



Empowered by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the mission of Lutheran Human Relations Association is to bring people together to do justice by:

- breaking down hostilities and fears between peoples;
- bridging racial, cultural, class, gender, age, ability and other separations; and
- building up human community.

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**Lutheran
Human
Relations
Association**

Vanguard LHRA

Honor God by Honoring One Another

Marilyn Miller

In 2001, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly commissioned a Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality to provide a Report and Recommendations for the 2005 Churchwide Assembly. You may view the entire report at www.elca.org. This issue of the Vanguard is dedicated to the struggle and witness of our LGBT brothers and sisters as they seek full acceptance with all the rights and privileges given to heterosexuals. We pray for forgiveness for the terrible things that are being said and done to one another all along the continuum of perspectives, and we ask for God's healing, peace and love as we work to shape a new way of honoring all. God is not through with us yet. Please pray for ELCA Church leaders and voters of the Assembly to gather August 8-14 in Orlando, Florida.

We pray for God's wisdom and the presence of the Holy Spirit in all we do and say as we continue to enlarge the circle to embrace each and justice for all.

Justice for God's Gay and Lesbian Children

**Paul Johnson
LHRA Board President**

The work of LHRA is deeply rooted in issues of racial justice; however, we are also committed to work in many other arenas where God's people face injustice, discrimination, and oppression. One of those arenas is justice for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people.

I am a gay man who is currently privileged to serve as the President of the Board for LHRA. I live in West Des Moines, IA, with my partner, David. We have been together for over 13 years. From 1972 until 1991, I served as a pastor in the ELCA. When I was outed to the bishop in 1991 my resignation was demanded and I was removed from the clergy roster. I would like to offer my observations on how things look to a gay man in the heartland of our nation.

The visibility of gay and lesbian people has greatly improved in the past few years. Television programs and movies with gay themes have become commonplace. More and more of us have been courageous enough to come out of the closet. Many of our family members have also come out of the closet with us and for many of our family and friends, shame has been replaced by affirmation, respect, and even admiration.

Over the thirteen years that we have been together, David and I have noticed a significant difference in how we are treated at hotels and in medical facilities. Thirteen years ago when we asked hotel clerks for a room with a king size bed they acted surprised and tried

to give us a two-bed room instead. They are no longer surprised. Hotel clerks now regularly treat us with respect rather than with suspicion.

Clinics and hospitals are increasingly respectful of our relationship. Some of their forms now include the category of "domestic partner" along with "married" or "divorced." On a recent visit one of our local hospitals was willing to list me as David's next of kin. During hospital stays they now treat us with the same respect as other spouses of patients.



In Massachusetts same-sex couples can now be married. It has been over a year now and the sky has not fallen and God has not hurled fire and brimstone on Boston. The one-year anniversary passed on May 17 with little mention because gay marriage has not produced the problems many predicted. Some folks keep saying that same-sex marriage will destroy traditional marriage, but in Massachusetts no one can show us even one heterosexual marriage that has been destroyed by gay people getting

married.

Gay marriage isn't legal anywhere else in the country and fourteen states have now adopted anti-gay marriage amendments. Such an amendment will soon go to the voters in Texas as well. Other states, including Iowa, have laws stating that marriage is between a man and a woman. Some folks in Iowa have been pushing a constitutional amendment as well, but for the past two years a majority of state senators have been opposed. Nationally, our president and many other leaders would

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like to add discrimination against gay people to our constitution with an anti-gay marriage amendment, but the good news is that they have fallen far short of the votes they need in congress. The outcome of all this is not certain, but I am optimistic. Polls still indicate a majority of Americans are opposed to gay marriage, but the percentage may be narrowing. When young people are polled a majority are in favor of gay marriage.

While many things encourage me, I am disappointed in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The recommendations of the task force regarding gay ordination, which will be considered at the Orlando assembly in August, fall far short of respecting or affirming the leadership of gay or lesbian people as pastors of the church. The ELCA Church Council voted to send a resolution to the Churchwide Assembly that proposes a process for granting exceptions to the discriminatory policy regarding gay and lesbian clergy. This proposal fails to dismantle or challenge the ideological framework that is the basis for the policies of injustice and oppression within the church. The proposal would leave LGBT clergy in jeopardy in many places throughout this church. This proposal does not address the situations of gay and lesbian clergy who currently serve at all levels of the church, as well as those who have been disciplined, or those who have been ordained and continue to serve in open defiance of the church's policy.

I challenge you to support justice in the church for gay and lesbian people. I recommend an organization called "Goodsoil." Goodsoil is a coalition of groups committed to end discrimination within the ELCA; to engage in faithful, genuine conversation within the church; and to support the full participation of LGBT people in the church. I suggest that you check out the website, www.goodsoil.org, and join with others who seek justice within the church for David and me and all of God's gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people.

An Open Letter to My White Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Sisters and Brothers

By Diane Finnerty - Introduction Marilyn Miller

The Word tells us that God loves justice, blesses those who love justice, and calls us to maintain justice. The work we do through LHRA is our effort to obey God. Our stand against racism and other forms of oppression are part of the application of God's Word in the world. On April 27-30, Joyce Caldwell and I attended the Sixth Annual White Privilege Conference at Central College in Pella, Iowa. Dr. Eddie Moore and associates did a wonderful job under the theme "Women Activists: Their Fight Against White Privilege, White Supremacy & Oppression." One of the workshops I attended was led by Diane Finnerty who is the Director of Training at the National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and an adjunct lecturer at the University of Iowa in the School of Social Work. Her workshop was entitled "Are Gay Rights Civil Rights? Through an Anti-racist's Lens." Her work intersects with our work, and I thought she did a very good job of helping people understand how we get co-opted into working against each other instead of strategically working together to bring about justice for all. She gave us permission to share her main points from "An Open Letter to My White Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Sisters and Brothers." She encourages us to share it and discuss it widely.

"...I am writing to my white lgbt community to implore you – in these days of legal and rhetorical battles- not to take the bait and allow the White Right's tactics to enlist us knowingly or unknowingly in their racist agenda...I want to chronicle some of the tactics I have observed from white lgbt people on the regional and national level that I believe, although perhaps intended to create short-term political gains, will only increase unnecessary division among people of color and lgbt communities. If left unchecked, I fear this will result in strengthened white supremacy in our society, increased silence in communities of color around issues of same-sex sexuality, and intensified oppression of our lgbt brothers and sisters of color. That very same lump in my throat turns from pain and anger, to grief and "can't-you-see- what's-happening?" rage when I see the following tactics from my white lgbt brothers and sisters as we struggle for lgbt civil rights:

- Piggy-backing on the civil rights struggles of people of color, most notably the Black Civil Rights Movement, without *first* studying those struggles to honor the true legacy which they have offered this country, nor acknowledging the work yet to be done. I see this happening in our community when we too readily lift quotes and metaphors from the Black Civil Rights movement: ...Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr;...equating the *Nabozny v. Podlesny* (7th Circuit, December 18, 1995) case confronting homophobic harassment in schools as the "*Brown v. Board of Education* decision for gay people"...

- Making statements that diminish the impact of racism or imply racial discrimination no longer exists: "Gays are the last oppressed minority." ...Gay rights are *the* civil rights issue of the day."...

- Engaging in acontextual shaming tactics with a person of color who expresses views about marriage rights for same-sex couples that are different than your own: "Of *all* people who should understand discrimination, I'm surprised that *you* as a person of color, wouldn't understand this as a civil rights issue."

- Playing the "Tit for Tat" activist game: "They want *me* to support racial diversity efforts? Well, as soon as their definition of 'diversity' includes sexual identity, I'll work with them. Not until."

- Talking about sexual identity to claim it as a badge of victimization or making statements that if you were free from this one form of discrimination everything would be okay....

- Saying under our breath to each other or merely holding on to the unchecked belief that communities of color are essentially more homophobic than white communities,...

- Dismissing the contributions of leaders of color who are not quite "there" yet on "our issues...."

"The following suggestions are a compilation of ideas developed through numerous conversations with allies of color (straight and lgbt), and lgbt white anti-racist activists. They are beginning suggestions for what we can do to develop greater alliances for short-term political battles, as well as, for participating openly as lgbt people in long-haul strategies for a broader social justice agenda.

1. Do our white homework. (Holladay, 2000) Educate ourselves about the history of whiteness in the U.S. and contemporary white privilege that continues to operate in our society...
2. Understand how a people's history undergirds their views on issues of sexuality, sexual identity, gender relations, family, and religion/spirituality – all of which impact traditionally defined "homophobia." How, for example, does the experience of historic and contemporary genocide among Latino, Indigenous, Asian, and African peoples impact views within their communities on the roles of men and women, sexuality, families?...
3. Develop critical media skills and question the media's positioning of communities against each other....
4. Engage in much more thoughtful response to the request to compare civil rights struggles with one another....

She adds we need to continue to educate ourselves on the issues that are most challenging as well as where we

share common ground.

5. Similarly, as individuals and as a movement, we need to better understand the civil rights cases upon which our legal strategies today are built...
6. Do not say that racism and heterosexism are the *same* thing or that white lgbt people experience the same type of discrimination as people of color....
7. Show your trustworthiness as an ally by being articulate and clear about your understanding of racism and white privilege. To develop allies, let's show our commitment to dismantling white supremacy and *be* allies....
8. Don't allow our white straight allies to triangulate us against people of color....
9. Learn about the powerful work going on within communities of color by lgbt and allied people of color and ask how we can support those efforts....
10. Learn about and embrace the important contributions white lgbt people have made as allies for social change and racial justice....
11. Forge genuine relationships with people of color – lgbt and straight people....
12. As we are on this journey, we need to join with each other and create intentional communities of white queer anti-racist organizations....

...We can't and shouldn't ignore the pain we feel with each denial of our humanity, but we must care for our wounds outside of our coalition work (Reagon, 1983) – with each other as if our lives depended upon it and with our allies as the time is right...."

Yours in love and struggle,
Diane Finnerty

You may access the full text as well as works cited and resources by typing in: An Open Letter by Diane Finnerty (Google).



Diane Finnerty, far left, joins other participants after a panel discussion at the White Privilege Conference.

Resources

Extraordinary Candidacy Project
655 Corbett Av #507
San Francisco, CA 94114
excp@dnaic.com



Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries
152 Church Street
San Francisco, CA 94114-1111
info@llgm.org
www.llgm.org



Lutherans Concerned/North America
PO Box 4707
Saint Paul, MN 66104-4707
ric@lcna.org
www.lcna.org



Wingspan Ministry
St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church
100 North Oxford Street
St. Paul MN 55104-6540
651/224-3371 WNGSPAN@aol.com
www.stpaulref.org/wingspan.htm



Soulforce, Inc
PO Box 3195
Lynchburg, VA 24503-0195
Toll free: (877) 705-6393
info@soulforce.org
www.soulforce.org



The Lutheran Network for Inclusive Vision
11918 SE Division, PMB 316
Portland, OR 97266-1037
network178@earthlink.net
www.inclusivenet.com



It's Time to Close Our Bibles for a Few Months

David R. Weiss

For more than a year now, as we've tried to "journey together faithfully," we Lutherans have had our heads buried in Scripture. Some of us are convinced that the Bible unequivocally condemns homosexual activity. Others of us are convinced that context renders these biblical condemnations less than absolute – or altogether irrelevant today. And plenty of us remain somewhere in the middle, uncertain as to what exactly the Bible says – or means – regarding same-sex relationships.

Well, it's time to close our Bibles for a few months. We won't find the answer we're looking for there – at least not in the places we've been looking.

In fact, we haven't even asked the right question yet. Supposedly we've been studying whether to offer blessings to same-sex couples and whether to ordain persons in committed relationships. But in reality the study materials haven't really focused on those questions. Instead they've mired us in a quite different question: whether homosexuality, either in orientation or expression (and it's just plain arrogant when straight people assume a distinction between the two) is sinful.

But this has never been the right question. The church has only ever blessed a heterosexual marriages between sinners. The church has only ever ordained pastors who have also been sinners. And don't talk about "willful, ongoing" sin as the crucial distinction. We bless

marriages between persons quite willfully devoted to conspicuous consumption. We don't hesitate to ordain people who smoke – even while wearing their collar, even around children. So the "sin" question misses the point. And while I personally do not think homosexuality is sinful, I recognize that this argument isn't going to be settled anytime soon.

Moreover, even the questions about blessing and ordination are misguided. They're so specific that they keep us from seeing the question that would offer us a way forward. The real question is this: How should we as a church respond when persons come to us seeking full participation in our church – *as they are, without becoming like us?* Especially when they are persons whom the Bible has seemed to suggest have no part among God's people unless they become like us? *That's the situation we face.* And that's the situation faced by the early church when the Gentiles sought full participation without the precondition of first becoming Jewish in diet and circumcision.

There *are* texts in Acts 10, 11, and 15 that tell us how the early church responded to that situation, but the Sexuality Task Force chose *not* to put those texts before us in the *Journey Together Faithfully* study materials. They chose *not* to offer us the one biblical model for constructively engaging our situation. No wonder we got nowhere. In contrast, the early church did not rush back to the Torah to see whether Gentiles needed to be circumcised in order to join the church. If they had, they would've gotten mired in the same dilemma we are, asking whether what the Torah seemed to say about Gentiles 'back then' still applied in the first century. And while there were some who wanted to do that, the church dared to try a different approach.

Though not without some fierce squabbling, the church ultimately decided *to listen to the lives* of the Gentiles who sought to join them. Rather than challenge them with biblical texts, rather than insist on always presenting "fair and balanced" opposing views, the early church simply listened to the stories of God's activity in their lives. Then the church asked, is it possible that God's Spirit is already active in the lives of these people in ways we would never have guessed? Is it possible that God is surprising us even now? *These are the questions that we must ask today.* And we can only ask

them by closing our Bibles long enough to quietly and respectfully listen to the lives of those gay and lesbian Christians before us now.

If we were actually to do that, I suspect that many of us – a majority, *a two-thirds majority, I bet* – would find

ourselves saying, "I'm not sure exactly how to square up the biblical passages, but after truly listening to the stories of these people I have to agree with Peter (Acts 10:47), 'How can we as a church withhold blessings and ordinations from these persons whom God has so clearly blessed with love and/or called to ministry?'"

We still have time before August to create moments to genuinely hear their stories, to truly ask whether we hear evidence of the Spirit active in their lives. But we'll need to close our Bibles for a few months if that's to happen. And according to Acts that might even be the most biblical thing we could do.

David R. Weiss directs the Reconciling in Christ Program in the Metro area for the Twin Cities chapter of Lutherans Concerned/ North America. He can be reached at ric-mn@lcna.org.

The real question is this: How should we as a church respond when persons come to us seeking full participation in our church – *as they are, without becoming like us?*

We are Your Soil

Who are we, Lord?—we are yours!
We are marked forevermore
By the cross and by the word.
In our hearts we've been stirred.

Darkness round us, still we sing;
To the promise still we cling.
Waiting for the coming dawn;
Solid rock turned to song.

We are good soil; we are your soil.
Sow your justice
In Christ's body still today!

Let compassion fill our lives, Lord.
Rocks and stones, now,
Sing hosanna to our God!

Who are we, Lord?—we are yours!
We were baptized at the font,
Water splashing on our face,
Marked forever by grace.

Gay and straight, we sing your praise.
Bi and trans, our voices raise.
To the feast you bid us dine;
Welcome bread, welcome wine.

We are good soil; we are your soil.
Sow your justice
In Christ's body still today!

Let compassion fill our lives, Lord.
Rocks and stones, now,
Sing hosanna to our God!

Text: David R. Weiss, June 3, 2005
Tune: Du är helig, Per Harling, Renewing
Worship Songbook, R185

Author's note: I wrote this hymn, set to a tune found in the Renewing Worship Songbook, with the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Orlando in mind. The theme of the Assembly is "Marked with the Cross of Christ Forever"; hence the use of that image here. Also, I draw on the image of "Goodsoil," the name taken by the Alliance groups working to promote full participation for GLBT people in the church. And I ironically invoke the image of "Solid Rock," the name taken by those opposing full participation, suggesting that ultimately even this solid rock will sing hosanna at Christ's coming.

Resources, cont'd

A Congregational Approach to Openness: A Reconciling Process is Ministry with and on Behalf of Gay and Lesbian Persons

The Blessings Group- St. Paul-Minneapolis, MN

This resource is written by a group of pastors, lay rostered leaders, seminary faculty and congregation ministry staff in the ELCA. The document offers congregations information to assist in being fully welcoming to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender person, including steps for a congregation to move toward blessing same sex couples.

Copies can be ordered by mail, email or phone:

St. Paul Reformation Lutheran Church

100 Oxford Street North

St. Paul, MN 55104-6540

651-224-3371 ■ stpaulref@aol.com

There is a \$5.00 charge to help cover printing and mailing.

Invoice for payment enclosed with shipment.

In our homes, churches and schools we often struggle with what to talk about to our youth and when. There is a great deal of information available, and there are important conversations we need to have with our children- if we don't, others will, and most if it will be inaccurate. Here are some **Youth Resources** to help young people on their journey of learning about lgbt people as people who live, work, play, love and hurt just like everyone else:

Ministry with Sexual Minority Youth available through Lutherans Concerned. <http://infox.lcna.org/>

Ten video and discussion sessions explore the needs of sexual minority youth and how congregations can be hospitable places of Christian welcome and affirmation for them. Cost \$85 plus \$5 shipping.

The GLSEN Lunchbox 2

By GLSEN (Gay Lesbian and Straight Education

Network), glsen@glsen.org or call 212-727-0135, 2004, \$129.95 + tax

A comprehensive training program aimed at providing educators and community members with the background, knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to make schools safer and more affirming places for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students. A "do-it-yourself" kit with 45 exercises, handouts, resources, a video with nine excerpts, 25 Safe Space stickers and more.

National Education Association Human & Civil Rights Action Sheet:

Teaching and Counseling Gay and Lesbian Students, Action Sheet circa 1994

By NEA, 1201 16th St. NW, Washington DC 20036-3290;

Human and Civil Rights

202-822-7000, <http://www.youth.org/loco/>

[PERSONProject/Resources/OrganizingTactics/NEA.html](http://www.youth.org/loco/PERSONProject/Resources/OrganizingTactics/NEA.html)

Mark Your Calendars



LHRA Annual Fall Event

JAZZ FOR JUSTICE

Saturday, November 12
Location to be determined
Watch the next Vanguard for further details

4:00 LHRA Annual Meeting
5:30 Reception with Silent Auction
Our best one yet!
7:00 Jazz Concert featuring

Contact LHRA for ticket information
lhra@ecunet.org or 414.536.0585

NOT FOR MILWAUKEEANS ONLY!!

Once again, a silent auction will be part of this year's Jazz for Justice fundraiser. LHRA is thrilled to announce the generous donation of art and pottery from artist Lois R. Geiger Campagna. Lois is moving to Africa and has donated a large number of her art and pottery pieces to LHRA for the event. In addition, she has donated a collection of pieces from West African potter Doris Larteley Quretey. Such a blessing for LHRA is too good to keep for only our Milwaukee area Jazz for Justice attendees, and our plan is to open the auction up to members who are not able to attend the Jazz for Justice event. If you would like to receive more information, please contact our office: 414-536-0585 or lhra@ecunet.org

Run, Don't Walk, with Our LGBT friends

Laura Weber

Lutherans of the ELCA have been asked to "Journey Together Faithfully" in regards to same gender relationships. Unfortunately, under the guise of "saving traditional marriage," some religious groups and political leaders are running, no, sprinting, to put in place laws that will write discrimination into state constitutions and trigger far reaching consequences for glbt persons.

In the November 2004 election, eleven states passed legislation defining marriage as between one man and one woman. The amendment passed in Ohio reaches far beyond that as it bars legal status that "intends to approximate marriage." A proposed amendment in Wisconsin, likewise, overreaches in the effort to define marriage between a man and a woman by including the phrase "...a legal status identical to or **substantially similar to** that of marriage for unmarried individuals shall not be valid or recognized in the state." (emphasis added) Currently 38 states have laws that prohibit same sex marriage or deny same sex couples rights available to married couples (source: OLR Research Report <http://cga.ct.gov/2005/rpt/2005-R-0374.htm>).

A conference held in the Milwaukee area in December, 2004 brought together people of faith, glbt persons and their allies, to educate and support each other in order to fight the proposed Wisconsin law that, if passed, will hurt so many of our neighbors by denying them basic legal rights. Two keynote speakers at the conference, hosted by the group Christians for Equality in Wisconsin, offered wisdom and support for those gathered.

Dr. Mary Ann Tolbert, a professor of biblical studies at the Pacific School of Religion, denounced the proposed Wisconsin amendment as being "on one hand, completely unnecessary and, on the other hand, profoundly mean-spirited." By delving into the Bible in a historical context, Dr. Tolbert made it clear that those who claim to be protecting marriage in its "unchanging form over thousands of years" are ignoring the history of the

institution. Dr. Tolbert outlined the changes in the institution of marriage; in ancient Mediterranean times the purpose was for the production of heirs and the management of the household, in the times of Moses and David we see evidence of multiple wives, and in the New Testament Jesus and Paul tend to reject marriage in favor of celibacy.

Dr. Herbert Chilstrom, retired Presiding Bishop of the ELCA detailed his long journey in understanding the struggles of lgbt people. It became clear through his two keynote addresses, Dr. Chilstrom's journey was most impacted by hearing stories about, and developing personal relationships with lgbt people and those around them.

We hear stories such as these often. The following stories come from Action Wisconsin (www.actionwisconsin.org), a group seeking to stop the ban on same-sex marriage and civil unions in Wisconsin:

Mark was devastated when his lifelong partner unexpectedly died of a heart attack. Still overwhelmed with grief, Mark came home to find his partner's children in his living room, demanding that he turn over the keys to the house. The children were the legal next of kin. But even though Mark had shared a life and a home together with his partner, they were legal strangers. Mark was forced out of his own home before his partner had even been buried.

Carol was rushed into the hospital because of heart problems, and the nurse would not allow her partner of 29 years, Virginia, to be by her side during the ordeal. Even though Carol and Virginia had two adult children and two grandchildren together, Virginia was not legally recognized as Carol's next of kin. They had filled out paperwork that would give Virginia access, but they were out to dinner when Carol felt pains in her chest, and they did not have the paperwork with them at the time. A married couple wouldn't need paperwork to be with their loved one during a medical emergency.

It is in hearing and sharing such stories that we may have the best chance to affect the hearts and minds of those who walk cautiously (faithfully?). In journeying as they do, they allow the race to be won by others who intend to deny our brothers and sisters the basic rights they deserve.

For the full texts of Dr. Tolbert and Dr. Chilstrom's keynote addresses, visit the Christians for Equality in Wisconsin website: www.marriage-equality-wi.org, and choose "Conference Notes."

Yes!

I want to join with others in the work of breaking down hostilities and fears, bridging separations, and, building up human community.

I want to be a member of LHRA

- Here is my annual membership of \$30 (individuals), \$40 (families). Please send me the **Vanguard** to keep me posted on current issues of concern.

I want to help Lutheran Human Relations strengthen and expand its ministry.

- Here's my special gift of \$ _____

Please contact me/send me more information about:

- Books, publications and videos
- Youth Programs/Consultations
- District/Synod opportunities
- Congregation Programs/Consultations
- Planned Giving/Wills/Bequests
- Bridges Resources
- Regarding Bridges* (Bible study)
- Bridges of Human Community*
- Tending Bridges*

Name _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

Enclosed is my check or money order for \$ _____

send to: Lutheran Human Relations Association 1821 N 16th St Milwaukee, WI 53205-1626	Phone: 414/536-0585 Fax: 414/536-0690
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