

Presbyterian Promise News

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Trans – Do We Understand? Do We Welcome?

In the last Presbyterian Promise News issue we noted that when we say “LGBT” to refer to lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender persons, we are usually referring only to lesbians and gay men. Bisexuals and transgender persons are given lip service but are actually ignored. This is unfortunate because the social and personal issues facing them are as complex as those facing lesbians and gay men, and their welcome in the church is as ambiguous and ambivalent as it is for gays and lesbians. In the last issue, Pres Promise News provided articles on the stressful daily dilemmas and institutional inequalities faced by transgender persons and the story of one transgender person’s courage and commitment to live honestly in his church. This time we offer suggestions on how to help the church develop a greater sensitivity to transgender persons and become a more welcoming and safer space to grow in faith. The following material appeared first in the More Light Update February, 2013.

The Top 10 Ways to Welcome Transgender People to Church

1. Remember that transgender people come to church for the same reasons you do: a connection to God in a loving community where worship and working for equality and justice are the focus of the Christian experience.

2. Include “gender identity” and “gender non-conforming” in your statement of welcome and nondiscrimination/anti-harassment policies.

3. Don’t make assumptions about a person’s gender and give people the choice about whether to share that information. If you need to learn more, ask: “What pronoun do you prefer?”

4. Offer adult education classes and sermons that provide information and open up dialogue about welcoming transgender people.

And Then There Were ...

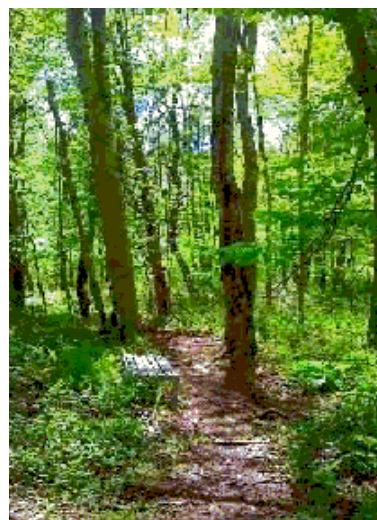
Dan Blackford

The hopes and fears of all the years ... or And Then There Were Eleven ...

The State House, Providence, R. I., April 24, 2013, 5:45 p.m.: the final hurdle, if not the final step, toward marriage equality in Rhode Island. Nearby, those who are unable to accept or understand this new reality quietly depart the rotunda area while those who have worked and waited long for this are jubilant: applause, cheers, hugs and tears – the state Senate has just passed by 26 to 12 An Act Relating to Domestic Relations – Persons Eligible to Marry. Not quite the same as a previously (and overwhelmingly) passed Assembly bill, S 38 Sub A will require that body’s approval before being signed by the governor, expected by the time you are reading this.

It is a somewhat incongruous scene: the “Bell Room,” a majestic lower entry to the state capitol building (where an historic bell now sits, out of the weather) with a dramatic view of the city, an overflow crowd of spectators – some in folding chairs and dozens more standing, focused on a small television

Continued page 6



Country Retreat

August 3

Save the date!

See Calendar below...

5. Create non-gender-specific restrooms by covering over the “Men” or “Women” sign with an “All-Gender Restroom” sign.

6. Advertise, host, or co-sponsor other organizations’ transgender-related programs, like Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR).

7. Use trans-inclusive language in all your communications. Instead of saying “this event welcomes men and women,” try “all genders welcome”; rather than talking about “both men and women,” try “people of all genders.”

8. Publicize the trans-inclusive steps that your church has taken, as well as the programs that you are planning. This lets trans people know that your community cares about being an affirming place for them.

9. Include the transgender community in your social justice work. Work with transgender advocacy organizations on hate crimes, name changes, changing gender “markers” on legal documents, and employment/housing discrimination.

10. Develop trans-inclusive liturgy and rituals that celebrate unique life-cycle events such as moments of gender transition or name change.

Adapted from transACTION.

Transgender and Pastoral Care Resources for Churches

One of the top 10 ways to welcome transgender people to church is to offer adult education classes that open up dialogue and solidarity. To help in these discussions, consider transACTION, a curriculum created by the Institute for Welcoming Resources. transACTION is designed to help churches address understanding and welcome by providing step-by-step training about the needs, apprehensions and fears of transgender people – as well as the wealth of gifts and graces they bring – while responding to the concerns in the community of faith. Download both the leader and participant manuals free at More Light Presbyterian’s Gender Identity and Expression resources area, <http://bit.ly/transresources>

For pastoral care issues, check out *Experience* by Reverend Erin K. Swenson, Th.M., Ph.D. It may be downloaded from <http://bit.ly/transresources>.

Pro-Transgender Changes in the DSM-5

The American Psychiatric Association board of trustees made history in December by voting to no longer classify transgender and gender non-conforming

identity as a mental disorder. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) will include a diagnostic category of “Gender Dysphoria,” a term communicating the emotional distress that can result from “a marked incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender.” This will open the door for affirmative treatment and transition care without stigma. Homosexuality was similarly declassified as a mental disorder in 1973.

Where the Youth Are – PP Goes to True Colors

Elder Keith Rhoden, Jr., Presbyterian Promise board member

March 21 – 23, 2013 saw over 2,000 LGBTQI young folks, allies, and helping professionals like school counselors from all over Connecticut and Western Massachusetts converge on the campus of UCONN at Storrs for the 20th True Colors Conference. I and Dick Hasbany, both Presbyterian Promise board members, were present in conjunction with the newly reformed Welcoming Congregations of Connecticut to make visible welcoming faith communities.

This year’s theme was “Heroes: Past, Present and Future,” and participants attended programs, performances and workshops with topics including:

- Coming Out & Self-Acceptance in Co-Occurring Mental Illness
- Sexual Taboos: Discussing Difficult Topics in Sexuality
- Being Out in the Classroom
- Being Out at Work
- Creating the Best GSA (Gay Straight Alliance)
- Exploration of Body Images in the Media

There was a group from West Point that shared their current on-campus experiences. The conference concluded Saturday with two very popular events: A drag show hosted by Harlette LeFleur and a Youth Dance which went until midnight.

Fortunately, with all of this going on, there was also a screening and discussion of “For the Bible Tells Me So.” Presbyterian Promise was honored to be a part of the three-day event. Positioned next to the Planned Parenthood booth, Welcoming Congregations of Connecticut received a lot of its overflow and was able to share the Good News. Often, we found ourselves speaking to the “un-churched.” Many of the attendants that perused our table of information, with its cross section of inter-faith brochures and resources, stated they had no religious background. Others were happy to learn there were

places they could worship and be themselves. No less than two attendees asked about a welcoming church in the New London area, and we were happy to be able to give them a brochure from Crossroads Presbyterian Church.

The organizers of True Colors created a safe, nurturing and encouraging space. Reminders of Inclusion, Respect and Safety were posted and hard to miss, demonstrating the organization's mission: "True Colors works to create a world where youth, adults and families of all sexual orientations and gender identities are valued and affirmed. We challenge all forms of oppression through education, training, advocacy, youth leadership development, mentoring and direct services to youth and those responsible for their well-being."

Participating allowed us to see a small sampling of where the movement is going and helped to engage future leaders with spiritual resources to help them on their new journeys.

Equipping the Candidates

Presbyterian Promise co-moderators Jane Hindenlang and Dick Hasbany recently presented Presbyterian Welcome Executive Director Rev. Mieke Vandersall and John Russell Stanger, Organizer of Mission and Advocacy,



with a check supporting this year's candidates and inquirer's retreat. Presbyterian Welcome developed this ministry, which brings LGBT candidates and inquirers together in a safe space to build support and community. The retreat helps each candidate live into their candidacy graciously, grow in the "hard" professional skills of articulating their calls and effectively telling their stories. The retreat helps candidates who had let their calls lie

idle because of the barriers to ordination resurface. Rev. Vandersall writes that "the need for this ministry, now that all exclusionary ordination polices are removed, is only increasing. Those in the process towards ordination will be the first out LGBT Teaching Elders in our Church, and as such, they face many particular challenges." The retreat is a powerful professional preparation and an opportunity for grace and faith to grow and abound. Presbyterian Promise has contributed to this program since 2005.

Board member Ralph Jones journeyed with the co-moderators to New York City to meet with Presbyterian Welcome staff to discuss the challenges and activities of the two organizations. Welcome's "Not so Churchy" program (officially recognized as one of the PC(USA)'s 1001 Worshipping Communities) and John's work with the youth of New York Presbytery were of particular interest.

Chris and Teddy Write Letters

In our last Presbyterian Promise News, Rev. Maria LaSala shared her pleasure at reading the reflections of gay men and lesbians in Sarah Bloom's book, The Letter Q. The writers in The Letter Q wrote a letter to their 17 year old selves, sharing with that youth what they'd learned, how they survived and thrived. Rev. LaSala noted that only one letter referred to God, and "there are no references to the ways that religious institutions and their interpretations of scripture can both cause wounds and also heal the soul." We invited readers to address that lack and to write their own letters, sharing with their young selves how loving people, faith, and the church can be crucial sources of strength, healing, and hope. The following two "letters" do just that. The first is from our board member, Elder Teddy Hogle from New Haven. The second is from Chris Glaser, whose candidacy for ministry in the 1970's helped start the denomination's long, hard journey toward recognizing the calls and ministry of LGBT people. See information on Chris's regular blog following his letter.

Dear Teddy Joy,

I wish that in some mysterious way you could have known at 17 what you know now. This is kind of a congratulatory letter for a journey excitingly and faithfully lived, a reminder of whom you've become and where you came from.

If you'd grown up considerably northeast of where you did, things might have been clear to you sooner, but all unfolded in God's time. Dallas was not the Progressive bastion of the southwest. Your schools had no African American kids, no Jewish kids (they had a very nice school of their own), not any European/Slavic immigrant kids and certainly no kids that ever talked about gender. That was a word you won't remember from your list of 1,000 or even 10,000 most used words. Queer was the



word used for the dorky kid in the highwater pants and thick glasses. Queer was just not "in." You were lucky however that your Dad was on a fast track of upward mobility in the FAA so you actually moved really far north at a very good time.

First to Minneapolis, a city that was about as white as could be but a change nevertheless, not too abrupt, but different.

The second move, to New York City would change your life forever. It was a place of constant amazement, a place you where would meet the love of your life. It was also the place you had many gay friends before you really knew what gay was. Herb was a guy in the young adult church group. He was tall, very well dressed, witty, a little acerbic but loads of fun with friends just like him. How lucky for them you thought, that in this large bustling community they had found friends so quickly – they were from many different places, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Chicago - you couldn't believe your good luck to be accepted into such a cosmopolitan circle of well-traveled folk. Remember how Carolyn, also from church, said you were always safe with Herb. She didn't explain why and you thought it was because he was such a gentleman. Then you met Alan who was as progressive and open and free as your Southern relatives were pinched and closed and judgmental, and your life really expanded. He was instantly the center of your understanding of yourself.

Then things got more serious and Alan proposed – no doubt about your answer. As you planned the wedding it seemed natural to ask Herb to be an usher and Carolyn an attendant. Alan's father was to perform the wedding. Do you remember he said something to your parents about how pleased he was that your family was so open and accepting? You had no idea what he meant and when you asked Alan he was surprised you didn't know but he did say rather offhandedly "Oh, Herb and Carolyn are gay that's all."

As time went by it was clear to the two of you that your faith and values put you a little to the left of most of your friends, all of your relatives, and many of your church friends. As your children grew and prepared to leave home you didn't give them the "Bird's and Bee's talk" you gave them the "color and gender" assurance. It didn't come as a surprise to them because you'd been living that way for as long as they could remember. They'd been with you and Alan to Vietnam Rallies, Marched on Washington and in the "Gay Pride Parades" and went to schools where they were the only white kids. You must have been quite satisfied that they "got it."

Right up to the end you and Alan stood by those that others would leave behind, you urged your church to live out the life the Gospel presented. Then time seemed to speed up and although things were going well there was much left to do and you would be doing it alone. The kids are still living the inclusive lives you hoped for them and your friends are helping you to continue your journey with those in need of advocacy, companionship and support. So as usual it's "You go girl!" there's no retiring from life.

Truly yours,
Teddy

Dear Chris (at 17),

You fear you are the only one with same-sex attractions, or the only "normal" one, and that you will never find someone to love and to love you in a lasting, intimate relationship – but you will, and the church and culture will even



come to recognize your relationship within your lifetime. In your extreme loneliness right now, I know that's hard to imagine. Put away your suicidal thoughts, and know that you are NOT alone!

You know already you are loved: by God, by your family, and by your friends. But you fear they might not approve of your desire to be with a man, or love you still. Let me tell you, your fear and anxiety and anticipation in telling them is really the beginning of birth pangs – in some ways, the worst part. Once it's out there, you can talk about it – with God, with your folks, with your friends.

God loves you, and has made you who you are. That's difficult for you to accept right now and sounds too good to be true. But be logical – why would God create gay people and not let them love, marry, and pursue ministry, or whatever vocation they feel called to fulfill? Yours is a gift to love, deeply and intimately, someone of your own gender, and all ability to love comes from God. And you have loved God, tried to do what's right, and have heard a call to ministry. Harmonizing your sexuality and spirituality will give content to your ministry, believe me! Many, many people do not know how to put the two together.

You especially fear your father's reaction, afraid even that he might attempt to block your call to ministry. You are closer to your mom, but she will have the greater trouble because she will worry about your safety, happiness, and future – that's what mom's do! And Dad, think about how he's handled every REAL crisis (not the petty stuff). He gets quiet, ponders, tries to respond both with reason and love. He will be there for you, both your parents will be there for you, even before their questions are answered and their doubts addressed. Mom will worry about what she did wrong, and both will hope you might change with therapeutic help. But they will read the materials you give them and they will find other information on their own until they understand you and who you are, and they will become your greatest advocates.

You know your friends hold you dear, just as you hold them dear. You know how open they are – it's the '60's, after all. Especially when you get to college, your friends will be liberal, compassionate, concerned for justice, and not the fundamentalists you were raised with. And what will surprise you is that those fundamentalist childhood friends for the most part will also become liberal and progressive, and accepting of you. Not all of your friends will welcome you, but most will. Focus on the many, not the few.

However, I must warn you that coming out to the

church will prevent your ordination. Yet it will give you a broader ministry. If you're looking for financial or job security, don't come out to the church, or do something else. But if you're looking to make a difference in the church and world, to have a ministry that reaches beyond an individual congregation, presbytery, or denomination, coming out openly and honestly is God's calling for you.

Mind you, you will then be typecast and your spiritual insights will be ignored or dismissed by the vast majority of Christians, but the people who need you and want you and love you will appreciate your gifts. And you will come closer to God and to Jesus, which is what you hope for. You will shed many tears, endure hardships, have your heart broken or disappointed in love and in ministry many times, but it WILL be worth it, let me tell you. Joy and love, God and writing will always lift you up again.

And know that I love you. I suffer with you in your struggle. And I admire you. It does get better.

With love, always,
Chris (at 62)

Rev. Chris Glaser was one of the openly gay candidates for ordination that prompted the Presbyterian Church to study the issue, and he served on the denomination's Task Force to Study Homosexuality (1976-1978) as its only openly gay member. From 1977 to 1987, he was the Director of the Lazarus Project out of West Hollywood Presbyterian Church, a first-of-its-kind ministry of reconciliation between the church and the LGBT community. Chris blogs at <http://chrisglaser.blogspot.com>, "Progressive Christian Reflections," and is the author of a dozen books, including "As My Own Soul: The Blessing of Same-Gender Marriage," (Seabury, 2009). For more, visit <http://chrisglaser.com>.

Our Newest Board Member



We are happy to welcome Elder Tricia Thelen to the Presbyterian Promise board this year. Tricia is a seminary student at Andover Newton Theological School,

working towards an M. Div., which she hopes to complete next year. She is a ruling elder and sings in the chancel choir at Westminster Presbyterian Church in West Hartford. As a college professor at Quinnipiac University, Tricia teaches Theater Design and Technology and designs scenery for up to four productions a year. She spends her summers at The Chautauqua Institution designing props and painting scenery for the opera company. A life-long church member, Tricia feels passionately about full inclusion for the LGBTQ community in the life and ministry of the church.

Then there Were ... (con't. from page 1)

set, broadcasting the Senate chamber proceedings. The Senate Judiciary committee passed this bill April 23, 7-4, rejecting a bill that would have put the question of same-sex marriage to the voters in 2014. At about 4:15 p.m., following some brief, non-controversial items, the debate began.

The bill's primary sponsor, Sen. Donna Nesselbush (herself openly gay) recalled the history of the LGBT civil rights struggle in R. I. and recognized her forebears and contemporaries in this effort – achieving passage of a non-discrimination law in 1995 and the introduction of marriage equality legislation beginning in 1997 – but never before voted upon.

It has always been the determination of LGBT people and their allies to bring about marriage equality legislatively rather than judicially, however long that might take. The reason for this strategy was that until recently, the governor was opposed, the assembly and senate leadership were opposed – the votes were not there. The landscape changed in 2011. Governor Lincoln Chafee campaigned for marriage equality. Rep. Gordon Fox, (himself openly gay) was elected Speaker of the House, but the votes were not there. Instead Rhode Island's citizens were offered the now stale, separate-and-not-really-equal bone of civil union (an alternative fewer than 100 couples have taken advantage of since its enactment). This year would be different. A criticized and chastened Gordon Fox vowed to bring a marriage equality bill to a House vote – and it passed 51-19 on January 24. Senate President M. Teresa Paiva Weed continued to

express opposition and felt no urgency in taking up the matter but promised not to stand in the way. In the meantime myriad forces and influences came to bear: joining MERI (Marriage Equality Rhode Island), Rhode Islanders United for Marriage formed, staff were hired, volunteers enlisted and funds were raised from near and far. And there would be many endorsements, civic and religious including the newly-installed Episcopal bishop and the State Council of Churches (at the expense of now-disaffiliated orthodox members). And in what may be a first, the R. I. Republican Senate caucus – albeit only five in number – voted its unanimous support. Opposition would come from expected places – Bishop Thomas Tobin and the Roman Catholic Church, a newly formed Faith Alliance to Preserve the Sanctity of Marriage as Defined by God and the National Organization for Marriage (the opposite-sex kind, that is). Telling this year however was the absence of a bill expressly prohibiting same-sex marriage, only a proposal to “let the people vote” on the issue, curiously endorsed by Bishop Tobin. This idea was resurrected in the form of a proposed amendment on the Senate floor but rejected with little debate. Only one senator would speak at length in opposition, sharing King James Version quotes of the “terror texts” and repeating an assertion made at the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing that he could change his sexual orientation at any time. That hearing, some twelve hours in length spanning March 21-22 would offer all comers the opportunity to be heard and tend to support the assertion attributed to Otto von Bismarck, that one ought not watch either sausages or laws being made. This year's largest-ever hearing began over a near-constant din of “no!” and other protestations from a large crowd of those opposed to gay marriage, assembled in the rotunda. Testimony included official statements for and against, oft-repeated positions, scriptural quotations and allusions, poignant stories, irrational rants, “the truth” and other certainties and dire warnings (in just the first few hours witnessed by this writer). It came from politicians and those who would be, clergy of many faiths, labor leaders, members of various fields of medical and social science and educators, but mostly otherwise ordinary people, including children and grandparents. This writer is of course biased, but found the stories of supporters most compelling and moving while many defenders of traditional marriage seemed to speak out of fear and expressed their zeal in arguments not always firmly grounded in reality.

And so this first and last, historic Senate floor debate continued ... with recollections of episodes from the race-based civil rights struggle, the role of religious belief including musings on “what would Jesus do?” and Paul's



RI Senate Vote

words to the Corinthians: faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love (1 Cor. 13: 13). What also comes to mind were those who fought the good fight but did not live to see this day and its affirmation of their loves and lives.

Perhaps it is appropriate that Rhode Island is the last New England state to equalize marriage. It was the last of the original thirteen colonies to ratify the U. S. Constitution in 1789.

Also recalled in retrospect was the discussion about the wisdom of pursuing this radical (to some) concept of marriage equality at the More Light Churches Conference in Rochester in 1996. This was when a court case in Hawaii so threatened presumptions about marriage (or prejudices against lesbian and gay people) that Congress swiftly enacted the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA.) Until then, who knew marriage needed defending? Now we know that this pernicious law, DOMA, needs defending but instead went defenseless (by the Attorney General, at least) before the Supreme Court.

The words “unwise and untimely” may not have been used at that More Light gathering but those judgments have certainly been expressed, particularly when the challenge to California’s Proposition 8 was taken up ... with the almost certain destination of a presumably tradition-bound, unsympathetic Supreme Court. Fifty years ago those words elicited the eloquent and compelling response of Martin Luther King, Jr. in his letter from Birmingham jail. Among his observations was the belief that it is never the wrong time to do the right thing.

The journey to marriage equality – perhaps the last major aspect of the normalization of relations between society and its LGBT members – continues, with breathtaking swiftness of late, with now a fifth of these still United States joining a growing number of other nations embracing this reform, albeit with varying degrees of consensus. And so we in Southern New England find ourselves in this Easter season with a newly uniform (if not re-defined) marriage law and with a growing number of minds changed. While in our church – as in so many faiths and denominations – our work of telling stories, offering resources, supporting each other, even changing minds, continues. Why not?

Dan Blackford is a member of Providence Presbyterian Church, an Elder and has been a Board member of Presbyterian Promise since the beginning.

Calendar

May 11 – Covenant Network Regional Conference in New York City

June 15 – RI PRIDE in Providence Rhode Island from 11:30 AM. Join Providence Presbyterian and Pres Promise.

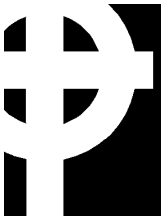
June 30 – NYC PRIDE – Presbyterian Promise plans to join Presbyterian Welcome in providing hospitality to the marchers. Noon on. Please join us!

August 3 – Mark your calendar!

Pres Prom Country Retreat



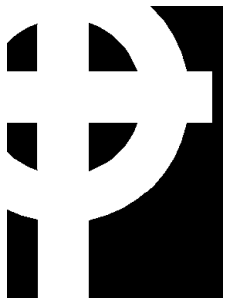
Presbyterian Promise invites you to make a short journey to a peaceful pocket of countryside in Connecticut’s hills for a day of prayer, storytelling, shared food, music, musing, walking – being. We will gather at the Sanctuary at Shepardfields in East Haddam, CT on Saturday August 3. More details will be coming. Save the date and make it a highlight of your summer.



Presbyterian Promise News

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News

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Proclaiming God's promise of justice and love in Jesus Christ
By organizing inclusive and inquiring churches in the
Presbytery of Southern New England
Into a community of mutual support for the empowerment of
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender persons,
And for outreach, education and Christian evangelism.

visit us at

Crossroads Presbyterian Church	Waterford CT	(860) 442-3693
First Presbyterian Church	Hartford CT	(860) 246-2224
First Presbyterian Church	New Haven CT	(203) 562-5664
First Presbyterian Church	Stamford CT	(203) 324-9522
Providence Presbyterian Church	Providence RI	(401) 861-1136
Westminster Presbyterian Church	West Hartford CT	(860) 521-6240
Wilton Presbyterian Church	Wilton CT	(203) 762-5514

...working to extend the hospitality of Christ to all God's children...

<http://PresbyterianPromise.org>

Affiliations
That All May Freely Serve
More Light Presbyterians

Our ministry is one of reconciliation – introducing GLBT people and families to welcoming congregations even as we educate churches about what it means to be truly welcoming.