



The Kindred Connection

Newsletter of the Parents Reconciling Network
3801 N. Keeler Avenue, Chicago, IL 60641 773-736-5526

WINTER, 2009 Edition

Parents Reconciling Network--PRN, an extension ministry of the Reconciling Ministries Network, is an outreach program for United Methodist parents and families of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons. "We envision a United Methodist Church which in both policy and practice accords all persons, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, full participation in the life of the church."

COMING SOON TO YOUR ANNUAL CONFERENCE

This summer we have an opportunity to make our Church more inclusive, in policy and practice, by passing the amendment to the United Methodist Constitution Article IV which was passed by a two-thirds majority at General Conference in Fort Worth, 2008.

Supporters are calling this the "All Means All" amendment. Instead of singling out "race, color, national origin, status or economic condition" as (the only) members of groups eligible to receive the church's ministry (which omits women, gays, the differently abled or "handicapped" persons, lesbians, the aged, bisexuals, transgender persons), the amendment says "ALL PERSONS."

Just as "all persons are of sacred worth", we should include ALL PERSONS in the church's ministry. YOU can help the church pass this amendment IF you attend Annual Conference this summer and vote FOR this. Maybe you are a delegate to your annual conference already. Perhaps you could become a delegate if there are openings for additional "at large" delegates to your conference (call your district superintendent). In any case you should contact your pastor and any delegates to annual conference from your church.

CONSTITUTIONAL PETITION ON INCLUSIVENESS

Inclusiveness (81157-GA-¶4-C) Amend Paragraph 4, Article IV of the Constitution as follows:

"Inclusiveness of the Church — The United Methodist Church is a part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ. The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth **AND THAT WE ARE IN MINISTRY TO ALL**. All persons ~~without regard to race, color, national origin, status or economic condition~~ **WHO SEEK RELATIONSHIP IN JESUS CHRIST** shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection. In the United Methodist Church no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured so as to exclude any member or any constituent body ~~of the Church because of race, color, national origin, status or economic condition.~~" (Material to be omitted is lined out, and new material is capitalized in bold.)

THIS MOTION WAS ADOPTED, WITH 558 VOTES FOR AND 276 VOTES AGAINST, (66.907%).
Submitted by: Breaking the Silence - Texas Annual Conference, Kevin & Laura Young, Huntsville, TX, USA.

NOTE: All Constitutional Amendments Approved By A Two-Thirds Vote Of General Conference Must Be Ratified By A Two-Thirds Affirmative Vote of the Aggregate Number of Voting Annual Members. (This means that 2/3 of all the members of our annual conferences. In other words YOUR conference members' votes count, whether the conference votes for or against this.)

Plan to attend **CONVO 2009 "Justice and Joy"**, at the YMCA of the Rockies, **Estes Park Colorado**, on **Labor Day weekend**, Friday, September 4 through Monday, September 7, 2009. Attend the **PARENTS PRE-CONVO** program Friday (Sep. 4) from 10 AM to 4 PM (cost for this is \$30). If you register (www.rmnetwork.org) by May 1, you save 20%!

TELL YOUR STORIES!

Editorial



Tell Your Story

At the RMN “Call to Witness Workshop” many of us have learned to tell our stories as we reach out even across the “gulf” that seems to separate Christ’s people on the issue of homophobia. Here are two stories we want to share. Please write and tell yours to your annual conference members.

“WHY WE ARE INVOLVED IN PRN”

Our beautiful daughter, Beth is lesbian. When she came out to us 20 years ago, we searched for help from our church and friends, but few were really helpful. We walked a lonely road then.

It hurt when our daughter told us, “As hard as it has been to tell you and my friends about my being lesbian, it is even harder to tell my glbtq friends that I am Christian. They ask me, ‘Why would you bother with such a group of hateful and hurtful people?’”

Fortunately we found PFLAG. It was great to be associated with others who were making the same journey as us, learning how to be strong and supportive parents. We especially appreciated Bill. Although he had no gay family members, he knew how to show support (and he was a Christian!). Then, at a national PFLAG conference in Columbus, Ohio we found that there were many PFLAG members who were Methodist too!

It was great when the United Methodist Church published its study curriculum on homosexuality. We used it in our Sunday School class, and encouraged others to use it too. Then we discovered the Parents Reconciling Network, we joined it, and have been very involved. We have been given the opportunity to share our story with so many other parents in our community, at parties, on cruises, on cross-country train rides, and even at church conferences! We set up informational booths at annual conferences where so many heart-broken parents, even ministers, stopped and said to us, “I have a child *LIKE THAT*, what can I do?”

We tell them that God loves them and their children in a special way. We even share our hope that our church will truly “open its doors” to glbtq people who have been shut out.

Thank God for a daughter who has helped us learn about an “Other America.” Thank God for calling us to be hopeful for the future. Please help us share this Really

Good News that God loves all God’s children, and has created each of them for a special place in the church.

“OUR CHALLENGE TODAY”

I was not born into the Methodist church. I joined it as a junior in high school. Rev. Charles Bright at Ridgewood Methodist Church, in Parma, Ohio told us about the church’s historical commitments to social justice... how it had opposed *child labor*-- using children in the coal mines; *slavery* – using humans as beasts of burden; *segregation*-- oppressing blacks; war – murdering innocent civilians; and sexism -- the degradation of women.

I was impacted when, in 1963, I went to Washington to hear Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. give his now famous “I have a dream” speech. The church paid for my trip and blessed my succeeding efforts to promote racial integration.

In 1968, as a student minister I preached against the Vietnam war, even when some parishioners got angry and called me a “communist.” My District Superintendent, Gil Weisshaar, told the church members that our bishop Thomas Prior shared my feelings. The church was there for me.

In 2000, when my wife Barbara and I joined Parents Reconciliation Network we worked to support parents and their gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual children, we were joined by so many church members, pastors, the “Denver 15” and other bishops who have blessed us in our efforts.

Now, in 2008, can the church meet the challenge of its “exclusiveness”? Our Constitution says we should not exclude anyone from the ministry of the church based on “race, color, national origin, status or economic condition.” But what about women, gays, the differently abled (or “handicapped”) persons, lesbians, the aged, bisexuals, and transgender persons?

Let us now support the General Conference of the United Methodist and pass the amendment to Article IV of our Constitution to bring Christ’s ministry to **ALL PERSONS**.

THE HILTON AWARD

Marlene Crowder, Steering Committee, PRN

The first CONVO I attended with RMN/PRN was 2005 at Lake Junaluska! Everything was new and exciting. The scenery, the worship, the workshops, the music, the fellowship and sense of community was uplifting and encouraging. One of the Joys was meeting Bruce and Virginia “Ginny” Hilton. They were so inspiring just being in their presence. I felt like they were long time friends. So it is with great pleasure that I accepted the role to serve on the



committee to select a parent to honor with the Hilton Award. Bruce and Virginia were very loving, caring, activists! They have a long history of working to make “justice roll down like a river”.

From the civil rights workers in Mississippi in the mid 60’s, to the United Methodist Church since 1980 they diligently worked for justice issues.

The Parent’s Reconciling Network will award the Fourth Hilton Award at CONVO during Labor Day weekend, 2009, at Estes Park, Colorado . We need your help! We know there are many out there that deserve this award, and you can help us identify them. You know those who are making a difference in your church, community and conference. Please help us find, “those parents of LGBTQ children, who through outstanding compassionate witness and work, give significant support to other parents and increased hope for a more inclusive denomination”.

Please use the form in this issue to make your nomination. ALL nominations should be submitted by July 1, 2009. Thanking you in advance for your help on this project.

[An award nomination form is on the last page]

THE STORY OF A STOLE

By Helen Andrew, PRN Steering Committee & RMN

I imagine that most of you reading *The Kindred Connection* are aware of PRN’s Reconciling Stole Project—most likely have worn one of the rainbow stoles at one time or another. If you are not familiar with the rainbow stoles, you will find a brief history below.

We are presently in the midst of creating stoles for RMN’s Tenth Convocation, “Justice and Joy”, to take place in Estes Park, Colorado next September. And that has brought me to musing about the stoles as I stand in the midst of the yards and yards of rainbow fabric that have taken over my basement.

For the past few days I have been measuring, folding and packing fabric to be sent out to the volunteers who will make the stoles. It is slow work, rather tedious—and a bit lonely--as I hole away in my basement workroom. There are eight bolts of rainbow fabric to deal with and an equal amount of muslin for the lining! It got me to thinking that, with a bit of a

stretch, this process of stole creation could be a metaphor for my journey as the parent of an LGBT child.

I am reminded of those lonely days when our daughter came out to us as a bi-sexual woman. I knew immediately that she was still the child we had loved and cherished for 25 years and was totally accepting of what she had discovered about her sexual identity. Yet I still felt isolated and alone—worried for her safety and praying that this beloved child would find acceptance in her world—and, yes, wondering what my friends would think if I told them. It took me a long time to be able to share my story—and those were lonely years.

But slowly I was able to reach out—just as I am sending this fabric of celebratory colors out to others--to women across the country who will stitch with the fervor of the love they hold for their children. Sharing the work, just as sharing our stories and concerns, is liberating. Some of these women will be working alone, as I have been. Others will make a party of the project, inviting others to join them in mass-producing stoles. But our shared longing for justice—especially within the church unites us.

When I see the stoles being worn, however—that is the moment of celebration. At General Conference, the feeling is bittersweet. It takes courage—and tears—to wear a stole there. But to see the rainbow colors sprinkled throughout the convention center is definitely a sign of solidarity and hope. However, to be at CONVO and to look out over the sea of color, with everyone wearing a stole—this makes my heart sing! It says, loudly and proudly—each of us is God’s child of sacred worth. Never in those lonely days, early on, did I dream that this journey, would unite me with such a wonderful, diverse community, would make me more aware of what it means to work for justice, would put me in closer touch with God, would bring me so much hope and joy. It has been a blessing.

Come to CONVO in September—wear a stole--experience “*Justice and Joy*”!

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PRN’S RECONCILING STOLES

By Helen Andrew, PRN Steering Committee & RMN

Prior to General Conference 2004, the Parents’ Reconciling Network Steering Committee selected a short, symbolic stole of rainbow colors to be the

identifier for reconciling persons at GC in Pittsburgh. Those wearing the stole would identify themselves to be committed to the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons in the life and policy of the United Methodist Church. The stole motif was chosen to signify that we are all ordained in God's kin-dom. The rainbow colors represent the wondrous diversity of God's creation.

About 300 stoles were given to delegates and an additional 600 were worn by others who desired to make the witness to full inclusion. All the stoles had been made by faithful volunteers. Still, requests poured in. Clearly the stoles had taken on a life of their own. PRN decided to make patterns available to Annual Conferences, encouraging them to find their own suitable fabric in rainbow colors.

PRN found volunteers to make stoles for all who attended the RMN Convocation, "Hearts on Fire", at Lake Junaluska in 2005 and again for the Convocation, "Faith, Hope and Love", in Nashville in 2007. Two thousand stoles were made for General Conference 2008 in Fort Worth! We are presently making stoles to be worn at Convo 2009 in Estes Park, Colorado. We hope to see you, in your stole there!

A PRAYER FOR THE NATION & OUR NEXT PRESIDENT, BARACK OBAMA

By The Rt. Rev. V. Gene Robinson,
Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire

At the Opening Inaugural Event
Lincoln Memorial, Washington, DC, January 18, 2009

Welcome to Washington! The fun is about to begin, but first, please join me in pausing for a moment, to ask God's blessing upon our nation and our next president.

O God of our many understandings, we pray that you will...

Bless us with tears – for a world in which over a billion people exist on less than a dollar a day, where young women from many lands are beaten and raped for wanting an education, and thousands die daily from malnutrition, malaria, and AIDS.

Bless us with anger – at discrimination, at home and abroad, against refugees and immigrants, women, people of color, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

Bless us with discomfort – at the easy, simplistic

"answers" we've preferred to hear from our politicians, instead of the truth, about ourselves and the world, which we need to face if we are going to rise to the challenges of the future.



Bless us with patience – and the knowledge that none of what ails us will be "fixed" anytime soon, and the understanding that our new president is a human being, not a messiah.

Bless us with humility – open to understanding that our own needs must always be balanced with those of the world.

Bless us with freedom from mere tolerance – replacing it with a genuine respect and warm embrace of our differences, and an understanding that in our diversity, we are stronger.

Bless us with compassion and generosity – remembering that every religion's God judges us by the way we care for the most vulnerable in the human community, whether across town or across the world.

And God, we give you thanks for your child Barack, as he assumes the office of President of the United States.

Give him wisdom beyond his years, and inspire him with Lincoln's reconciling leadership style, President Kennedy's ability to enlist our best efforts, and Dr. King's dream of a nation for ALL the people.

Give him a quiet heart, for our Ship of State needs a steady, calm captain in these times.

Give him stirring words, for we will need to be inspired and motivated to make the personal and common sacrifices necessary to facing the challenges ahead.

Make him color-blind, reminding him of his own words that under his leadership, there will be neither red nor blue states, but the United States.

Help him remember his own oppression as a minority, drawing on that experience of discrimination, that he might seek to change the lives of those who are still its victims.

Give him the strength to find family time and privacy, and help him remember that even though he is president, a father only gets one shot at his daughters' childhoods.

And please, God, keep him safe. We know we ask too much of our presidents, and we're asking FAR too much of this one. We know the risk he and his wife are taking for all of us, and we implore you, O good and great God, to keep him safe.

Hold him in the palm of your hand – that he might do the work we have called him to do, that he might find joy in this impossible calling, and that in the end, he might lead us as a nation to a place of integrity, prosperity and peace. AMEN

ETHICS & GENERAL CONFERENCE

[Being concerned about the comportment of delegates to the 2008 General Conference, the Steering Committee sent the following letter to ...]

Rev. Alan J. Morrison, General Conf. Committee,
Gregory V. Palmer, President, Council of Bishops,
and others.

December 1, 2008

Dear Reverend Morrison,

As dedicated members of the United Methodist Church, we are aware that much interest has been expressed concerning improving the General Conference, so that it is be more responsive to the concerns of all members of the denomination pursuing our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. As members of the Steering Committee of the Parents Reconciling Network, we were present and active during General Conference 2008 as well as at previous General Conferences. We believe we have the experience, perspective, and obligation to suggest that some key changes must be made in order to fully accomplish the goals of General Conference.

Those who formulated the procedures for General Conference 2008 reached consensus that Holy Conferencing would be an effective tool in the pursuit of the goals of General Conference. The 2008 General Conference Legislative Committee #2, *Church and Society*, made a step in the right direction when its chair called the Committee to engage in Holy Conferencing. He did this to discern God's will in the matter of considering changes to Paragraph 161(G), among many other proposed amendments to the Book of Discipline. The observed failure of those who ultimately presented the minority report, to engage in

any meaningful manner in the discussion and conferencing, made it appear that the minority report was prepared and finalized long before the conferencing even began. We strongly recommend that in the future, minority reports should be limited to those minority positions that are disclosed, discussed, and fully developed during Holy Conferencing in Committee deliberations.



Ethical behavior by all delegates must be the rule. Even the appearance of impropriety must be avoided. Unfortunately, irregularities were witnessed at the 2008 General Conference that call the ethics of some delegates into question. For example, voting equipment was not always secure. In at least one instance a delegate was seen to vote on more than one machine. The action was immediately reported to a Conference official; however, we have no reason to believe that any corrective action was taken. A single delegate voting on two machines is an ethical violation, or at least it is an event that reflects the appearance of impropriety. Other occasions of unethical behavior or behavior that created the perception of impropriety included gifts of cell phones, meals, and payment of expenses to delegates from Central Conferences, who later voted for and spoke on behalf of Biblical Literalism and Dominionism in terms inappropriate to the spirit of love and unity in the Methodist Church.

Ethical behavior by Presiding Bishops must also be the rule. Giving Minority Reports more time in presentation than Majority Reports seems unbalanced. Calling on delegates whose conferences are definitely not bound (in culture & custom) by the amendment at hand is biased. We recommend that on very contentious issues, larger numbers of speakers be permitted, and questions of the Committee Chairs offered so that the plenary has the full benefit of the dialogue

coming from the responsible legislative committee.

We, as members of the PRN Steering Committee, and as individual members of the United Methodist Church working for unity and reconciliation within the Church, request that the appropriate staffs and agencies within the United Methodist Church conduct investigations into the information provided here and any other allegations of inappropriate or unethical behavior observed at General Conference and expressed by other members of the UMC. The ultimate goal of such investigations is to determine procedural changes required in future General Conferences to avoid any impropriety and, just as important, any appearance of impropriety.

In addition to setting ethical standards, we believe that consequences of such behaviors should be announced as a part of General Conference Rules, and then strictly enforced by suspending the authority of the offender. The polite requests by presiding Bishops and monitors to refrain from questionable behavior in these past General Conferences have not effectively resulted in changing the behavior of some offending delegates.

We offer these observations and recommendations in the spirit of Methodist love, integrity, and unity with the prayer that our dividedness (theological differences) will not be a hindrance to our mission in the world. Please keep us informed of your actions in response to our concerns.

Respectfully, Reginald and Barbara Olson, Coordinators and the Members of the Parent's Reconciling Network, active United Methodists all.

[To date we have heard responses from Alan Morrison, promising consideration of this matter, and Bishop Palmer.]

RACISM AND HOMOPHOBIA

[The proposed constitutional amendment to Article IV is not just about a sin of omission, as certain human categories were left out of the original constitution. It relates to the sin of DISCRIMINATION, as we have been guilty of *actively oppressing* certain human groups. We thought the following article, originally composed in June, 2004 helps us to see the parallels between two forms of discrimination, namely racism and homophobia. Editor]

When asked how he voted on the homosexuality issue, a United Methodist General Conference 2004 delegate proudly proclaimed, "I voted with the Bible!" I wondered about his certainty, as I was almost equally certain that he had really voted *against* the

Bible if he had voted to preserve the so-called "incompatibility" clause about homosexuality!

It seems to me that the lynching of African Americans and the murder of gay people have more in common than meets the eye. The symbol of the charred KKK cross and the signs carried by crusaders proclaiming that "God hates fags" have more in common than many realize. Both perpetrators claim to be Christian, with political agendas being founded on allegedly biblical "truths." Both have used the Bible to abuse their victims.



Even though the early Christians as well as John Wesley opposed *slavery*, many Christians decided to "vote with the Bible" and support slavery. Let us look at the use of biblical support for slavery and racism.

Although American Methodists at first followed Wesley's anti-slavery stance, many later came to support slavery. Slave owners favored the scriptures which seemed to approve of slavery, such as Exodus 21, Leviticus 25, and Deuteronomy 15. The primary justification for modern day slavery and racism came from Genesis 9:25-27 the so-called "Curse of Ham." When Noah's son Ham had seen the "nakedness of his father" his punishment was transferred to Ham's son Canaan, who was thought to have become the ancestor of Africans. And in the New Testament Paul said, "slaves, obey your masters."

Few Christians uphold these biblical "supports" for slavery today. However, members of the Klan and various Christian Identity groups preserve a tradition upholding alleged racial superiority. They say that racism is what the Bible teaches, it is "true Christianity."

The Bible has also been used to support *sexism*. It seems that Eve was created as a subordinate to man. Because of her role in eating the forbidden fruit she was blamed for the sins of mankind. The New Testament echoes this sentiment when it says, "the head of woman is the man", *and* "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord." Few American Christians publically claim to follow this line of reasoning in their treatment of women today! If it is deemed inappropriate to adhere to the biblical suggestions or commands relating to slavery, racism and sexism, why do so many Christians still feel it is okay to use the Bible to condemn homosexuals?

I believe that there are several reasons, heresy, benign ignorance, and biblical terrorism. According to Karl Barth, “*Heresy* is the willful abstraction of *one element* from the whole of the doctrine and the placing of it with *equal weight* beside the Christological center.” Accordingly, some people make a selective choice of biblical injunctions which reject homosexuality, but ignore the other aspects of the Holiness Code. Remember the biblical rules against wearing clothes made of more than one fabric; cutting your hair or shaving; and also the idea that men should castrate themselves in order to go to heaven (*Matthew 19:12*). I am grateful that few call for adherence to these rules today.

Then there is the failure to see the continuing revelation of God who broadened the range of acceptance of people as members of the Christian Church. Saint Peter argued for the acceptance of the Samaritans, Phillip supported the inclusion of the Ethiopian Eunuch, and Paul called for the acceptance of the Gentiles. Retired United Methodist Bishop Jack Tuell has extended this inclusion to homosexuals too.

How is homosexuality “central” to the gospel, or “essential” for the faith, especially when compared to the weight of Christ’s gospel of love?

Another reason why people believe that the Bible supports a condemnation of homosexuals is what I would call *benign ignorance*, a lack of information, or acceptance of misinformation regarding the Bible. Idolatry of the Bible is an example. When people interpret the Bible in a literalistic way which fits with a prevailing mood of authoritarianism, this is a failure to relate the Wesleyan quadrilateral for biblical interpretation. Indeed tradition, experience and reason must all be used to help us understand the Bible.

While the first two categories of biblical interpretation might be seen as being understandable and forgivable, the third is more sinister. “*Biblical Terrorism*” is the use of the Bible to eliminate human opposition and manipulate power relations for one’s selfish purposes. This includes the conscious choice of biblical texts to preserve traditional power relations, and the theology of *Dominionism*. [“Dominionism describes, in several distinct ways, a tendency among some conservative political activist Christians, to seek influence or control over secular civil government through political action—aiming at a nation governed by a conservative Christian understanding of biblical law.” *Wikipedia*]

Dominionism is an insidious theology which serves a Machiavellian purpose of the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) and others.

There may be other reasons why people believe that the Bible supports a condemnation of homosexuals, but whatever the cause the result is the same-- the rejection, alienation, harassment, and exclusion of gays, lesbians, and transgender persons, and the maintenance of superiority feelings among heterosexuals, called heterosexism. Let us face the realities of contemporary power relationships, and not try to paper them over with biblical rationalizations.

Neither God, nor the Bible should be used as pawns in a human chess game. *Reg Olson, June 2004*

PRN STEERING COMMITTEE

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PARENTS RECONCILING NETWORK

Parents Reconciling Network

An extension of Reconciling Ministry Network

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HILTON AWARD NOMINATION FORM

Name of Nominee _____ Date _____

Nominee Address _____ Phone _____

Nominee E-mail _____ Church Affiliation _____

Nominator Name _____ Phone _____

Nominator Address _____

Your Connection to the Nominee _____

Please check the areas in which the nominee has made an impact:

Local Church _____	Church District or Region _____	With Individuals _____
Community _____	Annual Conference _____	With Groups _____
School/s _____	General Conference _____	Other _____

Describe in a narrative the reason for your nomination of this person and please incorporate any of the areas checked above and include the impact of the nominee on these areas. Please describe fully your observation of the nominee's work and compassionate witness. The nominee should share the Mission and Goals of Parents Reconciling Network to bring about the practice and policy of full inclusion of everyone in the United Methodist Church, especially GLBTQ persons. (Please use as much space as needed to adequately describe the work of your nominee.) Nota bene: members of the PRN Steering Committee are not eligible to receive this award.

(Please mail this to Marlene Crowder, Chairperson of the PRN Hilton Award Committee, 3206 Senate Avenue, Fort Wayne, IN 46806-2627 crowdermarlene@verizon.net.)

The deadline for receiving nominations is July 1, 2009.