

Reconciling Ministries Network

75 LGBT Clergy speak to the United Methodist Church!

Special Flashnet!

Wednesday, March 19, 2006

The Reconciling Ministries Network Digest

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RMN MISSION STATEMENT: Reconciling Ministries Network is a national grassroots organization that exists to enable full participation of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in the life of the United Methodist Church, both in policy and practice.

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Reconciling Friends,

75 of our LGBT Clergy have come together to issue a letter to the United Methodist Church. As you learned in Sunday School, it is the people who make up the Church. We are seeking your help in furthering the spread of this letter until it reaches everyone in the UMC.

We have sent out a Press Release and the Letter itself to national media and interested groups. We hope that it will be picked up and publicized.

Please read the Press Release and the actual Letter below. Then send it to your local newspaper and media, your Annual Conference leaders and newspaper, and your own pastor and congregation.

We believe the list of 75 will grow as more of our pastoral leaders learn of its message and wish to be included.

Sue Laurie

RM Network

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PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Letter from 75 UMC Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Clergy Notes Defrocking Fears yet a Continued Commitment to Service

On Eve of UMC Judicial Council, Clergy Insists On Inclusion of LGBT Community and Say Hundreds Still Serve Silently in Church

(Chicago – April 18, 2006) —In an unprecedented move and at great personal risk 75 United Methodist Church (UMC) lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) clergy issued a letter to UMC church leaders today seeking full inclusion in the life of the church and outlining their deep fear of coming out of the closet because, like Beth Stroud, they will be stripped of their ordination credentials. The letter also reaffirmed their commitment to serve the Church.

The 75 signatories were collected by the Reconciling Ministries Network. The list includes clergy from every jurisdiction in the UMC and represents a unified voice of hundreds of others who serve the church in silence at all levels.

The letter is released exactly one week before the Judicial Council meets in the Kansas City area to continue to interpret Church policy. Last October, the Judicial Council, which acts as the church's supreme court, ruled in favor of a pastor who withheld church membership vows to an openly gay man. The decision has erupted a firestorm of controversy in the denomination. At next week's meeting, the Judicial Council will decide whether or not to revisit the case.

“For 35 years the UMC has been on a slow but steady course to exclude LGBT people from the life of the church as a whole,” Rev. Troy Plummer, a minister based in Chicago said quoting from the letter. *“Many in our denomination support this dismembering of Christ’s Body. Yet even while our sister Beth Stroud was stripped of her ordination credentials, hundreds of LGBT clergy continue to serve the church faithfully at every level of leadership.”*

The 75 clergy reminded United Methodists that *“you are the church that opened our minds and hearts to God’s irrevocable call into ministry.”* Serving the church at every level, they *“have embodied God’s presence in worship and in your lives,*

blessing your marriages, responding to midnight calls, holding your hands, wiping your tears, and laying your precious loved ones to rest."

The Methodist denomination has been wrestling with the issue of homosexuality since 1972, when it declared homosexuality "incompatible with Christian teaching." Since that time, legislation has been passed preventing the ordination of "self-avowed, practicing homosexuals." The ban against homosexuals extended from clergy to the laity when an October 2005 Judicial Council ruling allowed a pastor to withhold membership vows from a gay man.

"This letter represents hundreds of clergy from around the United States who are giving their heart and soul to the United Methodist Church and its ministry through work in local congregations and specialized settings," said Dr. Joretta Marshall, chair of the Reconciling Ministries Network. "Their voices and experiences are silenced out of fear of losing their standing in the church and, as a result, fear of losing their ability to respond to the call of God for their lives. It is a tragedy that so many good pastoral leaders have to hide and live in fear when they have gifts and graces in abundance to share."

While the debates around homosexuality will continue in the church, the signers of the letter emphatically state that *"even with the most restrictive legislation, LGBT people will still be raised up through the UMC's Sunday School and youth programs. They will hear God's voice calling them into ministry, and Boards of Ordained Ministry will continue to find them called and gifted candidates, regardless of their sexual orientation."*

The Reconciling Ministries Network is a grassroots organization that works to enable full participation of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in the life of the UMC. The full text of the letter appears below, although the names of the 75 signers will remain private to protect and preserve their ministries.

Additional clergy are welcomed to confidentially add to the number of signers in a secure way. For instructions on how to do so, contact Jennifer Soule, Attorney At Law, at 312-616-4422 (indicate "RMN confidential respondent" when calling).

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A PASTORAL LETTER TO THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

FROM 75 LESBIAN/GAY/BISEXUAL/TRANSGENDER UM CLERGY

For Immediate Release

The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance.

You are Christ's body--that's who you are! You must never forget this.

1 Corinthians 12:25-27 (Peterson, *The Message*)

We are 75 lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) clergy in The United Methodist Church and we feel it is time our voices were heard in the debates regarding sexuality and the church.

We have known the church at its best through first hand experience. In baptism, we were welcomed into the loving, waiting arms of the family of God. The United Methodist Church both nurtured and confirmed our faith, saturating our lives in God's grace. You are the church that opened our minds and hearts to God's irrevocable call into ministry.

As your pastors, we have embodied God's presence in worship and in your lives, blessing your marriages, responding to midnight calls, holding your hands, wiping your tears, and laying your precious loved ones to rest. We have had the joy and privilege of baptizing you, your children, and your grandchildren, and we have experienced the profound mystery of the spirit of Christ in serving you Holy Communion.

At the same time, we have known the church at its worst. Since 1972, the UMC has been on a slow but steady course to exclude LGBT people from the life of the church as a whole. Many in our denomination support this dismembering of Christ's Body. Yet even while our sister Beth Stroud was stripped of her ordination credentials, LGBT clergy continue to serve the church faithfully at every level of leadership.

We serve our beloved United Methodist Church at great cost. We have experienced personally the church's power to harm as it rejects an elemental part of

who we are. The UMC's official policy has pushed us, as well as our families, into closets of fear and isolation. We are not deceitful people, but the church has given us no choice. To deny God's calling in our lives would leave a void in the Body of Christ.

As LGBT clergy, we are also keenly aware of the suffering of LGBT laity who question whether they can continue to support the UMC with their ongoing prayers, faithful presence, personal and financial gifts, and dedicated service when the church has declared their lives to be incompatible with Christian teaching. Judicial Council Decision 1032 has revealed what we have known for a long time: there are those in the UMC whose agenda is not only antithetical to our Wesleyan heritage, but a dismembering of the Body of Christ.

Yet we know that it is ultimately impossible for the church to amputate us from Christ's Body. Even with the most restrictive legislation, LGBT people will still be raised up through the UMC's Sunday School and youth programs. They will hear God's voice calling them into ministry, and Boards of Ordained Ministry will continue to find them called and gifted candidates, regardless of their sexual orientation. Many will realize, as we have, that seeking ordination in another, more welcoming denomination, is impossible—for it is in the UMC that our spirituality is rooted.

If you are an ordained, commissioned, licensed, or lay LGBT person in The United Methodist Church, take heart! Hear the good news: *If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing.* You are not alone!

We call upon our UM sisters and brothers to break the silence and bear witness to these truths. We implore you to do all in your power to support LGBT people and their families so that we may live our lives as ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ with integrity and without fear.

John Wesley's prayer is our prayer, that we might serve the United Methodist Church with "purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God... giving God all our heart...devoting, not a part, but all, our soul, body, and substance to God... loving God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves." (*John Wesley's Theology--A Collection from His Works*, 1982.)

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The Reconciling Ministries Network is a national network of United Methodist-focused organizations advocating for the full inclusion of persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities into the life of the Church. Founded in 1984, RMN consists of 211 United Methodist congregations, 28 campus ministries, 31 Reconciling Communities, and over 18,000 individuals. Organizations involved include the Parents' Reconciling Network, Reconciling Ministries Clergy, United Methodists of Color, and RMN's student movement, MOSAIC.

For additional information you may contact the Reconciling Ministries Network office at:

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