

"We came to believe that the biblical references to homosexual behaviors do not address the Christian commitments and loving relationships of our gay and lesbian members," the church's statement said, and added that "gay and lesbian Christians serve as Sunday School teachers, choir members, deacons and preachers" at Oakhurst.

The 135-member executive committee voted with only one dissenting voice to declare Oakhurst, which has about 250 active members, "out of harmony and cooperation" with the convention.

"There are a whole lot of people who are looking for someone who will stand up for what they believe," White told them. "In a society where people will tell you that political correctness includes the full acceptance of homosexuality as moral, we, the church, I believe, are mandated to tell the truth about what the Bible says in love. The Bible calls it sin. We have a wonderful message about relief and release from sin."

Oakhurst pastor the Rev. Lanny Peters said he thinks there will be "some sadness" in the congregation about the committee's decision. "We've been a member of the Georgia Baptist Convention since our inception in 1913," he said. "It's always been part of our identity."

If ratified by the full Georgia Baptist Convention, the severing of ties with Oakhurst will mean that the church will no longer be counted in convention statistics, can no longer send representatives to state conventions, and will neither contribute to convention ministries nor receive assistance from them.

"Even if you believe that homosexuality is a sin, it's wrong to pick on this particular group," Peters said. "I think my question would be, would they be equally adamant in kicking out a racist church?"



*From The Atlanta Journal-Constitution  
Wednesday, September 15, 1999*

**RAINBOW BAPTISTS**  
[www.rainbowbaptists.org](http://www.rainbowbaptists.org)

## Dialogue With Dignity

continued from page 1

him/her at work or church. Not being out on the other hand can harm one's self-esteem and feeling of wholeness as a human being. Both decisions have consequences for one's self and for the individual's relationships to others and institutions.

Dialoguing with others became a major focus at the retreat because most attendees had attended the biennial meeting of the American Baptist Churches/USA the week prior. During that convention, four churches from California were expelled (disfellowshipped) from the denomination because they welcome and affirm sexual minority Baptists. Cynthia helped people deal with issues centering on the biennial meeting. People at the retreat had a spectrum of feelings about what had happened the preceding week, but sadness at the further exclusion of LGBT people from the American Baptist family and the violation of Baptist principles was widely held.

One of the ways of working through the anger and frustration that folks had was to talk about ways to channel it into working productively both individually and with others to build coalitions where common ground and common goals are shared. The threat has gone beyond excluding sexual minority people from the table and is now extending to local congregations that do not adhere to a certain theology. The concern about what and who is next was often expressed.

But the retreat was not just a place for workshops and dialogue; it was a time to gather for worship, prayer and singing. We were people, sexual minority and straight, gathered together from New England to California, New Hampshire to Texas, gathered to worship God and to share our feelings and thoughts in an open, supportive environment.

The site of the retreat was Simpson College, located in Indianola just south of Des Moines, Iowa's state capitol. Indianola is definitely small town America - complete with a town square a few blocks from the campus. Simpson, with its tree-lined campus and

brick buildings was a welcoming and pleasant site for the retreat. Some of us spent time walking around campus or the beautifully landscaped park with arboretum adjacent. Others spent time using the recreation facilities and taking excursions into Des Moines. Those of us who enjoy arts and crafts were able to attend the Des Moines Art Festival and some of us took a tour of the state capitol building.

We hope you can attend the next ABConcerned retreat in the Seattle, Washington area in June 2000. Look for registration materials in the *Voice of the Turtle Century* issue, due in December ▼

## YOUTH FOCUS

Youth Focus on page 6-8 is a special *Voice of the Turtle* feature on youth in crisis. Children and young adults today face many pressures to conform to the perceived norm. There is added pressure on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth. Young people often hear verbal slurs and condemnation of sexual minorities at school, at home and even in the church. This can be devastating to a young person's self-esteem. Some are subjected to physical abuse and assaults simply because they are a LGBT person.

Where the church could be a haven for youth of faith, it is often a place of fear and oppression. The negative information disseminated by the greater religious community push many young people out of the church by telling them that they can not be who they are and a person of faith.

As you read Youth Focus, please think of ways you can help make the church an affirming and nurturing place for God's children.