



The Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists

Associational

A Ongoing eNewsletter from the Executive Director

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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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From the Executive Director

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When I first spoke publicly for AWAB, I explained that I was trying to work myself out of a job. For when churches really live the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they are including all and excluding none! Would we need an agency like AWAB, which advocates for the full inclusion of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender people in the life, mission and ministries of the church, if the Church was really the Church?!!!!

But the truth is that an organization like AWAB is desperately needed in our day! We still have a big job to do! Many suffer terrible oppression by those who call themselves "Christian."

AWAB has the strong will, desire, energy and enthusiasm to expand ministries of inclusion for LGBT-Allied people in the Church and Society. What we need is financial support! We are an organization with a \$71,000 yearly budget and a vision for a \$130 million dollar yearly budget (*In the year 2000, the annual budget of Focus on the Family was \$128.8 million. Shouldn't we aim higher?!).* Frankly, friends, despite the generous gifts and monthly pledges of some of you, we're barely breaking even financially.

To meet standard operating expenses, AWAB relies on the regular contributions of individuals, congregations and partner organizations. You'll receive two appeal letters this fall, and we all hope that the resulting gifts will help us end the year in the black.

But to truly EXPAND ministries of inclusion, we know we must create a larger support base. We're committed, therefore, to discovering a large number of individual major donors who will challenge our members to match their gifts. We hope to grow through estate planning, endowments and planned giving. We will write grants to the tune of \$15,000 if we apply to foundations on our own, and to the tune of \$250,000 if we apply to foundations with our partners. We are assembling a team of people with training and experience in fund development to help AWAB move in these directions. Would you consider serving on AWAB's development team? Let's chat! Phone me at (608) 255-2155. Or email me at ken@wabaptists.org. You may be just the person we've been looking for!

In the meantime, we rely on your regular contribution to make ends meet. Please log on to www.wabaptists.org, and donate on-line. Or send your contribution to AWAB, PO Box 259257, Madison, WI 53713. And thanks for all you have contributed already!

Lovingly, Rev. Ken Pennings
Executive Director

Woodside Church Disfellowshipped from North Area Association of Michigan After Joining AWAB

In opening arms to gays, Woodside Church cast from state Baptist group

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Tuesday, August 29, 2006

By George Jaksa, gjaksa@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6332

FLINT - Woodside Church has become the first Baptist church in the state to be disaffiliated with area Baptists because of its stand on homosexuality.

By a vote of 18-3, churches in a 10-county area that are members of the American Baptist Churches USA have elected to sever all ties with Woodside, Flint's oldest Baptist church.

The action will be presented to American Baptist USA churches in Michigan on Sept. 9 for affirmation.

The Rev. Ray A. Strawser II, treasurer of the North Area Executive Committee, said member churches voted to "dis-fellowship" Woodside after five Flint-area Baptist churches objected to Woodside's open stand toward homosexuality and the congregation's decision in May to join the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists.

"We are American Baptists who believe homosexuality is incompatible with biblical teaching," said Strawser, pastor of First Baptist Church in Owosso.

The action did not come as a surprise to the 275-member congregation of Woodside, 1508 E. Court St.

"We anticipated that this would happen," said the Rev. Deborah Kohler, pastor of Woodside.

Kohler said the decision won't affect the church's Baptist foundation, even though it might be forced to seek affiliation with a Baptist group in another state if the Michigan church bans it.

"There is nothing they can do to keep us from being Baptists," said Kohler. "We can find other churches to connect with."

Woodside also is affiliated with the United Church of Christ.

Woodside's view toward homosexuals is well-known. About five years ago, it took a formal stand of openness to all without regard to sexual orientation. "We believe Jesus, as we know him and understand him through the Gospels, teaches us to love everyone just as they are without judgment," Kohler said.

Strawser said that even if Woodside is kicked out of the American Baptist Church at the September regional meeting, it can still affiliate with other Baptist groups in the U.S.

He said churches in California have affiliated with churches in Wisconsin, and one in Ohio joined a Rochester, N.Y., association.

Woodside also could appeal the state decision to the U.S. American Baptist Church, he said.

Jack LeSage, an openly gay Woodside member, said he was disappointed with the decision that came after a series of meetings, including one with Woodside members.

"Woodside has been a very positive, supportive and welcoming and affirming congregation," LeSage said.

Miriam Schaefer, a Woodside member who has been a Baptist for all of her 88 years, also supports the church's position on homosexuals.

"I don't think Jesus would kick them out," Schaefer said. "They are our brothers and sisters. If they want to be members of our church and support us, we shouldn't say no to them."

Strawser said that in the 1940s, a church was kicked out of American Baptist Churches USA for a different reason, but Woodside would be the first over the homosexual issue.

American Baptist Churches USA has 1.5 million members with 5,800 churches in America.

Two AWAB Congregations Find New Regional Home

The University Baptist Church and Judson Memorial Baptist Church both of Minneapolis MN were voted into the American Baptist Churches of the Rochester/Genesee Region on June 28, 2006.

After years of alienation from their region (Mid-America ABC) and more recent actions by their region to not recognize ordinations from both

churches of GLBT clergy, a decision was made to explore the possibility of a new home.

Both Metro-Chicago and Rochester Genesee Regions were considered for a potential new home. Both regions were open to receive these congregations.

Hearty congratulations to Rev. Lyn Welton and Rev. Ross Aalgaard, whose ordinations are now recognized by the Rochester-Genesee Region of the ABC/USA!

AWAB Welcomes 2 New Churches

Huge loving welcome to Circle of Mercy, Asheville, NC & First Baptist Church in Jamaica Plain, Jamaica Plain, MA, which have recently joined AWAB! We celebrate your partnership with us!

Circle of Mercy, 358 Brevard Rd., Asheville, NC, 28806, ken@circleofmercy.org, 828-252-2297, Revs. Ken and Nancy Sehested, co-pastors

First Baptist Church in Jamaica Plain, 633 Centre St., Jamaica Plain, MA 02130, 617-524-3992, fax: 617-848-2612, churchoffice@firstbaptistjp.org, www.firstbaptistjp.org
Rev. Ashlee Wiest-Laird, pastor; Nancy Sweeney, Moderator & W&A Contact Person

Dave Parnell Joins the AWAB Council

Dave Parnell has joined the AWAB Council, and will complete the term of Lee Sartain, who resigned from the Council last April. Dave resides in Raleigh, NC, and attends Pullen Memorial Baptist Church. Dave's life partner is Jeff Evans. Welcome Dave! Dave Parnell, 2307 Byrd Street, Raleigh NC 27608, 919 782-7005, drparnell1952@earthlink.net

Many Thanks to Ken Sehested!

For the past few years, Rev. Ken Sehested, Asheville, NC, has served faithfully as AWAB's representative on the board of The Institute for Welcoming Resources (IWR). We reluctantly accept Ken's resignation from the IWR board; we can't thank him enough for his enormous contributions to the work of the board, and wish him well in all his endeavors!

Host the AWAB Council in 2007?

Would your church or region like to host the AWAB council in the fall (October?) of 2007? The Council can remain after a day of its own meetings to conduct an open council meeting, help lead in a worship service, or teach adult forum classes or workshops. Contact Kathy Stayton Kbstay@aol.com or 610-647-9616.

Donations in Honor of Darrell Lance

Recently, still more donations have been made to AWAB in honor of Dr. H. Darrell Lance, who for ten years served faithfully as the editor of *The InSpiriter* and as a member of the AWAB Council.

AWAB Strongly Supports The Institute for Welcoming Resources (IWR)

The Institute for Welcoming Resources—An Exciting Ecumenical Collaboration

By Rebecca Voelkel

The leaders, representing eleven different Christian denominations, sat in a circle in the fireside room of a joint Presbyterian and United Church of Christ congregation. They were lead in prayer by an ordained minister in the United Church of Canada who is also lesbian. They held in their hands stones and were asked to place in the stones their grief, pain and sorrow at what the church had done—to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and to itself. Then they placed the stones on the altar, symbolically releasing the pain, and ended with singing a hymn of resurrection and hope before they began their work together to strategize, prepare and act to collaboratively change the Church and the world.

This scene-- deeply spiritual, deeply ecumenical, deeply honest, deeply hopeful—is a kind of microcosm of the work of the Institute for Welcoming Resources. The gathering was of the Welcoming Church Program Leaders (the heads of the various “welcoming and affirming programs” in the United Church of Canada, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Presbyterian Church, USA, the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, the Reformed Church in America, the Community of Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the American Baptist Churches,

the Alliance of Baptists, the Church of the Brethren and the Mennonite Church). Twice a year for fifteen years, this body has come together to share best practices, develop resources (*Open Hands Magazine* was a joint publication as are *Shaping Sanctuary* and *Claiming the Promise*), hold joint conferences—the Witness Our Welcome 2000 and 2003 conferences, for example and work toward better equipping our movement. In 2002, the Welcoming Church Program Leaders officially started a separate non-profit known as the Institute for Welcoming Resources.

Today the Institute for Welcoming Resources is still very closely aligned with the Welcoming Church Programs that birthed it. Its work can be found at www.welcomingresources.org. In February of this year, IWR received the Shower of Stoles Project as a gift and then merged with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. The combined partnership offers a model of hope for the Welcoming Church Movement—shared resources, shared vision, shared energy.

As we look to the next five years, here are some of the projects that IWR is doing:

- Training denominational folk in faith-based community organizing skills in order to increase the numbers of welcoming and affirming churches to 10,000 by 2011
- Producing a Spanish Language Welcoming and Affirming Bible Study for use in Latino communities
- Gathering the Youth and Young Adult leadership in the various denominations to determine what resources are most needed and then producing them
- Working with the Welcoming and Affirming Programs on shared fundraising, staffing and outreach in order to expand the reach of the specific programs and numbers of congregations
- Gathering Bishops and Elders of the various pro-lgbt Christian denominations and movements (from Roman Catholic to Pentecostal and everyone in-between) to strategize, collaborate and speak publicly

The Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists and all our friends in the American Baptist Churches USA and the Alliance of Baptists are an integral piece of this work and we invite you to visit www.welcomingresources.org to learn more about our shared work.

Rev. Rebecca Voelkel is Pastor, Teacher & Leader of the Institute for Welcoming Resources

Thanks from Alice Langford

The following note is from Alice Langford thanking the attendees of the Tapestry 2006 Conference for the money collected at the closing worship service.

For years, Alice has prepared and served scrumptious meals out of her own home for people living with HIV/AIDS. "I'd like to thank all the churches whose people donated to my dinners for those infected and affected with HIV/Aids held twice a month. The very generous check for over \$1800 was deposited and will feed us for a year. I spend about \$75 per meal. You are indeed an answer to prayer as I was beginning to need some financial support for my dinners as I am retired and my income does not increase but as you can see God blesses those who do His work. AliceLangford@aol.com

2006 Regional AWAB Gatherings: Expanding the Welcoming Church Movement 12-Stop Tour - Flyers and Regis. info at www.wabaptists.org

September 22-24: North Carolina Gathering.

Hosted by Olin T. Binkley Memorial Baptist Church, 1712 Willow Drive, Chapel Hill, NC 27514. Contact Dale Osborne at dale@binkleychurch.org, 919-942-4964, or Tonya Hamm at swells50@aol.com, 919-732-5170.

October 14-15: Northwest Gathering.

Hosted by Seattle First Baptist Church and University Baptist Church, Seattle, Washington. Contact Elizabeth Patrick lizpatrick@comcast.net, 206-459-0206 for more information.

October 20-22: Texas AWAB Retreat.

Hosted by University Baptist Church, 2130 Guadalupe St., Austin, TX 78705. Contact Bill Cox, (512) 619-4909, bcoxal@yahoo.com.

November 3-5: Philadelphia Area Gathering.

Hosted by Drexel Hill Baptist Church, 4400 State Rd., Drexel Hill, PA 19026. Contact Harry Rickards (610) 259-2356, rickardsh@msn.com.

2006 Events Sponsored by AWAB's Partners

Complete calendar of events at: See www.welcomingresources.org (*calendar*)

October 14-15... A Weekend Retreat with James

Alison. Together with the Coalition of Welcoming Congregations, California Central Coast, and the Bay Area Coalition of Welcoming Congregations, Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies is pleased to co-sponsor a special retreat weekend with Catholic priest, theologian and writer James Alison, October 14 – 15 on the Pacific School of Religion campus. Attendance

is limited for this event and registration is required. For more information, go to www.clgs.org.

October 21-22... Interfaith Conference: Transforming Faith - A Transgender Witness, at First United Methodist Church, Corvallis, OR. Sponsored by The Community of Welcoming Congregations and the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies. Keynote: Dr. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott. Plenary Speakers: The Rev. Dr. Erin Swenson, The Rev. Malcolm Himschoot, The Rev. Dr. Justin Tanis. Concert by the gospel choir Transcendence. Contact: The Community of Welcoming Congregations, PO Box 14948, Portland, OR 97293, 503-665-8741, tara@welcomingcongregations.org

April 27-28, 2007...Revive Us Again! Revival of our Spirit, Revival of our Baptist Principles, at Andover Newton Theological School, Newton, Mass.

This is a gathering of progressive Baptists from around the country, ready to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. We are gathering to say that we are Christian, we are Baptist, and we believe our Baptist Principles are foundational to our understanding and sharing of the Gospel. We are gathering to say that we can be both progressive and evangelical! Friday, April 27th, 7:00PM: Healing Service and Worship at First Baptist Church in Newton Centre. A time to acknowledge that we have been hurt, that we have been broken by the divisions in our churches and

denomination, and to come together to seek healing from Christ. Saturday, April 28th, 9AM-9PM: Bible Study and Discussion Groups on Engaging Scripture and Soul Freedom, Progressive Evangelicals, How to Have Meaningful Dialogue. Evangelism in Progressive Churches, Teaching Baptist Principles to our Children and Youth, Reviving Baptist Principles and Spiritual Life in our Congregations. Afternoon Forum: Update on ABC-USA, and Where Do We Go from Here? A time of reflection and discussion. Closing Revival Worship at First Baptist Church in Newton Centre. We will gather in prayer and praise and celebration as only Baptists do it! There will be limited affordable on-campus rooms available. More information will be made available soon.

Associational is a periodic e-newsletter of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, a network of 65 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.