

Okay. We've Come Out of the Closet as W&A. Now What Do We Do?!?

It has been a long, careful, prayerful road. We studied the Bible, met lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (lgbt) Christians and heard their stories. We led our congregation through a thorough study of human sexuality and listened to medical experts. We encouraged members to air their reservations and answered their concerns to the best of our ability. By the end of this process, which took several years, when we took the vote whether to come out of the closet, declare publicly that we were a welcoming church, and join the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, we knew the vote would be overwhelmingly positive. And it was.

We celebrated and rejoiced. But – now what?!?

A fair question. And a good one, because it means you know that the preliminary study and the vote to join AWAB are first steps, not the end of the road. Here are some suggestions of what to do next.

1. Form a permanent Welcoming & Affirming committee, a group that will be part of the church structure on a standing basis. If W&A issues are simply added to the responsibilities of the pastor, the board of deacons, or whatever, they will get lost in the shuffle. The church needs a permanent task force that will focus on lgbt issues; have the needs of lgbt members as a prime

concern; keep the church informed about current events, such as the debate over same-sex marriage; and advocate for mission dollars to support the mission work of AWAB, finance *The InSpiriter*, etc. This committee or task force, although a distinct entity, should be integrated into the church structure so that it does not become marooned on the margins of church life. The church has voted to make the welcoming and affirming ministry a central part of its witness; therefore it should own the decision and give the welcoming ministry permanent status in the life of the church.

2. Look at your sanctuary and facilities and listen to the worship with the eyes and ears of a gay or lesbian person coming for the first time. Is your signage clear and your church easy to find and identify? Does your sign board say, "A Welcoming & Affirming Congregation?" (Let's assume for the moment that the visitor knows what that means.) When visitors enter the vestibule or the sanctuary, do they see a rainbow or pink triangle or other symbol of lgbt identity? In some churches, the members of the W&A committee put rainbow stickers on their name tags. Are the words "gay and lesbian" or "sexual orientation" or "gender identity" frequently heard from the pulpit in prayers, sermons, and announcements? Does your worship bulletin make it clear that when this congregation says it welcomes "all," this truly means "all?" Lgbt people have long since learned that most congregations that say "all are welcome"

AWAB to Join with Disciples and UCC for National Gathering

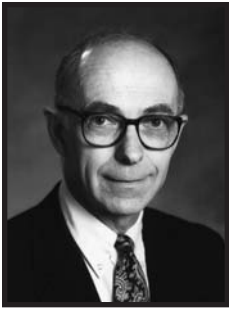
“Tapestry 2006: Live, Love, Laugh and Lead,” a joint gathering of people from the welcoming programs of Baptists, the Disciples of Christ, and the United Church of Christ, will be held June 26-29, 2006, at the University of Indianapolis in Indianapolis, Indiana. Each day of the gathering will have a theme, uplifting the empowering aspects of what it is to be a person of faith in an affirming Christian community. Each day will include a keynote speaker, worship, and opportunity for group discussion and meditation. Presenters will include, among others, Rita Nakashima Brock and Kenneth Samuel.

The sponsoring organizations are the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists (AWAB), Gay Lesbian and Affirming Disciples Alliance (GLAD), and the UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns (Coalition). These organizations are made up of lgbt and affirming people, churches, and organizations. The Tapestry group came about as a way to build on ministries of inclusion that AWAB, the Alliance of Baptists, Disciples, and UCC share.

The gathering will be held at the University of Indianapolis at its newly remodeled campus on the southern edge of downtown Indianapolis. The campus buildings being used for the conference

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Editorial

Peeling the Onion of Homophobia

by H. Darrell Lance

Why has the issue of homosexuality created such furor in church and society in recent decades? Why does it stir up such passions? Why is it called an abomination, “the sin which cannot be named,” a “threat to civilization as we know it”? If visitors from another planet were observing us, I think they would be puzzled by the inconsistent way that earthlings regard love. Our religions extol it. We praise it when displayed to families and friends. We extend it to children needing adoption or foster care, to those in the community who are sick or in financial distress, even to strangers in distant lands who have been caught up in natural disasters.

And yet, as our alien visitors would observe, when love and commitment are expressed between two earthling men or two women, many other earthlings get terribly upset. It can be a love that is as caring and as giving as that which is praised in all its other expressions; but when it is love between people of the same sex, it is regarded as disgusting and perverted. Just how would we explain this anomaly?

Or to put it another way: What are the roots of homophobia? How do we explain this negative, sometimes even violent reaction to what is – when stripped of all the culture-war rhetoric – a difference of opinion about how people may responsibly love each other. Where does this feeling come from, that there is something fundamentally distorted or immoral or unnatural with homosexual people or anyone who does not identify with and behave like the heterosexual majority? Whence arises this depth of animosity that seems out of all proportion to the cause?

For years I have puzzled over this state of affairs. I would think I had reached an answer to these questions only to realize that there were yet more layers to the onion I was peeling. At first I thought that the negative feelings about same-sex sexuality were grounded in the Bible, but I had to abandon that when I saw how inconsistent and self-serving was the biblical interpretation that supported that line of argument. The existing depth of feeling about this issue could never have arisen from the Bible’s faint concern with same-sex sexuality; rather the feelings arose elsewhere and then justification for them was sought – unsuccessfully in my opinion – in the Bible.

Next I thought that the answer lay in the peculiarly American obsession with and fear of sex. From L. William Countryman’s book *Dirt, Greed, and Sex* I learned that a culture’s attitude toward sex is shaped by its purity code – the feelings that tell a culture what is clean and what is dirty. It is America’s purity code that shapes our attitudes about sex and teaches us that sex is dirty: a joke about sex is a “dirty” joke; people that talk about sex “have their minds in the gutter.” So if the general attitude in our culture is that sex is dirty, then it’s not surprising that homosex is considered even more disgusting and dirty. So America’s attitudes toward sex in general, distorted by our peculiar ideas of purity, are indeed part of the explanation of our society’s homophobia.

However, I’ve become convinced there is a deeper layer to the onion of homophobia, one that I believe is the primary source for the psychic energy

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A New Altar Call

by Melissa McBain

How long does it take to write a play? A lifetime. *Altar Call* began in my father's church and grew in my husband's home. Worship shaped my childhood, influenced my character, and punctuated my entire life. As a child, I witnessed my father preaching to hundreds and enticing dozens down the aisle with eloquent homilies laced with North Dakota farm stories, folksy humor, and humble faith. As gospel music played, I witnessed tearful adults and timid teens leaving their pews for a slow walk to him and then a public and emotional profession of faith. New converts and old sinners answered the altar call every Sunday in churches from Brooklyn to Los Angeles and finally Phoenix. By the time I was in a "good Christian college" my father was president of the American Baptist Churches USA. We made Billy Graham's Christmas card list and started hosting dinners for Norman Vincent Peale and Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen.

How long does it take to write a play? A lifetime of sermons, soups, and silences. When my father retired, we were proud of his ecumenical outreach, his social gospel, his presidency of the American Baptist Seminary of the West in Berkeley, California, and his denominational leadership from Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. But in his retirement he confessed, "I'm glad I got out before the homosexual issue took center stage." Kissing my mother in public or discussing sexuality anywhere was not his style. He was a good man. He was a great man. But he lived without looking for the tools he needed – language, science, and social interactions – to rethink his inherited views on homosexuality. It is not too late for us.

He died still boasting. "My grandson, the doctor?" without knowing our "secret:" my son, the doctor, is gay.

How long does it take to write a play? Years of polite country-club chatter and Sunday school chats. Years of choosing reverence over truth and scholarship. And years of protecting what *Altar Call* and these admissions may cost my family.

Altar Call draws on my past, my education, and on my passions. It is true, even if it never happened. *Altar Call* depicts a minister's daughter drowning in a desert, submerged by the dictates of her fundamentalist church, the love of

**(My Father) died still boasting.
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her parents, the demands of her unfaithful husband, and the needs of her gay son. Finally, faith and family erupt, just as they now are doing in American Baptist families and churches across our nation.

Now that the curtain has come down on the Moline, Illinois, production of *Altar Call*, I need to share some of the impact this drama has had in this region and on me as the playwright and the Christian mother of a gay son.

There was significant opposition to *Altar Call* before its booking at the Playcrafters Barn Theatre. A handful of theater members responsible for recommending the season denounced its booking. During the controversy, one board member resigned. Other board members made dire predictions about losing subscribers, money, and the theater's reputation. The attendance and box office numbers are in, and it's clear that *Altar Call* was a success for the theater and the community. Attendance and profits increased by twenty percent.

The play attracted a diverse crowd, including many seniors and people who

are skeptical of providing basic fairness for gay and lesbian people. The only letter to the editor at *The Quad City Times* editor was supportive. "The writer and players of *Altar Call* joined forces to address most forcefully and truthfully a problem simmering on the back burner of our theological stove. This is perhaps one of the Barn Theatre's most impressive productions." The news coverage and publicity campaign resulted in a diverse audience for the performances of *Altar Call* and the beginning of an honest and serious discussion about issues of faith and sexual orientation.

The critical reception to *Altar Call* has been outstanding. The *Quad City Times* theater reviewer offered unqualified praise. "The show is truly a great one and it is also very powerful. This is the show and the performances that everyone will be talking about all year." Heady stuff.

Biblical scholars, social scientists, clergy, and gay activists applauded *Altar Call*. Professors of language and literature have sent their congratulations. Although I value these public and private affirmations, the personal stories that people shared with me made the strongest impact on me. The mother of a lesbian revealed that her daughter had tried four times to commit suicide. "I wish I had seen this before all the blood," she told me.

A grieving mother called me several days after seeing the drama:

Your play helped me. Not in the way you might imagine. I don't have a gay son. I have a dead one. I had a happy and almost perfect little family. I went to Bible study for several years and thought I knew what it said and what it meant. Then my son was killed when he wasn't where I thought he should be with God. It has been hard enough to lose him but unbearable to imagine that

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he's not at peace with God now. Your play has raised questions about the Bible that I didn't dare to ask. Now my grief is a little less heavy. So thank you.

A gay couple made a three-hour drive from Chicago to see *Altar Call*. After the play, one partner struggled to describe how years ago his preacher father had sent him away to be "reprogrammed and fixed for Christ." He was forced to choose between his family and his true self. The result was years of failed relationships and self loathing in a church and home that didn't know him.

I heard from many clerics and their families. A woman reported that her brother in New York City urged her to see the play. She revealed that they were from a minister's family in the area. Unbeknownst to him, his mother and retired preacher father attended the show the first weekend. "They loved it! It's too bad they didn't see this play years ago. They might have avoided a lot of mistakes they made with my brother before he moved away."

One of the most surprising stories came from a cast member. During the second week of the show a younger brother came out to his family. When the father (and elder in his church) learned of his son's sexual orientation, he started researching where he could send his son "to be delivered." During the final weekend of *Altar Call*, I sat with this son, who now feels fatherless,

as he watched his brother on stage accept a gay character.

After each Sunday matinee, we had a panel discussion about issues of faith and sexual orientation. These discussions included academic experts, spiritual leaders, and gay rights advocates. Audience members articulated shock that the Bible was an open book for 300 years. "Do preachers know this?" Dr. Ritva Williams, a New Testament

***I**t has taken me ten years
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a gay son. . .*



scholar, reminded us that "we must always ask ourselves if and how our readings and interpretations of scripture advance the love of God **and** the love of neighbor." They expressed interest in the latest scientific research on failed efforts to "reprogram" one's sexual orientation. The elderly in particular were on the edge of their seats. These informative and emotional discussions provided an important context for the play's content and created the roots for important dialogue and education.

The breadth and depth of responses to *Altar Call* have been astounding. It has taken me ten years to create art and

laughter out of my pain, ten years to publicly out myself as the mother of a gay son, and ten years to develop the necessary courage to challenge the church and clergy in my own family for ignoring the science, for misinterpreting scripture, and for demonizing a love they don't understand. As a playwright, I am obviously gratified to see characters I created find life on stage. As a mother and sister I am hopeful that these same characters will be a catalyst for not only emotional responses but also real change in our pulpits, in our association meetings, in our conventions, and in our families.

I look forward to future productions in college towns and professional theaters. As a playwright, I covet these opportunities for *Altar Call*. As a mother for justice and as the daughter of an American Baptist minister, I wait for God's people to catch up to the scholarship, slow down for the love, and affirm all of his children.

Dr. Melissa McBain is a playwright, professional actor, and theater scholar. As the Director of Clinical Experiences at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, she administers the student teaching program and produces the Quad City Playwrights Festival for young writers. As a guest lecturer she frequently addresses the depiction of doctors in drama, the focus of her doctoral dissertation.

Tapestry

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are clustered together, and both the meeting locations and lodgings are fully air-conditioned and handicap accessible.

Brian Dixon and Kevin Rose are representing AWAB on the planning committee with Chris Boisvert working on the communications team. More details of the program as it develops will be posted on the Tapestry's Web site, www.tapestry2006.org.

Costs will be approximately as follows:

- \$ 99 Early registration (by April 15, 2006)
- \$124 Registration (by May 30, 2006)
- \$150 Late registration fee (after May 30, 2006 and at the door)
- \$ 50 Daily registration rate
(On-site meal purchases for daily registrations only will be available at \$8.00 for lunch and \$10.00 for dinner)
- \$ 75 Three night's housing (double) with linen service included.
Linens include two flat sheets, one pillow with case, and two bath

towels per person. *Washcloths and blankets are not provided.*

- \$120 Three night's housing (single) with linen service included.
- \$ 60 Meal plan (3 dinners, 3 breakfasts, 2 lunches)

Registration materials and information are available by mailing Tapestry 2006, 2592 West 14th Street Cleveland, Ohio 44113, or by checking the Web site: www.tapestry2006.org. All friends of AWAB are cordially invited and urged to attend for a time of ecumenical fellowship and encouragement.

W&A Congregations in Profile: Central Baptist Church, Wayne, Pennsylvania

by Marcia B. Bailey

Central Baptist Church of Wayne, Pennsylvania (CBC), describes itself as a “caring and risking community of faith.” For more than 100 years, that caring and risking has played itself out in a variety of ways as the members and friends of this communion seek to understand their call to actively imagine the emerging reign of God, to be peacemakers and justice seekers for those in their midst and in the world.

CBC officially became a Welcoming & Affirming congregation in 1996. For some who had been members a long while, it seemed like an exercise in the obvious. The congregation already had been actively inclusive for twenty or more years. For others, it was a watershed event as the congregation intentionally and publicly “came out.” In the years since, CBC has been known locally for its sexual minority inclusion as the congregation hosts speakers, educational events and groups, and has become a public witness for justice under the leadership of Soulforce.

Yet the call to become Welcoming & Affirming is just one portion of the justice work that is on-going in this congregation. Congregation-led mission groups enact a corporate vision that values stewardship of all creation, providing hospitality for homeless persons, teaching English as a second language, providing long-term hospitality for international students, responding to issues of racial injustice, and partnering with congregations in El Salvador. In addition, there is a group who builds with Habitat for Humanity and an active group of seniors who volunteer their skills and time to support other non-profit organizations.

Marcus Pomeroy and Marcia Bailey share pastoral leadership at Central Baptist. For more than a decade, the congregation and this team have envisioned and lived into a non-hierarchical ministry of mutuality. This partnership extends beyond the pastoral team to the other staff and to the congregation as a way of birthing new spiritual community that transcends patriarchy and hierarchy. Leadership between pastors and among congregational members is shared, mutually owned and therefore, mutually sustained. It creates an interwoven web of relationships with God as the center, supporting, encouraging and empowering each to discover their call and path.

CBC is an active part of the Philadelphia Baptist Association (PBA), a relationship that has become more and more meaningful as American Baptist Churches USA continues to struggle and find its footing. PBA is a place where CBC’s leadership continues to be valued and celebrated; in November, Kathy Stayton, a CBC member and the chairperson of the AWAB

Council was the first to receive one of this Region’s outreach awards for LGBT work in our area and across the country! We are proud of both Kathy and our Region for this important witness! In addition to our American Baptist connection, Central Baptist is also affiliated with the Alliance of Baptists, a solidly welcoming and affirming group made up of Baptists from a number of current/historic affiliations.

CBC is host to a number of organizations, some of which began as missions of this congregation. Central Nursery School is in its 46th year of nurturing pre-school children and providing educational resources for parents in our community. The Women’s Resource Center, located in the CBC Mission House, serves women throughout the county offering legal and abuse counseling, networking, job and career resources, and parenting support. Mainline Youth Alliance (MYA) meets weekly at CBC; it is a youth group specifically for LGBT youth and their allies. Young people come from miles around to find support, encouragement and caring in this wonderfully unique group.

CBC moves beyond the local community to work for justice in the world. In the 1980’s this congregation welcomed undocumented refugees from the war in El Salvador. The special relationships formed between CBC and individuals and congregations in El Salvador have grown and deepened ever since. Most recently, CBC youth prepared for and participated in a youth-to-youth delegation with Salvador youth, a transforming event for all the youth and for their congregations. During apartheid, CBC partnered with a congregation in South Africa, and today the Mission House is home to a Tanzanian woman studying in the community.

Entering Central Baptist Church from the main street places one in the Martin Luther King, Jr. Commons. Between beautiful wood beams are stained glass windows; the “Motherhood of God” window, depicting representatives of all the earth held up and surrounded by eagles wings, and over the front door, the “Christ, the Peacemaker” window depicts the Spirit of God transforming swords into plowshares. “Bright colors represent the explosive transformation that occurs when peace breaks out in the world.” Turning from the windows, one sees the intricate woodcarving that captures the spirit of a communion involved with the world, caring for one another. Art, courage, vision and grace meet here....and all are welcome!

The Rev. Dr. Marcia B. Bailey has served as a part of the pastoral partnership at Central Baptist Church since 1993. She is also an adjunct professor at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, Rochester, New York.



Introducing the New Members of the AWAB Council!

The Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists meets to conduct business only every other year at the Biennial of the American Baptist Churches USA. According to the Association bylaws, the responsibility for leading the organization in the interim falls to the AWAB Council and its executive director, Ken Pennings. At full strength, the Council is composed of eleven members, eight elected by the Association membership and three who serve ex officio with voice and vote, namely, the executive director, the treasurer, and the editor of *The InSpiriter*. Also the Council may appoint a secretary. The elected members serve a two-

year term and may be re-elected twice for a total of six years before retiring.

Those whose terms ended at the Denver Biennial were Dale Edmondson, David Gregg, Heather Rittenhouse, and Kevin Rose. (Heather was subsequently appointed to the Council as secretary.) Elected to succeed them and to fill vacancies were Bill Cox (who formerly served as treasurer), Brian Dixon, Diane Hooge (who later found she would be unable to serve), Sandi John, Lee Sartain, and Jim Singletary. Mikhail Mashudi was appointed treasurer. Re-elected were Chris Boisvert and Kathy Stayton. We are pleased to introduce here the new members of the Council.



Jim Singletary

Jim grew up as a Southern Baptist in Kentucky and was completely immersed in church activities from birth. As a teen he was very involved with youth group and then with Baptist Student Union at Indiana University and somewhat also as a graduate student at the University of Iowa. In the late '80s, he moved to Minnesota where he first became involved with American Baptists, joining the University Baptist Church (W&A) in Minneapolis. He found UBC to be a very gay-affirming and supportive community, and this helped greatly in his coming out. Soon career plans took him to Boston to work with film exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, which included a few years of programming Boston's Gay and Lesbian Film Festival. He now serves the MFA as the communications coordinator for Museum Learning and Public Programs.

Upon moving to Boston, he quickly sought out a church similar to what he had experienced in Minneapolis, and that led him to Old Cambridge Baptist Church (W&A). About this time, issues of inclusion in the denomination started heating up, and the gay and straight supportive Baptists at OCBC and elsewhere

in the Boston area began mobilizing through American Baptists Concerned where Jim has served in leadership roles, both locally and nationally. He and Jim Maynard, his husband (they were legally married on Oct. 1), now live in Salem, Massachusetts, and are members of the First Baptist Church of Beverly (W&A). Jim (Maynard) is an ordained American Baptist minister.



Sandi John

The Rev. Sandi John recently completed nearly nine years as the pastor of the Washington Plaza

Baptist Church, a Welcoming & Affirming congregation, in Reston, Virginia. She has served in pastoral roles at Bancroft Avenue Baptist Church (now San Leandro Community Church) in San Leandro, California; Cambridge Drive Baptist Church in Goleta, California; and Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. Most recently she is also serving as a chaplain for Capital Hospice in northern Virginia. She holds masters degrees in mental health nursing from the University of California San Francisco and in divinity from the American Baptist Seminary of the West in Berkeley,

California, and is certified in pastoral counseling, marriage and family counseling, and mental health nursing. She has 30 years of professional experience in nursing, counseling, and pastoral care in community, hospital, hospice, and church settings with specializations in loss and grief, crisis, addictions, and the integration of emotional and spiritual needs. She is married to Dr. Chuck John, and they have two daughters.



Brian Dixon

Brian Dixon is originally from Florida, where his family still lives. He received a B.S. from Gardner-Webb

University in Boiling Springs, North Carolina, and an M.Div. from Candler School of Theology at Emory in Atlanta, Georgia. While living in Atlanta he attended Oakhurst Baptist Church, an AWAB congregation in Decatur, Georgia. He is currently the pastor of Dolores Street Baptist Church, also an AWAB church, in San Francisco, California. He is also the director of Baptist Youth Camp, a gathering of youth groups from seven congregations in the Southeast, all of which are either AWAB congregations or welcoming congregations in practice.



Lee Sartain

Hailing from Raleigh, North Carolina, Lee Sartain is a member of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in

Raleigh. Lee is a volunteer with the student ministries, among other things, at Pullen. Over the last year he has been involved with the North Carolina Coalition for Marriage Equality – which has successfully fought to keep anti-family state constitutional amendments from reaching the floor of the General Assembly in the last two sessions. Lee

has served churches in North Carolina vocationally and as a volunteer. However, currently he is an executive in the corporate world. His passion currently surrounds progressive church planting in emerging new growth population areas in North Carolina. His desire is for AWAB to be a missionary people carrying a progressive Baptist message into the world.



Mikhail Mashudi

Mikhail hails from the Pacific Northwest and is a newly elected member of the AWAB

Council. Having previously served in AWAB’s finance committee in a supporting role, he is happy to lend his organizational skills and financial know-how, gathered from his professional life, to AWAB.

Mikhail is also actively involved in his church, Judson Memorial Church (W&A) in New York. He is a member of the church’s congregational life committee and enjoys singing in the church choir and contributing to his church’s social justice programs. Outside of AWAB, Mikhail manages real estate for a major New York real estate developer. He lives and works in New York City.

Now What?

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don’t really mean it, so you have to be explicit. Put it in writing in your materials. Learn to say the “g” word, not in a way that calls attention to itself and makes it stand apart as a “big deal” but rather as an everyday part of the ongoing life of the church. Specific but not ostentatious is the ticket.

3. Reach out to the glbt community.

More than one AWAB congregation has observed that even though they voted to become W&A, no lgbt people joined their congregation. The reason for this is simple: glbt people – for good reasons – don’t trust Christians or the church. They have received too many messages – that they are “garbage in the eyes of God,” “an abomination,” “a disease that should be put outside the camp” – to believe that any congregation – especially Baptist! – could hold a different view. Thus a welcoming congregation must work patiently and persistently to overcome this impression. It may take many months before lgbt people begin to trust you.

- Among the things you need to do: Advertise regularly in the local gay and lesbian newspaper (it’s usually not very expensive), and send it news

releases of your activities, gay-related or not. Say explicitly that “welcoming and affirming means that glbt people are full participants in all aspects of the life and ministry of our church.” Advertise especially around Christmas and Easter; lgbt people are often estranged from their families and feel particularly isolated at holiday times.

- Print up a simple brochure about the welcoming ministry of your church and put a supply on the welcome table in the narthex. If there is a glbt community center, take a supply there for their information rack.
- Make a banner for your church and march with it in the local gay pride parade. The cheers from the crowds along the way will tell you what it means to them. In one case, the pride parade route passed directly by the welcoming church, and they offered cold water to the marchers and onlookers. If there is a gay picnic or festival in the area, put up a table there with your banner, your literature, and some friendly faces seated behind.
- Learn the language of the lgbt community. Although there is no “gay lifestyle” (gay people have lives, not lifestyles), there is a gay subculture with its own language, symbols, code

words, and customs that exists in a kind of parallel universe, invisible to the oblivious. One doesn’t have to become fluent in “gayspeak;” being genuine and sincere goes a long way in communicating in any situation. But even the casual traveler learns to say “Please” and “Thank you” in the local language, and it behooves a traveler into the gay subculture to do the same. If you don’t know the significance of the pink triangle or Stonewall, for example, you need to do a little homework.

- Be patient and persistent. You will be tested. It may take months of advertising and outreach before you notice a few visitors. It cannot be stated too frequently: lgbt people have learned that the local bartender is more trustworthy than the typical church. One AWAB pastor described the process of having lgbt visitors as a comet orbiting the sun. They may visit once and not be seen again for weeks. Then they reappear for a couple Sundays and disappear again. Then they may make an appointment with the pastor to come in and talk. Then they may visit the church again. It may take months before enough trust is established for the glbt person to believe that a welcoming church actually means what it says.

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4. Provide opportunities for your lgbt members and visitors to gather socially. This might be a Sunday evening social group, an occasional picnic or pot luck dinner, excursions to local fairs or tourist sites, etc. Some churches have a Sunday School class that reads and discusses some of the many books on gay liberation theology now available. Obviously, care must be taken to include “whosoever” in these

AWAB Seeks Council Nominations

AWAB invites your suggestions of a pastor of an AWAB-member church to fill a current vacancy on the Council. The Council regretfully accepted the resignation of the Rev. Diane Hooge of Judson Memorial Baptist Church in Minneapolis, an AWAB congregation. Responsibilities of Council membership include: meeting via teleconference about every two months; face-to-face meetings twice a year, this year in Birmingham, Alabama, during the Alliance of Baptists Convocation April 21-23 and in Austin, Texas, the third or fourth weekend of October during an AWAB regional gathering there; and a willingness to follow his/her passion in the Welcoming movement through one of several possible committees that support the mission of AWAB. The nominee must currently be pastor of a church that is a member of AWAB. Please send your suggestions to Ken Pennings, executive director, at the AWAB office, P.O. Box 259257, Madison, WI 53725, 608-255-2155, ken@wabaptists.org. He will pass the suggestions to the nominating committee for follow up.

Kathy Stayton, Council chairperson

groups lest they become ghettoized and cut off from the rest of the membership. Every church that has voted to become W&A will have family, friends, and other allies who will enjoy the company of new glbt members and gladly help them to feel at home within the entire congregation.

5. Continue the education of the church. Regardless of how thorough and patient the process before the W&A vote, many questions will remain. Moreover, a congregation is a living organism; stalwart supporters die or move away and new members join who did not go through the education process. Like sexism and racism, homophobia and heterosexism are deeply embedded in all of us. Thus the W&A committee must find ways to continue to educate and re-educate.

- Plan and present a W&A worship service on a regular basis. Let lgbt people and family members tell their stories.
- Submit items to the church newsletter to inform the congregation about the problems facing glbt Christians and the ostracism they often experience at the hands of their “Christian” families; about current events – the appointment of a gay Episcopal bishop; Connecticut’s vote to adopt civil unions without a court order; the refusal of the Massachusetts legislature to challenge gay marriage, etc.
- Ask the church librarian to buy some of the many books on gay liberation that are now available so that people may read and educate themselves.
- Work with Sunday School teachers to help them combat the hate language that is so common today among school children. Children don’t know what “gay” means, but they often hear their peers say it as a way to put down someone or some teacher or even some song they don’t like, saying “Oh, that’s so gay!” Help them see that this language, like racial or ethnic slurs, is unacceptable.

- Plan a periodic review of the study process that led to the vote to become W&A, especially for the church leadership. The leaders who were active during the time the church was preparing for W&A membership go on to other tasks, and their successors may not have the same level of understanding of lgbt issues. Thus every few years, the leadership of the church changes, and care must be taken that the new leaders understand what is at stake.
- Encourage people to ask for *The InSpiriter* to be sent to them – and be sure they know it is free of charge. Also, each member church receives a packet of ten copies sent to the church. These should be forwarded to the church moderator and the current chairs of boards and other leaders so they may stay informed about issues affecting glbt Christians in general and AWAB in particular

6. Make common cause with other welcoming churches and organizations. There may be other welcoming churches in the area, e.g. “More Light” (Presbyterian); “Open and Affirming” (United Church of Christ); “Reconciling Ministries” (United Methodist), etc. Perhaps you can sponsor special social or learning events in common. Build a bridge to the local chapter of P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), an organization that helps people come to terms with the coming out of a daughter or son or other family member and who often have religious questions.

Educating and re-educating a congregation how to become more welcoming and affirming is a continuous process, but the rewards are great. Not only will you have the joy of communicating Good News to those who are truly hungry for it, you will find that these new members get deeply involved in their church homes. As one W&A pastor put it: “Who wouldn’t want new lgbt members? They work like crazy!” After all, when grain falls on fertile ground, the eventual harvest can be great.

Darrell Lance to Retire as Editor of *The InSpiriter*

by Kathy Stayton

Darrell Lance, who has been the editor of *The InSpiriter (TIS)* since its inception, has informed the Council of AWAB that he will be retiring from this position at the end of June, 2006.

In recognition of his personhood and what will be his ten years of service as editor, AWAB presented Darrell with the Randle R. Mixon Award at the 2005 biennial AWAB membership meeting in Denver. In his acceptance, Darrell said, "My life has been spent in education, and I know from experience that education can be a powerful instrument in opening the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf and especially in breaking loose the chains of those who are bound in darkness. As my time as editor of *The InSpiriter* begins to draw to a close, I promise you here today that as long as God gives me strength, I shall continue to work through education that the liberating gospel might come to all lgbt people."

"My hat is off to Darrell," writes Rev. Howard Bess, AWAB advocate and former Council member. He continues, "During my tenure on the AWAB board, the most important action decision that we made was to publish not just a newsletter, but a journal with solid editorials, scholarly articles, and personal witness.

Darrell made it happen, sometimes under trying circumstances...*TIS* gave 40 to 50 churches a voice that was heard loud and clear throughout the denomination. The quality of the publication made our message difficult to ignore. I believe history will show that our movement caused enormous changes for justice and good in ABCUSA. The role of *TIS* and Darrell Lance cannot be overestimated."

I, for one, continue to marvel at Darrell's editorials and choice of articles. Thank you, Darrell, for your dedication to and high standards for *The InSpiriter* and your contributions toward an inclusive church.

The Council is delighted to announce that we have already found a worthy and enthusiastic successor, the Rev. Dr. JoAnne Juett, who has a Ph.D. in comparative literature and is a working pastor at First Baptist Church, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. She and Darrell have already begun to work together toward a smooth transition. You can expect a more thorough description of JoAnne in the next issue of *TIS*.

Kathy Stayton is the chairperson of the AWAB Council.

Welcoming & Affirming Congregations and Ministries

Alaska

Palmer, Church of the Covenant

California

Berkeley, First Baptist Church
Oakland, Lakeshore Ave. Baptist Church
San Francisco, Dolores St. Baptist Church
San Jose, New Community of Faith
San Leandro, San Leandro Community Church

Colorado

Grand Junction, Koinonia Church

Connecticut

New Britain, South Church
Noank, Noank Baptist Church

District of Columbia

Riverside Baptist Church

Georgia

Decatur, Oakhurst Baptist Church

Illinois

Chicago, Grace Baptist Church
Evanston, Lake Street Church

Kentucky

Louisville, Jeff Street Baptist Community Church at Liberty

Maine

Portland, Immanuel Baptist Church

Massachusetts

Arlington, Horizons Counseling Associates
Beverly, First Baptist Church
Brookline, United Parish
Cambridge, Old Cambridge Baptist Church
Northborough, Trinity Church
Northampton, First Churches
Provincetown, The Lighthouse
Worcester, Bethany Christian United Parish
Worcester, First Baptist Church
Yarmouthport, Healthsigns Counseling Center

Minnesota

Minneapolis, Judson Memorial Baptist Church
Minneapolis, University Baptist Church

New Jersey

Middletown, Old First Church
Princeton, Christ Congregation
Summit, Christ Church

New York

Albany, Emmanuel Baptist Church
Buffalo, Good Shepherd Baptist Church
Cortland, United Community Church
Ithaca, First Baptist Church
Jamestown, The Judson Fellowship
NYC, Judson Memorial Church

NYC, Madison Ave. Baptist Church

NYC, Maranatha, Riverside Church

NYC, The Riverside Church
Rochester, Lake Ave. Baptist Church

Schenectady, Emmanuel Baptist - Friedens UCC

North Carolina

Chapel Hill, Olin T. Binkley Memorial Church
Charlotte, Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America
Charlotte, Wedgewood Baptist Church
Raleigh, Pullen Memorial Baptist Church
Winston-Salem, Wake Forest Baptist Church

Ohio

Granville, First Baptist Church
Oberlin, Peace Community Church

Pennsylvania

Drexel Hill, Drexel Hill Baptist Church
Pittsburgh, Community of Reconciliation
State College, University Baptist and Brethren
Wayne, Central Baptist Church

Tennessee

Memphis, Prescott Memorial Baptist
Nashville, Glendale Baptist Church

Texas

Austin, University Baptist Church
Cedar Park, Church of the Savior
Houston, Covenant Church

Virginia

Reston, Washington Plaza Baptist

Washington

Seattle, Companis Mission Workers Assoc.
Seattle, Seattle First Baptist Church
Seattle, University Baptist Church

Wisconsin

Madison, First Baptist Church
Milwaukee, Broken Walls Christian Community
Wauwatosa, Underwood Memorial Baptist Church

For more information on each of the above, go to www.wabaptists.org and click on "Find a Welcoming & Affirming Church."

Editorial

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that has made the battle over homosexuality so intense. Let me make my case.

It has often been observed that men have a great deal more difficulty dealing with the issue of homosexuality than do women. A poll reported in *TIME* in 1997 found that 45% of men felt it important to have laws prohibiting homosexual relationships, but only 24% of women did. I think we find a clue as to why this is the case in an interchange between Pat Buchanan, the columnist and former presidential candidate, and Andrew Sullivan, an openly gay writer and former editor of *The New Republic*. They were engaging in a TV debate about the issue of gay marriage, and at one point Buchanan exploded, “It’s not what you are that’s the problem, Andrew; it’s what you do!” Now this is a statement both curious and telling. Unless Mr. Buchanan has a video camera in Mr. Sullivan’s bedroom, he doesn’t have a clue as to what it is that Mr. Sullivan “does.” Mr. Buchanan’s problem, thus, is with what he **imagines** that Mr. Sullivan does in his bedroom. What is the focus of this imagination?

Well, admittedly I don’t have a video camera into Mr. Buchanan’s imagination. But there are some pretty impressive anthropological and sociological data to allow us to make a guess about what he is thinking. Let’s start by analyzing an ordinary saying that we hear all the time. It’s a vulgar expression that takes many forms, so let me choose a couple of the milder varieties. We say, “Man, I really got royally screwed,” or “Boy, he really shafted me!” (You don’t have to be a Freudian to know what shaft is being referred to!) Now what does a male speaker of this or countless similar expressions mean? Clearly, the speaker is saying that he, figuratively speaking, has been anally penetrated. He has been the victim of unscrupulous, brutal behavior; or to put it bluntly, he has been anally raped.

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 illustrates this nicely. In ancient societies, as Bernadette Brooten and others have pointed out, the distinction that we draw between homosexual and heterosexual did not exist. People did not classify each other, as we do, according to their sexual orientation. The concept of sexual orientation as an intrinsic part of a person’s psychic makeup is a modern idea, unknown to

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the biblical writers. Rather the distinction had to do with sex roles: those who penetrate — strong, aggressive, dominant, macho, always male, of course — and those who are penetrated — the trespasser, the unprotected, the stranger (as in the case of Genesis 19), the prisoner, the weakling — and of course the woman. The sexist theme is paramount. To rape a man is the supreme humiliation because it turns him into a woman.

Modern parallels are easily cited. In the movie *Deliverance*, a mountain man rapes the members of a white-water canoeing party who have intruded into his territory. A few years back a boxer created an uproar and was forced to apologize when he said of his upcoming opponent, “I’m going to make him my girlfriend.” On the last Saturday Night Live before the 1996 election, the actor playing Bob Dole was told “Tuesday Bill Clinton is going to make you his woman.” All this fits with the common understanding of the expression about getting screwed. There is no implication that the one who did the screwing is homosexual. Rather he is a mean, dominant, bullying, s.o.b, who brutalizes and

humiliates his victims by treating them like a woman.

I think all this helps us to understand why some men have such problems with male homosexual persons. Ignoring the issue of sexual orientation and whether or not genuine love and caring are possible between two people of the same sex, they fixate like Buchanan on the issue of behavior, the real or imagined act of anal penetration. The passive homosexual partner is seen to be betraying the entire male population; he is voluntarily acting out the subliminal fear of every male who has ever said, “Boy, did I get screwed.” He is abdicating his role as the dominant sex and hence is a threat to the whole basis of a sexual system that is built on the assumption that there is a dominant sex (male) and a subordinate sex (female). Any variation from this pattern undermines the status of male superiority.

So at the core of the onion of homophobia is the issue of power: Who is to be in control? The current system is constructed on the understanding that there are two clear genders, male and female, and that males are to be dominant. Men who refuse to play their part in maintaining this system (notably gay men) and women who love women, thus rendering male control moot, are a potentially fatal threat to this system. Perhaps even more threatening are those — the transgender — who challenge the very concept of strict division of gender. The Christian church has historically and unreflectively bought into this system of exclusive male-female categories and the concomitant corollary of male dominance. Is it mere coincidence that those church traditions that are the most hostile to LGBT persons are also the most male dominated? If the church is truly to be about the task of proclaiming good news equally to all — gentile and Jew, slave and free, female and male, gay and straight — then the time has come to re-examine a system that presumes the subordination of half of the human race.



From the Executive Director: Ken's Pennings

by Ken Pennings

AWAB just grew larger AND better! In October 2005, we welcomed two new congregations to the membership: Drexel Hill Baptist Church (ABC), Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania, and Community of Reconciliation (ABC and others), Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

The goal of Drexel Hill is to create a place which is safe for everyone. They have a particular concern that the Christian church has effectively excluded individuals who are openly gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, and/or transgender. They believe God's love extends to all people. Drexel Hill has an outreach ministry located in Philadelphia: Fusion Church, which ministers primarily to the lgbtq (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community.

Community of Reconciliation is a radically inclusive congregation and is also a member of Open & Affirming Ministries (O&A) of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), More Light Presbyterians of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Open and Affirming Program (ONA) of the United Church of Christ, and Reconciling Ministries Network of the United Methodist Church.

Welcome to Drexel Hill and Community of Reconciliation! We are delighted to have you with us, and look forward to building a more inclusive Christian community with you!

The year 2006 promises to be a very exciting and productive year for our welcoming church movement! AWAB announces the **"2006 Expanding the Welcoming Church Movement 12-Stop Tour!"**

The **Tour** features 12 regional community-building events and one national event. A description of the first three regional events follows:

Michigan Gathering: Feb. 17-19 "Expanding the Welcoming Church Movement." Sponsored and hosted by Woodside Church, Flint, Michigan. For all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer-curious, and allied people seeking Christian fellowship. Facilitators: AWAB director Rev. Ken Pennings and Rev. Heather Rittenhouse, AWAB Council member and pastoral staff member of First Baptist Church, Granville, Ohio. Out-of-towners should make own arrangements for accommodations. Contact Steve Blinks, 810-733-2618, rsb62@aol.com, or Rev. Deborah Kohler, 810-767-4911, deborahk@woodsidechurch.net.

Feb. 17, 6:00-7:30 p.m. Jazz Vespers, at Woodside Church, 1509 East Court Street, Flint, Michigan 48503-6202. 810-767-4911 (next to Mott Community College).

Feb. 18, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. Community-Building Event at Woodside Church. Lunch included: \$5. Come celebrate our Christian unity and diversity through inspirational music and

messages and through group interaction. Also find out more about the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists.

Feb. 18, 6:00-10:00 Dinner social, at the home of Jim Hazen, 5476 Woodfield Parkway, Grand Blanc, Michigan 48439.

Dinner provided by the members of Woodside Church. No charge.

Feb. 19, 10:00 a.m. Worship at Woodside Church. Ken Pennings, preaching. 11:30 a.m. Talk-Back - Facilitators: Heather Rittenhouse and Ken Pennings.

Northeast Gathering: Feb. 23-25 "Welcome Back Again: Our Journey from Pain to Power" at the Madison Avenue Baptist Church in New York City. Participants will have an opportunity to worship, share spiritual journeys, heal, make spiritual connections, and build new networks of friends. Guest speakers include Rev. Ken Pennings, executive director of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, and Rev. Alan Newton, executive minister of the Rochester/Genesee Region of American Baptists. Friday afternoon will be free to explore New York City with new friends.

Friends and family of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists will provide housing in New York for those interested who register before February 10, 2006. A \$50.00 fee includes a reception with hors d'oeuvres and beverages and two light lunches. Ken Pennings will preach at Madison Avenue Baptist on Sunday, Feb. 26, for those who can stay an additional day. Contact welcomingandaffirming@hotmail.com for further information. Information will also be available at <http://www.wabaptists.org/northeast.htm>.

Bay Area Gathering, March 18-22, "Expanding the Welcoming Church Movement"

March 18, 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. Community Building Event: Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church, 3534 Lakeshore Ave., Oakland, California 94610, 510-893-2484. All welcoming and affirming Baptists of all denominations and affiliations invited!

March 19, 10:00 a.m. Worship: First Baptist Church, 2345 Channing Way, Berkeley, California 94704. 510-848-5838, fbcberk@aol.com. Preacher: Ken Pennings, executive director of AWAB

March 22, 12:00 noon-2:00 p.m. BLT (Baptists Lunching Together): Ken Pennings will be the presenter. At Grand Lake Gardens (ABC retirement facility), 401 Santa Clara Ave., Oakland, California 94610 (1/2 mile from Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church). Cost \$8. Call Joan Thatcher (510-843-4656) for reservations by Monday, March 20. Capacity: 50 people.

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The InSpiriter

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The first-ever collaborative national gathering of AWAB, UCC, and Disciples of Christ welcoming congregations, Tapestry: Live, Love, Laugh & Lead, will take place June 26-29 at the University of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, Indiana. Please make every effort to attend Tapestry. Register at www.tapestry2006.org.

“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realm in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6-7, NIV). I love the view from “the heavenly realm,” don’t you? Keep perspective, dear friends!

AWAB Online...

Explore AWAB’s web site at www.wabaptists.org!

Read *Associational*, a periodic newsletter from executive director Ken Pennings at www.wabaptists.org/associational.htm. To subscribe, send an e-mail to e-subscribe@wabaptists.org with SUBSCRIBE in the subject line.

For commentary, thoughts, and stories, read *The Voice of the Turtle*, at www.wabaptists/voto.htm. Or go to www.wabaptists.org and click on *Voice of the Turtle Online*. Also, some back issues of *The InSpiriter* are posted online.

The InSpiriter

Established in 1996 as a ministry of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, *The InSpiriter* is distributed free of charge. Although there is no subscription fee, contributions are always needed. Please send your tax-deductible gift, payable to AWAB, to AWAB, P. O. Box 259257, Madison, WI 53725. To be added to the mailing list – or deleted – contact Ken Pennings, mail@wabaptists.org, or write him at the above address.