



The Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists

Associational

A Ongoing eNewsletter from the Executive Director

Issue 26 ~ November 20, 2006

From the Executive Director

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Burton Bagby, the chair of AWAB's new development team, recently shared with the AWAB Council, "We need to improve the public image of AWAB nationally, regionally and locally. For instance, Houston has commissioned the AIDS Memorial Quilt for its World AIDS Day Interfaith Remembrance Service. I paid for it. But the press release will read "Affirming Baptists bring AIDS Quilt to Houston.' "

What AWAB needs is more volunteers like Burton!!! Can you possibly share your gifts of time, talent and money to improve the public image of AWAB nationally, regionally and locally as Burton has done?

Read more in the next article in this newsletter.

Lovingly,
Rev. Ken Pennings
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AWAB Brings AIDS Memorial Quilt to Houston

HOUSTON – The Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists (AWAB) has secured several panels of the AIDS Memorial Quilt from the NAMES Project Foundation for display at the 2006 Houston World AIDS Day Interfaith Remembrance Service Friday, December 1.

"We are glad to be able to give people here a chance to view these historic panels that remember fellow Houstonians as well as the faith community care teams that so lovingly cared for them as they faced this horrific illness," said Burton Bagby, local AWAB representative.

Several of the panels to be displayed were made by AIDS care teams created by local churches and synagogues in the early days of the AIDS crisis. The panels will be on display before and after the remembrance service at Covenant Church, an ecumenical liberal Baptist congregation at 4949 Caroline in the Museum District.

"As the AIDS epidemic continues to claim lives around the world and here in the United States, the quilt continues to grow and to reach more communities with its messages of remembrance, awareness and hope," Bagby added.

Founded in 1987 in San Francisco by Cleve Jones, the AIDS Memorial Quilt is a

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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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poignant memorial, a powerful tool for use in preventing new HIV infections, and the largest ongoing community arts project in the world.

The panels will be on view from 3 until 8 p.m., Friday, December 1 and from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m., Sunday, December 3.

"We are thrilled to be able to facilitate the coming together of all of Houston's major HIV/AIDS service providers," said Bagby. "They will all have representatives officiating."

Virtually every one of the more than 45,000 colorful panels that make up the quilt memorializes the life of a person lost to AIDS. Over \$3,250,000 has been raised by the quilt for Direct Services for People with AIDS and over 15,000,000 people have viewed the quilt since the project began, according to the NAMES Project Foundation, cosponsor of the Houston display.

"We are most grateful to Covenant Church for graciously hosting this year's World AIDS Day remembrance service," said Bagby, "which will include Jewish rabbis, Christian ministers, a Unitarian Universalist minister, community leaders and leaders of several HIV/AIDS service organizations as well as members of Congress and other elected officials.

Quilt facts:

1. Number of Names on the Quilt: More than 83,900.
2. Size : 1,293,300 square feet (the equivalent of 275 NCAA basketball courts with walkway, 185 courts without walkway).
3. Miles of Fabric: 52.25 miles long (if all 3'x6' panels were laid end to end).
4. Total Weight: More than 54 tons

Members of AWAB are churches, organizations, and individuals who are willing to go on record as welcoming and affirming all persons without regard to sexual orientation or gender identity, and who have joined together to advocate for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons within Baptist communities of faith.

AWAB's Lake Street Church, Evanston, IL, Brings Together Eight Faiths in Day of Harmony

By Manya A. Brachear, Chicago Tribune staff reporter, September 29, 2006

In some ways, it was a traditional Baptist Sunday service. The pews creaked and groaned, and the congregation belted out a rousing rendition of "Down by the Riverside."

But when parishioners pressed their palms together and bowed their heads, it was not only a greeting to God but a gassho greeting to their neighbors in the pews--a Buddhist rather than Baptist tradition.

Blending Buddhist philosophy with the Baptist faith is not uncommon at Lake Street Church in Evanston,

where followers of eight religious traditions--Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Jain, Sikh and Ethical Humanist--will converge Sunday to celebrate their harmony as one in humankind and share Communion.

"Divinity is a mighty river that cannot be dammed up or stopped," explains irreverent Rev. Bob Thompson, 57, borrowing a quote from Meister Eckhart, a 14th Century Christian mystic. "We all do drink from the same river, but we package the water differently."

Celebrated by Protestant churches, World Communion Sunday calls for all Christians to commemorate their unity in Christ and the sanctity of the Communion table. Inaugurated by the Presbyterian Church USA in 1936, the worship service has been embraced by other denominations and is celebrated the first Sunday in October.

At Lake Street Church, a liberal congregation affiliated with the American Baptist Churches of America, Thompson broadened the scope of Communion Sunday after preaching a sermon about the tradition 10 years ago.

"All of a sudden it struck me as so ironic the way we celebrate World Communion," he said. "Protestants get together in their own churches and think about each other while they're having Communion. What about the rest of the world? If we really believed in this stuff, we would invite the rest of the world in to share the Communion with us in the spirit of Jesus table fellowship."

His approach reflects the autonomy that Baptists hold dear. They have what Thompson refers to as "soul liberty," freedom from a higher authority other than truth. But he acknowledges that Lake Street Church worships on the margins of the Baptist denomination.

"What we do here though on the margins is rooted in Baptist heritage, because soul liberty is inextricably part of our self-identity as Baptists," he said. "At least it was historically. Most Baptists have lost that awareness."

Rev. Larry Greenfield, executive minister of the American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago, said Thompson takes interfaith relations to the next level.

He said that while joint worship services and community service projects are worthwhile endeavors, encouraging parishioners to examine themselves before examining other religious traditions can yield to a deeper connection.

"There is an interest on Bob's part about the deep wellsprings of every human being," Greenfield said. "He has explored that within himself and helps others within the congregation to do that.... That might seem unrelated to relating to other traditions. But if you go deep enough, you're going to find some connections. There's a kind of bonding between people at a greater depth than simply saying, let's do some rituals together or let's understand each other's teachings."

"Bob and the church understand they are part of a wider fellowship that doesn't necessarily do the ministry the way they do it," Greenfield added, referring to the 1.5-million member American Baptist denomination. "But they are a very important part in contributing to our common life in dealing with interfaith sorts of issues."

Despite Thompson's unconventional ways, his path to the pulpit was common for clergy of his generation. His father, too, was an evangelical American Baptist

preacher. After college, Thompson entered seminary to avoid the draft, though he had no intention of following in his father's footsteps.

In the late '70s he landed at Lake Street Church. He opened a soup kitchen in the basement of the building and encouraged parishioners to form mini-communities that embraced other spiritual traditions.

A typical calendar includes Meditation Satsang, Explorations in Mysticism and Dream Sharing. The church's Light of the Moon Society meets monthly at the sight of the full moon.

In 1995, the name of the church changed from First Baptist to Lake Street Church. The congregation also welcomed gay and lesbian parishioners. Attendance has since tripled, Thompson said.

"People are here not because they resonate with [the Baptist affiliation]. We're in a post-denominational era anyway," Thompson said.

Cheryl Graham grew up Lutheran, studied in a Presbyterian seminary and dabbled in Buddhism, the Baha'i faith and the Unitarian Church before she heard about Lake Street. There she said she found a community of "Christian misfits" like herself.

"People come for Bob but stay because of the church," she said. "He tries to bring us as close to Christ as possible. He opens gates for all of us to be honest about our journey."

AWAB Seeks Nominations for Two Awards

Every two years, the AWAB Council is privileged to honor two individuals whose efforts to improve the path of GLBT people of faith have been inspirational and transformative. We are currently seeking nominations for these two awards, to be presented at the AWAB gathering in Washington D.C. in June 2007.

The Randle R. Mixon Award for Christian Service is given to an individual whose work has helped to increase the inclusion of sexual minorities within Baptist bodies and has served to advance the cause of justice by educating congregations and organizations about sexual minority and gender identity issues.

The Barbra MacNair Award for Christian Witness is given to an individual whose life has inspired

understanding and acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people by opening dialogue that would not otherwise be there, opening the eyes of those who might otherwise turn away, and, by example, helping to advance the affirmation of everyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Please submit nominations to AWAB at ken@wabaptists.org by January 31, 2007.

A Perspective on the American Baptist Churches, USA

Rev. Heather Rittenhouse, a member of the AWAB Council and also a member of the ABC/USA General Board, recently responded in writing to a question from a member of AWAB, "What is happening in the ABC-USA at this time?"

Heather replied: At this moment, I don't see that there is much discussion going on at all about GLBT issues, at least not overtly. There are too many other major issues to deal with, such as the tremendous financial crisis which is forcing the denomination to restructure or die.

At our General Board meeting next week, we will be hearing some proposals regarding how the denominational restructuring could look in preparation for the biennial delegates to vote on a specific plan in 2009. We will also be considering a proposal to sell the Mission Center building in Valley Forge, a plan which I think will move forward. The ABC can no longer afford to occupy this space, but the larger question becomes what space IS affordable for the ABC offices. The new budget covenant which was enacted several years ago is having exactly the effect I expected -- a drastic reduction in United Mission dollars to support the ABC as a whole. Thus the central structures of the denomination are becoming increasingly defunded and new structures will have to emerge as a result. This is not necessarily a bad thing, in my opinion. However, the next few years are critical as the ABC redefines itself and decides what it will look like overall.

I suppose the most overt thing that is happening around the issue of homosexuality is the increasing number of churches which are leaving the ABC. As you likely know, the Pacific Southwest region has already voted to leave the ABC and I suspect there are other regions which are seriously studying this as an option for themselves. Several regions have

adopted constitutional policies which allow churches within the region to withdraw from the ABC but still remain members in good standing of the region. All of this to me suggests that the real power in the ABC is being shifted to the regional bodies. In my opinion, the local church no longer possesses any real autonomy in this denomination, for the most part. The regions have become the ones who call the shots, with churches who disagree getting kicked out right and left. Disfellowshipping continues on at record pace, only now no one is paying attention anymore. It has become commonplace, rather than a cause for concern and consternation. What will eventually happen, I think, is that regions will kick out all the churches with whom they have disagreement and thus purge themselves of the unwanted elements. Those churches will either join new regions or form their own alliances, which in effect will divide the ABC into two groups of regions/churches with opposing theologies. Just as the Southern Baptist Convention and the Northern Baptists (now ABC/USA) split themselves over the issue of slavery, so too will another split occur, only this time over the issue of homosexuality. Interestingly enough, I think the moderate to liberal SBC churches and the moderate ABC churches will find themselves united once again after all these years, all because of yet another theological and power-seeking rift. Who says God doesn't have a sense of humor?

Give to AWAB from your IRA in 2006 and 2007

This summer, the Pension Protection Act (PPA) became the law of the land. The PPA permits you to make charitable contributions from your IRA up to \$100,000 per year for two years, 2006 and 2007. Consult an attorney, tax expert, or investment professional for more information.

Events Sponsored by AWAB Partners

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

Nov. 20, 2006 - Transgender Day of Remembrance. Check out www.hrc.org/religion over the next few days for further materials honoring this important day.

January 19-21, 2007 - Religious Leaders Summit: a by-invitation event to examine issues related to religious and public policies about transgender people, sponsored by the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry and the National Center for Transgender Equality, in Berkeley, California.

We are heartened by the number of congregations and conferences exploring transgender theology and ministry. A growing number of jurisdictions now have laws that include protections based on gender identity and expression. Yet less than a third of Americans live in such a place, many congregations are essentially closed to transgender people, and much of the opposition to transgender inclusion in public policy stems from the religious communities. Denominations are uncertain how to proceed with transgender people, often conflating the issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.

In response, we are organizing an event specifically to provide leaders in both the transgender and religious communities an opportunity to learn about policy issues, network with one another, and advance the cause of transgender inclusion. Our programming will include day-long workshops on denominational policies, public policies, outreach to the transgender communities, and developing transgender leaders.

Registration is only \$55. If you know of people who should be included in this conference, please feel free to forward their names, contact information and a little about them to jtanis@nctequality.org so that we can send them an invitation.

February 16-17, 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!

Speakers include: Rev. Cynthia Maybeck, pastor, Trinity Church in Northborough, MA; Rev. Nancy Hitt, pastor, First Baptist Church of Natick, MA; Rev. Dr. Liliana Da Valle; Rev. Alan Newton, Executive Minister, ABC of Rochester-Genesee.

Friday, February 16th, 7:00 p.m to 9:00 p.m. Healing Service and Worship, led by the Rev. Cynthia Maybeck

Saturday, February 17th, 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Bible Study and Discussion Groups; Afternoon Workshops; Forum: Update on ABC-USA

Closing Revival Worship at the First Baptist Church in Newton

There will be a registration fee (to cover the cost of meals on Saturday) of approximately \$30. For accommodations, please see the separate Travel and Accommodations notice.

Revive Us Again! is endorsed by the following churches and organizations: The American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts, The Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, The Samuel Stillman Association, First Baptist Church, Framingham, MA

Please RSVP to Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell at 508-872-1176 or email fbcf Framingham@verizon.net by January 31st.

Alabama Church Ejected for Hiring Female Associate Pastor

By Robert Marus, Published October 24, 2006

MOBILE, AL. (ABP) -- An Alabama Baptist church has been ejected for hiring a female associate pastor.

The Mobile [Southern] Baptist Association voted Oct. 19 to withdraw fellowship from Hillcrest Baptist Church in Mobile. Associational leaders cited the church's July decision to call Ellen Guice Sims to the associate position, saying the congregation had violated the association's policy of adherence to the 2000 version of the Southern Baptist Convention's "Baptist Faith and Message" confessional statement.

That document, in its article on the nature of the church, states: "While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture."

Messengers to the association's annual meeting voted 204-44 to oust Hillcrest.

Sims said she has "mixed feelings" about her church getting ousted. "Primarily, however, I'm inexpressibly thankful to be serving with a congregation that

understands the gospel to be inclusive and loving and that strives to follow Jesus with courage and humility," she said.

"Frankly, we don't have a quarrel with them," Hillcrest pastor Dudley Wilson said of the association. "We're not angry with them. I did not recognize the validity of them coming to us to question anything we had done as an autonomous body. And they granted that, but they said they were an autonomous body too, and they could vote to exclude us."

The revision to the SBC doctrinal statement proved controversial at the time, mainly because of the ban on female pastors. But even some of the supporters of the revision say the ban applies only to senior pastors.

The doctrinal statement is not binding for local congregations -- there are between 50 and 100 SBC-affiliated congregations with female pastors and many more with ordained women in other staff positions. But many Southern Baptist-affiliated state conventions and local associations have adopted the revised "Baptist Faith and Message" as their doctrinal guideline.

Hillcrest's ouster apparently is the first time the doctrinal statement has been cited to exclude a church for having an ordained woman in a staff position other than pastor. Prior to 2000, other SBC-affiliated churches were occasionally ousted from, or voluntarily left, local associations or state conventions over issues of women in ministry.

In 2004, a Georgia church, led by a husband-wife co-pastoral team, voluntarily left its local association after the association adopted the "Baptist Faith and Message" as its doctrinal standard. Leaders of North Broad Baptist Church in Rome, Ga., said the Floyd County Baptist Association's decision to adopt the document was related to the congregation's decision to call the co-pastors.

Wilson, Hillcrest's pastor, said a representative of the Mobile association's membership committee first contacted him about two months ago to inform him that Hillcrest was under investigation for hiring Sims.

He said he and church leaders met with representatives from the committee. "It was obvious already that they had already made a decision about what they were going to recommend," he said.

The church then had five congregational meetings to develop a response to the expected ouster. Wilson said the congregation -- with about 200 members -- unanimously adopted a statement on women in ministry and agreed it would not pick a fight during

the Oct. 19 meeting.

Instead, lay leaders from Hillcrest read the statement which, in part, said God calls those who serve the church: "We do not believe we should submit to any human rules that seek to limit how God calls and equips persons for ministry."

Wilson said two "stalwart moderate pastors" in the association spoke out in Hillcrest's defense but the church's members chose not to defend themselves. "It was not ugly, from our standpoint," he said.

Thomas Wright, the association's director of missions, agreed the issue was settled amicably. "There was no floor fight, and both sides presented their differing view[s]," he said in an e-mail interview. "In the end, the messengers overwhelmingly recognized that Hillcrest has chosen to step outside the guidelines for affiliation."

Wright defended the association's interpretation that the Bible restricts women from all ordained ministry roles. "Our exegesis confirmed no distinction biblically in the office of pastor between the contemporary titles of pastor, senior pastor and associate pastor," he wrote. "Even the Internal Revenue Service sees ordination as the distinction for all pastoral roles."

North Carolina Baptist State Convention Moves to Expel Welcoming & Affirming Congregations

GREENSBORO, N.C. (ABP) -- Baptist churches in North Carolina will have to deny membership to gays or face expulsion from the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (Southern Baptist).

Messengers to the convention's annual meeting voted Nov. 14 to add language to its governing documents that will exclude from convention membership any church thought to affirm homosexual behavior.

It is the most rigid anti-gay policy of any statewide organization affiliated with the national Southern Baptist Convention and is similar to an SBC policy approved more than a decade ago. The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, with more than 4,000 churches and about 1.2 million members, is the second-largest state body that relates to the SBC.

After a show-of-ballots vote, leaders of the N.C.

convention determined the amendment passed by more than the required two-thirds margin -- as it did last year during the amendment's first reading.

The revision adds a section to the articles of incorporation that says, "Among churches not in friendly cooperation with the Convention are churches which knowingly act to affirm, approve, endorse, promote, support or bless homosexual behavior. The Board of Directors shall apply this provision. A church has the right to appeal any adverse action taken by the Board of Directors."

Supporters of the amendment said North Carolina Baptists need to take a stand against homosexuality. Opponents said the convention already had a policy in place that has removed churches that affirm homosexuality.

Convention president Stan Welch, a conservative leader, later told reporters the previous policy, enforced by the Board of Directors' policy "did not have teeth." Passage of the amendment gives the convention clarity on the issue, he said.

During discussion on the convention floor, Jeff Dawkins, pastor of Jewel Baptist Church in High Point, said he has dealt with homosexuality in a "close and personal way." He said when a person repented of the homosexual lifestyle, the church welcomed him. But when the person returned to that lifestyle, the church removed him from membership.

"We can be against the sin and love the sinner," he said.

Nathan Parrish, pastor of Peace Haven Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, said it is ironic that the convention was moving to exclude some churches while the theme of the meeting is "Cast a wider net."

"Having the right to exclude doesn't make the practice of excluding the right thing to do," he said.

Mark Harris, pastor of First Baptist Church in Charlotte, was chair of a committee that recommended the change. He said nothing would please him more than if the motion were unnecessary. But, he said, there is a national agenda promoting homosexuality. "We truly believe this convention must stand with courage," he said.

Don Gordon, pastor of Yates Baptist Church in Durham, said, "You can still believe homosexuality is sinful behavior and oppose this amendment." The change turns the convention into a "watchdog" over a single issue, Gordon said.

Dan Heimbach, an ethics professor at Southeastern

Baptist Theological Seminary who also served on the committee that recommended the change, said that although there are many sins, homosexuality is the one challenging the church.

Ed Beddingfield, pastor of First Baptist Church in Fayetteville, said the motion sends a message that some people aren't welcome in N.C. Baptist churches. The motion also makes some churches guilty by association, he said.

The action will immediately affect about 16 North Carolina congregations -- whether or not they welcome homosexuals -- because they are affiliated with the Alliance of Baptists, a progressive national group that is officially gay-friendly.

President Welch said the convention will not assign people to police church practices. If word comes to the convention about possible violations, convention officials will follow-up on the issue, he said.

Convention executive director Milton Hollifield agreed: "It's not that we're looking for those situations," he said. "We want to be as redemptive as possible."

A church with an openly homosexual member must choose whether it wants to keep that person as a church member or whether it wants to continue to be a member of the convention, Hollifield said. "But that's not something we're going seek out."

New Jersey Supreme Court Directs State Legislature to Give Equal Rights to Same-Sex Couples

'The question for the Legislature is an easy one: whether to follow through on the support of the majority of voters in this State to allow their gay friends and neighbors to marry, including over 20,000 committed same-sex couples raising more than 12,000 children.'

(Trenton, New Jersey, October 25, 2006) --- The New Jersey Supreme Court unanimously agreed today in Lambda Legal's lawsuit that denying same-sex couples from the rights and benefits different-sex couples obtain through marriage is unconstitutional, and by a 4-3 split opinion, referred the matter to the state legislature to fix the inequality.

Justice Barry T. Albin, who authored the 66 page majority ruling said, "[The] unequal dispensation of rights and benefits to committed same-sex partners

can no longer be tolerated under our State Constitution..." The opinion went on to say that "Our decision today significantly advances the civil rights of gays and lesbians. We have decided that our State Constitution guarantees that every statutory right and benefit conferred to heterosexual couples through civil marriage must be made available to committed same-sex couples."

"The bottom line here is that the entire court said that there must be a remedy for the inequality that bars same-sex couples from marriage," said David Buckel, Marriage Project Director who argued the case before the high court as lead counsel for Lambda Legal. "The question for the Legislature is an easy one: whether to follow through on the support of the majority of voters in this State to allow their gay friends and neighbors to marry, including over 20,000 committed same-sex couples raising more than 12,000 children."

Lambda Legal filed the lawsuit against the State of New Jersey in June 2002 on behalf of seven same-sex couples seeking marriage. After appealing at both the trial court and middle appellate court levels, the last stop for this case was the New Jersey Supreme Court.

"The Legislature cares about families and helping people be more responsible for each other and their children, so we hope it will pass a law quickly to honor the freedom to marry for same-sex couples," said Buckel.

The plaintiffs are: Mark Lewis and Dennis Winslow, two Episcopalian pastors from Union City, Hudson County who have been a couple for 15 years. Karen and Marcye Nicholson-McFadden, who have been together 17 years and are raising a seven-year-old son, Kasey, and three-year-old daughter Maya; Sandra Heath-Toby and Alicia Toby-Heath, who have been together 17 years and are leaders in Newark's Liberation In Truth Unity Fellowship church; Craig Hutchison and Chris Lodewyks, who have been a couple for 35 years and live in Pompton Lakes; Marilyn Maneely and Diane Marini, a southern New Jersey couple who were together for 14 years before Marilyn died tragically in the fall of 2005; Sarah and Suyin Lael, a 16-year couple raising three girls, nine-year-old Zenzali, seven-year-old Tanaj and six-year-old Danica; and Maureen Kilian and Cindy Meneghin, a couple of 32 years with a 14-year-old son, Josh, and an 12-year-old daughter, Sarah.

Lambda Legal is a national organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people and those

with HIV through impact litigation, education and public policy work.

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South African Parliament Okays Gay Marriage

The Associated Press, November 14, 2006, Cape Town, South Africa

The South African parliament on Tuesday approved new legislation recognizing gay marriages - a first for a continent where homosexuality is largely taboo.

The National Assembly passed the Civil Union Bill, worked out after months of heated public discussion, by a majority of 230 to 41 votes despite criticism from both traditionalists and gay activists and warnings that it might be unconstitutional. There were three abstentions.

The bill provides for the "voluntary union of two persons, which is solemnized and registered by either a marriage or civil union." It does not specify whether they are heterosexual or homosexual partnerships.

But it also says marriage officers need not perform a ceremony between same-sex couples if doing so would conflict with his or her "conscience, religion and belief."

"When we attained our democracy, we sought to distinguish ourselves from an unjust painful past, by declaring that never again shall it be that any South African will be discriminated against on the basis of color, creed culture and sex," Home Affairs Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula told the National Assembly.

The bill had been expected to pass given the overwhelming majority of the ruling African National Congress, despite unease among rank and file lawmakers. It now has to go to the National Council of Provinces, which is expected to be a formality, before being signed into law by President Thabo Mbeki.

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

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