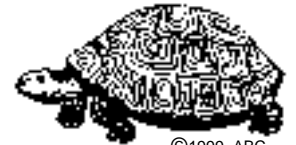


# Voice of the Turtle



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

THE NEWSLETTER OF AMERICAN BAPTISTS CONCERNED FOR SEXUAL MINORITIES

Vol. 22, No. 1 Winter 1999

[www.rainbowbaptists.org](http://www.rainbowbaptists.org)

## Ninety-Five Ministers Perform Holy Union to Challenge Church Policy

By Lois Pearlman

**Sacramento** - Organizers expected 80 Methodist ministers to perform a lesbian holy union in Sacramento's Convention Center Theater on, January 16, 1999, but by the time the clergy marched on stage their ranks had swelled to 95. The ministers blessed the relationship between Ellie Charlton, 63, and Jeanne Barnett, 68, both longtime members of the church, thereby defying a 1998 United Methodist Church ruling that forbids its ministers to perform same-sex holy unions.

Fado made it clear that the ministers officiating at the ceremony were ready to face the consequences of their actions. Before they read, in unison, the "blessings and announcements" that joined the couple together, Fado declared, "If anyone wants to file charges against us, this is what the charges are for, this blessing."

Following the blessing, Charlton and Barnett exchanged their vows, pledging to love each other for the rest of lives. The women wore identical outfits - gray slacks,

turtlenecks, and lavender cardigans applied with flowers.

The 90-minute service was a mixture of religion, politics, and pure fun. It included music performed by soloists and a chorus of hundreds of local singers who call themselves DIVA (Diverse Individuals Vocalizing Affirmatively). Barnett's niece and cousin also sang a duet from *Phantom of the Opera* and Charlton's daughter-in-

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Under Methodist law the ministers could be defrocked for the simple act of providing their relationship with the blessings of the church. Gay former ministers and dozens of lay representatives from gay-supportive churches joined the ministers on stage, adding their presence to this act of "ecclesiastical disobedience." According to organizers over 1,000 guests were in the audience, most of them gay-supportive members from Northern California churches.

What had begun in October 1998, as a personal commitment by Charlton and Barnett's minister, the Rev. Don Fado of St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Sacramento, to perform his next same-sex holy union in public, turned into a powerful statement of religious support for gay marriage.

Although Methodist ministers have been quietly performing same-sex unions for many years, the group's General Conference voted in 1998 to amend its Social Rules to say, "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches."

## New Website Launched

A year ago, American Baptists Concerned launched our website, Rainbow Baptists. On March 29, we will launch an improved website with a new look and more resources. The new site, also called Rainbow Baptists, is a joint venture of ABCConcerned and Honesty, our equivalent Southern Baptist organization. Both groups share the common goals of providing support and advocacy for sexual minority Baptists, family and friends, and outreach and education to those seeking information and answers.

The new site includes: links to the growing number of regional chapters of both groups, information on homosexuality and the Bible, a listing of welcome & affirming churches, resources for youth and families, and links to affirming ecumenical groups and resources. Rainbow Baptists also has a "news" section to keep folks informed on matters of interest to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Baptists and supportive allies. We plan to update the news section weekly.

We hope Rainbow Baptists can be your one stop source for news and information affecting sexual minority Christians. Please check the site out and let us know what you think. [www.rainbowbaptists.org](http://www.rainbowbaptists.org)

### The Inside Scoop

- ▼ ABC/USA General Secretary issues statement on hate crimes.
- ▼ UCC President issues pastoral letter calling for LGBT inclusivity.
- ▼ Steering Committee wants to foster chapter growth.
- ▼ North Carolina church takes stand for sexual minority rights.
- ▼ Canada moves toward equality.
- ▼ "The Call to Serve God."
- ▼ "ABCConcerned National Retreat June 26-29."

## Tentative Biennial Schedule

American Baptist Churches  
Biennial Meeting  
Des Moines, Iowa • June 22-25, 1999

American Baptists Concerned and the  
Association of Welcoming & Affirming  
Baptists Will Have a Visible Presence

### PLANNED ACTIVITIES INDLUE

#### Monday-Friday

AWAB Hospitality Suite, Conversation Space  
at the Savery Hotel, which is very close to the  
Convention Center (by walkway)

#### Tuesday-Friday

- ABCConcerned & AWAB booth/exhibit space  
at the Roger Williams Fellowship Freedom  
Exhibit, located in St. Johns Lutheran Church  
(next to Convention Center)

#### Wednesday, 2:30-3:30 p.m.

- Be(com)ing a Welcoming & Affirming  
Congregation (Sponsored by AWAB)\*
- Dealing with a family member "coming out"  
(Sponsored by ABCConcerned)\*

#### Wednesday, 3:30-4:30 p.m.

- AWAB Business Meeting\*

#### Wednesday, 5:00-6:00 p.m.

- W&A Service of Worship. The Rev.  
Timothy Phillips, co-pastor of University  
Baptist Church in Seattle, preaching (W&A)\*
- Following worship a reception will be hosted  
by American Baptists Concerned to present  
the "Randle R. Mixon Award for Christian  
Service."\*

#### Thursday, 2:45-4:30 p.m.

- Turning to Jesus - What does the Bible Say?  
a study of scripture as it relates to the church  
and homosexuality (Sponsored by AWAB)\*
- Being Christian and Gay. (Sponsored by  
ABCConcerned)\*

#### Thursday, 9:00 p.m.

- Preservation of Baptist Principles Gathering,  
held at the Convention Center.

\* At St. John's Lutheran Church, 601 Keosauqua Wy

# ABC/USA General Secretary Speaks Out Against Hate Crimes

## A Response From The Rev. Daniel Weiss

In the wake of widely reported incidents of violent attacks against individuals, American Baptist Churches USA General Secretary Daniel E. Weiss is urging American Baptists and other people of faith "to bring forward our Lord's mandate for peacemaking, compassion and reconciliation and confront immediately and unconditionally these despicable expressions of hatred."

"For Christians, the course is clear," Weiss said. "Violence is the manifestation of cowardice and fear. As a response to interpersonal relationships it is antithetical to everything the Gospel teaches us. We who take seriously the Great Commission need to articulate that truth. Our voices need to be heard. If we don't pursue understanding ourselves, and call others to the same standard, we're failing to be effective disciples." Weiss's concern reflects the imperative expressed by many American Baptists for confronting violence and injustice motivated by racism and homophobia against individuals and groups. Among numerous recent incidents, media attention focused early last year on Jasper, Tex., where James Byrd Jr., an African American man, died after being dragged chained to a pick-up truck. And two In October of last year, Matthew Shepard, a homosexual University of Wyoming freshman, died after being beaten and left to

die lashed to a fence. Weiss noted particular concerns about the actions of a religious group that picketed Shepard's funeral and publicly denounced him. "I want to assure all people of good will that those taking part in this horrible spectacle are in no way associated with an American Baptist church or in our life as a denomination. That, however, does not lessen the sadness we feel. It is especially unsettling when people who claim to be living out the reconciling Gospel of Jesus Christ—and who call themselves Baptists—use a time of grieving and loss to spew their vitriolic message of hate."

"Even if these are, as some maintain, isolated incidents, we cannot assume the seeds of misunderstanding and violence have not been planted in many places, among many people," Weiss said. "We see the evidence of that in the Middle East, in Kosovo, in Jasper, in Wyoming, and in so many other places that don't make the 'News at 11.' It is our responsibility as followers of Christ to confront the evils we see and to promote reconciliation. We need to confront hardened hearts, and affirm the wonderful opportunity for change and renewal that Christ offers to all people at all times." ▼

*From the American Baptist News Service*

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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.

### Membership, Subscription and Donation Information

If you would like to like to subscribe to *Voice of the Turtle*, join American Baptists Concerned (\$25 per year) or make a donation, please write to the address below:

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## Is There An ABConcerned Chapter Where You Live?

### Steering Committee Accepts Challenge to Help Start Regional Chapters

Once a month, on average, American Baptists Concerned receives a call or an email from someone “out there” alone, wishing to make contact with someone who just might become a friendly lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender face. It can be lonely out there, and too often we are at a loss to provide the name of a supportive ally, especially in the south central states. Thankfully, there has been an active chapter of ABConcerned in New England for some time. I can remember the first time I reached out and attended a meeting of ABConcerned Massachusetts. It truly is like finding long-lost family members. This February Rhode Island’s chapter of ABConcerned celebrated its fifth anniversary, and I am thankful for the friendship and support of so many LGBT friends and straight-but-not-narrow allies who meet monthly in our group.

At its 1999 mid-winter Steering Committee meeting in Connecticut, ABConcerned took up the challenge to help local chapters begin wherever there is a need and a desire. Two regions have already indicated an interest, and we will support them in whatever way we can as they begin. While we will not share the names of others in those regions,

the Steering Committee will write to nearby *Voice of the Turtle* subscribers and members to share the name of the contact person in that region with the hope that there will be enough interest to begin a new group. You can be assured that we will do everything we can to protect your confidentiality. Remember that Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered together...”

Each chapter will take on an identity all its own, but we will share insights from other chapters. For example, Rhode Island is small enough that we have a state-wide group that meets monthly and has seen up to 20 persons gathered for pot luck, check-in, devotional moment, and a meeting that may involve a guest speaker, a time of personal story-sharing, business, or planning. Yes, we have parties too. While this might not work in regions with a larger area mass, growing a different sort of ABConcerned chapter is still possible.

Contact us by snail mail, email, or phone. We look forward to the time when there is an ABConcerned place for everyone. We need your help to outreach and help others ▼

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*There are new chapters in the process of being formed in Indiana and New Hampshire*

## 95 Ministers Perform Holy Union

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law and granddaughter recited a poem they had written together.

A high point was a comic song called “The Ballad of Ellie and Jeanne,” about the joys and tribulations of lesbian love, written and performed by a husband-and-wife team. Just before the benediction, audience members tossed hundreds of multi-colored crepe paper streamers into the air, strewing the auditorium with an overlay of helter-skelter rainbow stripes.

Outside the convention center, cordoned off by yellow tape and police, about 15 members of the Rev. Fred Phelps’ traveling band of anti-gay activists held brightly colored signs that proclaimed “God hates fags,” “sows wed,” and “Union made in hell.” Phelps, a Topeka, Kansas preacher, has appeared with his hand-full followers at numerous gay religious events, most recently Matthew Shepard’s funeral in Wyoming last October.

On the other side of the street supporters of the wedding ceremony formed a “Circle of Love,” singing hymns and spirituals and holding hand-made signs. One group of supporters from Placerville, California, carried signs that said, “I’m a white, married, middle class, heterosexual woman. Homophobia hurts. This is my issue, too” ▼

### American Baptists Concerned of the Rochester, NY Area

*Join us as we seek to embody the Good News of God’s acceptance and love.*

**(716) 442-5486**

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# North Carolina Church Takes Stand for Gay Rights

By Yonat Shimron

**Winston-Salem, NC** — Members of Wake Forest Baptist Church cleared the way in November 1998, for its ministers to perform same-sex unions — a decision that will have wide-ranging ramifications for the church and its standing within the Baptist State Convention [N.C. Southern Baptists]. The church, however, stopped short of formally endorsing same-sex unions and resolved that only God can bless relationships between two people.

The church will likely proceed with a ceremony for two lesbian members who have asked that their union be given a formal church blessing. If it does, the church will also face almost certain expulsion from the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, the state's largest religious group with more than 1.2 million members. At a denominational meeting, convention President Mac Brunson was quoted as saying, "We can't condone sin."

The congregation is the third in the state to take a stand in favor of full inclusion of gays and lesbians in the life of the church. A church in Raleigh and a church in Chapel Hill were expelled from the convention in 1992 for performing a gay covenant ceremony and ordaining a gay divinity school student, respectively. Both churches — Pullen Memorial Baptist in Raleigh and Binkley Memorial Baptist in Chapel Hill — were later kicked out of the Southern Baptist Convention as well, after the national group amended its constitution to bar churches that affirm homosexuality.

The November decision, approved in a 90-33 vote after more than two hours of discussion in a basement auditorium, was not as strongly worded as some in the church would have liked, but at least one member, a deacon who is a lesbian, said she was satisfied. "I'm pleased our ministers have the opportunity to participate in these ceremonies," Susan Parker said. "It's important for gays to know this service is now available through Wake Forest Baptist Church."

The discussion was closed to the media, but church leaders later held a news conference to announce the resolution. They stood underneath an oil painting of the Rev. Samuel Wait, the founder of Wake Forest University, and the man whose name graces the chapel where the church meets. The original motion would have affirmed same-sex relationships. But the substitute motion was typically Baptist, said the Rev. Richard Groves, the pastor of the church, in that it affirmed the right of each individual to make personal decisions about their faith. "We are very committed to the idea that each of us has a relationship with God," Groves said.

But last week, at their annual meeting in Winston-Salem, state Baptists said they would ask for even tougher measures against North Carolina churches that affirm gays. The state convention prohibits churches that endorse homosexuality from contributing money to the denomination — a policy that, in effect, limits those churches' participation. But some said they wanted to see stronger language or a formal amendment to the convention's constitution. "Somewhere a line needs to be drawn in terms of how we respond to churches that practice things contrary to Scripture," said the Rev. Wayne Blackwell, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Rutherford County. "I'm concerned that our convention remain faithful to Scripture."

But members of Wake Forest Baptist Church said the relationships among church members were more important to them than membership in the state convention — a position that is becoming increasingly popular among congregations across the South.

"We're more concerned with the effect this decision will have on our members than our connection with the Baptist State Convention," said Ed Christman, a member of the church. "I think the focus has been more on what this means for our long-standing members." The church, which was founded in 1957 shortly after Wake

Forest University moved to Winston-Salem, has at least a dozen gay members including two openly gay deacons.

Baptist historians say denominational unity is weakening and many churches are leaving the fold for new alliances. "We are at a time when increasing fragmentation is taking place in the old Baptist system," said Bill Leonard, the dean of the Divinity School at Wake Forest University. "There seems to be more questioning of official ties to the Southern Baptist Convention."

In the past few months several churches, including First Baptist of Raleigh and Watts Street Baptist in Durham, cut off ties to the national denomination after it amended a statement of faith to require women to be submissive to men. Wake Forest Baptist is among those churches that have felt alienated from the Southern Baptist Convention over its position on women. The church includes women on the deacons board and the church's associate minister is a woman.

Dialogue on the status of gays began in 1993, when the church revised its weekly bulletin to say that it was "an inclusive Christian community." Over the years it has grappled over Scripture quotes that condemn homosexuality and pondered whether gays and lesbians choose their sexuality or are born with it. In October, 1998, the church took a decisive step toward performing gay unions when it voted to allow church space to be used for covenant ceremonies. November's vote was intended to be more principled: whether church members endorse the idea.

Members said it was the presence of gays in their midst that convinced them they were ready to recognize their lifelong commitments. "They've been extraordinary, good, faithful members," said Richard Barnett, a deacon in the church. "They're hard-working and deserve as complete a level of participation as any member should have, including the blessing of their relationships — which are long-term and monogamous." ▼

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*From the Raleigh News & Observer  
November, 16, 1998*

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# Canada Moves Toward Equality

By Erin Anderssen

**Ottawa, ON-** The Canadian federal government is planning sweeping changes to dozens of pieces of legislation to extend equal rights to same-sex couples.

Pre-empting a losing battle in the country's courts, government sources say, Ottawa has decided to proceed with amendments that will treat homosexual couples the same as heterosexuals in everything from pensions to bankruptcy law to the Criminal Code.

The government's political will to make the changes was strengthened by the fact that there was little evidence of a backlash when Immigration Minister, Lucienne Robillard, announced in January 1999, that her department will open the door to same-sex immigrant couples.

The major policy shift has been prompted by a growing stack of court cases that say certain existing federal laws violate the Charter of Rights and Freedoms by not treating homosexuals and heterosexual couples equally.

"The government has to deal with this sooner or later," a government source said. "It's unavoidable."

A gay and lesbian rights group has launched a massive lawsuit against Ottawa, seeking changes to 58 federal statutes. But David Corbett, lawyer for the Foundation for Equal Families, said the group has made it clear that it is willing to drop the court action if the government proceeds with changes under a set time line. Ottawa has not yet responded officially to the lawsuit.

While the decision has been made to make the changes, sources said the government is still debating how to do it, either with one omnibus bill amending a mass of legislation together or by proceeding individually through each department involved.

High-level discussions are under way in a number of government departments to decide how best to implement the changes. Beyond the obvious complication of drafting a massive omnibus bill, there is concern that it would create a focal point for opponents of gay rights. As well, cases against some elements of federal law have

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# A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words... Or Is It Just One?

By Nance Goodman

The word is lesbian. Or at least, that's the word according to the cabinet of Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children, where, up until September 1998, Alicia Pedreira was employed as a therapist.

My partner and I returned from our vacation in August, only to be greeted with the news that a 'lovely' picture of the two of us was being displayed at the Kentucky State Fair. After some creative sleuthing, we discovered that the picture was of the two of us, leaning up against a wall at the Louisville AIDS Walk. I had my arms around Alicia, and she was wearing a T-shirt with a map of Greece on it, and writing that said 'Isle of Lesbos'. The 11x17 inch photo had been taken by a photographer unknown to both of us, and entered in the State Fair photo contest, without our consent.

Ordinarily, this would not be a problem. The photograph was not in any way suggestive or risqué. However, Alicia was employed by Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children. At the time of her being hired by the agency, she came out to her prospective employers, telling them she was a lesbian, and stating that she did not want the job, if that was going to be an issue. She was assured that it was not a problem, as long as she didn't talk about her personal life at work. At the time of our vacation, Alicia was well settled into her job, as the clinician for a residential treatment cottage for trouble teenaged boys.

Everything changed with the display of the photograph. Suddenly, the cabinet of KBHC was meeting, personnel was phoning her boss, and her job was in jeopardy. Although Alicia had excellent rapport with her clients, a glowing job evaluation, and the respect of her supervisor and peers, she was asked to resign just one week after the fair. Alicia refused to resign, and after being harassed for six weeks, was officially fired. KBHC has instituted a new policy stating that the

"homosexual lifestyle" is incompatible with their work and "Christian values."

KBHC is the largest residential treatment agency for youth in the state of Kentucky, and accepts federal monies. Their mission statement includes the following: "The KBHC structure stresses a partnership among staff. KBHC is committed to fostering an environment that daily affirms the professional, personal, and spiritual development of our staff. That environment includes a safe work place, an appreciation of multicultural backgrounds, and a commitment to ethical integrity."

Kentucky does not have any sort of anti-gay discrimination laws on the books, and as I hope you know, there is no federal legislation to stop this kind of event from occurring.

What can you do to help stop situations like this one?

- 1) This kind of discrimination and harassment functions best in secrecy. So when you hear about stories such as this, share them with others and ask them to join you in responding through phone calls, email and letters.
- 2) Talk to any media people when you hear of stories like this. Let them know you are against such actions.
- 3) Write letters, send email and call the agencies, such as KBHC and let them know that this kind of blatant employment discrimination is unacceptable. Tell them about the "Christian values" of tolerance and respect.

It's too late to save Alicia's job. It's not, however, too late to stand up against this kind of injustice. Please help us create a culture where this kind of blatant discrimination is unacceptable ▼

# Prophetic Reflections: A Pastoral Letter For Us All

From The Rev. Paul H. Sherry,  
President of the United Church of Christ

November, 1998

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8.1)

In recent months we have witnessed the continuance of hate crimes against gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons, while in the church discussion about their civil rights and the appropriateness of their membership and ministry in the life of the church has intensified. Several denominations in the United States, as well as some churches and bishops around the world, have adopted or reaffirmed policies that exclude gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons from sharing fully in the ministry of the church. Other Christian leaders have harshly suggested that gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons have no place at all in the life of the church and that their human rights do not deserve the full measure of legal protection. In addition, some political leaders, usually claiming religious support, have vigorously opposed efforts to secure these very rights. Sometimes these anti-gay positions have been justified by flawed scientific understandings of the nature of homosexuality. Underlying many of these convictions is the assumption, frequently untested, that the Bible in general, and Christianity in particular, teach that homosexuality is a sin.

In my role as pastor to the United Church of Christ, and in this season of theological reflection on "The Inclusive Church," I offer this Pastoral Letter to remind all of us that the church is to be a place where all are welcomed, where the gifts of all are recognized and received, and where the rights of all are defended and promoted. When so many in our society would reject and exclude, it is critical that we of the United Church of Christ bear witness to the conviction that it is possible to be deeply faithful to the Bible, profoundly respectful of the historic faith of the church and of its sacraments, and at the same time support the full inclusion and participation of all God's

children in the membership and ministry of the church. Likewise, there can be no compromise that all persons in this society must enjoy equal protection under the law.

I write in deep gratitude for the journey of discernment and action that the United Church of Christ has taken over the past several decades. For all our difficulties and challenges, I believe the United Church of Christ is uniquely equipped to take on this complex but crucial vocation both in the public arena and among our ecumenical partners. Informed by the actions of several General Synods, by Biblical and theological reflection, and above all by countless pastoral encounters with members of our church, I am convinced that there must be and will be no turning back from our commitment, especially in the face of the current prejudice and misunderstanding prevalent in both the church and the society.

Contrary to what some assume or allege, the conviction of the General Synod of the United Church of Christ, along with the witness of many conferences, associations, and local churches, is not a superficial response to changing cultural norms or an easy reaction to certain social opinions. At their best, our commitments have grown out of a profound reflection on the meaning of our baptism and our participation in the sacrament of holy communion. Our commitments have grown as we have responded pastorally to the needs of many of our members and their families who have been the victims of prejudice or who have experienced rejection in the church.

We have been confronted and gifted by the presence in our church of gay, lesbian, and bisexual Christians who have been baptized in our sanctuaries, confirmed before our altars, and ordained by our associations. We have been confronted and gifted by men and women faithfully attentive to the Word,

diligent in their sacramental life, forthright in their Christian witness and compassionate in their service. We have been confronted and gifted by parents and grandparents, sisters and brothers, daughters and sons, faithful members of our church, whose embrace by a loving God has enabled them to accept a gay, lesbian, or bisexual family member, and who yearn for that same loving embrace to be extended by the church to their child, their grandchild, their brother or sister, their parent. We have been confronted and gifted by faithful, mature, and able members who have experienced God's call to the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament, who have sought and received the recognition and authorization of the church. We have been confronted and gifted by ordained men and women who have served faithfully and well for many years and who now wish to minister among us with renewed vitality openly affirming their same gender orientation. We have been confronted and gifted by gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons who have found love in the physical, emotional, and spiritual embrace of another, and are living in committed covenantal relationships of fidelity and trust which they yearn for the church to bless and the society to respect and protect. And we have been confronted and gifted by members of our church and those of other churches who have known the pain of rejection, the anguish of exclusion, and the fear of abuse, yet who remain faithful to their baptismal vows, seek to be fed at Christ's Table, and desire to be engaged in the mission of Christ's reconciling love in the world.

Confronted and gifted by these baptized persons, members of the United Church of Christ have been challenged to read the Bible again with new eyes and listen to the Holy Spirit with new ears. We have had to reexamine long held assumptions about those few passages of Scripture that appear to speak about homosexuality in the light of transforming interpretations from widely respected Bible scholars and teachers, and we have begun to recognize how our fears of those who are different, and our society's deeply entrenched bias against homosexual persons has often distorted and nearly silenced the Bible's liberating and inclusive voice. At the same time, encounters with hurting and excluded sisters and brothers have caused us to look to the whole of Scripture which speaks of a God who

continually reaches out for those who are cast out for any reason, those who live at the margins of our lives. We have been reminded of our identity as disciples of the One who often ate with those rejected by the religious norms of the day, the One who sets before us all the Table of God's inclusive love, mercy, and grace.

In these encounters, we have remembered our own history, recalling ways we have been led to expand the church's welcome to others who have been excluded. We remembered the Amistad and the story of our forebears, both enslaved and free, who rejected Biblical interpretations that supported slavery and whose new appreciation for the Gospel's mandate led them to fight for freedom for all. We remembered Japanese Americans driven from their homes during the Second World War, and those of our churches who spoke out for their rights. We remembered many women who refused to submit to a misuse of the Bible that denied them places of leadership or that conspired in their abuse, and who found affirmation and encouragement in our churches, our colleges, and our seminaries. We remembered ancestors of our Hungarian sisters and brothers whose witness to the Reformed faith led to their persecution as galley slaves and martyrs, as well as those who fled oppression in 1956 to find safe haven among our churches.

More recently we remembered our church's call for self-determination for Puerto Rican people, the championing of the rights of Chicano farm workers, the call for respect for the dignity of Native American people demeaned by caricature and stereotype, the recognition of the rights of Indigenous Hawaiians deprived of their land and culture, and solidarity with those who declared that the apartheid system erected and supported by other Bible reading Christians was idolatry, a denial of the very integrity of the church's confession. All of this has helped us discover that our church's concern for the rights and dignity of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people is not a break from our past, or a departure from Scripture, but is informed by our moments of greatest fidelity to the prophetic voice of the Bible and the Gospel's embrace for those who, with Christ, have been despised.

The encounters in our own church with each other over the subject of sexual orientation have not been easy and, for some, remain profoundly disturbing. We have experienced conflict; the covenants that bind us together have been tested. At times we have felt isolated from and misunderstood by some in the ecumenical community. But we have also experienced marvelous surprises:

...the growth and vitality of many local churches that have declared themselves open to and affirming of the gifts of gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons;

...the gracious perseverance of The United Church Coalition for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns which, for twenty-six years, has been a prophetic presence in our church, clarifying concerns, challenging stereotypes, providing leaders for every setting of the church's life, gently and persistently changing hearts and minds, providing a refuge for those who have suffered wounds of prejudice and exclusion in church and society;

...the gratitude and encouragement of Christians in other churches who have found in our church's journey to new understandings a sign of hope amid discouragement;

...the growing self-esteem of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth in our church who are able to worship in congregations that respect their full humanity, as well as the heterosexual youth in our churches who have found themselves called to confront the anti-gay prejudice so prevalent in their schools;

...the renewal that springs forth as we discover, again, that we are not trapped by the past but are part of a living tradition that is "reformed, yet always reforming," a people whose only comfort in life and in death is that they belong to Christ.

In these days we dare not be arrogant. The story of our pilgrimage with our gay, lesbian, and bisexual members at times has been marked by hesitation, fear, and frequent failures of nerve. At times prophetic voices, whether heard from inside or from outside the church, have been resisted. We have not always been properly respectful, or sought to understand with sincerity, those sisters

and brothers among us who do not share our understanding or conviction or witness. At the same time, we have sometimes failed to recognize how the Bible has been used by some to perpetuate prejudice and to justify violence against homosexual persons.

But in these days we dare not be silent, either. I believe our voice among the churches and within our society is urgently needed, bearing witness to the belief that God cherishes all and dignifies all, and to our experience of gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons as gifts of God, called with us by their baptism into the fullest participation in God's mission of reconciliation in the world. I am convinced this voice will have power insofar as it is a voice shaped by the language of faith and the experience of worship, a voice in which the liberating truth of the Bible can be heard, and the courageous spirit of the saints will be echoed. By that voice, I believe, our churches will be renewed. More importantly, in that voice, I believe, the lonely will be called to companionship, the frightened will find comfort, the abused will know safety, and those sisters and brothers in Christ who have lost hope will rediscover the blessing of their baptism: Child of God, disciple of Christ, member of Christ's Church. ▼

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## Have You Checked Your Address Label?

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# The Call to Serve God

## The Search for a Clerical Role

By Gayle White, Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Of all the issues surrounding homosexuality, ordination of sexually active gays and lesbians to the Christian ministry may be one of the most inflammatory. The Rev. Leon Jeffords, 64, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Douglasville and a leader in the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta, sums up the feelings of many clergy and laity across mainline Protestantism toward the ordination of noncelibate homosexuals: "We feel the Scriptures are very clear that a person should be living a lifestyle that is honorable and glorifies the Lord. We believe homosexuality doesn't do that."

A few openly gay and lesbian candidates for the ministry have found churches willing to defy popular practice. Some were ordained before they discovered their homosexuality. But for most gay would-be clergy, the position of the churches leaves several choices — hide their sexuality, accept a lifetime of celibacy, transfer to the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches or another gay-friendly body, or wait for a change in denominational policy.

Here is a look at four gay metro Atlanta residents, two who long for ordination and two who have succeeded.

### **Chris Glaser 47, Presbyterian:**

Sitting at a wrought-iron table in the courtyard of Trinity Presbyterian Church on a sunny February day, Chris Glaser looked dejected. Glaser, who is openly gay, had just watched the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta vote down a proposal that would have brought him closer to what he believes is his lifelong calling — the Christian ministry.

Glaser, has been watching such votes, nationally and locally, since graduating from Yale Divinity School 21 years ago. Although unordained, Glaser has spoken in

churches across the country, headed a national organization of homosexuals within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and written several books, including "Uncommon Calling," the story of his struggle to serve the church. He now edits Open Hands, a quarterly journal of congregations open to gays and lesbians in five denominations.

He moved to Atlanta in May 1993, when his partner, Mark King, took a job at AID Atlanta (an AIDS and HIV service organization). The two joined Ormewood Park Presbyterian Church and had their relationship blessed in a ceremony performed by the church's former minister. They remain active church members, but Glaser said he identifies himself less strongly as a Presbyterian than in the past.

"I'm optimistic that eventually gays and lesbians will be ordained in the Presbyterian Church and in mainstream denominations," said Glaser. "I'm not optimistic that I'll be ordained." Still, "I'm in it for the long haul," he said. "My greatest motivating factor is knowing what we do will make it easier for young people born now."

### **Harry Knox 37, United Methodist:**

Ever since his teen years in Cordele, Harry Knox, has wanted to be a United Methodist minister. As a student at Emory University's Candler School of Theology, he served as pastor of a tiny church where two families had gay sons. Through the process of counseling them, he says, he realized he could not be an effective minister unless he came to terms with his own sexuality.

Because the United Methodist Church does not ordain practicing gays and lesbians, Knox transferred to a seminary of the United Church of Christ, generally more open. But a Georgia-South Carolina denominational committee refused by a

single vote to ordain him. "They made it clear it was because I was gay," he said.

The church might have accepted his application had he agreed to be celibate, he said, "but I think it would have sent a message to parishioners that it's OK to let the church hurt you. I was not willing to say I should not be a sexual person."

After investing nine years and tens of thousands of borrowed dollars in college and seminary, Knox felt lost. "I didn't know how to be or do anything else," he said. He returned to the United Methodist Church as a member, and took a job in the nonprofit health field. In January, he became head of the Georgia Equality Project, a political action organization for gays and lesbians.

Knox teaches Sunday school at St. Mark United Methodist Church, where he met his partner, John Lane. "I stayed in the church primarily because I love Jesus and they do Jesus better at church than anywhere else," said Knox. "I have also stayed in the church because it's my responsibility to call the church to justice."

Knox said he feels "ordained by God if not by the United Methodist Church," but cannot fully be a minister until the church allows him to administer its sacraments. "That's a tremendous loss in my life," he said. "I grieve every Sunday a little."

### **The Rev. Chris Copeland, 29, Baptist:**

A year ago more than 100 people at Oakhurst Baptist Church laid their hands on a kneeling Chris Copeland as he became an ordained minister. "It was truly one of the most meaningful and powerful experiences of my life," says Copeland. "Those people had come to say to me they recognized my gift for ministry and my call for ministry. They affirmed that and celebrated it with me."

Copeland grew up in Snyder Memorial Baptist Church in Fayetteville, N.C., and felt called to the ministry from age 16. By his senior year at Wake Forest University, he was state president of the Baptist Student Union, the Southern Baptist Convention's college campus ministry. By that year he also knew he was gay.

He enrolled in Andover Newton Theological School in Massachusetts, affiliated with the American Baptist Churches/USA. and the United Church of Christ, but left because he felt compelled to choose between being a minister and being gay.

After a year working in campus ministry, he entered the law and theology program at Emory University intending to work in social justice. In Atlanta, he joined Oakhurst Baptist Church, a congregation affiliated with both the American Baptist Churches and the Southern Baptist Convention. Two years later, he felt he could no longer deny the call he felt to be a minister.

In what he describes as an "epiphany," Copeland decided to "go for broke and trust God." He asked Oakhurst to ordain him. Risking expulsion from the SBC, the church did, on May 11, 1997. A day later, Copeland received degrees in law and theology from Emory.

Copeland works in the field of institutional development. But he holds on to the hope of being a Baptist pastor. "That's what I feel called to and what I want to be and long to be," he said. He recently marked the one-year anniversary of his ordination by watching the videotape of the service. "It sort of gave me a renewed sense of hope that this is going to happen," he said. "I don't know when."

**The Rev. Marion Kanour, 44, Episcopal:**

She was a former Marine captain and a nun. Now the Rev. Marion Kanour is an openly lesbian Episcopal priest. Kanour, serves as assistant to the rector at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church in DeKalb County. In August 1997, when she and her partner of three years were introduced, the congregation gave them a standing ovation.

Kanour is open about her sexual orientation and her relationship, she said, because "it seemed too claustrophobic in the closet for me, and too paranoid. I would always be afraid of who knew. I wouldn't be able to be fully who I am." Kanour said she was 35 and preparing for ordination when she began to discover her homosexuality. "It was for me the most spiritually connected I

have ever felt, when I realized who God made me to be."

When questions about sexuality came up during the ordination process, she said, "I chose to respond by talking about a spectrum of sexuality, believing we all fall somewhere on the spectrum."

A native of Virginia, she was raised a Southern Baptist and later became a Roman Catholic. She graduated from Oregon State University, spent four years in the Marine Corps and then earned a divinity degree from Yale University. She entered the Sacred Heart of Jesus order of nuns, but after a year and a half, officials asked her to leave. "I didn't believe they could discern God's will for me," she said. "That affected the vow of obedience in a big way."

When her father died soon after she left the convent, she returned home to Norfolk and found work as parish administrator at Good Shepherd Episcopal Church. There, she decided she wanted to be ordained a priest. Since she was living in Atlanta three years later when she completed preparation, Atlanta's Bishop Frank K. Allan ordained her in 1991 on behalf of the bishop of southern Virginia.

Kanour spent a year in clinical pastoral education at Northside Hospital, worked four years as a chaplain at Grady Memorial Hospital's hospice, and became interim vicar at Emmaus House, a south Atlanta mission. When Allan accepted her official transfer to the diocese last year so that she could serve in a parish, Kanour became the first openly gay person received for official clergy status in the diocese.

At St. Bartholomew's, a church known for its wide range of community ministries, she is assistant to the rector for missions and evangelism. She finds the ministry exhilarating. "My sexual orientation isn't the focus here," says Kanour.



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# Join Us For A Retreat in Iowa

The 1999 American Baptists Concerned National Retreat will be held June 26-29 in Ames, Iowa.

The retreat leader will be the Rev. Cindy Maybeck, pastor of Bethany Christian United Parish in Worcester, Massachusetts and an out lesbian. Cindy's church is aligned with three denominations, including the American Baptist Churches. Cindy led a wonderful regional retreat for ABCConcerned last September and we have invited her to do the same for us at the national retreat. Come join with us for workshops and worship, fellowship and recreation, rest and relaxation.

The retreat will be held on the campus of Iowa State University. We will be housed in comfortable room with use of all campus recreation facilities. Ames, being a university town, is one of the most welcoming places for us to gather in Iowa.

Why a retreat in Iowa? Many of us will be attending the biennial convention of the American Baptist Churches/USA the week leading up to the retreat. You are also invited to join us in Des Moines for the biennial, June 22-25.

The retreat will begin Saturday afternoon, June 26 and conclude after breakfast, Tuesday morning, June 29. The price of the retreat is \$180 for ABCConcerned members and \$200 for those who have not paid membership or made donations within the last year. A \$50 deposit is due a time of registration.

A registration form is included with this *Voice of the Turtle*. If you do not have a registration form please write to us at: ABC Retreat, P.O. Box 130792, St. Paul, MN 55113; email: ambaptists@aol.com or call (925) 439-4672. Information and registration forms are also available on our website: [www.rainbowbaptists.org](http://www.rainbowbaptists.org).

If you cannot attend the retreat but can help someone else attend with the donation of scholarship money, we and those you can assist, would be very appreciative ▼



## Sweethearts All!

Sometimes, upon reflection, little things in life take on extra significance. It is the custom of the Men's Fellowship at Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church to choose a female and male "Sweetheart of the Year." On the Sunday nearest Valentine's Day, these individuals are recognized in the service and given a corsage and boutonniere respectively. This year the female recipient was a long time member of the congregation who served many years as church secretary. Dorothy was quite surprised to hear her name called, though she is a much loved and a "pillar" of the congregation.

As the President of the Men's Fellowship was making the presentation, I leaned over and jokingly whispered to John, another gay man who sings tenor in the choir, "One thing's for sure, they'll never pick you or me." We chuckled as Dorothy received her corsage. Then it came time to announce the male "Sweetheart." I was shocked and embarrassed, given what I had just said to John, to hear my name called.

Now in the overall scheme of things, being chosen "Sweetheart of the Year" by your local congregation is not earth shattering news, but the affirmation is meaningful - at least, it was to me. After 25 years as a member of this congregation, they are vital to my life and work. In a real sense, they are family to me and it's great to know you're family appreciates you. A flower, a hug, a word, a gesture can all help to enrich the lives of those we love.

After church, Chris and I were talking about the plans for the upcoming Biennial and he said ABCConcerned was interested in collecting pictures for a "family" album for use at the booth. I asked if he was looking for family of origin photos or family of choice. He replied both. This conversation got me thinking about family. Just who is my family? What pictures might I share?

First and foremost, my partner (along with our two dogs) is my family. On March 20, we will celebrate 22 years of being together. We have lots of great pictures we've taken over the years.

Unlike many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender folk, Gene and I are fortunate to have very supportive families of origin. Throughout our partnership, it has been clear to me what people mean when they say that the length and strength of any relationship is influenced significantly by a community of support. It is hard enough to sustain marriages which have legal and social sanctions. How can other types of relationships survive without the active support of families and friends?

We have simply been another couple within both of our families of origin for nearly our entire time to together. (It took Gene a little while to come out to his family; I'd been out for a few years.) The love and recognition we receive from our parents and siblings, with their partners, children and grandchildren, is so important to our life together. For the photo album, I could share pictures of Gene and me standing together in the midst of his family at his younger brother's wedding and in the middle of my family's portrait, made at the time of my step-father's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Then there is family of choice. In the substance abuse program where I work, we are mandated by our contractors to provide collateral family services for our clients. It has been an interesting process to think about who that might be for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender clients we serve. Clearly it must include partners, roommates, and various members of each individual's social network since many of our clients are estranged from family of origin.

So who is my family of choice and what photos would I choose? Right away, both Gene and I thought about some of the great shots we have of times together with our friends Katherine and Elizabeth - riding Splash Mount at Disneyland, camped beside a lake in Washington, celebrating birthdays and holidays - both silly and serious shots. And there other friends who have been there through thick and thin, loving and encouraging each of us individually and together as a couple to be the best that we can be.

Going back to the story with which I began this column, I also considered photos of my family of faith. I recognize that the image of "family" is not always comfortable for people whose families have been abusive or neglectful. It is certainly not the only way to characterize one's faith community. It is a meaningful metaphor for me, though. Over the last 25 plus years, I have worshipped and wrestled, prayed and played, laughed and cried, eaten and worked with the Lakeshore community. These are my people. Our common ground has always been our commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Here, too, is family for me. Pictures might include one of several of Gene and me from church pictorial directories (always photographed as a couple, no questions asked,) my ordination service, choir pictures, church picnics and retreats, even the awful picture of me in drag at the American Baptist Women's spring "fashion" show. They're all part of my "family" album. So, I guess this means I am thrice-blessed.

Actually, I am very aware of how my life has been blessed by these and by so many of you who are part of my extended family. There are some wonderful photographs from ABCConcerned retreats over the years which I would love to share, but I understand the need to keep them confidential for the safety of sisters and brothers whose "families" are not understanding and supportive. I do pray for each of your experiences of family which respect and nurture, which challenge and love you *as you are*. An unachievable ideal? I hope not. I encourage each of us to commit ourselves to working toward the creation of families - whether they be of origin, choice, or faith - families which will recognize us as the sweethearts we are ▼

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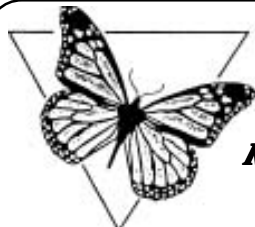
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## Canada Moves Toward Equality

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advanced further than others in the courts and may have to be amended sooner than the time it would take to draft one overhauling bill.

A more practical alternative - and certainly more manageable in terms of writing new legislation - may be to proceed case by case. The timing of the changes will depend on how the government makes them, since a piecemeal approach would likely get specific legislation amended faster than one large bill.

Either way, with the courts ruling consistently in favour of same-sex rights, the government is seen to have little choice but to make the amendments.

In 1995, when the Supreme Court of Canada said that the Old Age Security Act discriminated against same-sex couples, Ottawa acknowledged that the laws would have to change to reflect a

new view of families, but nothing was done.

Last year, however, the government tipped its position when it didn't appeal the Rosenberg case, which declared the definition of spouse in the Income Tax Act was unconstitutional. The ruling from the Ontario Court of Appeal cleared the way for a pension system that allows widowed same-sex partners to collect survivor benefits.

The majority of the legislation that would have to be changed has to do with pensions - including the Canada Pension Plan and the pensions of a wide range of federal employees, from the Canadian Forces to the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) to the federal public service. Under the current CPP, for example, same-sex partners are not eligible for survivor benefits when their partner passes away.

Other problem areas: People in same-sex

relationships can't claim their partner or their partner's children as dependents on income-tax forms.

Registered retirement savings plans cannot be transferred to surviving homosexual partners without that person paying taxes.

Conflict-of-interest guidelines do not require people in same-sex partnerships to disclose their partner's activities, as their heterosexual counterparts must.

The Bank Act or legislation regulating business requires heterosexual spouses to disclose insider information, but does not ask the same thing of same-sex spouses.

The country's bankruptcy laws do not specifically prevent people in same-sex partnerships from shifting their assets to their partner and then declaring bankruptcy.

The Criminal Code does not protect same-sex couples from being forced to testify against each other, as heterosexual couples are protected ▼

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