

Behold the turtle: it makes progress only when it sticks its neck out.
— James B. Conant

Voice of the Turtle

A Publication of American Baptists Concerned for Sexual Minorities ▼ www.rainbowbaptists.org

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Celebrating Our Past, Envisioning Our Future: A Historic LGBT Conference

On April 19 and 20, 2001 the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California, held its inaugural conference, "Celebrating Our Past, Envisioning Our Future." The keynote speaker was Jimmy Creech, a former United Methodist minister whose ordination was rescinded by his denomination because he performed a number of holy union ceremonies for same sex couples in violation of denominational policy.

As part of the evening's activities a group of people were honored as "leading voices" in the struggle for the equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Among the people honored were the Rev. Troy Perry, founder of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches; Rev. H. James Hopkins, whose church, Lakeshore Avenue Baptist in Oakland, California, was expelled from its Region for joining the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists; and Rev. Dr. Rick Mixon, who, through his leadership within American Baptists Concerned and beyond was a pioneer for GLBT rights within the American Baptist Churches/USA.

The Center is the first of its kind at any seminary or school of religion in the world. The decision to begin a program focused on sexual minority people in religion and ministry was based on unanimous votes by the faculty and the board of directors of PSR. Their goal in starting the program is to foster an understanding of the ministerial gifts of sexual minority people, to be supportive of GLBT people who are seeking to follow their call to ministry and to make the concerns of sexual minorities integral to the work of school in both the study of religion and the practice of ministry. Along with the American Baptist Seminary of the West, PSR is a member school of the Graduate Theological Union, the largest consortium of seminaries and schools of religion in the United States.

Creech talked of his journey from serving as a young minister in Raleigh, NC, who was naive about gay and lesbian persons to someone who serves as president of Soulforce, a gay and lesbian justice organization working across denominational lines. He had not knowingly known a gay person until a man in his North Carolina church resigned from the congregation and the denomination because he was tired of being condemned for being the person God made him to be. Creech also shared the story of a young man who was convinced God condemned him because he was gay and how the young man died thinking he was hell-bound. In the 1980's, Creech

went on to be a founding member of a community-based religious organization supporting and affirming the rights of sexual minorities in North Carolina. It was obvious that Creech's story touched many people.

Creech saluted the women and men who were in seminaries and called them to enter ministry in order to follow a call and not just in hopes of a career. Creech said that ministry is not serving the institutional church but the spiritual and faith needs of people. Homophobia and heterosexism are institutionalized in our society and the

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Last Disfellowshipped California Church Finds Regional Home

On Monday, April 30, San Leandro Community Church in California was accepted into the Rochester/Genesee (NY) Region. Rochester/Genesee is also the regional home to First Baptist Church of Granville, Ohio. San Leandro is the last of the four churches disfellowshipped two years ago in Des Moines, Iowa, to be accepted into another American Baptist Region. The requirement to join another Region was a compromise reached by the American Baptist Churches/USA General Board to allow churches expelled from one Region because of their membership in the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists to remain within the denomination.

San Leandro pastor, Rev. Kay Wellington and 4 members of the church made a presentation to regional delegates that was filled with joy and lots of emotion. After a time of prayer and silence, the vote was made by written ballot. The Region requires affirmation by 75 percent of the delegates present and voting to receive a

church into membership in the Region. With 69 people voting, the count was 64 in favor, 5 opposed, no abstentions. 52 votes were needed to receive the new church ▼

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Atlanta Southern Baptists Support Baptist Principles

The Atlanta Association voted January 30, 2001, to retain Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, GA, and Virginia Highland Baptist Church in Atlanta as members. The Atlanta Association is part of the Georgia Baptist Convention a part of the Southern Baptist Convention. The vote was 253-164 to retain the churches. The Georgia Baptist Convention had previously disfellowshipped the churches for being welcoming and affirming of gay and lesbian people. Even though many of the churches and individuals voting did not necessarily agree with the perspective of Oakhurst and Virginia-Highland they supported the congregational autonomy of the two churches.

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported a hug between the two congregations' pastors after the closed meeting of the Atlanta Baptist Association. Virginia-Highland's Rev. Tim Shirley told the paper, "I think this is a reminder to the world that Baptists are a diverse people in a lot of different ways," while Oakhurst's Rev. Lanny Peters described the vote as saying something important about the way the local association sees itself.

Oakhurst has an openly gay associate pastor, Chris Copeland, while both churches have had gay deacons. Oakhurst had declared in a 1999 statement to the Georgia Baptist Convention that, "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," who serve the congregation "as Sunday School teachers, choir members, deacons and preachers." Oakhurst recently became a member of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists.

Virginia-Highland also made a 1999 statement to the Georgia group that, "Our commitment to honoring the dignity and beauty of God's creation has led the Virginia-Highland Baptist Church to identify itself as an inclusive community of faith where everyone is welcome. Therefore, all persons, no matter race, gender, physical or mental ability, or sexual orientation, are welcome in every aspect of congregational life."

The national SBC, which has been dominated by conservatives for some twenty years to the point where moderates have fled, adopts one or more resolutions against homosexuality annually, but in 2000 it modified the denomination's basic "Faith & Values Message" to include opposition to homosexuality. The SBC has also moved to

make that "Message" more of an official creed, in contrast to the denomination's long history of congregational autonomy (the "free church" system).

But there is some serious resistance to the trend toward national control, most notably from the Baptist General Convention of Texas, which includes almost twenty percent of all Southern Baptists, some have even accused the SBC of trying to create "Baptist popes." The BGCT cut \$5 million from its annual support of SBC headquarters and seminaries in 2000 and is reportedly considering further cuts this year ▼

Historic LGBT Conference

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institutional church is a great perpetrator of it, he said. Millions of GLBT people have been hurt by institutions that claim to be Christ based but would rather exclude than include. Creech argued that a church should not be a place where only some people are welcome.

The 300 people gathered for the celebration and inaugural session in the sanctuary of University Christian Church in Berkeley witnessed an historic event that will be remembered as a milestone in the cause of justice on behalf of sexual minority people of faith. The celebratory event on Thursday night was followed by a day of workshops which focused on such topics as "Queer Spirituality," "Out in Ministry," "Queering Religious and theological Studies," "The Welcoming Church" and "GLBTQ Identities." Workshop leaders included American Baptists D. Mark Wilson, pastor of McGee Avenue

Baptist Church in Berkeley and Irene Monroe, theologian from Cambridge, Massachusetts; Mitzi Henderson, Presbyterian elder and former national President of PFLAG; Troy Perry; Kyle Miura, Executive Director of the Pacific Asian American Center for Theology and Strategies; Jose Cabezon, Buddhist scholar from the University of Denver; Michael Mendiola, ethicist; William Countryman, Episcopal New Testament scholar; Eliyahou Farjaje, Professor of Cultural Studies; and Mary Tolbert, Professor of Biblical Studies at PSR and Executive Director of the Center.

For more information, please contact the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and the Ministry at PSR, 1798 Scenic Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94709; 800-999-0528; info@clgs.org; www.clgs.org or www.psr.edu ▼

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American Baptists Concerned is the national Baptist caucus advocating the inclusion and affirmation of sexual minority people. The name or address of a person or business herein is not to be construed as an indication of sexual orientation.

If you are interested in further information about American Baptists Concerned, or would like to submit writing, please write to the preceding address. We are always interested in having writing submitted by our readers.

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Looking for Leaders

As in so many other institutions, a translation has been taking place in the churches from leadership to management, and, in the process, imagination, courage, authority...are being displaced by technical proficiency, administrative mediocrity, bureaucratic sophistication, mere routine.

- William Stringfellow, *A Simplicity of Faith: My Experience in Mourning*

In 1956, I attended my first American Baptist Convention. It was held in Seattle, Washington, and I was nine years old. My minister father and mother always attended these meetings and on this occasion they decided to drive from Southern California taking my older sister and me with them. I still have vivid memories of that experience.

One of the most compelling of those memories is that this convention was the beginning of my immersion into American Baptist life and politics. (Yes, you heard me correctly – politics; no institution or organization operates outside some sort of political reality.) In this regard, I am truly my father's son, for he was, throughout his ministry, deeply involved in the life and politics of our denomination.

My father died in 1964, but in 1965 my mother brought me to San Francisco for the American Baptist convention as my high school graduation gift. I was delighted. I loved the oratory, the pageantry, the camaraderie, and, yes, the politics. It all seemed so wonderfully alive and important!

I also have vivid memories of the battles around restructuring the denomination in the early 1970's. Friends of my parents took positions on both sides of the restructuring issue. I can still recite many of the

arguments from both sides: restructuring will provide for more responsible stewardship of limited resources, it will reduce some of the chaos of doing business with so large a body debating and voting on everything, we can avoid the embarrassing phenomenon of taking a position one year only to take the exact opposite position the following year depending on our meeting site, the new structure will be more representative. On the other hand, we will lose the passion and involvement of a large number of people in the conduct of our business, we will lose some of the great tradition of fellowship that the annual meetings offer, this structure is not the way Baptists do business, this is a "Presbyterian" system, this is not the democratic way of doing business we have long cherished.

For me, the way I feel about the loss of the old system is similar to the way I feel about the loss of the old political conventions when votes were close and debates meaningful. Those meetings seemed to be significant and were not just window dressing and media manipulation. There was something powerful in the passion of those meetings that we have forfeited along with our new-found efficiency.

The above quotation from William Stringfellow (in tribute to Henry Pitney Van Dusen, one of the powerfully moving speakers I heard at one of those early conventions) articulates the main point I want to draw from this background rambling. Whatever the assets of our current system, and there are many, it does seem to me that one result has been a loss of authentic leadership in our denomination. I do not know if this is a direct result of the change in structure, but it certainly seems correlated. Keeping everything balanced and in good order, keeping everybody – or at least the majority – happy (pacified?) seems to have become our mission.

I have thought long and hard about this as I have watched the unraveling of the American Baptist Churches of the West, the Region to which my home church once belonged. In this Region we have watched people with leadership potentiality abdicate that role in favor keeping the peace. And by that I mean a peace without integrity, without justice and, in the end, without love.

Technical proficiency, administrative mediocrity, bureaucratic sophistication, mere routine became the order of the day as people who could have led the "lion to lie down with lamb" failed to see and/or failed to say that this is the position God wants us to occupy, the possibility to which Jesus calls us, the home to which the Spirit lead us.

We are at a crossroads in our denominational life where imagination, courage, authority are deeply needed. My heroes from those early days – my father included – were not afraid to stand up and say what they believed; at the same time, they knew how to "agree to disagree." Disfellowshipping churches, dismantling Regions, dismissing those who are different or with whom we disagree, "dis"-ing of any sort, was not an option. It simply went against their understanding of the Gospel, which was more important to them than any political battle. They knew that everyone does not have to be happy in order to sit at the table.

We have spent much too much time battling over who is welcome at the table – Jesus decided that long ago when He made it clear that whosoever will may come, when He died and rose again that for every single one of us might know eternal life. The current battle over sexual orientation has come at the expense of doing the work to which God has called us – healing the sick, feeding hungry, caring for needy, bringing the whole creation back into communion with the Creator. Getting us back on the right track will take real leadership, not management. It may cost something in assets and reputation. Sadly, it may mean some members separate themselves from us for a while as they self-select out of our fellowship; they will certainly not be forced out or voted out.

Ultimately, it is God to whom we must make an accounting for how we use the resources we have been lent, not to those who are all too ready to "hide their talent in fear." Will we hear "well done" or will we be held accountable for wandering aimlessly in the wilderness? Who will show us the courage to overcome our fear? Who will lead us out of the mess we are in? May God send us leaders – now!



Knowing Me, Knowing You

By Heather Rittenhouse

This message was delivered at the ordination service of Rev. Kristy Moeller at Grace Baptist Church, Chicago IL on November 5, 2000.

Text: John 4:1-29

I must confess from the very beginning that this will not be a traditional ordination message, for in many ways neither Kristy nor I are “traditional” ministers. I first met Kristy six years ago, when she came to Northern Baptist Theological Seminary as a newly minted civilian and student, having left the military after ten years of service. I was a student there myself when she arrived, struggling to find my own sense of call amidst the avalanche of books and paperwork which is seminary. Our respective questions about ministry, life, and what in the world God was doing with us led us into numerous deep theological reflections and hypothetical postulations together, usually very late at night with lots of caffeine at hand. Through those times of talking, working, and studying together, Kristy and I knitted our journeys into a woven bond of friendship that just does not make a sermon the most appropriate means of conveying what I feel led to say tonight. Rather, in honor of those many late-night conversations, I prefer to think of this as a Bible study for Kristy in which everyone is invited to listen in.

The story in John 4 opens with Jesus on a journey as well, a south-to-north journey from the region of Judea to Galilee. This was a trip of some distance, for the land of Samaria lay between Judea and Galilee. The text says that Jesus *had* to travel through Samaria to get to Galilee, but the truth is that he *did not* have to—most Jews usually went east to the Jordan River, crossed over, and then went on north to Galilee. Why did the Jews go to such lengths to avoid Samaria, when a shorter route was available? They did so because the Jews and the Samaritans were the most hated of enemies. After the fall of Israel many years before, the Israelites had been deported from their land and had been replaced by foreigners, who brought their own gods to worship and their own customs to live by. Some had even intermarried with the Jews, creating a mixed race whom the Jews considered inferior and impure. Thus, these new

people, the Samaritans, represented to Israel a bitter part of their history; the animosity between them was fierce.

So in light of this, why did Jesus choose to go through Samaria? We may never know the exact reason. Yet there is the essence of compulsion here, that Jesus had to go there because of his mission. He did not avoid this place even though he knew he would likely face hatred and rejection there. He went to a place where he was not expected or welcome to demonstrate the nature of his mission to the world that God’s love, mercy, and grace are for everyone and can overcome every division. The Jews, the people with the “true” religion, would never have chosen to go there, but Jesus did.

My words to you, Kristy, as the one who ministers, are to encourage you to be open to unorthodox and “unacceptable” ways and places of ministry, as Jesus was. Do not be afraid to take the path less—traveled, even though no one else may be willing to go with you. The church, the denomination, your peers may all discourage you and think you to be crazy. After all, even Jesus’ disciples left him alone in this strange land. When they saw what he was up to, they were surprised and surely wanted to get him out of there. Yet go to these places, because God is for those people in that hostile place too. The next piece of significant information that we get in the story is that the woman which Jesus meets at the well chose to come to the well at noon. This may not seem like a big deal to us, but that was a great oddity in Samaritan culture. Most women went to the well in the early morning or the late afternoon. They knew better than to haul water during the most intense heat of the day. They also came in groups for a chance to chat socially about the day’s events and get caught up with each other’s lives. Yet this woman came alone at the hottest part of the day. She wanted to avoid the other women, their eyes, their conversation, for she was an outcast and was not part of their

circle. For a Jew such as Jesus, then, she had three strikes against her—she was a Samaritan, a woman, and an outcast for some heretofore unknown reason.

However, Jesus chooses to talk to her, thereby breaking all of the social conventions. Jews did not talk with and especially did not share drinking utensils with Samaritans. In addition, Jewish teachers did not talk with women in public, a fact which the woman knew all too well. Jesus dismisses these rules, though, and asks her for a drink. Through this simple question, he proves that he is more interested in her than in the rules of society, for they get in his way and interfere with his mission. He goes on to tell her that God wants to give her a gift, something wonderful and important, something that she aches for.

Kristy, as one who ministers, let your ministry also be one of empowering the outcast, the “different”, the unimportant. I believe, as I know you do also, that God is on the side of the poor and the outcast. Such people need to hear a word of hope, a word of love and mercy, a word of welcoming from God. Let your ministry be about bringing that word to those who so desperately long to hear it. God has gifted you to do this and has given you a heart for this ministry; let Jesus be your example as you seek to live that out.

In response to Jesus’s offer of a gift from God to her, the woman refuses to be taken in by him. Is this just another line from someone trying to trick her? She answers him antagonistically, challenging Jesus’s ability to draw living water for her from a well that seems too deep. Yet Jesus does not react as another man might have; there is no anger, no condescension, no superiority, no dominance in his reply. He simply counters with a description of just what his gift could do for her. He offered the possibility of never being thirsty in the noon sun again, a gift that would satisfy her deepest spiritual and emotional thirst. Her daily return to the well could never bring a final satisfaction of this perpetual thirst, so Jesus offered an inner source of fresh water which could constantly quench her thirst forever and could renew her life. He made available to her a relationship with God that could quench her desire to be loved and welcomed. This is a relationship that builds

up rather than tears down, that affirms our worth as God's beloved children rather than turns us away. This is a relationship that brings us hope and reminds us that we will always be welcome no matter who we are or what we do, a relationship that is greater than the weight of history and tradition, and which transcends the barriers of hatred and prejudice, a relationship that is based on the love and devotion of the Creator for the prized creation—you

Kristy, you can only offer this gift to others if you stay connected to it yourself. Keep going back to the source of life-giving water for yourself so that your ministry will stay fresh and alive. That water will enable you to stay focused on the task at hand and minister in antagonistic situations with peace, calm, clarity, vision, and direction.

After this second description by Jesus of the living water that could change her life, the woman responds and accepts his offer, even though she does not understand it. That sounds like a true call to ministry to me. Yet immediately afterward came the traditional doors slamming—"You can't follow me because... You can't minister because.... Many of us could fill in our own reasons here as to why we have been told that we cannot minister or follow God at all. For the woman, she would not have been able to go with Jesus without her husband's permission. She is therefore stuck. Jesus seems like a nice guy who genuinely has something real and appealing to give to her. Yet as soon as he learns the truth about her life, surely the offer will evaporate.

The twist in this story is that Jesus already knows the truth about her life. He knows that she has lived outside society's standards, that she has had five husbands and that she is now living with someone new. The woman finds herself in a situation straight out of an ancient-day Jerry Springer show. This for her is the moment of truth, the time when accusations fly, as well as shoes, chairs, and anything else that is not fastened down. She was an outcast, a spectacle, an abomination, unreachable, beyond hope, and Jesus was about to learn the awful truth and call her on the carpet. Yet Jesus already knows and calls her anyway. This is whom Jesus calls to be near him and to be in relationship with God. At the height of this tension-filled moment,

Jesus simply says, "I know who you are and I knew it when I first called you."

There will be those, Kristy, who challenge your call, your fitness to be called, the morality of your life. Later in the story, we discover that the disciples were surprised at Jesus' choice of people to reach out to, but they remained silent. That will not always be the case with you. There will be those who object to you and your ministry because of who you are, where you have been, and whom you love. Those who support you today may oppose you tomorrow. Yet remember that God knows you completely and always has, even before your call. God knows who you are and the gift and call of ministry is open to you. Your peers may help you with matters of guidance and discernment, but remember that God is who issues the call.

Fearing that she has been cornered by Jesus' knowledge of her life, the woman becomes argumentative with him. This discussion with this strange man had started innocently enough, but now she was pinned. She felt threatened and did not like the intensely personal direction the conversation had turned, so she tries to divert Jesus and direct his attention away from her life by using a tactic that has always been popular—she throws up an unanswerable religious question. She brings to Jesus an age-old conflict which raged between the Jews and Samaritans about which was the proper place to worship. This was a major hot-button issue and a source of endless controversy. Certainly this was a sure-fire way to change the topic of discussion away from the issue at hand.

This may happen to you also, Kristy, as people debate the validity of Jesus' call on your life. They may debate the issue of your gender or of your sexuality rather than recognize the true call of God to you. Be aware that these diversionary tactics are attempts to make those inflammatory and circular arguments the main issue. Yet the truth is that we also are capable of concocting our own futile arguments to try to get God's focus off of us. How many of us who have been called to ministry have not responded first by running full-force the other way? When I experienced my call to ministry after graduation from college with a degree in education, my first action was to

send out 75 resumes to school districts, seeking a teaching position. When I only received two interviews from those 75 attempts, I got the message that I should be paying more attention to what God was saying! Kristy, you too may feel at times that God is too close, pointing out uncomfortable areas of your life that you would rather keep hidden or calling you to ministries that are too challenging or too close to your own pain. Yet God is not deterred by your efforts to run away. You can run, but you cannot hide!

The woman discovers this for herself, as Jesus refuses to get sidetracked by her argument. He knows that she is trying to avoid him, but he responds by elevating the issue above the proper location of worship and bringing the focus squarely back on her. The real issue is that she has missed knowing God because such knowledge is based on spirit—from the heart seeking to know God's nature—and truth—dealing openly and honestly with God. In order to deal openly and honestly with God, one must also deal openly and honestly with one's own self, to be vulnerable to God's probing of our lives.

When the woman finally drops her defenses and allows Jesus' knowledge of her life to bring her to spirit and truth, look at what happens! She becomes one of the best ambassadors for God in the ancient world and in *Samaria*, of all places. Many came to have a relationship with God because of her, a hated, overlooked outcast. The woman who had once drawn water at noon to avoid being known now ran to be known by everyone. Despite her critics, despite the culture and the opposition, despite her own self-doubt, she ran to tell everyone what she now knew to be true. If this woman was not ordained by God, I do not know if anyone ever has been. Would we have recognized her call today? Would she have survived the paper-writing, the ordination councils, the inquisition of her peers? NO! Yet this was one who was called and who changed many people because she acted on her call.

Kristy, this is the most important thing I have to tell you tonight—God knows you and has called you to ministry, maybe in ways that are beyond our human imagination. To God, it does not matter where you

2001 Christian Service Award to be Presented to Rev. Brenda Moulton

American Baptists Concerned Steering Committee has selected Rev. Brenda J. Moulton of Attleboro, Massachusetts, as the recipient of the 2001 Randle R. Mixon Award for Christian Service. This award is presented every two years to an American Baptist who has worked to further the cause of justice and inclusion of sexual minority people within American Baptist churches and the greater Christian community. As coordinator of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming

Baptists for the last ten years, Brenda has worked countless hours to broaden the churches welcome to everyone regardless of sexual orientation. Today AWAB is made up of more than forty churches and continues to grow. Although Brenda did not get AWAB to where it is today on her own, she has been and continues to be a sustaining force.

In 1991 at the American Baptist Biennial in Charleston, West Virginia, American Baptists

Concerned organized a meeting of some fifty people from churches across the country to discuss the need for a network of Baptist churches that publicly welcome sexual minority people. The homophobia and hatred expressed against gay and lesbian people was so evident at the Charleston biennial that it moved people to action. At that first meeting Brenda volunteered to coordinate the effort to start such a network of inclusive congregations. Little did Brenda know that she would still be involved in leadership of that group a decade later. Brenda was part of the interim council that was established under the leadership of ABConcerned in 1992 and continued in leadership when the first official meeting of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists was held during the 1993 American Baptist Biennial in San Jose, California.

When movements began within some American Baptist Regions to disfellowship churches because of their membership in AWAB, Brenda in her leadership role faced major challenges. She worked tirelessly with others to raise the conciseness of people to the unbaptist nature of such actions and to dialogue with people in opposition to AWAB. At the 1999 Biennial in Des Moines, Iowa, AWAB worked with ABConcerned, the Coalition for Baptist Principles and others in organizing the effort to protest the disfellowship of four California Churches because of their inclusivity of gay and lesbian members and their membership in AWAB. As we approach the next biennial meeting all four disfellowshipped California churches and one from Ohio have found homes in other Regions and continue to be part of the American Baptist family.

Brenda is pastor of Chestnut Hill Baptist Church in Exeter, Rhode Island, a small but growing rural congregation that recently celebrated 250 years of ministry. She shares here life with her life partner, of nineteen-years, Patricia Potter. Pat, an ordain UCC minister, serves as Minister of Music at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Attleboro, Massachusetts and is co-chairperson of the Rhode Island chapter of ABConcerned.

Please join us in congratulating Brenda on her selection as the winner of ABConcerned's Christian Service Award on Sunday, June 24. The award will be presented at 12:30 PM. at Mathewson Street United Methodist Church in Providence, Rhode Island. The presentation is open to the public ▼

American Baptist Biennial Schedule Highlights

FRIDAY, JUNE 22

6:15-6:45PM Convention Center
♦ Rainbow Baptists Choir

SATURDAY, JUNE 23

9AM-6PM Mathewson UMC
♦ Freedom Alternative Exhibits
♦ Shower of Stoles

1:30-2:30 PM Mathewson UMC
♦ Meeting One Another: A Gathering of People from ABConcerned Chapters and W&A Churches

2:45-4:30PM Mathewson UMC
♦ Workshops Sponsored by AWAB and ABConcerned

6:15-6:45PM Convention Center
♦ Rainbow Baptists Choir

9:30PM First Baptist Church
♦ AWAB Welcoming & Affirming Worship Service

SUNDAY, JUNE 24

9AM-6PM Mathewson UMC
♦ Freedom Alternative Exhibits
♦ Shower of Stoles

12:30-1:30PM Mathewson UMC
♦ Randle R. Mixon Christian Service Award Presented to Brenda J. Moulton

1:30-2:30PM Mathewson UMC
♦ AWAB Business Meeting

2:45-4:30PM Mathewson UMC
♦ Workshops Sponsored by ABConcerned and AWAB

6:15-6:45PM Convention Center
♦ Rainbow Baptists Choir

9PM Marriott Hotel
♦ Coalition For Baptist Principles Gathering

MONDAY, JUNE 25

9AM-4PM Mathewson UMC
♦ Freedom Alternative Exhibits
♦ Shower of Stoles

5-6:45PM Convention Center
♦ Roger Williams Fellowship Dinner

6:15-6:45PM Convention Center
♦ Rainbow Baptists Choir

LOCATIONS

Rhode Island Convention Center
1 Sabin Street

Mathewson St. United Methodist Church
134 Mathewson Street.

First Baptist Church in America
75 North Main Street

The events here are meant to augment the official Biennial schedule. The organizations listed here include: American Baptists Concerned, the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, the Coalition for Baptist Principles and Roger Williams Fellowship. Inclusion in the schedule does not necessarily constitute an endorsement of one organizations mission by another.

Join Us At Summer Retreat in Rhode Island

“Life’s Journey and the Self” is the theme of the retreat that is expected to be an interactive experience where participation is encouraged. The retreat will be a time of sharing, spiritual enrichment and worship for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Baptists, family and friends.

The retreat speaker is Steven Pennell, a life long American Baptist and descendent of Roger William, founder of Baptists in America. Steven is the Artist in Residence at the University of Rhode Island, Providence Campus, Archivist at Rites and Reason Theatre at Brown University and Director of Senior Players of Rhode Island.

The retreat center provides over 300 acres of forest, meadows, and a 20 acre lake. Some of the activities at Canonicus include hiking and walks along nature trails. The local area offers many wonderful attractions.

The retreat begins with dinner Tuesday, June 26 and concludes with breakfast, Friday, June 29. Retreat registration is \$175 per person. Late registration is being extended through June 17, 2001. Retreat registration includes three nights lodging, eight meals, use of recreation facilities and retreat materials.

Please make plans to join us for a faith building experience this June ▼

Volunteer at the Biennial

June 22-25

Greetings to you from the American Baptists Concerned National Steering Committee! As you know, the 2001 ABC/USA Biennial meeting will occur this June 22-25 in Providence, Rhode Island, and as always, American Baptists Concerned will be there as a visible witness to and resource for the entire American Baptist family.

Hopefully at this biennial there will not be surprise news of any action having been taken against Welcoming and Affirming churches, as there was in Des Moines two years ago. Nevertheless, there remains much work to be done in order to educate, support, and assist as many folks as possible, particularly in the arena of a national gathering such as the one about to take place.

Toward that end, the ABCConcerned Steering Committee has compiled a “wish list” of opportunities available for any persons or groups that would like to participate in a meaningful and valuable way to the witness of ABCConcerned at the

biennial gathering. Volunteer assistance is sought in the following areas:

- ◆ Staff the ABCConcerned resource table for a 2 hour shift.
- ◆ Provide and/or serve dessert-type items following the Mixon Christian Service Award presentation.
- ◆ Run errands as needed during biennial to print copies, pick up supplies, etc.
- ◆ Assist with distribution of alternative events schedule to people entering the Convention Center.
- ◆ Delegates to the biennial who would be willing to speak from the floor on Statements of Concern, if necessary.
- ◆ Provide transportation from airport to Camp Canonicus, (brief distance) for the ABCConcerned Retreat following biennial
- ◆ Come sing with the Rainbow Choir at 6:15 every evening at the doors of the main event hall.
- ◆ Attend the Welcoming & Affirming worship Saturday night at 9:00 and sing with the Rainbow Choir.

If you are interested in volunteering your time and energy for any (or all) of these opportunities, please contact us at ambaptists@aol.com or 925-439-4672 ▼

Last Minute Retreat Registration

We are accepting late retreat registration through June 17 by phone or email. If you still haven’t registered for our June 26-29 retreat there may still be space.

925-439-4672
ambaptists@aol.com
www.rainbowbaptists.org

Shower of Stoles In Rhode Island

American Baptists Concerned is please to bring part of the Shower of Stoles display to Providence, Rhode Island, June 23-25. The Shower of Stoles is a collection of hundreds of liturgical Stoles from gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people of faith from all over North America, from Canada to Cuba, Alaska to Hawaii.

The individuals represented by these stoles are active leaders in their faith communities—ordained ministers, elders, deacons, seminarians, church musicians, missionaries, and other gifted people—who have been barred from serving their faith community because of their sexual orientation or must serve in the closet.

This collection was created as a witness to give a voice to these faithful people, many of whom have been forced to choose between serving in silence or not being able to follow their call to ministry.

The display is being graciously hosted by Mathewson Street United Methodist Church. The Stoles are expected to be on display Saturday 9AM-6PM., Sunday noon-6PM and Monday 9AM-4PM.

MSUMC is located at 134 Mathewson Street, a few blocks from the Rhode Island Convention Center. There may be some times that the area where the Stoles will be displayed will not be accessible due to activities at the church ▼

Outreach Takes Time, Commitment and Resources

The biennial meeting of the American Baptist Churches in the USA every two years is one of the primary opportunities American Baptists Concerned has to educate people in the ABC on issues of importance for sexual minority Baptists. Many people who attend a biennial have misconceptions about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Therefore, we take this opportunity every two years to try and dispel the stereotypes that many people have and to be a voice for the sexual minority people in our denomination that can not openly speak for themselves.

ABConcerned has some very exciting things planned at the 2001 Biennial in Providence, Rhode Island. We are doing a series of workshops sharing the stories and faith journeys of GLBT people, family members, ministers, etc. We are also assembling two booklets that will share the personal stories of GLBT people and their families. One booklet will focus on the challenges and issues specific to being a sexual minority youth.

We will be bringing the Shower of Stoles Project to the Biennial. This collection of liturgical stoles from people all over North America. Please read more about the Stoles elsewhere in *Voice of the Turtle*.

The Rainbow Choir will again sing as a public witness to biennial attendees. The choir has sung at every biennial since 1993. The choir will sing each evening outside the entrance to the evening biennial session and Saturday night

at 9:30 p.m. for the Welcoming & Affirming worship. If you are at the biennial, please come sing with us.

There will be a gathering for people from ABCConcerned chapters and W&A churches. This will give folks an opportunity to meet one another. The gathering is being hosted by the Massachusetts chapter of ABCConcerned.

ABCConcerned will be presenting the Randle R. Mixon Award for Christian Service. The award is given every two years to an American Baptist who has worked to help educated people about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people with our denomination and the greater Christian community.

In order to make all of these exciting events at the Biennial possible the ABCConcerned Steering Committee has had to devote a great many resources both in time and money. Unfortunately the expenses involved in putting on workshops, acquiring the stoles display, renting space, printing literature and flyers has severely depleted our treasury. Please consider making a donation to cover biennial expenses and to help us continue our ministry of justice on behalf of sexual minority Baptists. Please fill out and send in the form you will find inserted in this *VOT*. The names of donors, subscribers and members are strictly confidential and is not an indication of sexual orientation ▼

- Thank You

Knowing You, Knowing Me

continued from page 5

worship, what race or gender or sexual orientation you are, how many things you have, or how many times you have failed or run away. The only thing that matters is what is in your heart. Your call will remain fresh only as you approach God in spirit, seeking from your heart to know God's nature, and also in truth, opening up to God and yourself the truth about your life, your doubts, and your dreams.

My inspiration for the title of this reflection, "Knowing Me, Knowing You," came from the title of a song by ABBA, a Swedish pop group from the 1970s. In a way, that connection is irrelevant in that the song is a break-up song, based on the knowledge that breaking up is best to do "knowing me and knowing you." Yet for you, knowing you and knowing God is the basis for a partnership for life. Only in knowing both yourself and God will your call be fulfilled and your ministry really made complete. So above all, let your ministry be mainly about that—"knowing me and knowing You." ▼

*Heather Rittenhouse is Cochairperson
of American Baptists Concerned*

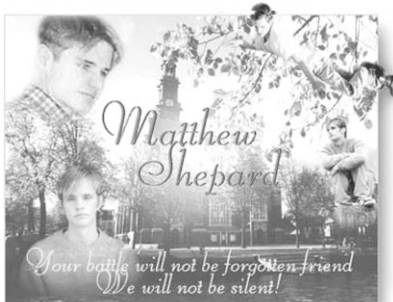
CLOUT Conference

Christian Lesbians Out Together will meet August 9-12 in Black Mountain, NC. CLOUT will celebrate the legacy of black poet activist, Audre Lorde, while examining and reaffirming its commitment to racial justice, as Christian lesbians who are out in the world.

The conference will begin by recognizing the Cherokee from whom the local ground was taken. And the Africans who were forcibly brought in to harvest it throughout North Carolina. Workshops include the LGBT ordination debate, transgender issues, and open slots to address participant's concerns.

For more information write CLOUT, P.O. Box 5853, Athens, OH 45701 or phone 740-448-6424 ▼

Don't Let God's Children Be Victims of Intolerance



Matthew Shepard
1977 - 1998

Art by Dick Alexander

"Matt is loved by God. It is love that has radiated out of the midst of this tragedy, love which empowers his parents to speak compassion rather than condemnation, love which inspired his friends to acts of prayer and witness, love which is more powerful than any voice of hate.

He was not always a winner according to the world's standards. He struggled to fit into a world not always kind to gentle spirits. What was important to Matt was to care, to help to nurture, to bring joy to others in his quiet, gentle way."

— Rev. Anne Kitch

The Spirit Blows in the Windy City

By Lynne Kelley

The Holy Spirit's presence was almost palpable when the Grace Baptist Church of Chicago gathered on March 18 to install their new pastor, the Reverend Jacki Belile. The installation service was filled with music, prayer, celebration and awe at God's surprising act in leading the congregation to call one of their own as pastor.

Jacki and her partner Carla Riggs have been members at Grace since 1990. Jacki was active at Grace during her student years at Chicago Theological Seminary. Working with then pastor the Reverend Kelly Sprinkle, she served an internship at Grace prior to completing her M.Div. in 1996.

Grace ordained Jacki to the ministry in 1999. She served as interim pastor at Phoenix Community Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Shortly before Kelly was called to another pastorate late in 1999, Jacki became associate pastor at Grace. Nearly a year later, Grace's pastoral search committee presented Jacki as their candidate for pastor. The congregation prayerfully extended their call.

The congregation began Jacki's installation service with the hymn "Spirit," which recalled the movement of God's Spirit throughout the biblical narrative. The service likewise reflected on the leading of God's Spirit in the lives of Grace and their

new pastor. Over the past eleven years, Jacki has been an integral part of the Grace community. She has contributed much to its welcoming, caring spirit. She carries that spirit beyond the Grace community into other areas of her ministry.

Jacki serves on the Steering Committee for American Baptists Concerned, and on the Council of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists. She chaired the National Coordinating Committee for WOW 2000. Locally she is a member of the executive cabinet of the American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago, and serves on the Region's search committee for new executive leadership.

With her personal warmth and integrity, Jacki has gained recognition and friends in her many different ministries. Attendees at her installation service included members and friends of Grace, and friends of Jacki from a variety of settings—ecumenical circles, Chicago Theological Seminary, Phoenix Community Church, urban ministries in Chicago, and the ABC/MC.

The Reverend E. Alfred Jenkins, immediate past president of the ABC/MC, was among the speakers at the installation service. He praised Grace Baptist Church for bringing to the Region a new sense of justice. He expressed appreciation for Grace's active

role in the life of the Region. Grace's members have worked in most of the Region's ministries, from its camp program to its executive council. Rev. Jenkins pointed out that in the years since Grace became a covenanting congregation of the ABC/MC, it has presented and ordained more candidates than any other church in the Region. He expressed gratitude to Grace for continuing faithfulness to partnership with the Region.

ABC/MC's interim executive minister, the Reverend William R. Nelson also praised both the church and the pastor for their work in the Region. The Grace community's commitment to historical Baptist principles has reawakened the Region's sense of those distinctives, he said. On behalf of the Region, Rev. Nelson enthusiastically looked forward to continuing partnership with Jacki and the congregation.

The congregation clearly shared that hope and enthusiasm about the future. Concluding the service with their own song, "Children of Grace," community and pastor committed themselves to remaining close to God and following the leading of the Spirit ▼

American Baptists Concerned of the Rochester, NY

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Lutheran Bishop Ordains Lesbian

Declaring he could no longer stand on the sidelines, Lutheran Bishop Paul W. Egertson, has defied his church's constitution and joined in ordaining a lesbian as a minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Egertson, bishop of the church's Southern California West Synod joined other ministers in St. Paul, Minnesota, in April when they ordained a lesbian woman, Anita Hill, to the ministry. Egertson became the first active ELCA bishop to participate in the ordination of a lesbian when he took part in the ceremony.

Egertson, 65, said he was conscience-bound to actively engage in disobedience by joining in Hill's ordination. Egertson, who's son is gay, has long been supportive of full inclusion of gay men and lesbians in the life of his church, but he has refrained from participating in ordinations because of his role as a bishop.

H. George Anderson, the ELCA's presiding bishop, asked Egertson before the ceremony to reconsider his participation, said John Brooks, a spokesman for the Chicago-based denomination.

Egertson said he does not know what disciplinary action might be taken against him, but has been in touch with Anderson since the ordination at St. Paul Reformation Lutheran Church. Penalties against the local congregation could range from censure to expulsion from the denomination.

Just weeks before Hill's ordination, the ELCA's Church Council passed a seven-point resolution reminding synod bishops of the limits of their authority. Among the points stressed were that bishops were expected to discharge their duties "in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, and in harmony with the constitution." The

resolution was prompted partly by the then-planned St. Paul ordination. But Anderson said at the time that the resolution was written with broader implications.

Some church leaders expressed concern about Egertson when he was elected bishop in 1995 because he said he had earlier joined in blessing same-sex unions. For that reason, Egertson said, he promised in writing to resign if he ever felt he must defy church law as a matter of conscience. Anderson now has asked him to follow through, he said.

Egertson's term as the region's bishop expires Aug. 31, and an election had already been scheduled during a two-day Synod Assembly, May 31 and June 1. He is not expected to seek re-election.



*Portions from The Los Angeles Times
and Associated Press*

Methodists Vote to Continue Anti-Gay Policies

A series of plenary votes at the United Methodist Church's quadrennial General Assembly on May 11 reaffirmed for four more years the denomination's opposition to ordination of non-celibate gays and lesbians, and to blessing same-gender couples. The moves sparked peaceful protests on the floor leading to a number of arrests, an ironic turn of events for a conference meeting under the slogan "We Who Are Many Are One Body."

First delegates voted 628-337 to retain the denomination's 1972 statement that although the grace of God is available to all, "homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching." A compromise proposal to replace this statement with one that, "Many consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. Others believe it acceptable when practiced in a context of human covenantal faithfulness," was defeated 585-376.

In the wake of that vote, some fifty members of the denomination's gay-supportive AMAR coalition marched down the hall's center aisle to the stage at the front in silent protest. After a moment, presiding Bishop Dan Solomon asked that non-delegates in the group return to

the visitors' seating in the balcony. Spokespeople for AMAR asked for a four-year moratorium on the application of all rules in the denomination's Book of Discipline relating to homosexuality.

Solomon declared a twenty-minute recess and asked all delegates to leave the floor. Reportedly about ten bishops and "scores" of delegates remained in solidarity with the group. Meanwhile another 100 people marched around the balcony wearing clerical stoles representing gays and lesbians who had been denied ordination. Both groups sang hymns and songs of protest.

After the twenty minutes had stretched to thirty, Solomon reconvened the Assembly. He explained that the people protesting would not leave unless a moratorium was adopted. Delegates agreed by vote to consider a moratorium and to allow the group to remain present but silent. Debate continued for about half-an-hour. Delegates defeated the moratorium proposal by 66.6%-33.4%.

Then delegates voted 640-317 to retain the denomination's ban on the ordination of "self-

avowed practicing homosexuals" ("out" non-celibate gays and lesbians) first adopted in 1984. They voted 646-294 to reaffirm the denomination's 1996 prohibition against "ceremonies that celebrate homosexual union" being performed by United Methodist ministers or in United Methodist churches. A proposal to modify the language so that violations would not be prosecuted, as they were for now-suspended Reverend Gregory Dell and twice for now-uncredentialed Jimmy Creech, was rejected.

At this point the AMAR members broke their silence to march on stage singing the civil rights anthem "We Shall Overcome," with some delegates on the floor and visitors in the balcony joining in the song. AMAR Spokesperson Randy Miller asked to address the delegates, and Bishop Solomon agreed. Miller told the crowd, "We have broken covenant because this church has broken covenant with us. We were baptized in this church, and grew up in your Sunday schools," only to be excluded as gay and lesbian adults. He concluded, "The covenant is already broken. We take it as an act of conscience to be forcibly removed from here."

Bishop Solomon reportedly buried his head in his hands and said, "I cannot witness what now is about to occur," the arrest of some 27 demonstrators, including Northern Illinois
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Welcoming & Affirming

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American Baptists Concerned Rhode Island

- Providing support for sexual minorities and their parents and friends
- Advocating the full acceptance of sexual minorities in American Baptist churches

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Methodists Vote

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Bishop Joseph Sprague, New York Bishop Susan Morrison and a number of ministers.

Small Victories Also on May 11, delegates by consent tagged on to the "incompatible with Christian teaching" statement a sentence saying, "We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn their lesbian and gay members and friends." A majority of more than 80% approved continuing dialogue on issues of homosexuality, to be organized by the United Methodist Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns. But after considering several alternatives, the delegates ultimately left in place a prohibition against using church funds "to promote the acceptance of homosexuality."

On May 10, after a large civil disobedience

action organized by Rev. Mel White's group Soulforce that resulted in 187 arrests, there had been one small victory for gays and lesbians: a plenary vote of 78% -22% to reject a plan to create a specific program in the denomination for "persons who seek to leave or not start the practice of homosexuality."

On May 8, a plenary vote of 705-210 rejected a proposal to require the following pledge from any minister to be assigned to a church: "I do not believe that homosexuality is God's perfect will for any person. I will not practice it. I will not promote it. I will not allow its promotion to be encouraged under my authority."

That same day, delegates also rejected a further addition to the "homosexual unions" ban, to state that a minister's celebration of such rites would remain a chargeable offense in the church even if same-gender relationships were legally recognized in the state where the ceremony took place.

Another action relating less directly to commitment ceremonies is less clear in its implications. By a ten vote margin, delegates had asked the denomination's Judicial Council to consider whether its regional bodies, known as Annual Conferences, could "legally negate, ignore or violate" the denomination's laws as set forth in the Book of Discipline based on conscientious objections. On May 10, the Judicial Council responded in the negative, saying that those who violated the law must expect the consequences, although not every violation would necessarily lead to trial, a verdict of disobedience, and a sentence.

The question was understood to relate to the "ecclesiastical disobedience" in the California-Nevada Annual Conference in which more than ninety United Methodist ministers joined together to bless a lesbian couple. The decision not to prosecute the 68 of those ministers from within the California-Nevada Annual Conference angered some conservatives ▼



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