



The InSpiriter

A publication of the **Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists**

The National Voice for LGBT Baptists

www.wabaptists.org

Volume 11 Issue 4
Summer, 2007

AWAB Has a Passionate Vision for the Future

By Jill McCrory, Minister of Outreach, Washington Plaza Baptist Church

On first glance, one would have thought that the group meeting at Riverside Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. on June 28, 2007 was working on an art project. Small groups hovered around flip charts, cutting out pictures and headlines from magazines and gluing them into a collage. Actually, it was a visioning session for the AWAB

Council, and it sparked some interesting conversations resulting in a new organizational identity statement. The Council realized that it wanted to focus on being an organization that not only talked about the issues, but created results and took practical actions, and that was a voice of change. From this discussion a fuller, richer identity statement emerged and the council decided to embrace:

**AWAB IS THE
NATIONAL
VOICE FOR
LGBT BAPTISTS.**

The council envisions being even more vocal, responding to national issues with comments or answers. This and other strategies will help increase AWAB's visibility and recognition by the media.

The council also envisions

- providing press kits, podcasts, and other information to AWAB churches to give them a voice;
- adding new AWAB churches throughout the country;
- providing churches with tool kits to assist them in welcoming and affirming conversations;
- creating a national community with regional events;
- being flexible in deciding time and location of holding the AWAB biennial meeting.

This new statement gives AWAB a huge responsibility. A healthy and successful organization realizes that its attitude and action must confirm its mission. As author John Maxwell states, "Anyone can dream. Effective leadership is knowing

how to lay down the action steps for yourself and the organization so that the vision can be realized." The AWAB council realizes this and is moving toward a full plan of action that will move the organization toward fulfilling its mission.

However, the Council does not work alone in achieving the vision. Everyone involved in AWAB churches has the opportunity to be a part of the plan and a part of the success as well. At the gathering in June, AWAB church representatives were asked for their input on "what might be possible" in the future of AWAB. Many answers were in line with the Council's visioning session. Groups discussed being more in touch with each other, holding more events, placing ads in LGBT newspapers, getting more information to churches about becoming welcoming and affirming, getting the word out about the existence of AWAB churches and the AWAB organization, increasing education in the community, participating in Pride and similar events, and more.

So what has to happen now? In the next few months the Council will continue the discussion they began in June. The Council will begin to identify what has to happen, change, or even cease to enable

AWAB Vision continued on 7



Council members Dave Parnell and Ron Green (L-R) work on their visioning project.

Inside this Issue...

Page 2
Editorial

Page 3
**AWAB Pastor Responds to
Bridge Collapse, Douglas
Donley**

Page 4
**W&A Congregations in
Profile: Washington Plaza
Baptist Church**

Page 6
**AWAB Council Chair Reflects
on AWAB Business Meeting**

Pages 8
AWAB Awards

Page 9
**Memories of AWAB Worship
Service**

Page 10
Ken's Pennings

Page 11
**AWAB Welcomes New Council
Members; Says Farewell to
Retiring Council Members;
Welcomes New Congregations**



Editorial

by JoAnne C. Juett

“Bi” The Way: Another perspective on Identity

“I am not gay,” is the mantra of embattled Senator Larry Craig of Idaho. His guilty plea then denial, along with his continued reversals of position, have spurred public outcries from both sides of the legislative aisles and from myriad cultural communities. My thoughts have been spurred as well, but not in the same ways. Admittedly, at the forefront of the entire situation is the issue of integrity—integrity about gender and sexuality issues, integrity about public statements, and integrity in regard to upholding the responsibilities of public office. The former is most significant, because as long as politics pushes its members to hide their true identities, then nothing of integrity can be possible in our society.

All that being said, I still think there is an issue to be considered that no one is. What about the issue of bisexuality? In our current world order and view, we, heterosexual and homosexual alike, succumb to its dualities instead of considering the myriad of

“I do raise the issue...that bisexuality is always a possible, a viable identification as people question, grapple with, and struggle with their orientation.”

options that really exist. Politicians are still forced into gender constructions—either they are gay or not—rather than authentic gender identifications. I think it is possible that a politician, male or female, who has chosen a heterosexual spouse, may well eventually come to terms with an identification that transcends traditional gender and sexuality constructions. This means that she or he might well identify as bisexual, still maintaining an attraction to her or his heterosexual spouse but realizing same sex attractions as well.

I am not, let me repeat, I am not saying this is the case for Larry Craig, or any other politician who is dealing with gender and sexuality questions, whether by their own admission or public demand. I do raise the issue, though, that bisexuality is always a possible, a viable identification as people question, grapple with, and struggle with their orientation.

We in the Christian tradition can find little in scripture to help answer these questions and struggles. Yet, I believe that the all-inclusive ministry of Jesus, a ministry that embraced women, touched the unclean, and envisioned the family as a village and not nuclear, could certainly be holy ground for a bisexual person as well.

As a professor of literary theory, I offer the perspective of transgender criticism to my classes. This in no way deals with transsexual issues, which themselves involve a clear duality of gender. Instead, the transgender perspective looks beyond gender to individual identity issues, fully considering the individuality, including sexuality, of every human being in every changing situation we find ourselves. The transgender perspective moves us beyond binary oppositions of masculine and feminine and the

social constructions of sexuality to an affirmation of the diversity of sexuality in our society.

As a biblical scholar, I can specifically apply a transgender perspective to the ministry, words and deeds, of Jesus. Let us consider some encounters Jesus has with women. When Jesus speaks to the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:1-11), he tells her to “not sin again.” But, what exactly would this sin be? Jesus does not clearly state, “do not commit adultery” again, but leaves his command much more general with the word “sin.” It is fully possible here that Jesus intends that giving one’s self up to meet the sexual constructs of the society—woman gives herself up to man—is the real sin here, rather than the breach of integrity involved in adultery. In fact, we never meet the man at all, who surely must be guilty of the same sinful condemnation afforded this woman; so, the emphasis upon the woman here must indicate that Jesus implies something much more. If we see Jesus’ ministry as transgender, then he would find that succumbing to the sexual roles of the day, based on limited societal constructions of sexuality, would be anathema, yes sinful, as it limits one’s God-given individual potential that transcends the limits of human imagination. So, as this woman leaves Jesus, she receives his instruction to no longer “sin,” to live in freedom from the demands placed on women by the men of Jewish society.

When Jesus meets the woman at the well (Jn 4), he doesn’t even mention anything about “sin.” He simply acknowledges that she has no husband. Is it possible that he sees her moving out of marital constraints as a move toward the freedom of individuality, rather than a breach of humanly constructed gender role expectations? Here Jesus opens the possibility that being his follower means transcending traditional cultural understandings of marriage and even heterosexual relationships, since he doesn’t even comment about her current relationship with the man to whom she is not married. In fact, Jesus only goes on to speak about worshiping God in

Bi The Way continued on 5

The InSpiriter

is published quarterly by the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists
Ken Pennings, executive director
P.O. Box 259257, Madison, WI 53725
Phone: 608-255-2155
e-mail: ken@wabaptists.org

Send editorial correspondence to the editor. Send address changes to the publisher (address above).

The Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists is composed of Baptist churches, organizations, and individuals who have gone on record as being welcoming and affirming of all persons, without regard to sexual orientation or gender identity, and who have joined together to advocate for inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons within Baptist communities of faith.

Materials in *The InSpiriter* may be freely copied or reprinted unless they carry their own copyright. Copied materials should indicate their source and be distributed free of charge.

JoAnne C. Juett, Editor, 1402 Vine St., Eau Claire, WI 54703, jcuett@charter.net (photo provided by the Leader-Telegram, Eau Claire, WI)

A WAB Pastor Responds to Bridge Collapse

“At the River I Stand,” a sermon preached by Rev. Douglas M. Donley

August 5, 2007

Psalm 46, Matthew 6:19-21

***Combined Service of University Baptist Church and First Congregational Church
Minneapolis, MN***

Rev. Donley, pastor of University Baptist Church, delivered this sermon the weekend following the disastrous collapse of the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis, MN on August 1, 2007. 13 people died and over 100 were injured.

It falls upon me to offer a word of hope, comfort and perspective this morning in the aftermath of the tragedy just a few blocks from this very building. Eric Nelson [pastor of First Congregational Church] and I spoke at length this past week. He was certainly conflicted about whether to remain in Minnesota or take his long-planned trip to Guatemala. We spoke about how surreal it all is. How insulated and isolated we are even these few blocks away. It's hard to go back to normal, whatever that is. Eric spoke about being in Guatemala after a mud slide and how digging through the mud at least gave one a tangible connection. We don't have that right now. He ultimately decided to go to Guatemala, and he sends his prayers, his support, and his concern to both of our communities.

I confess that I am feeling woefully inadequate to address the multitude of emotions that are swirling around this room right now.

We wonder why this happened.

We wonder what steps could have been taken to prevent it.

We wonder about the families that are still awaiting word from loved ones.

We wonder what cruel trick of fate kept us off the bridge we travel so often when others were there.

We wonder what the implications of this tragedy will

be in the coming days, months and years.

We wonder how August 1st will become a date ingrained in our history, not unlike August 6th is remembered as Hiroshima Day.

We wonder how to live our lives in response to this tragedy as we remember once again that life is both fragile and a precious gift given to us.

Wonder is what brings us together. It is also the seed of hope.

It's the seed of hope because we do not

rush to answers, but remain in our grief, in our anguish, in our confusion. And we remain there long enough to get a clear vision of how to move forward. It's too early, I think, to really move forward. Everything is still too raw. And yet, we come here so that we will resist the temptation to go on with life as usual. We know we have been shaken and a portion of our former life has crumbled into the river.

Grief counselors tell us that there are five stages of grief. The first is shock (Oh, my God). The second is denial (this didn't really happen; maybe I'll wake up from the nightmare). The third stage is bargaining (if I had only done this...if I had only left a few minutes earlier...if we had only fixed the dang bridge). The fourth stage is anger (how dare we let people drive on a structurally deficient bridge). The fifth stage is acceptance. There is no rhyme or reason to going through these stages. Folks go through them many times or linger on one for a long time. They say that it takes eight hours of telling the story for you to move from one stage to another. We have to tell the stories. We can't stuff it or bury it. It's part of our grieving process.

Both of our congregations held services of prayer on Thursday. We prayed. We lit candles. We heard the stories of where we were when the bridge fell.

We shared the concern for the people still missing. We prayed for and heard the struggles we all have in responding in an effective and appropriate manner.

At UBC we sang, "Precious Lord, Take My Hand." It seemed an appropriate song of comfort and longing. And then we got to the third verse: "At the River I stand, guide my feet, hold my hand. Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home." I don't think I will ever sing those words without remembering what happens when we stand at the river. I think about all of

our river songs and I wonder if they will all be like that for us.

"I went down to the river to pray, studying about the good old way and who shall wear a starry crown, good Lord, show me the way. Oh brother/let's go down come on down/won't you come on down. Oh sister let's go down, down to the river to pray."

"Yes, we'll gather at the river, the beautiful the beautiful river. Gather with the saints at the river that flows by the throne of God."

A river by its nature is always changing. It's sometimes calm. It's often foreboding. It's a place of power. Amos said our worship ought to be one in which "justice flows down like a river and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Until this week, we were all able to simply go over the river without even thinking about it.

Many of you have said to me, "I never even thought about the river being under that bridge; I was more concerned about getting into the correct lane."

But now we are gathered at the river, or at a safe distance. And we contemplate its power once again.

This river was where our congregations used to hold our baptisms—summer or winter. Now a different kind of baptism happens there. There in the river, there are no longer barriers of class or race or ethnicity or religion or political party.

We are all united by our desire to learn from this, to comfort those who mourn, to rescue and treat the injured, to recover the remains of those for whom we all grieve.

We have been buoyed by the stories of heroism as the tragedy unfolded...people climbing onto the shaky structure to pull people out of a school bus, to help people up onto the banks, to treat the wounded, to offer comfort to the afflicted. This was the best of Minnesota. It was that selflessness that I will long remember.

It was Nate Miller bandaging a walking wounded person.

River continued on 7

W&A Congregations in Profile: Washington Plaza Baptist Church, Reston, Virginia

contributed by Jill McCrory and Sandi John

www.washingtonplazachurch.com



1615 Washington Plaza
Lake Anne Center
Reston, VA 20190

Interim Minister:
Jere Allen
Minister of Outreach:
Jill McCrory
Minister of Music:
Glenn Cain

of a mixed-use area that includes offices, retail, restaurants, and housing. At one point in the history of WPBC (and when certainly the lake was cleaner!) they did baptisms in Lake Anne – so literally going “down to the river”!

WPBC tries to be a safe place for folks who have been turned off by their experience with or in churches or even totally disenfranchised by the church. The congregation offers a welcoming and affirming place to be fully a part of the faith community. This not only attracts an LGBT group, but women from traditions that do not affirm women’s full spiritual leadership, folks from a variety of more formal or liturgical faith traditions, those that identify as atheist or agnostic but are still interested in a spiritual conversation/experience, and those who because of addiction or other issues don’t feel comfortable or have felt judged in some faith environments. Simply put, WPBC is a safe place to explore one’s faith and spirituality. This doesn’t mean WPBC offers a watered down theology; in fact, WPBC is intentional about being a Christ-centered church and is very intentional about Jesus showing up in worship, media, etc.

PFLAG has a support group that meets at WPBC once a month and many WPBC members are very faithful in attending this as representatives of their W&A church. They have experienced all sorts of opportunities to minister to parents, relatives and friends of our LGBT community, helping them know that there is hope and acceptance and that WPBC is certainly a faith option for them. WPBC has gained several members from within the support group as they learn that, again, WPBC is a safe place, and they know that they won’t ever hear the LGBT community criticized or condemned from the pulpit. They also learn that there are role models within WPBC leadership.

WPBC is active in PRIDE celebrations and with Equality Fairfax. Outreach Minister Jill McCrory is active with Equality MD, AWAB, HRC, and GLAAD.

WPBC is also active with Reston Interfaith which provides many services to the Reston community; members teach ASL

classes at the church and have done repair work in the Katrina area for the last two years. WPBC actively participates in the Reston community in such activities as walks for hunger, backpacks for school kids, and making lunches for the homeless.

YAWeH is another significant ministry of WPBC, the “heartburst” of Dean Jenkins (former Minister of Music). (See following description and tribute.)



YAWeH (You Are WELcome Here) meets the first Sunday each month from 6:30 to 7:30 PM for a Christian discussion group reinforcing God’s love for the LGBT community and others who feel disenfranchised by organized religion. It is our hope that YAWeH will serve as a gateway for persons to find a relationship with God and with others who follow Jesus.

Editor’s Note: The following is a tribute by Rev. Sandi John, former pastor of WPBC, spoken in honor of Dean Jenkins upon his recent passing. Dean was a searching soul, attempting to answer and live the calling he felt to Gospel ministry, even through he experienced rejection by churches because he was gay, and he struggled with addiction. He did live his call at WPBC as their Minister of Music and through AWAB as a part of the pastoral care team. The AWAB Council learned of Dean’s death during the celebration of our biennial meeting in Washington, DC. The news was a crisis experience for all of us, our celebration was momentarily halted, and we comforted one another as we grieved the loss. Dean struggled with his demons to the end, but this summer he succumbed to alcoholism. This tribute expresses the tears of his friend and colleague Sandi John and the painful loss felt throughout AWAB.

Dean Jenkins was one of the greatest gifts God has given me in ministry. I really don’t want to be here doing this today. I wanted so much to preach his ordination service not his memorial service. Being in ministry partnership with Dean here at WPBC was one of my greatest joys and hopes in ministry. I trusted him, relied on his deep connection to the Spirit, and loved him as a brother.

You all know what an amazing musician he was and that he was equally gifted as a preacher, a worship planner, a bridge-builder among people, a courageous spiritual leader. In my exit interview as pastor here at WPBC, I said that the best decision I made was the one to invite Dean to the worship service of the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists in June 2003 where he re-dedicated himself to his call to the Gospel ministry which he had

Dean Jenkins continued on 5

Dean Jenkins continued from 4

received nearly 20 years previous.

I have so many wonderful images of Dean in my mind—

- The Sunday after the Marsha Stevens concert (Born Again Lesbian Ministries) when I had invited him to lead the opening prayer in the service, the tears in his eyes and how he looked up, took a deep breath, and then prayed with such groundedness and strength. He was back leading worship where he belonged. Marsha's song, "Dig Your Own Wells," about the need for LGBT persons not to wait around for others to usher them into ministry but to take charge themselves, he told me had inspired him.

- The rapture and exuberance in his whole being the day after a concert. He beamed, "I just can't believe it is now my job to do what gives me so much joy."

- The day during our Tom Bandy consultation when he walked into my office and said, "I know what my heartburst is!" He then shared his vision for the YAWeH (You are Welcome Here) worship service.

- His imposing ashes on Ash Wednesday and leading communion at Maundy Thursday. He loved these liturgical acts where he could bless others whenever his role didn't call for leading music.

- His sharing of his experience, "I was taught wrong," about his learning to play piano scales, how he then applied it to theology and led so many of us further away from unhealthy teachings.

In one of the first sermons Dean preached at WPBC when we were in that truth-declaring struggle we went through on being a Christ-centered community, he took Jesus' words in John 6:35, "I am the bread of Life." I can picture Dean pausing and looking around, "I sense the hunger in this church, and Jesus is the Bread of Life. There I've said it!"

I think everyone who loves Dean is in shock and confusion over his untimely (from our point of view) death. I was aware of some of his wounds and struggles, but not their depth. I am aware of his physical pain and fear that he might lose his ability to play the piano if he had surgery excising the growths under his arm. I am aware of his fears of losing financial security and belonging.

What I think is that he perceived the barriers as too much to be overcome, that he was genetically vulnerable to alcoholism, and the addiction took over. What I also feel I know is that he chose to be with God rather than on this earth where his heart had been shattered over and over. He had told us that in the many years when he felt rejected by the church, he had always known God's love and felt connected to God.

What I DO know and feel Dean knew is that nothing can ever separate any of us from the love of God made known to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I feel so personally deeply bereft of Dean's physical presence, of his voice, his hands, his mind and heart. I feel so sorrowful for the world to be bereft of his powerful gifts and what he could yet have done in ministry. AND I affirm that nothing can take away the impact of Dean's life and ministry on me, on this community, and beyond. I am sure that God will also use his death to further the Spirit's work of love and inclusion.

On Friday, the day after Dean died, I was singing with the Rainbow Choir at the American Baptist Churches-USA biennial meeting in DC. When we began to sing, "We are gentle angry people, and we are singing, singing for our lives," I couldn't hold it together. I was screaming inside, "We didn't sing loudly enough to save Dean." Friends, we need to admit this today to

Dean Jenkins continued on 12

Bi The Way continued from 2

"spirit and truth," which certainly implies that devotion to God transcends gender and any expectations of gender roles within Jewish society.

Perhaps most significant is Jesus' statement that in the "resurrection," or the ideal state of being one with God or as part of the realized kingdom of God, "they neither marry nor are given in marriage," which clearly indicates a transcendence, a shattering if you will, of the social constructs of one male/one female lifetime unions, as prescribed in countless cultures throughout history, including Jesus'. In Matt. 22.23-33, Jesus even alludes to the possibility of experiencing such transcendence in the present, as he speaks of God as "not of the dead, but of the living," as though if only his followers could envision a life beyond the culturally imposed gender and sexual constraints of his day they could experience the fullness of humanity and human relationships.

We would indeed be remiss if we did not consider Paul's words to the Galatians which clearly state a transcendence of gender and sexuality within the community of followers of Jesus Christ: "... there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (3.28). Even for Paul, gender, and I would argue sexuality, are no longer "subject to a disciplinarian" (3.25), but they are transcended in the relationship we have with Christ, a relationship that is to define our physiological relationship with our fellow human beings. Even Paul, who sometimes can come across as homophobic or misogynist, sees the transgender nature of Jesus' ministry.

So—what does my transgender interpretation of scripture offer to bisexuality in our culture? What I think Jesus would expect is that we consider possible a broader range of human attractions and relationships than we allow ourselves in our culture and world. We obviously can't transcend who we are physically and what we feel physically and psychologically for one another. What we can do is to understand that we are attracted to other human beings in various ways--perhaps different sex, perhaps same sex, perhaps both sexes--because there are many factors that bring us together and many things about others that draw us especially to them. I believe that our call from Christ is to transcend the dualities of our culture (isn't it interesting we haven't moved very far in over two thousand years!) and help others to authentically identify themselves, to transcend the categorizations of our culture to appreciate and celebrate individuals in their complete humanity rather than gender constructions and roles. Maybe the next time that we encounter someone struggling to come into their own sexual identity, we won't sell humanity short with limited labels of heterosexual, gay or lesbian, but we will generously seek to expand the value of individuals to understand their gender and sexuality across the broad spectrum of possibilities, starting with the B and T of LGBT.

AWAB must give more attention and care to the B and T aspects of who we say we are if we intend to fully live into our identity of "national voice for LGBT Baptists." When we do, perhaps then we will no longer need to be identified as LGBT at all!

"I believe that our call from Christ is to transcend the dualities of our culture...and help others to authentically identify themselves..."



From the AWAB Council Chair, Heather Rittenhouse

REFLECTIONS on the AWAB Business Meeting

This is an exciting time to be part of the AWAB family! Those who were able to attend the AWAB National Gathering festivities in Washington D.C. this summer got to catch a glimpse of the aura of excitement and possibility that envelops who we are in this particular moment. This

was especially evident at the AWAB business meeting, where record attendance numbers were recorded – nearly 100 people representing 46 of our member churches and organizations. In addition, 10 new member churches and organizations were welcomed there into the AWAB family, including Andover Newton Theological School, our first official American Baptist seminary affiliate. We are ecstatic about the presence of these new faces at the table of inclusion, and we celebrate them as well as all of the individual members of AWAB that comprise who we are.

As the newly elected Chair of the AWAB Council, I have been reflecting lately on the fact that AWAB is 14 years old now, and, in many ways, we are experiencing the explosive growth and change of adolescence. In the past year, Executive Director Ken Pennings and other members of the Council have participated in the AWAB 12 Stop Tour, a series of regional gatherings orchestrated to catch the spirit of how God is moving among us in our local contexts and assist us all in networking more effectively with one another. These journeys across the face of this movement empowered the Council to adopt a new identity statement for AWAB that was unveiled at the business meeting in D.C. From this moment on, AWAB will be the national voice for LGBT Baptists. This goes beyond the scope of our traditional ABC/USA boundaries, meaning we will be looking to make connections among all kinds of Baptists like never before.

We are definitely hard at work on this already, having in the past few months hired two new people to help us further this ministry. Just before our time together in D.C., Rev. Dr. Anita Bradshaw came on board as the new AWAB Field Organizer. Over the next three years, Anita will train folks from AWAB and three other denominational welcoming programs in techniques to increase the number of welcoming and affirming churches in their local areas. In addition, Rev. Tim Dean has been engaged as the Director of an extended segment of the very popular North Carolina Baptist Youth Camp. Projected to be up and running in a yet to be determined location by next summer, this additional week of Baptist Youth Camp is designed to be the first of many regional camps which AWAB hopes to foster across all regions of the country.

There was even excitement to be found at the AWAB business meeting in the typically dry and uneventful procedure of evaluating potential organizational bylaw changes. As Council Chair, I am especially thrilled that those in attendance urged us to move beyond a Roberts Rules of Order kind

of decision-making process in conducting organizational business. Rather, the Council was challenged to create a

consensus model of decision-making and bring that back to the delegates for consideration at our next biennial business meeting in 2009. While we are still working on what that will look like for the larger organization, we have already adopted that model for our Council interaction, making our time together so much richer and more meaningful. I am grateful to those who lovingly pushed us in this direction.

Another significant change authored at our D.C. meeting

“From this moment on, AWAB will be the national voice for LGBT Baptists.”



(L-R) Ken Pennings, Kathy Stayton, and Heather Rittenhouse assist in leading the AWAB biennial business meeting.

empowers the Council to plan the 2009 and other future AWAB biennial National Gathering business meetings and events in a time and place separate from the ABC/USA biennial. This is so important because having our national events in conjunction with the ABC has become exorbitantly expensive and organizationally difficult over the past few years. Having the freedom to host our National Gathering in a place and at a time that makes sense for us will enable us to use our resources most effectively and also allow us to be in locations that are more coincident with the needs and desires of this inclusive movement among Baptists. This change does not mean that we have abandoned the ABC or that we will no longer have a witness at the ABC/USA biennial; instead, we will have greater freedom and flexibility to make that witness as powerful as possible. Toward that end, I welcome the chance to hear from you personally about how you envision that witness. What presence would you like AWAB to have regarding the ABC/USA biennial meetings? I would love to know your thoughts and visions about this matter, for ultimately this is our AWAB and every voice is important.

Finally, the AWAB business meeting also served as a changing of the guard for the AWAB Council itself. Two members, Bill Cox and Rev. Sandi John, retired from the Council after a time of significant service. Bill leaves after four years, the first two of which were spent as the AWAB Treasurer

Rittenhouse continued from 6

during a span of great transition, when AWAB and American Baptists Concerned reunited under one umbrella as a single organization. Sandi began a tremendous ministry of networking and nurturing during her short two years on the Council, serving as the inaugural Chair of the Pastoral Relations Team. Both contributed much to the depth and richness of AWAB and they will be sorely missed.

However, two new individuals have joined the Council, bringing with them an intense passion for this ministry. Burton Bagby of Houston, Texas, comes on board as the Chair of the AWAB Development Team. Robin Lunn of Quechee, Vermont, hit the ground running by being a major contributor to a grant application AWAB has just written to the Arcus Foundation. Both are wonderful additions to the Council, and I encourage you to welcome them warmly as you have opportunity to interact with them.

Truly, for those attending our summer events and expecting a dull, lifeless business meeting, there were pleasant surprises abounding! This IS an exciting time to be a part of the AWAB family, as we continue to grow and catch the wave of the movement of God's spirit among us. This movement of God is present in each one of us and I am extremely thrilled to be on this journey with you!

River continued from 3

It was Nancy Osborne going to Hennepin County Medical Center saying, "I'm a chaplain, can I help?"

It was Sara Brown working as a nurse round the clock at HCMC from the time of the tragedy until Thursday evening.

It was Erinn Huntley volunteering with the Red Cross, knowing that she had her turn signal on ready to go from University Avenue onto the bridge at 6:05pm on Wednesday.

It was First Congregational Church opening its doors to the searching, the grieving, the onlookers.

It was all of us praying and holding tightly to each other.

This is what we have needed to do.

These are the acts of heroism in which we all engage.

Blame is as murky as the Mississippi water, and ultimately not helpful right now.

What is helpful is the assurance that we have come together as a community. We have learned from the tragedies of Katrina and Rita. We will not again leave a community comfortless.

Eric Nelson received the following e-mail:

"My name is Karen Nauck and I am a member of Good Shepherd UCC in Metairie, Louisiana, a suburb of New Orleans. I cannot begin to tell you of my sadness of the bridge collapse disaster in your town. I know it is still early, but please let me know if there is anything I can pass along to our congregation as needs for your church members or community [arise]. I pray that no one was directly affected by this disaster. Our church was directly affected by Hurricane Katrina and we know what it means to have churches reaching out to us in time of need. I got your church web site from ucc.org, but if any other churches in your area are in need, please let them know we will

"What is helpful is the assurance that we have come together as a community."

be praying. If nothing else, we will keep you in our prayer and thoughts in the upcoming days and weeks."

We have responded with compassion and effectiveness. We remember that bridges and towers and even church buildings are human-made structures. As such they are subject to deterioration, attack, accidents, even malfeasance. Ultimately, the best bridge cannot guarantee our safety. In an ultimate sense, the only thing we can count on is God's presence and our reaction.

I think the two are related. We are God's hands and feet. We have seen God's presence in the way people reacted; in the way that we have trusted our hearts and our instincts and we have once again come together as a community to offer support, comfort and yes, even questions and solutions going forward. This is God's presence right here and now. We are God's hands and feet, we are God's face whenever we greet one another with compassion and support.

People will ask us where we were.

People will ask us how they can help.

People will ask us how we reacted.

Tell the story. Don't stuff it.

Learn from this not only about the fragility of human structures, but of the fragility and gift that is life.

Be gentle. Be patient. Remember that God watches over and provides us with a comforting hand as we gather at the river.

What can we do?

- Continue to be that comforting hand of God to one another.
- Rise up from this tragedy with a renewed sense of purpose.
- Make your interactions count.
- Don't put off for tomorrow what you have been meaning to say.
- Let your light shine and remember to whom you belong.
- Remember the importance of community. And every time you cross a river, remember to pray not only for the victims, but for God's ever-flowing presence.

"When the shadows appear and the night draws near,

And the day is past and gone,

At the river I stand, guide my feet, hold my hand:

Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home."

AWAB Vision continued from 1

that future to become reality. Council members will then engage others to share a conversation on the vision of the future. Within this year AWAB will set clear, specific and measurable goals that define what successful achievement looks like. The AWAB Council is taking on a bold new perspective, but the national leaders cannot and should not do it alone.

So, proudly we announce: AWAB is "The National Voice of LGBT Baptists." Are you ready to join us?

Jill McCrory is the president of Leadership Outfitters, Inc. a leadership development and consulting company with offices in Washington, DC, Los Angeles, Boston, and Hartford. She is working with the AWAB Council on the strategic planning effort.

GLIMPSES OF THE 2007 AWAB NATIONAL GATHERING

CHRIS BOISVERT:

"I am sorry that I cannot be in Washington to accept the award named after my friend Barbra MacNair. I miss greatly the opportunity to share in the wonderful AWAB activities with the AWAB Council, members and my Baptist family. Thank you for the honor you have bestowed on me. I am only a small part of a movement that continues to expand."



The Rainbow Baptist Choir, led by Garry Harris, sings before a plenary session of the ABC-USA Biennial.

AWAB AWARD RECIPIENTS

Every two years, the AWAB Council is privileged to honor two individuals whose efforts to improve the path of LGBT people of faith have been inspirational and transformative. 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. This year's recipient was Chris Boisvert.

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. Rick Mixon, currently Senior Pastor of FBC, Palo Alto, CA, was one of the first openly gay ABC-USA pastors to begin the work toward full inclusion in his denomination. This year's recipient was Howard Bess.

AWAB biennial business meeting. Record attendance!



HOWARD BESS:



"I would rather not be here. I find receiving awards to be embarrassing. When I received the call telling me that I had been selected for the Rick Mixon award, I indicated that I would not be coming to Washington DC. When I hung up the phone, Darlene [my wife] was very upset with me. She ordered me to come to Washington

DC for this award presentation. I am here because Darlene gave me no choice.

All of us involved in our justice movement stand on the shoulders of others. Four people to whom I am greatly indebted come to mind.

When I started this justice journey thirty-five years ago, I went to the Santa Barbara County library to see what books about homosexuality were on the shelf. The library had seven. Six said that gay persons were either sick or horribly sinful. The seventh was entitled "The Lord Is My

Howard Bess continued on 12

Memories of the AWAB Worship Service at Calvary Baptist Church, Washington DC June 30, 2007

by Kathy Stayton

My responsibility to chair the business meeting of the AWAB membership was over. I felt elated with the numbers attending and the enthusiastic responses and helpful suggestions. But I admit that I was glad it was over.

Drumming, singing, and guitar playing started about 20 minutes later, and we were asked to process up to the sanctuary for the worship service singing a simple "Alleluia." I was ready for that!

Greeting us in the front of the sanctuary were about 20 African American women--ages young teen to senior--liturgical dancers dressed in red and white, beckoning us in a most welcoming choreography with the backdrop of the Alleluia music we were all singing. Already I was moved. Because I knew they were from Covenant Baptist Church in DC, an African American congregation, I found their presence even more compelling in our mostly white AWAB membership.

The liturgical dancers, obviously well rehearsed and beautifully choreographed, led us to feel, to emote, through movement and their chosen music. Beautiful!

The altar table, beautifully laden with breads of the world and fruit, was like a giant three-dimensional still life painting, the details of color and texture of which revealed the beauty of the arrangement and the beauty of the symbols they represented.

Strong congregational singing with excellent piano accompaniment of wonderfully chosen hymns dotted the service throughout; I felt thankful for lots of music.

Scripture passages were read alternately between two people with words of joy and celebration. The offering was invited in



Council Chair Heather Rittenhouse with Jeffrey Barnes

a graceful way. Jeffrey Barnes, a gay playwright and dramatist, joyfully presented some of his story in a short vignette.

The bread and 'wine' was offered to all from

two stations. At each station a colorful narrow and long stole was draped over our shoulders as we went back to our seats. We then had the opportunity to write a few words or sentences



Liturgical Dancers from Covenant Baptist Church, Washington, DC

about our own story on that stole and share it with our pew neighbors. Our stories are sacred.

What? No sermon? The whole service was the message of joy in the presence of the Holy Spirit in inclusive community. Visual art, dance, music, drama touched my heart and my mind in ways that only the arts can.

I thank the Worship Committee for their collaborative planning: Heather Rittenhouse, Jill McCrory, Nancy Hall, Brian Dixon, Jacki Belile, and Karen Shipp.

Kathy Stayton is former Chair and current Secretary of the AWAB Council.

Ken Pennings reading during AWAB worship





From the Executive Director

Ken's Pennings

What if every American knew about AWAB? What if AWAB was a household “word?” AWAB is, after all, a national organization. AWAB’s influence is much broader than the communities of our 68 member congregations. The word is getting out nationally that there are Baptists, of all people, that are inclusive of LGBT people!

Frequently, reporters phone AWAB for comment on events and issues related to the LGBT community and Baptist life. For example, after the devastating hurricanes in the Gulf Coast one Boston Globe reporter phoned for comment on a Baptist church in Boston which was creating quite a stir over a sign it had placed on its lawn which read, “Hurricane Katrina – God’s Judgment on Homosexuality.”

You see? The time is coming. Behold, it is now here, when AWAB’s phone number is keyed into the cell phones of reporters, politicians and policy-makers all over the country. AWAB is the ONLY strong Baptist voice for full inclusion of LGBT people in the life, mission and ministries of Baptist congregations.

Recently, Leadership Consultant Jill McCrory^[1] led the AWAB Council through a visioning process in which we imagined ourselves speaking truth to power, seizing opportunities that are immediately available to us, emphasizing passion, humanity and family connections, operating with unconventional wisdom, acting with and on behalf of the next generation, experiencing joy in the journey, utilizing a teamwork model of leadership, moving from gradual change to radical change, and expanding our mission to justice, equality and liberation for ALL people.

This process led us to claim the identity – AWAB: The National Voice for LGBT Baptists. We brainstormed a plan for creating results, taking practical action steps, and developing our organization to become a significant voice of change in Church and society. Unanimously, the Council affirmed that AWAB is ready to become more deeply involved in the larger welcoming and affirming movement beyond our American Baptist roots, and we are ready to join more fully in the larger movement for LGBT equality!

What are the implications of this national visibility and influence for our organization? Well, for starters, we’re getting our house in order so that we are above reproach. We’re writing grants to help us expand our institutional capacity to be able to live into our identity as “The National Voice for LGBT Baptists.” We’re consulting with our national partners in the creation of our “vision path.”

We sincerely believe that this good work, which begins with AWAB locally, regionally and nationally, will lead to the liberation of ALL who are oppressed and marginalized - a mission that keeps us highly motivated!

^[1] Jill McCrory is “Ringleader” of Leadership Outfitters, Inc., 3919 Baltimore St., Kensington, MD 20895, (240) 430-0770, fax: (240) 430-0771, jmccrory@leadershipoutfitters.com.

Robin Lunn and Burton Bagby Join AWAB Council

Guidance for AWAB between biennial business meetings of its member churches is provided by a Council of elected and appointed representatives. At each biennial meeting, AWAB members elect representatives to the Council. The AWAB Council welcomes new members Robin Lunn and Burton Bagby.

Robin Lunn has been a member of the ABC for 17 years and has served at ABC churches or related ministries for 12 of those years. These ministries include Assistant Camp Director at Camp Wightman in CT, Youth Minister at FBC Keene, NH, and Pastor of the Jamaica Community Church, ABC/UCC, in Jamaica, VT. She received her M.Div. in 2006 from Andover Newton Theological School, where she was chair of the Baptist Fellowship for five years. Robin is currently the interim pastor at the Sharon Congregational Church, UCC, in Sharon, VT.



Robin has been a member of AWAB since 2000 and sees the vision cast for AWAB as one that sustains her own understanding of God's radical welcome through historic Baptist principles. She would like to help AWAB grow this vision, and she is particularly interested in developing a church planting model that is sustainable and connects with the emerging church conversation and community.

Robin's partner, Shayna Appel, is the Assoc. Pastor at Christ Church Dartmouth College, UCC, in Hanover, NH. They have two children, Zeb and Amelia Tracy. Zeb is finishing up at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and Amelia is a senior at the University of Redlands.



A licensed American Baptist minister, Burton is a Sunday School leader at Houston's South Main Baptist Church along with Ron Grose, his partner of 18 years. South Main is a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship congregation. Burton is also a member of Covenant Church, an ecumenical liberal American Baptist congregation that joined AWAB several years ago. Burton is currently a master of divinity

student at Andover Newton Theological School, the first seminary to join AWAB, and the only officially welcoming and affirming American Baptist seminary.

Burton previously worked for the U.S. House of Representatives. As a LGBT equality advocate, he is a co-founder of the Houston LGBT Community Center and a former president. He also served as president of the Houston LGBT Political Caucus, the South's oldest LGBT civil rights group. He founded the Old Sixth Ward Community Development Corporation, an affordable housing provider and advocacy group, for which he received a Hammer Award from Vice President Al Gore. He has organized several of the Houston LGBT Pride Interfaith Worship Services as well as World AIDS Day Interfaith Worship Services.

Burton and Ron live in Westbury, a heavily gay southwest Houston neighborhood, with Roosevelt, their Scottish terrier and their cat Chatté. Their 78 year old uncle has lived with them for the past two years. Burton loves working out at the gym, traveling and is an avid reader.

WELCOME! **New AWAB Members**

*First Baptist Church, 19 W. Main Street, Moorestown, NJ
08057, (856) 235-1180, fax: (856)-778-5458*

fbcmoores town@aol.com

www.fbcmoores town.com

Pastor: Rev. Rene Colson Hudson renecolson@aol.com

W&A Contact person: Mary Wells marywells2@aol.com

Affiliations: ABC, BPFNA

Hyde Park Union Church, 5600 S. Woodlawn Ave.,

Chicago, IL 60637 (773) 363-6063

fax: (773) 324-3874, office@hpuc.org, www.hpuc.org.

Rev. Susan Johnson: susan@hpuc.org

Rev. Richard M. Landers.

Affiliations: ABC and UCC.

THANK YOU!

AWAB says farewell and many thanks to both **Bill Cox** and **Sandi John** for their work on the AWAB Council. Bill and Sandi worked diligently in many areas of service to bring inclusivity in and beyond Baptist life. Bill served as treasurer for the Council, and he was a key organizer in past AWAB gatherings in Austin, Texas. Sandi formed the AWAB Pastoral Care Team, and she worked tirelessly to make the AWAB Biennial gathering the huge success it was. AWAB will miss you!

The InSpiriter

The Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists
PO Box 259257
Madison, Wisconsin 53725

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED
TIME DATED MATERIAL

Nonprofit Org
US Postage
PAID
Madison WI
Permit No 168

Moving?

Please remember to send us your new address (or any corrections). Send address changes to AWAB, P.O. Box 259257, Madison, WI 53725 or e-mail your changes to mail@wabaptists.org.

Howard Bess continued from 8

Shepherd, and He Knows I'm Gay." I read the story of TROY PERRY [founder of Metropolitan Community Churches]. I concluded that he was neither sick nor a special kind of sinner. Bruised and battered, he was one of God's saints. The book is one of the classics of our mission. I am eternally grateful that Troy shared his story with us all.

Next I looked for an American Baptist and I found RICK MIXON. Back in those days, Rick was a very lonely voice. He was a lone candle in a very dark room. I am immensely indebted to him, as are all of us who are gathered in this room today.

Third is a little known theologian from Indianapolis. Professor EDGAR TOWNE taught at the Disciples seminary in Indianapolis. I met him on the conference circuit. We became close friends. I heard him several times present papers on the practice of hospitality in both the Old and New Testaments. He convinced me that Biblical hospitality was THE great issue in our justice mission. Thank you Ed.

Fourth, DARRELL LANCE, Old Testament Professor Emeritus at Colgate Rochester Divinity School and recipient of this award two years ago. Darrell took on the task of being the first editor of the AWAB journal, *The InSpiriter*. For ten years the most important piece in each edition was his editorial. He brought scholarly information to current issues to the special audience to whom we

directed the publication. I was always a learner at his feet. What a gentleman! What a friend! What a force in our movement!

In closing I share the words of a favorite hymn.

Naught have I gotten but what I received.

Grace has bestowed it since I have believed.

Boasting exclude, pride I abase.

I'm only a sinner saved by grace.

Thank you for the honor you have brought to me."

Dean Jenkins continued from 5

continue to make meaning out of Dean's death. We as a church universal have not sung loudly enough for the lives of our LGBT brothers and sisters. Dean died partly because of the homophobia of the institutional church.

While I was waiting for Dean's body to be picked up, I noted that the hymnal was open on his grand piano. The hymn it was open to was, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling." I don't know when Dean last played and sang it, and maybe I'm projecting to make myself feel better. Yet it seems to me he may have just needed to have his "troubled breast perfectly restored in God, to go take his place in heaven." I am so grateful that the Christ he loved, the Spirit that filled him, are holding him in the most wonderful, loving, peaceful embrace, that his "heart is set at liberty." I am confident he is singing with the angelic choirs now, "lost in wonder, love and praise."