Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell and their passionate acolytes of the Religious Right in America. Negative words also come from Christian leaders in the third world who try to cover their obviously uninformed opinions with the charge of racism when those opinions are rejected as simply ignorant. The evidence is so clear. Homosexuality, just like heterosexuality, is morally neutral. Both can be lived out in holiness or in degradation. Both are 'givens' not 'chosens.' The only "sin" of homosexual people is that they are born with a sexual orientation different from the majority. (More)

You can sign up for Bishop Spong's full articles at: https://secure.agoramedia.com/spong/regstep2_spong2.asp?promo=8E8054FA-64A6-4100-9B08-37F4592A6F13&samplecode=8&email=

The book, *Born Gay!* is available at www.Amazon.com.

Calendar of Events

Ken Pennings' Speaking Engagement:

February 19, 2006, 10 am...Ken Pennings will be preaching at Woodside Church (ABC/UCC), 1509 E. Court St., Flint, MI 48503-6202 (810-767-4911, info@woodsidechurch.net). Dialogue Discussion with Ken 11:15 am.

AWAB's Big Event for 2006:

June 26-29, 2006...*Tapestry: Live, Laugh, Love & Lead* - Joint National GLBT-Allies Gathering, sponsored by AWAB, UCC Coalition, and GLAD (Disciples of Christ), at University of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, IN. Check the AWAB website, www.wabaptists.org for updated information on the gathering. There will be time for discussion and worship led by each of the convening groups. Brian

Dixon and Kevin Rose are AWAB's representatives on the planning committee.

Regional AWAB Gatherings:

February 24-26, 2006...Northeast (NY, CT, MA, ME, NH, VT, RI, PA) regional gathering for AWAB churches and individuals at Madison Avenue Baptist Church in NYC. If you are interested in attending and/or if you have thoughts, or can help in the planning, please email Susan Sparks, Associate Pastor at Madison Ave Baptist Church suegrace1@aol.com.

August 2006...Contact Rev. Dr. JoAnne Juett (pastor of First Baptist Church [ABC], Eau Claire, WI), if you would like to help in the planning of a Wisconsin/Minnesota AWAB Regional Gathering to be held in Eau Claire, WI (JoAnne Juett, 715-832-0642, icjuett@sbcglobal.net).

First Baptist Church, Granville, Ohio, Seeks a Full-time Pastor

First Baptist Church, Granville, Ohio, a small, active Welcoming & Affirming congregation, seeks a full-time pastor steeped in social justice. We welcome applicants from any denomination who value substance over style and questions over answers. For more information, see our website: www.firstbaptistgranville.org Contact: Reverend Alan Newton, Executive Minister, American Baptist Churches of the Rochester-Genesee Region, 1100 S. Goodman St., Rochester, NY 14620. Phone: 585-340-9520. Email: anewton@crlds.edu

New Mailing Address & Phone Number

Please note that the Association has a new mailing address and phone number:

AWAB, P.O. Box 259257, Madison, WI 53725, 608-255-2155

Associational is a periodic e-newsletter of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, a network of 57 churches, local chapters 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. 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