

BEYOND APOLOGY AND TOLERANCE

Queer Gifts in Our Own Backyard

The Rev. Jay Emerson Johnson, Ph.D.

For decades now, lesbian and gay people of faith have been engaged in what I would call the “apologetic task.” It usually involves refuting biblical and theological arguments that condemn homosexuals as “sinners.” The hope in such work is to foster tolerance and create “a place at the table” for same-gender loving people.

While that work certainly has been important, it’s also important to realize that the terms and parameters of that work have been set by others, by those seeking to condemn and exclude. It’s

The experience of not quite “fitting in” is precisely the energy and shape of the Gospel.

for that reason that we seem always to return, again and again, to the same five or six biblical passages that continue to sit like roadblocks in the middle of our religious institutions. More pointedly put, the apologetic task is what has left so many of us feeling as if we ourselves must bear the burden of proof for our own dignity, for our own status as cherished creatures of God.

What has been emerging since the 1990s, however, is a much more positive and constructive approach rather than a negative and defensive one. Over the last twenty years or so, queer people of faith have been increasingly finding a place in Christianity not in spite of their queerness but *because* of it. This is because the experience of being a bit peculiar, odd, strange, and of not quite “fitting in” is precisely the energy and shape of the Gospel.

Yet more than working for tolerance or even acceptance, sexually queer and queerly gendered people have begun articulating some profound insights into the meaning and purpose of Christian faith drawn from their

own queer experiences, sensibilities, and relationships. Much to the surprise of many, not least queer people themselves, these insights carry the potential to transform and revitalize Christian churches and Christian witness in the twenty-first century.

It is for that reason that I believe working for “tolerance” is aiming far too low, and it is also

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BMC Welcomes New Field Organizer

The late Senator Paul Wellstone from Minnesota was fond of saying that, if you want change, you should do three things: organize, organize, organize! This is something that BMC has been doing throughout our thirty plus years of history as we have reached out to the lgbt community, its families, and friends.

With the help of ecumenical partners, a generous foundation grant, and a growing confidence in the power of our vision, BMC is moving its organizing capacity to the next level with the hire of a full time National Field Organizer. After a lengthy search process, BMC is delighted to welcome Anita Bradshaw as its new staff person.

Anita combines the heart of a pastor, the intellectual keenness of a scholar, the insights of a consultant, the passion of an activist, and the deep commitment of a person of faith.

Anita received her M.Div. from the Yale Divinity School and recently was awarded her Ph.D. from Luther Seminary. She is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, most recently serving on the pastoral staff at Mayflower Community Congregational Church in Minneapolis. She has also served on the faculty at the College of St. Benedict and St. John’s University in Minnesota and



Anita Bradshaw

adjunct faculty at Yale Divinity School, United Theological Seminary, University of St. Francis, and Augsburg College. She has done considerable work as a consultant, with an emphasis upon non-profit leadership and development, and has been an activist and educator in urban and social justice ministries.

The focus of Anita’s work will be to develop resource materials, trainings, consultant services, and the networking structures that will help congregations grow as welcoming communities. It promises to be a rich time in BMC history and for the broader welcoming movement as well. Welcome, Anita. Paul Wellstone would be proud! •

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UNDER THE RADAR

Randall Friesen

Yes, it was a Mennonite church, but the sermon was being delivered by a gay man who frequently referred to his husband and questioned biblical passages used to exclude gays. I looked across the congregation that Sunday morning expecting to see angry, tight, red faces and people walking out in a huff. From the posse of teenaged boys across the sanctuary I expected giggles and snickers. But none of this happened. The teens listened (as attentively as teens do) to the stories of the speaker and his boyfriend, and an older congregant thanked the speaker afterwards, saying things like "It's wonderful to finally hear such clear ideas spoken openly in our church."

To me, it was almost deceptively welcoming. Of course, this is how all churches should be, I thought. I now could understand, in a real and tangible way, the power of sitting in church on Sunday morning and feeling not just tolerated, but supported and valued. Afterwards, I met and spoke with some of the congregants who knew of my association with BMC. I commented on the power of worshiping with my people—Mennonites—in a place where I was accepted. This church should be held up as a shining example to the broader Mennonite church!

Oh no, I was told. We don't want word to get out that we accept and welcome gay people, one elder told me. If that

happens, the conference might kick us out. We feel we can do more good by welcoming gays quietly than by losing our conference membership.

Well, I can understand that. I've lost my church membership because I am gay. I know self-preservation. For gay people, it's a big part of our lives: Don't tell your parents until you can support yourself in case they cut you off; Don't tell your boss because you may not get promoted; Don't hold hands in public because you might get beaten up. I get it.

Last summer, I attended "Living Out the Call," a conference BMC co-hosted in San Francisco. Inspired by the book of Esther, the three main speeches of this dynamic weekend were so timely that I felt we should excerpt them in this month's *Outspoken*. I hope you will go online at www.bmcglt.org and read these wonderful pieces in their entirety, as they are really something of a call to action for lgbt people and straight allies.

Carol Wise put it eloquently when she said that the work of welcoming lgbt people into the church will have to be done mostly by non-lgbt people ("On Dignity and Queens," page 5). Most of us gay people have already chosen to risk exclusion in order to live as whole and Godly people. We know how scary this can be. But we also know there is really no better way to live than "above the radar." •

Letters to Editor

I am a new *Outspoken* reader and wanted to respond to Becky Kreps' article *Unapologetics* (August 2006). Her words triggered a truth in my own spirit around getting off the fence and walking upright in my own truth given to me by my Heavenly Father.

As an ex-member of a Mennonite congregation, I am reminded of the agonizing task of attending Sunday morning worship services with my daughters, who are still in this community. The loss of raising them together in the community which I respected and loved is of great sadness. I joined the church at 15 and had been part of the church body for over 26 years. My best friends were there, my gifts of music and children's ministry were nurtured and used there. I thought my coming out as a lesbian would be difficult to understand, but never did I think it would cost me my life. Even my ex-husband is accepting of my truth and respects me as a person and mother.

The lessons learned after eight years of living my own truth about myself has strengthened my faith in Christ as I reflect on Christ's own ill treatment from those who proclaimed to be children of God. I am not ashamed nor do I have anything to hide when I enter the doors of my "home" church. As I worship with my daughters, aware of the space between me and the other members, I want to shrink underneath the pew. But then God nudges me, and I remember my daughters and what I am teaching them, so I lift my voice in songs of praise and participate in every way possible. For their sake, I respect this silencing. And yet, for the children, I want to ask, "Where are the eyes of Christ, His feet and the hands which extend love and compassion even in the midst of differences?" I answer myself, "Do not judge, let them be present in me."

On a closing note I just want to thank you for *Outspoken* and thank Becky Kreps for her words of life. May you continue your work.

Name withheld by writer's request

Outspoken welcomes your comments. Please email your letters to outspoken@hotmail.com.

Consider a Gift

BMC welcomes your financial contributions so that we can continue the work for lgbt justice and care for the well-being of lgbt people, our families, and supporters within the Mennonite and Brethren churches. To donate to BMC, go to our website at www.bmcglt.org and click on "Donate Now." Contributions may also be sent to the BMC office at P.O. Box 6300, Minneapolis, MN 55406. Thank you for your generous support all year long!

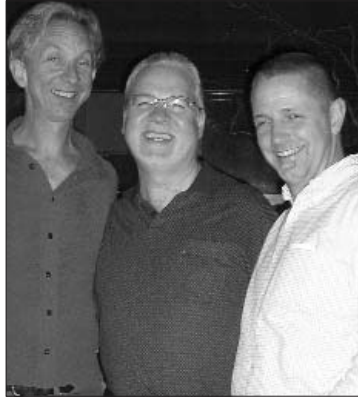
For Just Such a Time

Living Out the Call

San Francisco, CA, June 30 - July 1

How do we push the movement for lgbt inclusion forward? How do we boldly take the next steps in this justice journey?

For Just Such a Time: Living Out the Call was a powerful experience for BMC and its supporters. The book of Esther guided conference reflections on models of resistance and hope as we explored these questions together. Held just prior to San Jose 2007, the biennial convention of Menno-



Jim Lichti, Ed Driskill, and Christian Yoder



Randy Newschwager, Bart Shulman, Chay Yew, and Kenda Autumn

nite Church USA, the BMC weekend conference was rich in worship, play, insight, laughter, and hope.

The conference began with an evening gathering at the home of Dan Flickinger and concluded with a powerful worship service at First Mennonite Church of San Francisco on Sunday morning.

The co-sponsorship of BMC, SCN (Supportive Communities Network), First Mennonite Church of San Francisco, and MennoNeighbors offered a depth of talent and resources that were well-utilized. The congregants of First Mennonite Church of San Francisco were wonderful hosts, and the content of the conference was inspiring, strong, and fostered a time of dynamic fellowship and solidarity.

This edition of *Outspoken* features excerpts from the three major presentations offered at the conference—*On Dignity and Queens*, by Carol Wise; *Becoming the Subject of Our Lives*, by Rev. Sheri Hostetler; and *Beyond Apology and Tolerance*, by Rev. Jay Emerson Johnson, Ph.D. Full transcripts can be found at www.bmcglbt.org.



Ruth Villasenor and Esther Ho

Proclaiming the Power of God's Peace and Justice

Cleveland, OH, June 30 - July 3



Jeff Overton and Myrna Frantz provide music.

As an act of solidarity and conscience, Womaen's Caucus and Voices for an Open Spirit (VOS) declined the invitation to have a booth in the Annual Conference Exhibit Hall, opting instead for a shared hospitality space sponsored by BCM, Caucus, and VOS.

Dubbed the "Hospitality Center," the space buzzed with activity during the Conference, with hundreds of delegates finding sanctuary, information, conversation, good music, and refreshments within its confines. Events such as a Love Feast, panel conversation, insight sessions (*Making Churches Safe for LGBT Youth* and *How Heterosexism Damages the Church*), music presentations, and a celebratory party were offered during the four days that the Center was open. Led by an understanding that the practice of justice often heralds the presence and power of the Holy, the theme for the Center was *Proclaim the Power of God's Peace and Justice*.



Ruth Garwood and Craig Hoffman

In addition to the Center, BMC also helped sponsor a dinner for denominational officials and other leaders that featured a panel of UCC executives discussing how the UCC's policy of "extravagant welcome" has impacted their denomination. The excitement, theological strength, compassion and vision of the UCC representatives were compelling and rich.



Jan Fairchild and Steve Brunk enjoy BMC's Hospitality Center.

Farewell from Katie



This August, I finished my final year as the BMC volunteer and moved on to begin a culinary arts program at Saint Paul College. When I began working at BMC two years ago, I was freshly graduated from Goshen College, idealistic and ready to make a difference. In weak moments of grandiose naiveté, I even imagined that, if I put in my time, maybe the church would be about right in a year or two.

These two years have been a great experience for me. A highlight has been meeting and spending time with some of the best people in the church (and some who aren't in the church anymore). Many of these lgbtq people, families, allies, and whole congregations have been involved in the work of BMC for 10, 20, even 30 years. The strength, courage, generosity, hospitality, humor, and joy of these new friends inspires me. I also encountered many who were newer to BMC and sometimes just coming out. These bring fresh energy and a sense of urgency to push forward when we all feel frustrated and worn down. I've met young people growing up in an increasingly open time. They live more free of the burdens of shame, fear, and homophobia as they have queer friends, relatives, and mentors.

I've learned and laughed much in all the hours in the office and traveling with Carol. It was always great to get out of the small BMC office to go to conferences, church and college visits, board meetings and retreats, even when the trips were long and tiring.

I originally committed to one year with BMC, but I decided to stay another year. In addition to my work at BMC, I had found a great, welcoming community in Faith Mennonite Church. I enjoyed my work in Minneapolis and have grown to enjoy the Twin Cities.

My experiences with BMC gave me hope and have shown me what the church can and should be. I move on from my job at BMC more convinced than ever that it is inevitable that the Church will welcome and affirm the lgbtq community; it is just a matter of time. I also leave with a greater sense of urgency and impatience for that change to happen. I know that institutional change takes time, but I wonder if it will be 5, 10, 20 or more years. What is lost as time passes? Could it pass us by? Will we be too late?

When I started working at BMC, I thought of my work as a service and ministry to my lgbtq and allied community. I have now come to see it also as an important service and ministry to the church. BMC has a lot to offer the broken church in the way of healing, and I am glad I have been able to be part of that. Thank you. •

BMC Receives Carpenter Foundation Grant

BMC is pleased to announce that we have been awarded a \$15,000 grant from the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation. The funds will be used to produce resource toolkits for Brethren and Mennonite high school youth, their parents, and youth advisors; develop welcoming church worship materials; and to expand library and resource materials for non-lgbt family members.

The request to the foundation was made in response to changing and emerging needs in the lgbt and allied communities. One significant dynamic is that youth are coming out at increasingly younger ages and with different social, religious, and emo-

tional needs than previous generations. This phenomenon has an impact upon parents as well, with many of them feeling ill equipped to deal with their daughter or son's sudden visibility as lgbt. This concurrently brings new challenges and opportunities for youth advisors who are concerned about the well being of youth in their congregations.

Greater social visibility has also brought to light the unique experiences of individuals with lgbt siblings, children of lgbt parents and non-lgbt spouses. The grant will enable BMC to better respond to these changing needs, offering education, healing, hope, and support. •

New SCN Community

The Parent Support Group of Southwestern Ontario is the latest community to join the Supportive Communities Network (SCN). This group has been meeting for many years, offering support, resources, friendship and hope to family and friends of lgbt people.

Their statement of welcome reads:

We are a support group in Southwestern Ontario of Mennonite Parents of Gay, Lesbian, and other sexual minority persons. We believe:

- that in Christ there is "neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28);
- that we are called to nurture non-discriminatory, non-judgmental relationships with each other based on love, acceptance, and understanding. Indeed we are called to "love one another responsibly, faithfully and joyfully" (Frederick Buechner).

We provide confidential support, resource and opportunities for dialogue, in the Spirit of Christ, to create and encourage a welcoming and open environment.

BMC welcomes the Parent Support Group as a community of welcome, grace, and hope. •

ON DIGNITY AND QUEENS

Carol Wise

Many within the lgbt and allied community are of the opinion that those of us who persist with the Christian church are deluded, naïve, compromised, not quite really queer, an accomplice in self ambush. If we can avoid not over-personalizing it too much, perhaps we can see that the critique has some merit. The Mennonite Church, the Church of the Brethren, and the Mennonite Brethren Church have hardly been shining examples of welcome and love towards gays and lesbians. Occasionally unwittingly, but often quite intentionally, the church has done a great deal of harm to our families, to our faith, and to our basic sense of human dignity and worth.

If we desire to be truly healthy, then our first task is to change the kind of conversation that we are having with the church. The church has rendered lgbt people invisible, save for moments when we are summoned for acts of sexual vulnerability. The so-named “dialogue” has been primarily comprised of lgbt people sharing our stories

while the church sits back to critique and judge our value. To be acceptable, the story the church wishes to hear from us must ultimately reinforce the overarching theme of heterosexual superiority.

This expectation—that we will divulge intimate details of our sexual lives and human longings before a church that assumes it is entitled to hear and evaluate them—has become increasingly problematic for me. It feels intrusive and voyeuristic in a way that is becoming creepy. I am tired of being expected to carry the weight of the church’s own sexual confusion, misgivings, fear, and curiosity. I am not interested in providing titillating sexual fodder to a repressed institution. My heart cheers those among us who, with great dignity, say, “No, I will not participate. I am not willing to display my vulnerability to satisfy your desire.”

For me, the issue that needs to concern us is not the obsolete debate over the essential morality of homosexuality, but rather the morality of a church that persists in its harmful practice of injustice and oppression towards a particular group of people. The questions that I wish to explore are: What happens to the soul of a church that actively and knowingly participates in the oppression of another? What are the costs? What are the implications? What does it do to the church as an institution, as a body, as a people of faith? These kinds of questions are becoming more and more relevant because it is now harder and harder for the church to hide behind a façade of innocence or a curtain of ignorance.

The church is on a destructive path. As I reflect on the damage that the church’s insistence upon a rigid heterosexual norm that is reinforced by the oppression of lgbt and allied people, I see some precipitating consequences. The first is a general slide into mediocrity. When we fear information, when we reject quality leadership, when we refuse to engage certain topics and silence dissenting voices, when we cut ourselves off from conversation and study, when we stifle excellence and imagination, we enable the emergence of a tedious mediocrity that has serious implications for the long term well being of the institution.

Related to mediocrity is a loss of credibility, particularly with young people. In an ecumenical survey of church attending youth, 96% reported that they know someone their age who is gay, lesbian or bisexual. This means that young people are forming their opinions based upon their actual experience with lgbt people. Not surprisingly, this tends to make them significantly less homophobic and also much less patient with a church that refuses to get it.

But there are more serious issues as well, for the damage wrought by oppression is far more insidious and extends far beyond the targeted group. A refusal to talk honestly and forthrightly about human sexuality means that youth, left to their own devices, risk making poor judgments related to sex. I am not just referring to youth who might be questioning or even

identify as gay or lesbian, but also to those who feel compelled to prove their heterosexuality by becoming sexually active before they otherwise might have done so. This can be tragic, in part because it is so unnecessary.

And what do we say to the pastor who flecks off a little piece of her or his soul each time she or he violates their pastoral covenant by refusing to offer the comfort, healing, and celebratory ministries of the church to their lgbt congregants?

Finally there is the problem of language. As a church, as a

The damage wrought by oppression is far more insidious and extends far beyond the targeted group.

people of faith we have been entrusted with a particular language. Ours is the language of the Spirit poured out. It is brazen, immense, powerful and dangerous for it carries remarkable and weighty words like justice, grace, mercy, forgiveness, hospitality, redemption, love. It is the language of risk and possibility, of imagination and engagement, of relationship and wonder that is simultaneously overwhelmingly human and awesomely divine. But what happens when the church takes its language of love and justice and Jesus and uses it to justify exclusion and condemnation, to punish and expel, to dehumanize and destroy? What do words about sacredness and the sanctity of love mean when parents are forced to choose between their

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Carol Wise is Executive Director of BMC.

BLESSED ARE THE... QUEERS?

Caitlin Neufeld

I have a rainbow-coloured pin in the shape of a cross. Most of the time, I am too embarrassed to wear it. Funny thing is, I'm more embarrassed about being Christian than I am about being gay.

Until I met my partner, I was stubborn and righteous. Ever hear someone say, "hate the sin and love the sinner?" That was me. But since then, (many of) the layers of blind faith have been peeled from my eyes, and not without considerable discomfort. I now hesitate to use the word "Christian," not because I lost my faith but because I lost my faith in what that word represents.

How can the Church speak about human dignity, love, and healing—the evangelical "good news"—when it is not good news for everyone? There are no seats in the pews for me, my beautiful partner, or others like us. Not as we are.

It boils down to fundamen-

tal differences of perspective: to us, life-affirming self-acceptance; to them, a lifestyle of recidivistic sin. They want to help us; we want to help them. They think they are right; we think we are right. We are begging to be let in, they want to love and welcome us; but we are also running the hell away, and they are hardly chasing after. Let's face it: we are one dysfunctional family.

But families fight. That's normal (at least in my experience), and for the most part, it's healthy and natural. So why, if all of this is to be expected, am I still so damn angry at the Church?

Because they aren't fighting fair. The Church has stripped its members of their voices, breeding an army of powerless people flexing institutional muscles. These are people I love and who love me. But say the magic word ("queer," or if they don't understand that, "homosexuali-

ty" also works), and suddenly they are deaf, dumb, numb, and goodness knows otherwise challenged. It's painful to watch: they know their words would be hurtful, and they somehow see silence as the solution, trampling on their conscience rather than stumbling over it.

What is the good news for queers? I have yet to hear a sensible, meaningful answer from the Church. And spare me theological acrobatics.

Let's keep it down to earth—or rather, down to the Church's gutter. Self-mutilation and suicide (these are the children), hardened hearts and bitterness (these are the women), frailty and fear (these are the men), scarred faces and outdated dresses (these are the in-betweens), damaged people seeking healing from the ones who have hurt us most. We are sitting in an emergency room pounding on the doors for entrance, Christian muzak playing in the background, cheery and distant, with no concept of what our pain is like or who has caused it.

We need healing, yes, some of us desperately. But our illness is not our sexuality or sexual identity; it is our suffering, our

loneliness, our shame, our bitterness, our rage.

I asked my church for healing. Behind door number one was the "foolproof" option of lifelong celibacy. After all, nuns do it. Behind door number two was... well... that is to say... what was the question again?

We queers are not the only ones in need of healing. Life is messy, faith is messy—embrace it and get dirty. No more scapegoats and sidestepping, no more compromised integrity for the sake of denominational obedience. No more silence, no more

*Our illness is not our sexuality;
it is our suffering, our loneliness,
our shame, our bitterness, our rage.*

apathy in the face of suffering, no more bowing to the idol of neat and tidy faith.

The Church is sitting on a Rosetta Stone of lepers, Gentiles, blacks, women, and queers, and still they are unable to decipher the message. I refuse to believe that the tearing of the HOLY curtain does not extend to us; that we, falling short of the heterosexual ideal, are the only ones who won't see the liberation of that furious act of God.

I'd like to wear my pin proudly. But for some reason, when I wear it out, it makes people uneasy. Maybe it's because it's rainbow-coloured. Or maybe it's because it's a cross. •



Caitlin currently sits on the Board of BMC Canada in the role of Vice-President. She also acts as LGBT Liaison on the Board of United in Marriage (www.unitedinmarriage.org) with her partner Sharon. When unhindered by her day job, Caitlin is a freelance writer, blogger, and proud parent of two gorgeous pugs, Heidi and Beatrice.

From a sermon delivered at First Mennonite Church of San Francisco during the BMC conference "For Just Such a Time: Living Out the Call" in July 2007.

BECOMING THE SUBJECT OF OUR LIVES

Rev. Sheri Hostetler

Esther was supposed to be one of the silent ones of history. As a woman in a patriarchal society, an oft-despised minority, and an orphan in a culture where kinship defines you, she had three strikes against her. She was destined to remain nameless, faceless, powerless. She was never supposed to hold the destiny of her people in her hands.

Esther was the object of other's people's lives, not the subject of her own. A subject *acts*. An object is the thing acted upon. And this is Esther. Never the subject, the one doing, initiating, acting. Always the object, the one acted upon. She is the one commanded, spoken to, taken, summoned—or not. She is so used to doing this, she can't even recognize that she, also, can command, summon, speak.

How does this happen to us? How do we become objects instead of subjects? How do we who are made in the image of God, made in the image of the one who creates, who speaks and calls a world into being, how do we lose our agency, our ability to act in the world, our subjecthood?

For years in the city of Nashville and elsewhere in the South, African-Americans patronized the department stores that would sell them a coffeemaker but not allow them to drink a cup of coffee at the lunch counter. For years, gay and lesbian Mennonites and Brethren believed that silence and secrecy, anonymity and hiddenness were their only choices. And you don't have to be African-American, or gay or lesbian, or Jewish or an orphan to experience objecthood, do you? We

can experience objecthood—that loss of our agency, that loss of our ability to act—in a workplace or a family or a church if being true to ourselves and our deepest beliefs is threatening to others, if speaking up and acting out carries risk.

We do not willingly forfeit our agency, our subjecthood. Only fear can so suppress that divine part of our nature. Only fear can cause us to renounce—or forget—who we are. Only fear can make us into an object. Fear of losing our life. Fear of being physically hurt. Fear of losing our job. Fear of losing our funding. Fear of losing our social status. Fear of losing our tribe. Fear that if we speak up, stand out, stand tall, we will be shamed. Fear that someone will get angry at us.

These fears are real. No one wants to be beaten. No one wants to lose their job. No one wants to be seen as different, as the only one. The subject, after all, is the one who acts, and actions provoke reactions. It's the law of physics: For each action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Who wants to deal with the reaction? It's so much easier not act. To be safe, to be comfortable. And this is not a bad choice, my friends.

It is not wrong to want safety, want comfort. Sometimes, especially if we have been threatened for a long time, this is what we need. And sometimes, if others (and we ourselves) have seen us as an object for so long, we may not even realize we have a

choice between acting or not acting, between being a subject or being an object.

An organizer named James Lawson, who had studied with Gandhi's disciples in India, came to Nashville in 1959. He told the young black college students there that they didn't have to quietly accept their status as second-class citizens. They could sit at any lunch counter they wanted. But they needed to draw deeply upon each other and upon the spiritual resources available to them. For weeks, they prayed and sang and learned how to sit down together at a lunch counter and how to help each other when the reaction came. James Lawson reminded the black community of Nashville of their royal dignity, and they made their choice. They became the subject of their lives.

In the mid-1970s, several gay men and their partners—men like Martin Rock, Jim Lichti, Ed Driskill—began breaking silence. Yes, there were gay Mennonites and Brethren. And they wanted others to know this. So they drew deeply upon each other and the spiritual resources available to them, and they began sending out a newsletter and passing out brochures with trembling hands at Mennonite conferences, and making themselves available for discussion with church leaders. Jim told me: "I was scared. Not many people were willing to be that visible back then." But they had found their royal dignity, and

they made their choice. They became the subject of their lives.

Esther was not killed for breaking her silence, and neither were her people. In fact, her story is still told every year at Purim. The college students of Nashville were beaten and jailed. But their beatings awakened the conscience of a city and a nation. Six months after starting their campaign, the lunch counters of Nashville were integrated, and the victory gave momentum to a civil rights movement that changed the country. Martin and Jim and Ed's talks and newsletters became the Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Interests, and BMC exists because of these early pioneers. Thirty years later, we are not only breaking silence, we are starting to define the conversation.

There is much to fear, my friends. The fear is real, and the consequences of action are also real. But this fear makes us an object, and this is not who we are. We become who we are when we fulfill the promise of being made in the image of a God who speaks and calls a world into being. We become who we are when we remember our royal dignity. We become who we are when we become the subjects of our life. Who knows, perhaps we—like Esther, like the black college students of Nashville, like Martin and Jim and Ed—have been called into our royal dignity, for just such a time as this. •

Sheri Hostetler, a graduate of the Episcopal Divinity School, has been pastor at First Mennonite Church in San Francisco for seven years. Sheri is also a poet and a contributor to A Cappella: Mennonite Voices in Poetry.

Pastor's Invitation to Speak Withdrawn by Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc.

Kurt Borgmann, pastor at the North Manchester Church of the Brethren, was recently dis-invited from an invitation to speak at the 300th Anniversary Celebration of Brethren groups that is being held in Schwarzenau, Germany, in August 2008. The event honors the eight men and women who, as an act of faith, defied the authority of the church and state and were baptized in the Eder River in 1708, thus beginning the Brethren movement. The Board of Directors of Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc. withdrew Borgmann's invitation to speak after an individual (who remains unnamed) raised a concern about Borgmann's pastoral leadership at a congregation that, as an act of faith, is part of the Supportive Communities Network and willing to bless same sex relationships.

BMC Announces Blog – Coming Out Strong

The BMC Kaleidoscope program is introducing a new blog, *Coming Out Strong*. The blog focuses primarily on the perspectives of youth and young adults who identify with the BMC community. The blog (short for web log) will include commentary and news on a range of topics that relate to BMC. Some of these will include: lgbtq issues, language, homophobia, the church, Mennonites, Brethren, politics, culture, faith, being young, privilege, current events, school, theology, humor, coming out, stories, and family.

To view the new blog, go to www.bmcglt.org/blog. We are

looking for contributors, if you are interested writing on the blog, please contact Katie Hochstedler at kaleidoscope@bmcglt.org.

Staff Change in Kaleidoscope Program

BMC is pleased to welcome Maggie Miller, of Elkhart, IN, as the new BMC volunteer and Kaleidoscope Coordinator. Maggie, a 2006 graduate of Manchester College, will begin her service at BMC in October. We look forward to her presence in the Twin Cities.

Bilingual BMCers Needed

The BMC office continues to be a point of contact for more and more lgbt Mennonites and Brethren from around the world. Some of these individuals are looking for information and support in their own language. If you are able to help BMC provide support and information in languages other than English through translation or conversation, please contact the BMC office so we may note your interest and ability for future reference. Spanish speaking individuals are particularly needed at this time.

SCN Congregation Recognized

Congratulations to the Columbia United Christian Church (CUCC), an SCN congregation in Columbia, Maryland, for being awarded a 2007 Arc of Maryland Community Dignity Award. The award was given for "significant contributions to the dignity of persons with developmental disabilities and promoting their inclusion in the community to lead meaningful lives." According to Arc,

CUCC is a model for how to include people with disabilities. "They walk the talk, without fanfare, without hypocrisy, without judgment, just a simple message." Congratulations, CUCC!

We Made It!

Because of strong contributions at the end of our fiscal year, BMC was able to meet a matching grant challenge and end our fiscal year solidly in the black. The matching grant of \$7,500 is used to fund the Volunteer Position. An additional \$7,500 matching grant challenge has been issued for this new fiscal year. BMC thanks our many contributors for your generosity and commitment to a kinder and more humane church and society.

Family & Sexuality in Mennonite History Conference

A special conference addressing the meaning, structure and function of families in Mennonite history, including the notion of sexuality as experienced and expressed by Mennonites in the past, will be held at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario on October 12-13, 2007. For more information, visit www.grebel.uwaterloo.ca/family or call Marlene Epp, Associate Professor, Conrad Grebel University College at 519-885-0220 ext. 24257

Call for Papers

The Journal of LGBT Youth (previously entitled the Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education) invites scholars, practitioners, researchers, educators, lay persons, young persons, and policy analysts to submit abstract proposals for this special

theme double issue that will focus upon the theme: Millennial Teens: International Perspectives on LGBTQ Youth. Download article submission guidelines at: www.schools-out.org.uk/research/docs/Millennial%20Gay%20Teens%20CALL.pdf.

MennoNeighbors Resolution Discussed at Menn. Church USA Assembly

There was time for discussion of a resolution submitted by MennoNeighbors at the Mennonite Church USA Assembly in San Jose, CA. The Resolution on the Membership Guidelines for Mennonite Church USA challenged the practice of disciplining and expelling congregations deemed to be "at variance" with the Confession of Faith (i.e. those who welcome LGBT members) and called upon "...the leaders of MC USA to discourage, and member conferences to end, the practice of disciplining or expelling congregations based on differing interpretations of the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective." The Executive Board of MC USA elected to submit the resolution to delegates as a Statement for Discussion, with the understanding that no votes would be taken.

Conference ministers Lloyd Miller of Central District Conference, and Kurt Horst of Allegheny Mennonite Conference led the discussion by speaking in support of or opposition to the statement. The rest of the time was used for table discussion and time for table groups to report on their discussion. Text and explanation of the statement, as well as Miller and Horst's presentations are available at the Mennonite Church USA web page for the San Jose

Convention: <http://www.san-jose2007.org/delegates/index.htm>. There was a forum later in the day for those who wished continued discussion.

Welcoming Hymnal Project

Attention hymn writers and composers! The Institute for Welcoming Resources (IWR), an ecumenical organization that develops resources, conferences and networking for the welcoming movement, is working on the development of a new hymnal. The project will feature a variety of traditions and styles that reflect the worshipping spirit of welcoming congregations. Individuals interested in submitting pieces for the new hymnal may contact David Lohman, IWR Program Associate, at David@WelcomingResources.org. BMC is an active member of IRW and encourages individuals to submit materials so that our Anabaptist voice is present in this important resource.

Come Out!

National Coming Out Day, October 11, is an international event which gives gay, lesbian and bisexual people the opportunity to "come out" to others about their sexuality. It also provides a means of increasing the visibility of gay people. In the United States, the day is facilitated by the Human Rights Campaign's National Coming

Out Project (NCOP).

The first National Coming Out Day was held on October 11, 1988. This date was chosen for the annual event in commemoration of the 1987 March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. It also marks the anniversary of the first visit of the AIDS Memorial Quilt to Washington, D. C.

Many communities and college campuses sponsor activities such as dances, film festivals, workshops, literature booths, and rallies on National Coming Out Day.

Tearing Down Walls, Restoring Communities: Christian Peacemaker Congress IX

Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) held its ninth congress at Toronto United Mennonite Church in Toronto, Ontario on September 20-23, 2007. The conference, titled "Tearing Down Walls...Restoring Communities," explored the power of nonviolence in addressing communities broken by violence. BMC was one of the co-sponsors of the event and Carol Wise presented a workshop exploring heterosexism and the church. Keynote speakers included Jim Loney, Judy Da Silva, and Ricardo Esquivia. For more information, see the CPT website, www.cpt.org or contact CPT Canada, 416-423-5525 or canada@cpt.org. •

Fresno Pacific University Faculty Reaches Out to Equality Riders for Resolutions

AN unprecedented exploration of Christian faith and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender inclusion occurred on Fresno Pacific University campus as twenty-six Soulforce Equality Riders of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities met with students, faculty, and administrators.

One Fresno Pacific student said, "This is the first time we have talked about [these things] openly on our campus." This sentiment was echoed by other students and faculty members throughout the day, many of whom expressed a need for continued dialogue around issues of faith and LGBT equality.

At Fresno Pacific University, administrators collaborated with the Equality Riders on the west-bound bus to create a setting for meaningful dialogue. On April 3rd, Equality Riders participated in classroom discussions and gave presentations on topics such as "Progressive Theology" and "In God's Image: Identity and Scripture." Over meals, Equality Riders talked with concerned faculty who wanted to learn what they could do to make Fresno Pacific a safer learning environment for LGBT students.

In the early afternoon, Fresno Pacific University faculty spontaneously requested that Soulforce Equality Riders host a workshop to discuss what a safe

space for LGBT people might look like on campus.

The Fresno Pacific student handbook states that "the university is opposed to homosexual, premarital and extramarital sexual relations." But while FPU Director of Communications Diana Bates Mock affirmed that the institution's views had not changed, she acknowledged that "there is a better appreciation for listening to each other."

"I am excited for the future of this dialogue at Fresno Pacific University," says West Bus co-director Alexey Bulokhov. "We count on the leadership of Provost and Dean of Students to help interested faculty and staff create a safe space in their offices and classrooms for further exploration of the intersection of homosexuality and faith. We are hopeful that the Soulforce Equality Ride visit helped the FPU community identify areas of need for greater learning regarding LGBT issues within the Mennonite Brethren tradition, in this valley and American society at large."

Soulforce Q is the young adult division of Soulforce, a social justice organization that works to end political and religious oppression of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. For more information go to www.soulforce.org or www.equalityride.com. •

To donate to BMC, go to our website at www.bmclgbt.org and click on Donate Now or contact Paul Hawkins, Development Coordinator, at phawkins@bmclgbt.org or (260) 341-6387. You can also send a check to the BMC, PO Box 6300, Minneapolis, MN 55406. Thank you for your generous support!

Contribute to Outspoken

Outspoken is taking announcements for the "Happenings" column for upcoming editions. Please send any events, announcements, achievements, etc. to outspoken@hotmail.com.

(“Beyond” cont. from page 1)

why I want to encourage LGBT people of faith to embrace their queerness as a divine vocation, as a way to think and a way to live in the household of God that calls all God’s people back to the radical roots of the Gospel.

Recently, I’ve been thinking about this vocation as being “queer home economists.” I like that image for several reasons. It assumes, for example, that queer people are already part of the home, part of the household of God. We’re not asking to be let in because we’re already here. More than that, we’re taking responsibility for the well ordering of that household, which is what every good home economist does.

And this is queer household work because, quite simply, we’re followers of Jesus, who showed us in how he lived and what he taught that queerness is in fact divine.

Just consider a few of the many gospel texts we might choose in that regard. The vocation to which God is calling us taps into the energy Jesus described, for example, in the shepherd who leaves ninety-nine sheep behind to find the one that is lost (Mt 18:12-14). That is the same energy he described in the man burying treasure in a field and then selling everything he has to buy that field; or in the woman turning her house upside down to find one missing coin; or in

divesting one’s self of all possessions to purchase the one pearl of great value (Mt 13:44-45; Lk 15:8).

All of these are economic images that Jesus used to describe what he called “the kingdom of God,” and by most economic standards today, the energy in each case is foolishly spent. It makes no economic sense to put ninety-nine sheep at risk for the sake of just one, or to liquidate one’s resources for the sake of buried treasure or a single pearl, no matter how valuable, or to devote so much time and effort to recovering one coin. These are remarkably queer economic strategies Jesus used to describe the essence of faith, and queer people today are taking up those strategies in the work of transforming the whole household of God.

Home economists likewise recognize the inevitable moments of chaos and disorder that arise in the process of transforming a household. A woman furiously sweeping her house in search of a single coin can raise quite a cloud of dust, creating even more work to do when the coin is finally found.

Jesus tried to prepare his disciples for precisely this kind of economically queer work by reminding them that a wise householder brings out of the household treasure not only what is old but also what is new, surprising, and fresh (Mt 13:52). Even more pointedly, he reminded them what happens to old

wineskins when they’re filled with new wine—eventually they burst (Mt 9:17).

In those moments of chaos and transformation, it becomes particularly important to remember why anyone should take up this kind of work; it’s not only for the treasure—the pearl and the coin—but for that one out of a hundred who is lost, and not merely lost, but abandoned, neglected, tossed aside, beaten down, and left for dead.

I believe God is calling us to this vocational work with some urgency. For many, this work is quite literally a matter of life and death.

Though I’ve been dealing a good bit with biblical passages, notice that not once have I mentioned any of the so-called “clobber passages” that are so often used against same-gender loving people. I’ve done this intentionally as a way to model what I believe is a key component of the queerly divine vocation to which we are called: The positive and constructive reclaiming of biblical texts as Scripture.

Though there is, of course, much more to the vocation to which God is calling us than dealing with the Bible, we can’t ignore those texts either, especially given how they have been used and abused. Among the many abuses is certainly the way in which those texts have been used to short-circuit the vocation of spiritually and theologically gifted queer people of faith. Only God knows how many treasured gifts we’ve lost in the household because of that kind of abuse.

So right up front let’s all be clear about this: There is absolutely no need to be on the defensive when it comes to the Bible. In fact, I want to encour-

age LGBT/queer people of faith simply to disengage from those encounters and situations in which the Bible is being used against them. There are plenty of resources out there that you can recommend to those who are concerned about your biblical status.

Meanwhile, there is much more important work to do as queer home economists as we seek and retrieve queer gifts from

If we’re looking for queer gifts in our own backyard, we don’t have to look any further than this room.

our own religious backyard, and that includes Scripture.

The divine vocation to which God is calling us simply cannot be done alone or in isolation. The work of queer home economics must be done together. This is exactly what the Apostle Paul insisted in nearly every one of his letters. There may no longer be Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female, but there most certainly is a body – Paul called it the “body of Christ.” It is a body, moreover, that is made up of many diverse members, each and every one of which is essential for the body to thrive.

That Pauline image of the body is of course a very familiar one to many of us. But I invite you to hear the queerness in it. I invite you to find in this image the confidence and energy you need to take up your vocation as God’s queer people in the world. Listen to what Paul wrote in his first letter to the Christians in Corinth:

“The body does not consist of one member but many. ... And the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we



*The Rev. Jay E. Johnson, Ph.D. is on the faculty at Pacific School of Religion, and is the Acting Executive Director of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry in Berkeley, Calif. Author of *Dancing with God: Anglican Christianity and the Practice of Hope*, Jay also writes articles on the intersections of spirituality and Christian theology. Jay is an Episcopal priest and serves the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd in Berkeley, Calif.*

clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect... For God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member..." (12:14, 22-24).

Just as it was for those first-century Corinthian Christians, so is it also today that those who seem to be dispensable are essential; those thought to be without honor have the greater; those deemed without respect are by God called to transform and renew God's own household.

If we're looking for queer gifts in our own backyard, we don't have to look any further than this room. *You* are those gifts; *you* are the very treasure God the householder is bringing out of the divine treasure chest.

I look forward to seeing how these great gifts—*you*—will continue to transform the household of God. •

(*"Dignity" continued from page 5*)
faith community and their child?

I cannot help but think that the path of healing for the church, if it is to be real, must pass directly through the queer community. It is going to take a lot of work and a lot of pain and a lot of faith to reconstruct this fragmented soul that is the church (work, incidentally, that must be mostly done by those who are not gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender). But those of us who are lgbt are here to say to those courageous non-gay people who, in spite of all the risks and in spite of all the fear, are still willing as an act of love and redemption to step forward in defiance of oppression, that yes, yes, it is worth the struggle. For we are here to bear witness that in liberation one gains a dignity and strength that is, frankly, queen-like, and the good Lord knows that we have plenty of queens in the queer community.

We're here, we're queer, and we're willing to help—for our sakes, for the sake of the church, and especially for the sake of future generations. But we are not going to beg, and we are not going to do work that isn't ours, and we are not going to stop moving forward because we have struggled too long and there is too much at stake to give up now. •

WHAT IS THE SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES NETWORK?

SCN is a program of the Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Interests. It is a network of Mennonite and Church of the Brethren communities who are publicly affirming of gay, lesbian, transgender, and bisexual members.

Why Should Your Community be Publicly Affirming and Join SCN?

- Because it matters. The sad reality is that the Church of the Brethren and The Mennonite Church actively discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (lgbt) people in their institutional practices and are often not very welcoming institutions. This makes the church a potentially harmful place for lgbt people. Many lgbt people assume that a Brethren or Mennonite congregation or community is not supportive or safe unless they specifically hear otherwise.

"Coming out" as publicly affirming identifies the community as a "safe space" for lgbt individuals and their families. It provides lgbt people and the people who love them with some assurance that they will not be subjected to overt harm. It is an act of solidarity with the lgbt community.

- Being publicly affirming suggests that the community has educated itself about issues of sexuality, so that an openly lgbt person knows that they will not suddenly become a topic of controversy and discussion or that their presence in the congregation or community will suddenly become questioned.
- Being publicly affirming indicates to questioning or struggling youth that the church or community is a place where it is safe to discuss issues related to sexual identity. This is very important as lgbt youth have a statistically higher incidence of suicide because of their lack of mentors and support.
- Being publicly affirming shifts the onus of responsibility for explaining their position away from the lgbt community and onto those who would challenge the inclusion of lgbt people in the community.
- Being publicly affirming indicates a concern about the Church of the Brethren and the Mennonite Church. The level of hostility and fear that the church frequently exhibits towards lgbt people damages and diminishes the soul of the institution. Dissenting from the church's fear and rejection of lgbt people is an act of faithfulness and hope because it witnesses to a more loving way of being church together.
- Being publicly affirming is a symbolic act of prophetic witness to the Church of the Brethren and the Mennonite Church and to the broader community, indicating a commitment to justice, hospitality, and the dignity of each human individual.
- Being publicly affirming connects a community with other communities that are serious about welcome, creating a network of support and encouragement.

How to Join SCN

If your community is interested in becoming publicly affirming and a member of SCN, contact Carol Wise, SCN Coordinator, at bmc@bmclgbt.org.

Most congregations and communities engage in a process of education and discernment prior to joining SCN. Resources and counsel are available through the BMC office, and congregations are encouraged to make use of these resources. Communities who join SCN are asked to make a public statement of their support and complete the SCN application form.

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

BMC's new video Coming Out Strong

listen
 to the
 stories



"Coming Out Strong" is available on DVD from the BMC office. To order, email bmc@bmclgbt.org, or call the office, (612) 343-2060. This DVD is free, but BMC asks for \$5 to assist with shipping and handling costs.



I still hear people say that I should not be talking about the rights of lesbian and gay people and I should stick to the issue of racial justice...But I hasten to remind them that Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere"...I appeal to everyone who believes in Martin Luther King, Jr's dream to make room at the table of brotherhood and sisterhood for lesbian and gay people.

—Coretta Scott King

UPCOMING EVENTS

October 11

National Coming Out Day

October 12-13

*Family & Sexuality in
 Mennonite History: An
 Academic and Community
 Education Conference
 Conrad Grebel University
 College, Waterloo, Ontario.*

November 2-4

*MennoNeighbors meeting at
 Assembly Mennonite Church in
 Goshen, Indiana*

November 9-11

*Voices for an Open Spirit
 Gathering, Ridgeway
 Community Church of the
 Brethren in Harrisburg, PA*

*For more information on these events, or to place your own
 "Upcoming Event," contact BMC at bmc@bmclgbt.org
 or call (612) 343-2060.*