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Our Logo

The Lutherans Concerned logo unifies visual symbols of our Christianity and our sexuality into a single image. It has two parts: the fish and the pink triangle. The IX-Thus, or fish symbol, originated as a secret recognition symbol for the early Christian community. The pink triangle was used by the Nazis to identify the European homosexuals who perished in the concentration camps of the Third Reich. Both symbols are now used by their respective communities as honored signs of recognition and support.

Statement of Sanctuary

The ministry of Lutherans Concerned, its meetings and its mailing lists are protected by our understanding of sanctuary. No participants need fear exposure or abuse in subscribing, joining or attending chapter functions.

All information that individuals may reveal of themselves is to be honored by others with total confidentiality. Mutual trust and respect, in the spirit of Jesus Christ, is offered to all who may elsewhere experience alienation, distrust or rejection. For the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we welcome you.

Diversity and Anti-Racism

An equal-opportunity employer, LC/NA welcomes candidates for paid or volunteer positions who share our commitments to full participation for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities and anti-racist accountability to communities of color.

Bullying: Glorified by Our Culture? Lost Connections to One Another? The Struggle for Justice!

The issue of bullying has surfaced in our society after a number of high-profile news stories. The LGBT community has never been a stranger to bullying. Bullies may have “written the book on bullying,” but we have “written the sequel.”

This issue of *Concord* features the concern about bullying with two feature articles, the first beginning right here on page 1 by Chris Wogaman and the second one of what we hope will be more feature articles by theologians of the church. “Have We Given Them Any Other Option?” is by Professor Jeremy Myers. A number of vignettes are included by people telling their stories of bullying. Bullying is also the concern of the editorial and the Deputy Director’s article. There are stories about church assemblies, the RIC feature, a memorial to ally and advocate Paul Egertson, the *Creating Change* conference, and a sobering article about Uganda. ▼

God’s Work, Our Hands: Bullying and Sexual Identity

By Chris Wogaman

Minneapolis was recently chosen by *The Advocate* magazine as the “gayest city” in the nation. It specifically noted the work done by the ELCA to advance justice for LGBTQ people. There are dozens of organizations here that support and represent every conceivable aspect of the wonderfully diverse LGBTQ community. I myself sing with the 145-member Twin Cities Gay Men’s Chorus, one of many LGBTQ musical organizations in the Twin Cities. To say the Twin Cities are a gay mecca is an understatement.

Yet, on a sunny Saturday last September, I walked the streets of the Uptown neighborhood in Minneapolis with tears streaming down my face. The day before, I had learned of the death by suicide last July of a 15-year old gay person. He had lived in a town merely a 20-minute drive northwest of where I was at that moment.

As I walked down the sidewalks of my safe neighborhood, I wondered how he could have lost hope when he lived so near one of the most supportive urban centers in the country. I later learned that he had a supportive family, but that his family had trouble finding a church in their area that welcomed them with an openly gay son. No Reconciling in Christ churches were in their community, although later they learned of one UCC congregation in the local area that publicly welcomed LGBTQ people and their families into a safe space of worship.

Indeed, many churches in that area north of

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The Editor

DALE TRUSCOTT



Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. —MATTHEW 5:9–10, NRSV

I was bullied when I was a scrawny little kid. I was a straight “A” student, not into sports, quiet, the perfect target for the aggressive boys. I had to walk to

elementary school and so was fair game to and from. I devised my ways of finding different routes and hiding behind certain bushes until the coast was clear.

I have been recently reunited with a small group of high school friends who found me via the internet. It has been fun to get together for dinner or coffee and reminisce about those days in the 60s. We were the nerds, the geeks. We were the backstage crew at the high

developmental. We are a society full of anxieties that have to do with superiority, power, wealth and advantage.

As I write this, we are in the midst of the news reports about the apparent melt-down of a nuclear reactor in Japan resulting from the devastating 9.0 earthquake and subsequent tsunami. Journalists are amazed at the stoic Japanese attitude called “*gaman*.” There has been little or no looting. People are

We come to the issue of **bullying** from the perspective of a **minority** that has taken the brunt for **centuries**

school shows, the public-address system techies. At our last gathering it was remarked by those who have gone to the class reunions (I have not!) that the “popular” set, the “bullies,” still sit together at those events over 40 years later. I believe I was never forgiven for winning the class presidency by the fluke of dividing the vote between two popular guys running against me – a revenge of the nerds for sure.

Jeremy Myers, in his article in this issue of *Concord*, points out that we live in a culture that condones bullying. Our culture has a violent, proud, aggressive streak in it that is historical and

quietly lining up for food and fuel without outbursts of aggressive behavior. Workers in the nuclear plant are, perhaps, sacrificing their lives to try to prevent disaster. Reporters cannot help but compare that to the scenes of looting in other natural or manmade large disasters or to the violent episodes at the time of the gasoline shortages in the 70s.

We in Lutherans Concerned/North America come to the issue of bullying from the perspective of a minority that has taken the brunt of bullying and related attitudes for centuries, especially in Western religious society (Judaism,

Christianity and Islam). My own anecdotal understanding of this phenomenon is that it seems to stem largely from sexual insecurity of men and women and spreads from there throughout the culture. We can find traces of it in patriarchal religion, in the chivalry codes of the Medieval times, in the aggressive colonization of the world, in some aspects of the entrepreneurial spirit. There just seems to be a certain kind of person who reacts aggressively to a gay man, a lesbian woman or a bisexual or transgender person. The result is some form of lashing out against a perceived enemy or threat that must be eliminated or, at least, put down. And then, folks like this go looking for justification for their fear and violence and find it in scripture or elsewhere.

Whether bullying is against those of us of a sexual minority or against others, the problem lies, I believe, in the “bullyer” more than the “bullyee.” And the key to the problem seems to lie in attitudinal features of our society. This makes bullying a difficult problem to solve because it calls for a change in societal behavior. In this respect, it is similar to racism, which is also a societal condition developed over a long time and difficult to root out of societal norms.

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount was about shifting religious and societal norms of first century Judea. His Beatitudes were a re-write of the Ten Commandments so that what a person does do and what motivates a person’s behavior and attitudes becomes more important than simply refraining from some action or finding an easy way around it. In the two verses I selected for this editorial, Jesus calls the peacemakers blessed. Peace is not the absence of violence in Middle Eastern languages. When one greets another with “Peace be with you,” as is done in Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic,

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Co-Chair

LEN WEISER



Board of Directors Update

The 2010–2012 Board of Directors, elected at the Biennial Assembly this past summer in Minneapolis, has been very busy.

In October, the board held its regularly scheduled fall meeting in Orlando so that board members could participate in the *Believe Out Loud* conference. At that board meeting, we met with a consultant who is helping move the LC/NA board toward becoming a “policy governance” board of directors. (With a policy governance model, the job of the board is to establish the guiding principles and

The board will soon be meeting in April for our spring meeting. We will continue to look at our process for moving from a day-to-day operations board toward a policy governance board and what it means to operate in this hybrid form.

We will also be discussing how we will fill two vacancies on the board. In January 2011, Adam Bost (director of communications) resigned. Adam joined the board in July 2010 and assumed communication duties for the organization, working on a communications plan with a consultant. In March 2011, Rose Beeson (co-chair) also resigned. Rose joined the board in July 2008 as secretary and was elected as co-chair in 2010. Prior to serving on the board, Rose spent many hours at the grassroots level cultivating relationships as a regional coordinator. We are grateful for the service that Rose and Adam gave to LC/NA. We are also very thankful that Phil Soucy (former director of communications) has volunteered to assist with communication duties until we meet in April to decide on next steps.

If you have any questions for the board of directors, please feel to email me at any time.

We have begun to **develop policies** that will help **guide the board** with how it operates.

policies for the organization, to delegate responsibility and authority to those who are responsible for enacting the principles and policies, to monitor compliance with those guiding principles and policies, and to ensure that staff and board alike are held accountable for their performance.) Since that October meeting, we have begun to develop policies that will help guide the board with how it operates. In addition, a personnel committee has been formed and has held an initial meeting focusing on norms and best practices.

Sincerely,
Len Weiser
Board Co-Chair
LenW@lcna.org

From the Editor

continued from page 2

the “shalom” or “salaam” is a profound, largely untranslatable word involving a complete sense of well-being. It implies a place to live, room for one’s flocks to pasture, ample food and water, and support of neighbors. Perhaps a way to say it would be “May you be truly fulfilled.” So our attitudes toward those who are different from us, who frighten us in any way, who disconcert us should be to wish them well, to do them well, to discipline ourselves to enable wellness for them. This is so much more than just refraining from doing violence to them.

And then, I chose to quote the next verse, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.” It might be a stretch to claim that every gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender person who is bullied is being persecuted for righteousness sake. We are not by definition any more righteous than the next person. But for an LGBT person to be persecuted because she or he is LGB or T makes that aspect of the person righteousness. We believe that sexual orientation is a gift of God, an aspect of our createdness that is normal and good. Therefore, to be persecuted for it brings in the aspect of righteousness, the rightness of our own personhood being transgressed, being stepped on.

Note that the reward Jesus gives in the Beatitudes is always the same, just spoken in different metaphor. Children of God, Kingdom of Heaven, comfort, fulfillment, seeing God – all ways of expressing that profound oneness of persons with each other and with their God, with the present and with eternity.

This issue of *Concord* is about a profound and large topic. I hope that the articles you read here will encourage study, discussion and plans of action in your communities of faith and in your secular communities. Persecution is against the will of God. It does not lead to blessedness. This is reason enough for us Christians to search for ways to change it. ▼

Deputy Director

ROSS MURRAY



Lately, I've been invited to visit congregational youth groups. Often, I am asked to share about my life growing up, coming out as a gay man, and the impact that had on my faith. Through these visits, I have come to realize my stories about growing up in the great north woods of Minnesota, going to a tiny high school, and coming out as a college student several years ago don't have a lot of relevance to the youth I'm visiting. Typically, the youth I visit attend large urban or suburban schools with a completely different social dynamic than my tiny class of 30. Young people are also coming out at a younger age today than I did. I've found that it's a better use of my time to *listen* to what the reality is for LGBT youth in their schools today, rather than just tell my story.

The youth I talk with tell stories about knowing openly LGBT students, some who are bullied and harassed and some who are out and proud. Many of their stories start with "This one gay kid at my school..." From there, they describe physical bullying, verbal abuse, and even the use of social media to isolate and harass. Some youth describe trying to avoid the attention of the bullies, who will go after *anyone* who is perceived to be different: for being too smart or not smart enough, for having a body type that doesn't fit preconceived notions of what's

"good," or for not conforming to strict gender roles.

Since I represent Lutherans Concerned/North America, I want to share with these youth the exciting developments that LC/NA and the overall LGBT movement has been able to accomplish. I want them to know that congregations who call pastors in same-gender relationships won't be disciplined. I want them to know that congregations are free to bless the commitment made between all couples. I want to talk about the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and the freedom to serve one's country.

But in many cases, I find I can't. I've come to realize that for all the gains we had made in our church

and society, we still haven't made it easy for young people to be who they are without judgment, condemnation, or active aggression from their peers. The gains we celebrate mean nothing if youth cannot imagine making it through the 9th grade unscathed. It is a sad reality that I've had to face, and that we all have to face. We still have a long way to go to make people feel safe.

The problem of bullying has given rise to several efforts to increase awareness and build hope. One that has been particularly inspiring is the "It Gets Better" project, created by Dan Savage in order to affirm youth in their sexual orientation and gender identity. It began as LGBT adults trying to offer some hope for a life beyond the torment that young LGBT people experience in high school. Some would share their own experiences of being bullied. The main message was "You can get through this; it will get better." Eventually, the project caught on, with celebrities creating videos. Actors, musicians, and politicians (including President Obama), made videos. Even ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson made a video. So has Bruce Burnside, Bishop of South Central Wisconsin of the ELCA.

Popular singers have also addressed teenage bullying, suicide, and the loneliness people feel in high school. Several recent songs highlight the story of those who are bullied, those with different bodies, and social outcasts. The messages in these songs are clear: "Don't you ever feel like you're less than perfect." "Ignite the light, and let it shine."

When I listen to these songs, or hear the stories that are told on the "It Gets Better" project, I am reminded of the words that Jesus spoke in his sermon on the mount. "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand and it gives light to the whole house" (MATT. 5:14-15 NRSV).

Jesus is speaking to these youth and to you and to me in his sermon. There is nothing wrong with these youth, and there is nothing wrong with us. We are the people God created us to be, and we are also called to live out our lives with integrity and authenticity. Jesus gives us complete affirmation. I believe that our world distorts that affirmation, and a part of our job as Christians is to remind people of the worth they have as children of God.

This year, Lutherans Concerned/North America is focusing on bullying and the role of the church in bullying prevention. There are great resources available for schools, but it has come time for the church to be part of the solution. We want our whole church to talk about it, including individuals, congregations, synods, and even our national denominational structures. We call on our Reconciling In Christ congregations to lead a response to bullying. Some are already doing it, and we are developing a resource to help all congregations discuss how to best address bullying. The core of what Lutherans Concerned is doing with RIC is working to create a

RIC Settings

Added to the Roster since last issue

Atonement Lutheran Church, Newport, Oregon
Berwyn United/First Lutheran Church, Berwyn, Illinois
Bethany Lutheran Church, Elkader, Iowa
First Lutheran Church, St. Paul, Minnesota
Grace Lutheran Church, Thiensville, Wisconsin
Grace Lutheran Church, Wyndmoor, Pennsylvania
Hope Lutheran Church, Nanaimo British Columbia
Lord of Mercy Lutheran Church, Sparks, Nevada
Luther House Campus Ministry, Corvallis, Oregon
Redeemer-St. John's Lutheran Church, Brooklyn, New York
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Albany, New York
St. Stephen Lutheran Church, Marlborough, Massachusetts

For the complete list of RIC congregations, synods, and organizations, go to our website at www.lcna.org

cultural climate where such violence is less possible.

Additionally, the Goodsoil Legislative Team is circulating a template memorial that calls the ELCA to address the prevention of bullying, harassment, and other forms of violence. (*See the article on the 2011 assembly season on page 10 of this issue.*) Bullying and its consequences are too important to be ignored by our church.

It is important to remember that bullying is not simply an issue of sexual orientation. Bullying is about difference, real or perceived. Youth with disabilities are the most bullied population; LGBT is second. Gender non-conforming youth are often targeted. In fact, 78% of transgender or gender non-conforming people have reported harassment in K–12 education. In order to stop bullying, RIC congregations are going to have to work across identities of race, weight, sex, gender identity, sexual

orientation, ability and class. This is about coalition building for a greater good. We may not agree on everything, but we do care for the safety and well-being of our young people.

Jesus continues, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (MATT. 5:16 NRSV).

Our gains mean nothing if youth cannot imagine making it through the 9th grade *unscathed*.

When Jesus calls us to let our light shine before others, he is calling us to live into the fullness of our creation. We shine our light when we use the gifts and skills that God has given us in this world: when we confront bullying behaviors, when we comfort the afflicted, when we promote justice, and when we stand with the oppressed. All of these things, and so much

more, are the ways in which our light shines before others. When people see that, it points beyond just us or our congregations to the God who endowed us with our gifts and skills for ministry.

God created us and declared us good. Jesus preached on the mountain and named us the light of the world. When Jesus calls us to let our light shine before others, it's a

call to live fully into God's creation. That message can get lost in our world. Bullies can make you feel small and insignificant. But God calls you the light of the world, and then shows you off to the rest of the world. And you shine. And people see that, and give glory to God. ▼

“In Honor of...”

In Honor of...

Honored by...

Rev. Kirk Anderson & Sheri Brown	In honor of the witness and ministry of Rev. Kirk Anderson & Sheri Brown	Allen & Marie Harper
Adam Bost	In honor of Adam Bost, a great son and friend	Sharon & John Bost
Sheri Brown	To God's Spirit moving within Sheri Brown	Rev. Kirk E. Anderson
Joe Brown	In memory of Joe Brown	Mike Crandall
Emily Eastwood	In honor of Emily Eastwood and the faithful staff of LC/NA	Cheryl A. Persigehl
Emily Eastwood	In honour of Emily Eastwood, a dear friend, for her untiring and inspiring leadership, and also in memory of her brother Robert, who died on Oct. 25, and of my sister Lydia (Remus) Marten, a passionate advocate for social justice who died Oct. 17 in her hometown Columbus, Montana	Harold Remus & Alice Croft
Robert Matthew Eastwood	In memory of Robert Matthew Eastwood	Robert & Martha Eastwood, Deanna Eichler & Leslee Froehlich; Lisa Mueller & Laurie Hamre; Martha L. Scheel; Deborah Wilson
Roberto Flores	In honor of Father Roberto Flores	Kenneth E. Rozek
Daniel Fujimoto	In memory of Daniel Fujimoto	Deanna, Bennie, Kevin, and Kathie Badgett
Lynn Lokensgard Hanson	In memory of Lynn Lokensgard Hanson	Rev. Glenn & Audrey Anderson
James Curtis Hill	In memory of my brother, James C. Hill, Sr. of Topsham, Maine	Rev. Anita Hill
James Curtis Hill	In memory of James Curtis Hill	Jan Bailey & Emily Eastwood
Robert Joppa	In honor of Robert Joppa's MBA graduation	Marti Scheel
Marie Kent	In memory of Marie Kent, one of the founders of Lutherans Concerned	Jean Huffey Rev. Barbara Lundblad & Nicole Johnson
LGBTQI teens	For all LGBTQI teens and young people that they might know that God is a God of love...	John Sunderman
Jim Lokken	In memory of The Rev. Jim Lokken	Mary Farmer
Mary Peterson & Mary Beth Weaver	In honor of the marriage of Mary Peterson & Mary Beth Weaver	Karen & Paul Jolly
Donna Simon	In honor of Donna Simon!	Pamela Sieving
Bob Snook & John Nelson	In memory of Bob Snook and in honor of John Nelson	Richard Israel
Dale Truscott and Kin Xuxa	In recognition of the work of Dale Truscott and Kin Xuxa	The Jennifer M. Lee and Jeffrey S. Chapski Family Fund of the Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund
Jerry & Val Vagts	In honor of Jerry & Val Vagts	Shirley Gangstad
Jay Wiesner and Steve Keiser	In honor of Pastors Jay Wiesner and Steve Keiser's reception onto the ELCA Clergy roster—and in THANKS for this great opportunity to pick Pastor Chris's pocket!!!	Martha L. Scheel
	In honor of the ELCA community in Idaho Falls, Idaho	Wayne & Cherie Stevens
	In honor of the work of friends Sheri and Kirk	John Jorde

R I C C O R N E R

Reformation Lutheran Church: Making a Difference

By **Carol Dunn**

Perhaps one of the biggest questions a congregation might ask when considering RIC is “What difference will it make?” Reformation Lutheran in Columbia, South Carolina, held an exciting weekend program with that topic, coinciding with the January 30 Welcoming Sunday, a celebration of welcoming recognized by denominations throughout North America. Events included a sanctuary showing of the movie *For the Bible Tells Me So* to about 75 people, followed by worship that included the participation of Bishop Emeritus Herbert

*It seemed **God’s Spirit** put wings to our plans.*

Chilstrom, LC/NA’s deputy director Ross Murray, and members of the congregation and community. The weekend also provided the setting for reorganization of the South Carolina chapter of Lutherans Concerned. Finally, on Sunday, Bishop Chilstrom preached at worship, focusing on the Micah 6 text, which is the congregation’s vision statement

Clearly, Reformation Lutheran is a congregation that recognizes the importance of communicating to the community how they welcome and support LGBT people.

Yet how did Reformation get to this point?

They got there by studying, listening, learning, discussing—and then by listening and discussing

some more. Throughout a four-year process of transformation, members of Reformation considered RIC status. The result of this careful sequence was a near unanimous vote, the doubling of average attendance over a two-year period, and a drop in average age of members from about 75 to about 50. As one member said, “It seemed God’s Spirit put wings to our plans, taking them to heights and depths we never considered.”

Defying stereotypes about older members as unable or unwilling to accept RIC, this congregation, under the leadership of Pastor Bill Eiwen (and following the interim leadership of Pr. Jim Nichols), is now a thriving blend of the “senior members” who were part of the study and decision and mostly younger newer members (both LGBT and straight) who have heard the call that Reformation actively welcomes all people. During their study, Reformation members heard from a young woman whose orientation led to her church’s rejection of her and her family, and a counselor whose work focuses on the LGBT community. Putting a face on the suffering caused by a failure of Gospel love is far more effective in moving hearts and minds than is quoting numbers or abstract theories.

Some who were skeptical about RIC status underwent a change as they studied. For example, longtime member Harold Crout, 90, was originally opposed. He now says, simply, “They are nice people. Like the rest of us, they are children of God.”

The language Pr. Eiwen uses speaks not of “spouses” but of “partners,” as he preaches hospitality and full inclusion.

The welcome at Reformation is expressed in words, but also in far more than words. Led by the Outreach Committee, the congregation and pastor marched in Pride parades, recognized Welcoming Sunday, and led in the city with a fundraising event for HIV/AIDS research. Reformation has members serving on the Board of the Business Guild. There is no desire to be a “gay church,” but rather, to be a church offering radical hospitality to all, including LGBT people.

Six days after the November 16, 2008, vote to become RIC, the congregation’s outreach was highlighted in a newspaper article about Reformation’s new ministry of intentional welcome. In January of 2009, one hundred fifty visitors came to the first Welcoming Sunday. Most of those who have since joined have done so because they value how the RIC welcome enhances the congregation’s overall mission. Reformation continues to provide a vibrant ministry with a lot of involvement by new people as well as longer-term members as they do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

Dot Jeffcoat, one of the leaders in the move to study becoming RIC, summarized the impact of the ministry, saying “We are on a journey for which there is no turning back and no one seems to even give that a second thought.” ▼

Reformation Lutheran (Columbia, SC) hosts a “covered dish lunch” on Welcome Sunday.



R I C N E W S

News from Region 1

Exciting things are happening in the “Wild, Wild West.” (Northwest, that is.)

In Region 1 of the ELCA, we kicked off our fall and winter season with the Building an Inclusive Church Training in Spokane, Washington, in September. Twenty people from five synods and 13 congregations attended, including the Assistant to the Bishop from the Eastern Washington/Idaho Synod. This excellent training inspired a wonderful exchange of ideas, which led to the formation of new RIC Teams in congregations in the Southwest Washington and Eastern Washington/Idaho synods.

Shekinah Worship Community (which became RIC in September, 2010) is doing wonderful community outreach in Lewiston, Idaho. Shekinah is partnering with Trinity Lutheran Church, Pullman, Washington, and Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Moscow, Idaho, to develop social justice workshops for their area.

The Palouse Chapter of Lutherans Concerned, located in the Moscow, Idaho, area, partnered with local United Church of Christ churches to participate for the first time in the Moscow Gay Pride Event in August, sponsoring a table entitled “Welcoming Churches.” Many people expressed appreciation for their public support for LGBT people. Two results have been greater student involvement and new members joining local RIC congregations.

As is our tradition in Region I, congregations received an official welcome into the RIC program with the presentation of RIC certificates by the Regional Coordinators. Recently, it was **Augustana Lutheran Church**, Portland, Oregon, and **Atonement Lutheran Church**, Newport, Oregon. Bishop Dave Brauer-Rieke of the

Oregon Synod brought the message to his former church in Newport. He stated:

I thank you for going through the RIC process, and being willing to wrestle with the inherent prejudice and marginalization that our culture forces upon gay and lesbian people. I thank you for saying clearly that Atonement Lutheran no longer wishes to participate passively in prejudice, but rather that, in care for your gay and lesbian brothers and sisters, you want to understand. (Full text found at <http://lutheransconcerned.blogspot.com/2011/01/celebrating-welcome-at-atonement.html>)

Partnered visitors sent the following statement of appreciation after the worship service:

Tears streamed down our faces for most of the service. It was another step toward our personal healing from years of rejection by the church. To some people this may seem like no big deal—of course we welcome everyone! But oh, it is indeed a big deal. You are actively living the message of Christ; when he said love one another, he meant everyone.

We celebrate with **Mt. Carmel Lutheran Church**, Portland, Oregon, for living out the inclusive ministry of RIC by calling an openly partnered gay pastor. Pastor Glenn Chase and his partner Greg Hamilton were warmly received by the congregation at Pastor Chases’ installation ceremony on January 16. His installation was a first for the Oregon Synod and Region 1.

In Northwest Washington, **Open Door Ministries** (ODM) and its director, Pastor Rick Pribernow, actively support the Reconciling in Christ outreach. The Region 1 Coordinators and the LC/NA board



Pastor Rick Pribernow (Director of ODM), Karen Jolly (LCNA Board Secretary), Mary Lauver and Paul Jolly (Region 1 Co-coordinators) at ODM auction.

secretary celebrated with ODM at their annual auction in November to show their appreciation for ODM’s work in the RIC process. Also, Harmony, a group from Trinity Lutheran Church in Lynnwood, Washington, is actively working beyond their church walls to support LGBT people and their families and friends. It has become a Lutheran PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) support group in the northern Seattle area.

The RIC weekend was amply celebrated in Region I. The **Portland Metro Chapter** invited Pastor Megan Rohrer for the weekend, which included three events in Vancouver, Washington, and Portland, Oregon. In addition, Emmaus Worshipping Community in Idaho Falls, Idaho, a new community arising from a local church leaving the ELCA, hosted its first RIC service to great success.

Yes, a time of excitement, celebration and rejoicing, and at the same time, a time for reflection on the work still to be done to make Lutheran churches in Region I fully welcoming for all.

—Mary Lauver and Paul Jolly,
Region 1 Co-Coordiators

Upcoming Building an Inclusive Church Training Session

May 13–15, 2011

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Minneapolis

See www.welcomingresources.org/communityorg.htm for more information on upcoming trainings. If you would like to host a training in your area, please contact Ross Murray at 651-665-0861 or rossm@lcna.org.

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God's Work, Our Hands

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town preach against the “homosexual lifestyle.” This includes two Exodus-affiliated ex-gay megachurches. Their voice carries far beyond the walls of their churches, into the homes, businesses, and schools of these communities.

While we cannot say for sure what actually *caused* this young person to take his life, and cannot tie it definitively to Exodus or unwelcoming churches, bullying or school policies, we are reminded that people of faith must work doubly-hard to counter the feelings of isolation, exclusion, rejection, depression, and anxiety that we know can contribute to suicidal behavior. Each congregation that extends its hands in welcome to LGBTQ people is doing God's Work double-time: both for their own communities of welcome, as well as for those communities that do not welcome. Yet more is needed.

This young person was also a baptized Lutheran. The words of the ELCA's motto, “God's Work; Our Hands,” blazes into my imagination around this situation. I think of those hands that said over him “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” I think of the hands that served him communion, that fed him, that held his hand as he walked forward to hear the message just for children. I think of the sign of the cross that his own hands made. I think of the work of his hands in helping to build houses with his family and others for Habitat for Humanity.

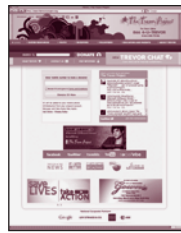
By the same token, I think of the hands

that did not do God's work, hands that brought him harm. And I thought of my own hands, powerless at that point to help another life lost to the pain that we visit upon each other as a normal and routine part of our lives.

...

From that morning in September, I was drawn inexorably to do something, to say something, to help give people hope in an area that had few signs of hope for certain people. Not long after my tearful walk in Uptown, I was asked to help gather persons of faith to stand in solidarity at a press

In case you might know someone who needs help, that help is available for those who might be struggling. The **Trevor Project** has a helpline for young people who feel despair: **866-4-U-TREVOR** (866-488-7386), and the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** is available for people of all ages: **1-800-273-TALK** (8255).



conference held at the Anoka-Hennepin School District offices. This press conference raised awareness of the need for greater support for the District's sexual minority students.

At that press conference, 20–25 faith leaders stood up as a visible sign that people of faith care about the lives of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, young and old. We included several local Lutheran pastors, a retired Lutheran bishop, and leaders of other Christian denominations, Unitarians, and Jewish leaders of faith.

The need for an RIC church in this area still exists, as it does in many areas of the country not connected to supportive centers. I am in the process of continuing conversation with the Minneapolis Area Synod on possibly starting a Reconciling in Christ community or congregation in the communities of the Anoka-Hennepin School District, this area north of the Twin Cities. This is a long-range process that I hope I or someone else will be able to see to fruition.

Even though conversations around this possible church start are helpful, there's more work to do, as demonstrated by the ongoing suffering of young people in schools throughout our nation. Much of this suffering is encouraged by quasi-religious messages from communities of worship. God's supposed will is presented as a pleasing varnish over spiritually violent messages against those whom some Christians consider beyond the reach of God's mercy and love. But God must never be used to hurt.

The culture of bullying in our schools starts in the homes and churches of people who harass others. Sometimes these people have been bullied themselves until they start doing the same to others. This violence must be confronted in every place with the loudest, most peaceful, and graceful love that our reconciling hearts can give, through the example of the one whose love for us is all-in-all.

You, I, and each of our family members in Christ in welcoming churches have it in us to share with others the love and welcome of God. The God that we know would never wish destruction on God's children wills

Stories of Pain, Courage

The following are stories of how shunning, bullying, harassment, and related violence have affected members of the community—and how some communities have responded.

Kimberley Denis

Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

My best friend in high school was a young man named Howie. (I've changed his name to protect his family and identity.) Howie was energetic, community-minded, and made me laugh so hard I cried. He loved playing in the high school band, hated selling his 4-H cow every year, but loved that the money he earned from the cow's sale could buy him some really great clothes for school the next year and pay for whatever 4-H camp he wanted to attend that summer. He ran on his own schedule (which we referred to as “Howie Standard Time”) and was incredibly concerned about the state of his hair and hair products. He loved public speaking and he and I were always in

competition for the top place when we competed against each other. When his brother had to go in for surgery, Howie and I dressed up as clowns and visited the hospital, attempting to make balloon animals for the kids—without much success but with great hilarity. Howie was the kind of friend that made you think about the world and find ways not to only love it, but make it better.

After high school, Howie moved away from home and small-town life to the big city. It was during that year that he decided to start coming out to his friends and eventually his family. The first friend he called told him that she felt it was wrong and a sin against God but that she still loved him and would try to help him if he asked her for help. The next three friends just said, “yeah... and?” and went on with life with a much relieved Howie and a stronger friendship. He never told me - he didn't have to, I already knew and he understood that. At least, that's what he wrote in his suicide note.

When he told his family, his father disowned him. Howie was banned from the home,

financial support for school was withdrawn, and he was told he was never allowed to set foot anywhere near his mother, brother, dog, or home again. Howie was devastated. He left, went back to the city, and decided that he couldn't live without his family. He tried to hang himself, was rescued, and the day after he came home from the hospital, he tried once again, this time succeeding (if such a thing can be termed a success).

His family was devastated, as were all of his friends. The church where the funeral was held had to open the church hall and set up screens and live video projection to handle the overflow of people that wouldn't fit in the sanctuary. Howie's eulogy was the first one I ever had to deliver and one, that with a little more understanding and a society more willing to understand the person and accept the orientation, I likely wouldn't have had to give.

As I've achieved various successes and milestones since Howie's death, I've often thought of him and the life he might have lived. I miss him, there's no doubt. I'm often envious

everlasting blessing. We can be the ones who say "I care about you, and will love you no matter what. And I know that God loves you very much."

...

I have a proposal for how you can help:

- Find out what your local School District's policies are on matters around expression and protection of students who are LGBTQ-particularly, whether those policies empower or help to silence students on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, and whether sexual orientation is specifically included in anti-bullying policies.
- Talk to your School Board members, and consider a run for this position if your local Board needs more supportive voices.
- Go to the www.goodsoil.org website and learn about how you can take part in passing anti-bullying legislation in your synod.



positive change for many. Through bringing to light and giving voice to those who suffer in silence, and through supporting those who can stand proudly to sing the song God has given them to sing, your heart for the Gospel will help to build the safe home of reconciliation for all God's children.

Perfect reconciliation in Christ is this: When we are united beyond being tormentors and tormented, beyond the need for forgiveness, beyond being victims or victimizers, when the truth of wrongdoing is told, acknowledged, and care replaces animosity.

God's will is done through the means of grace given in baptism and communion as much as the work that we can do through our hands and our voices. But our hands and our voices are crucial to getting out God's message of everlasting love and grace for all. Make your hands the hands that show a unique and unmistakable sign of

Make *your hands* the hands that *show* a sign of *God's love and grace* to those who need it most.

- Contribute your stories to Tim Fisher, Office Administrator/Legislative Assistant at Lutheran Concerned/North America at communications@lcna.org, about what you are doing, what you are seeing and hearing, what you've gone through, and what you wish for, for possible wider sharing and inspiration for others.
- Find out as well where there might be need for a welcoming message of God's love in your community; it may not yet be out there for others to hear.
- Write an editorial on an issue of anti-gay bullying and harassment from your experience as a welcoming Christian.
- Pool your resources and put this message up on a billboard: "God loves you whatever your sexual orientation or gender identity." Think of how many times you've heard the opposite message preached by churches, and work hard to get your faith message out. Our voices together can and will bring

God's love and grace to those who need it most. ▼

Chris Wogaman is an approved candidate for ordination in the ELCA, and is open to first call throughout the church while discerning the need for welcoming mission starts in Minnesota and elsewhere. He may be contacted at chris.wogaman@gmail.com.

of people that still talk to friends from high school, people who have someone close to them who has known them for what feels like forever. Howie left a hole in the community and my world that no one else has been able to fill and no one else should have to.

Dave Ehlers

Amityville, New York

A year ago, a dear friend of mine from church passed away. I miss her dearly, and I fondly look back at our deep bond. My friend, lived many years of her life as an outcast-not because she was a lesbian, but because she was drastically overweight. Because she was different, she knew firsthand what it was like to be hated, talked about and teased because of her weight. Interestingly, that was our "bond." We bonded together, because I recall what it was like to grow up experiencing hatred because I was gay (even before I knew myself that I was gay).

Yes, I know firsthand how mean kids can be to each other.

What I will share with those going through tough times right now is to hang in there and things will get so much better. I learned great skills from my ordeal. I learned compassion, I learned how to listen to others, I learned how to be strong, I learned how to be my own person, and I learned how to love my neighbor. What I am most proud of, through it all, is that I learned to love God even more. I thank him every day for the blessings he has given me in my life.

It's amazing how times have changed. While it's still tough out there, especially for today's youth, we all need to remember the great strides being made in society and in our church. I rejoice in knowing how wonderful it was to be a voting member at the last churchwide assembly in Minneapolis. One of the measures for inclusion past by one vote, so remember that you can make a difference now and in the future.

Liz McKay

Inverness, Illinois

In February, Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Arlington Heights, Illinois, hosted a five-week program called "Bullying, Hazing, & Internet Shenanigans: Ways to Help Keep Kids Safe" as part of its education hour. The congregation invited the community to participate. The series included a primer on popular social networking sites and how they may be used or abused, a presentation on "cyber-bullying" and how to improve internet safety, and a report on what local schools are doing to keep kids safe.

Burke Wallace

Rancho Cordova, California

It was 2008, in the height of the debate over Proposition 8, California's ballot initiative to take away the right of gay marriage by outlawing it in the California constitution. I held my sign reading "Hi, I'm your neighbor, please don't take away my right to get married" and I crossed the street into the battle zone. I had never seen

Synodical and Churchwide Assemblies:

Preserve the **Progress Made**

The changes in teaching and policy in the ELCA came as a result of an enormous amount of work on the part of many faithful witnesses, some of whom passed on long before their efforts came to full fruition. During this season of assemblies, which begins in April in the Alaska Synod and culminates in the 2011 Churchwide Assembly (CWA) in Orlando (August 15–19), the hard-won progress made toward fully including LGBT people and their families will be challenged. Last year, memorials calling for the churchwide assembly to rescind the changes were passed by a handful of synod assemblies, and we can expect at least a few

*The **need** for **volunteers** to gracefully engage with voting members is as **crucial** as ever. We need to be present in good **number**.*

more attempts this year. It remains extremely important to remain vigilant and work hard to defeat these memorials wherever they may come to the floor. *If you hear of any such memorials coming to your synod, please contact the LC/NA office immediately.*

While we are confident in the hope that the ELCA will continue to follow the leads of the Holy Spirit, we know that, legislatively speaking, little is guaranteed. What we know for certain is that a call to rescind the ministry policies and social statement will come to the floor in one form or another. We must

be ready to preserve the progress we have seen with as much vigor as possible. Approximately sixty percent of voting members to CWA will be new—i.e. never having served before at a churchwide assembly. This means the need for our volunteers to gracefully engage with voting members is as crucial as ever. We need to be present in good number so that we may provide prayerful, prophetic witness once again.

Anti-bullying Legislation

The recent wave of media reports of bullying directed at LGBT people, especially youth, has presented LC/NA with an important, albeit tragic, opportunity. Because it is not enough to simply say it will get better—as helpful as that may be in some cases—Goodsoil is working to make it better. To that end, the Goodsoil Legislative Team has developed template memorials calling for the ELCA to make a strong, concrete commitment against bullying. This is a great chance to expand and deepen our mutual work for reconciliation.

The Goodsoil legislation, called “A Memorial Calling the Church to Speak and Act to Prevent Bullying, Harassment and Related Violence,” provides an unprecedented opportunity to collaborate with other denominational, ecumenical, and secular organizations to identify and develop educational resources on anti-bullying for use in congregational and synodical settings. Already, Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson, and three ELCA synod bishops (David Brauer-Rieke of Oregon, Michael Rinehart of Texas–Louisiana Gulf Coast, and Bruce Burnside of South Central Wisconsin) have taken strong, public stances against bullying. Secular partners such as the Pacific Violence Prevention Institute, the Trevor Project, and the “It Gets Better” Campaign have provided much needed support and momentum.

The Goodsoil memorial will also broaden the discussion of anti-bullying beyond sexual orientation

such a site. Hundreds of people from both sides of the debate crammed each street corner of the busy intersection. I should have been wary when even crossing the street I received dirty looks and was “bumped” into several times by Prop 8 supporters. I decided to stand away from the masses. Some passersby honked and waved. Others flipped me off or cursed out their car windows. I still don’t quite understand how anyone can hate someone so much just for taking a stand on an issue, but, if you saw their eyes, you knew the hatred within. Early in the afternoon, an inebriated Prop 8 supporter came up behind me and ripped the umbrella from my hand, broke it, and shoved me into oncoming traffic. By the time I talked to a police officer, the drunk man had harassed other supporters of same-sex marriage and the police had to hog tie him to get him in the squad car.

Here I was, at 27, and finally starting to accept myself and fully come-out after spending 7 years in ex-gay ministries learning how to repress a part of me that I thought God didn’t want me to have. For the first time I was

beginning to identify with other LGBT people rather than shunning them because they were sinful. And while accepting myself as gay was still new to me in 2008, the experience on that street corner quickly made me understand what it feels like to be a member of a minority group.

I was devastated a month later when Proposition 8 passed and along with it my hopes of being legally married. Yet strangely, the passing of Prop 8 and the hatred I and others experienced made me feel more a part of the LGBT community than ever before. But that’s not the end of the story, and I guess it’s an interesting spiritual analogy that with Christ -- the story never really ends. We must always go on fighting for what is right and when our time is done, the next generation will carry the mantle of equality, justice and love in the name of Christ. Perhaps that is why, on November 5th, the day after the election, when an impromptu candle light vigil was called and thousands of people from many ages, religions, sexualities, and ethnicities surrounded the capital building

in silence, I felt that Christ was already beginning the healing.

Carol Baker & John Baker

Newport, Oregon

Atonement Lutheran Church, on the beautiful Oregon Coast, hosted a community showing of the movie *Out in the Silence* in early November of 2010. The movie producers, present at the showing, created the film to tell a specific story about the bullying of a gay youth in small-town Oil City, Pennsylvania, and the reaction of the townspeople to the issue. Atonement’s fellowship hall was packed with close to 150 concerned people, many more than expected. Gay and straight, youth and seniors, church and unchurched, all joined together to watch the movie and afterwards engage in a lively discussion about the issue of LGBT bullying. The large number of people attending this movie, some of whom were LGBT people who haven’t been in a church building for many years due to previous negative experiences with the church,

and gender identity to include other issues of “difference,” such as race, economic status, age, and ability.

We must not be satisfied simply with providing solace. Goodsoil and LC/NA are committed to effecting the systemic changes required to put an end to the age-old cycle of harassment of those considered “different” in churches and schools across North America. To do this, we need your help. *Please visit www.goodsoil.org now for information on how you can participate in synod assembly activity—even if you are not a voting member for your synod.*

ELCA Restructuring

The organizational structure of the ELCA is one of the means by which the mission and vision of the church are incarnated in the world. The 2011 Churchwide Assembly will be considering a number of changes to the organizational structure of the ELCA, including 1) a switch from a two- to a three-year cycle for churchwide assemblies, 2) the optional addition of up to twelve at-large seats on the national Church Council, 3) the deletion of “program committees” attached to churchwide units, and 4) the addition of the chair of the Conference of Bishops as a voting member of the Church Council. These proposals are sure to be a source of much floor discussion—and perhaps a little controversy—and will shape the future of our denomination in complex and important ways.

2011 ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Orlando

From Monday, August 15 through Friday, August 19, 2011, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly returns to the Marriott World Center Resort in Orlando, Florida, site of the 2005 assembly. Goodsoil intends to have a presence throughout the assembly. From graceful engagement with voting members to a large, public worship service, Goodsoil intends to be involved



PAUL NIXDORF

with every aspect of the assembly. Information about the churchwide assembly can be found in the months to come on the ELCA's official Churchwide Assembly website by going to www.elca.org. There you will find the ELCA schedule, as well as registration and housing information. Both the LC/NA and Goodsoil web sites will have updated and complete information for the Goodsoil activity occurring at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

More than 1,000 worshippers attended the Goodsoil service at CWA-2009

Goodsoil activities during CWA-2011 include:

Goodsoil Central will serve as the center for Goodsoil activity and hospitality during the assembly and will be conveniently located in the Marriott World Center where the assembly is taking place. Receptions,

continued on page 15

reflected a recognition of the importance of making our communities safe and welcoming to our LGBT family and friends. Christian voices, including many from Atonement, were heard strongly in the discussion as voices of welcome, which was important to help counteract the negative voices of “the church” as portrayed in the film.

This event galvanized local coastal communities by pulling together several welcoming congregations (Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal) as well as community groups such as PFLAG, local Gay/Straight Alliances, Coastal AIDS Network, LGBT Task Force, and others. All pledged to work together to create a widespread message of acceptance of and welcome for LGBT people, especially our youth, and to stand up against verbal and physical violence directed at those without power in society. Recognizing that the silence from the church is not a positive witness of welcome, nor is non-explicit welcome for groups that have been actively

rejected by the Christian community enough to demonstrate safety and affirmation, Atonement Lutheran voted overwhelmingly to become Reconciling in Christ on November 21st, just two weeks after the community event.

(*Out in the Silence* is available online from iTunes, Amazon.com, Blockbuster, and hulu.com and is highly recommended for group showing and discussion.)

Pastor Ian Reed Twiss

Holy Faith Church, Saline, Michigan

I learned last fall that a brave group of kids in our local high school's gay-straight alliance were petitioning the school board to include “sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression” in their non-discrimination policy. These students shared experiences of harassment and bullying at the high school, and asked the school board to add this language as a step towards changing the culture of the high school.

I met the students and got involved,

preaching about it at church. Ours is a middle-of-the-road congregation politically, but a number of people contacted school board members to urge them to vote yes to the proposed added language. On the night of the vote, the room was packed with supporters of the change from the community.

Unfortunately, the school board voted the change down 4-3, but a number of people in the community were so upset that we have started an organization devoted to promoting equality and welcome for LGBTQ people in our community. We are determined not to let this issue go away and are currently working on getting the city council to consider passing a resolution of welcome for LGBT folks. The setback has really galvanized some voices in the community, and our church, which is a Reconciling in Christ congregation, has been involved. So we have hope for the future. ▼

Have We Given Them Any Other Option?

By **Dr. Jeremy Myers**, Augsburg College

Editor's note: At *Let Justice Roll Down Like Waters* (the 2010 biennial conference of Lutherans Concerned/North America and the Reconciling in Christ community), nearly thirty teaching theologians from the Lutheran tradition gathered for the first LC/NA Theologians Roundtable. Roundtable participants were brought together to envision a transformative theology that not only identifies theological challenges for inclusive Christianity over the next fifteen years, but also suggests ways to work toward new, creative, and positive solutions toward establishing justice and full participation for all in the life of the church and society. To that end, the Concord will feature articles from teaching theologians of the church, as we do with this piece from Professor Jeremy Myers. For the full version of this article that includes endnotes, please go to www.lcna.org/images/stories/downloads/resources/047_bullying_jeremy_myers.pdf.

A Question

"Who wants to see Dean kick my butt? Who thinks it'll be a fair fight?" Before I knew it, I was standing on the bench outside of the men's locker room shouting these questions. Me, a 120-pound high school freshman. Dean, a 220-pound hulking senior defensive lineman on the varsity football team—and a bully. For some reason he had me in "missile lock" for most of the year. To this day I don't know why. I was fed up and was now standing on a bench and offering Dean a public challenge in front of at least 100 peers.

It was the early 1990s and I had learned my anti-bullying strategy from the only available expert—my VCR. I would walk to our neighborhood video store

The **problem** of **bullying** is real and more **pervasive** than we realize

every Friday to rent movies like *Weird Science*, *Can't Buy Me Love*, *Pretty in Pink*, *Back to the Future* and *Karate Kid*. I was an expert. My strategy? To publicly humiliate "the bully" before he could hurt me. By doing so I could convince the crowd that an actual fight between the two of us would be boring at best or inhumane at worst. It worked. Dean left me alone. But now, in hindsight, I realized I had become a bully just like him.

My question? Why was Hollywood my primary source? Why did I have to become a witty, smart aleck bully in order to stop a strong, physical bully? Why wasn't my church able to provide me with an alternative narrative? If we, as a faith community, are going to step up and intervene with the intent of bringing an end to bullying, then we need to disengage from these modern-day David and Goliath narratives and reengage in the actual lives of our young people with a new way of understanding what it means to be human.

A Snapshot

Bullying did not appear on the radar of researchers in the United States until 2001 when a landmark study uncovered its pervasiveness.¹ In a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Tonya Nansel and her colleagues found nearly 30% of children and youth were involved in bullying. 13% had been involved as bullies, 11% as victims, and 6% as both bullies and victims at different times. Bullying was more common in grades 6 through 8 than in grades 9 and 10. Boys were found to be more involved in bullying than girls, as bullies and victims; and poor psychosocial adjustment was found among both bullies and victims. However, more recent data suggests girls and boys experience bullying at about the same levels, albeit different types of bullying.²

There are multiple ways in which one can become involved in bullying, each with its own unique set of ramifications. The victims often struggle with being socially isolated, struggling to make friends, having weaker relationships with peers and experiencing more overall loneliness.³ They have also been found to have higher rates of depression and lower self-esteem than their peers at the age of 23, even though they were no longer experiencing unusual rates of being bullied.⁴

The bullies themselves also experience negative ramifications. Although they may not suffer from the same social isolation, they do tend to become more involved in other risky behaviors. They engage in these behaviors with their social network. They also generally struggle to thrive within the school setting, both academically and culturally.⁵

Some claim that those who fill the bully/victim role should be our primary concern.⁶ These students experience the social isolation that the usual victim experiences but it is dangerously paired with the same high levels of risky behavior a bully experiences. Victims tend to avoid risky behaviors but are social outcasts. *Bullies* have a social network but routinely take part in risky behaviors. But *bully-victims* are social outcasts who routinely take high risks *and* do not thrive in the school setting. The bullying event has long lasting consequences that do not distinguish victim from perpetrator. All are affected.

The pervasiveness and the effects of bullying are not the only things that are troubling; so is the reality of underreporting. Whereas younger kids (elementary and middle school) usually react to bullying by acting out, older youth (high school) tend to internalize their experience.⁷ This makes their experience of bullying less obvious and harder to catch. Another study found that 24% of those identified by their peers as victims of bullying did not identify themselves as victims. This means they either were not victims (which is unlikely, given that their peers identified them as such) or that they simply deny the fact that they are being bullied. In the same study, about 33% of the victims did not even answer this question (identifying the victims in their school), which might also be an indication of denial.⁸

A System

Any given bullying event is best understood as a system, or a group phenomenon, rather than as a simple interaction between two (or more) youth.⁹ In fact, Dan Olweus, the founder of an evidence-based bullying prevention program, has provided us with a helpful model.¹⁰ He has identified eight roles a student might play in any given bullying event: the student who is bullied, students who bully, followers or henchmen, supporters or passive bullies, passive supporters or possible bullies, disengaged onlookers, possible defenders, and defenders.¹¹ Our prevention and intervention strategies must extend beyond just the bullies and victims.¹² We must work to change our culture from

feel bullying is their only option. Our culture has become more violent, and this is an easy target when looking to blame someone for bullying. However, it is also important to critically consider the life-phase of adolescence itself and how we've constructed it.

Education professor, Nancy Lesko, puts forth a very provocative theory of adolescence. She claims that adolescents are, and always have been, considered a problem. Adolescence was identified as a new and unique phase of life in the early 1900s. Lesko argues that the primary anxieties of America at that time—race relations, gender roles, and nation building—began to drive the way we thought about and interacted

A Way Forward

To successfully intervene in this burgeoning bully-culture, we must understand and approach it as a system. Olweus' (and others') research has made this clear. But we must also disengage from our current way of constructing adolescence. In order to do so, we will need more than a theory, we will also need a story; a story that gives life and does not thwart it. The church has this story.

In *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship*, Douglas John Hall mines our Christian narrative and lifts up the *imago Dei* (image of God) as the best explanation of what it means to be human.¹⁷ And this is what we need in order to address the bullying we see, a better way to be human. Rather than

Our society defines teens primarily as consumers, causing them to treat others as disposable in order to prove that they themselves are not disposable.

one that condones to one that rejects bullying, moving young people into the role of defender. Some say any "effective violence prevention requires a comprehensive response that brings all segments of the community into play. Health care, public health, mental health, youth development, education, family support, faith and religious, and criminal justice institutions and professionals have roles to play as do community groups, survivors, and others who live with the consequences of violence on a daily basis."¹³

In summary, bullying is real and more pervasive than we realize. Its effects are broad and long lasting. The victim of an act of bullying does not remain the only victim of the event; all of those involved (actively or passively) are impacted. Bullying events must be thought of systemically and must be approached systemically. The faith community has a role to play.

A Theory

In an interesting review of Nansel's landmark study, David Gil borrows Erich Fromm's idea that we become destructive when our drive toward life is thwarted. Gil argues that bullying is essentially a form of counter-violence against a long history of social-structural violence as witnessed by our youth.¹⁴ I would concur. If we are ever going to have anything constructive to say about bullying we must honestly face the fact that we have created a culture that not only condones bullying but also glorifies it through movies, television, video games, sports and even our foreign policy. By condoning and glorifying bullying, we have backed our youth into corners where they

with our teenagers. The white, straight, married, male, productive citizen became the measure of normalcy; adolescent development became the way in which we imaged and ensured the pathway towards normalcy.¹⁵ Anyone whose drive towards life might lead them down an alternative path would be considered abnormal.

Today's anxieties revolve around sexual identity, economic vitality, and educational standards. Our culture's anxieties and expectations around these dynamics impact the way we imagine and interact with our young people; they drive what we consider to be the "norm." We are scared that our children might grow up to be queer, that they might never hold down a "good" job, or that they will not perform at the expected academic levels. These anxieties cause us to place inordinate amounts of pressure upon our young people. This pressure thwarts their drive toward life and they react through counter-violence. This reaction includes any number of stereotypical, risky adolescent behaviors, including bullying.

Henry Giroux claims that we have created a society that defines teens primarily as consumers (of material goods but also of "socially approved" life styles) and therefore considers those who cannot (or choose not to) consume appropriately or at the expected levels to be "disposable."¹⁶ This emphasis on consumption and the subsequent notion of disposability creates anxiety among our youth and causes them to treat *others* as disposable in order to prove that they *themselves* are not disposable. They are simply performing the way they've been trained. We (collectively) have been the bullies.

understanding ourselves as primarily anxious, disposable, all-consuming bullies, Hall suggests that we might begin to understand our being in the image of God—as community, communion and ecology.¹⁸ Being-as-ecology calls us to understand our existence not as being at odds with nature but wrapped up in nature. Being-as-communion calls us to understand our existence not as being under the wrath of God, but in relationship with God. Lastly, being-as-community calls us to understand our existence not as being independent from our neighbor but responsible for our neighbor.

We have become quite adept at bullying our neighbor, our Creator, and creation. Our current narrative of anxiety, consumption and disposability will never free us (or our youth) from this cycle of bullying. Any attempt at bringing an end to bullying must also bring an end to the myth-of-being we've constructed for our youth, a myth that forces them into a corner where their only option is to prove that they are not as disposable as the next person, the next organism, or even God. Only the gospel can do this.

The problem of bullying is real and more pervasive than we realize. It functions as a system with a variety of participants and roles. It must be addressed as a system, offering more than compassion for the victim and consequences for the perpetrator. Instead, we must offer a new way of understanding the self for all those involved in bullying. When we convince our young people that their primary vocation is to fit our definition of normal (*see above*),

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Paul Egertson, **Staunch Ally** and Advocate

Rev. Paul Egertson, bishop emeritus of the ELCA, died suddenly in the afternoon of January 5, 2011, in his home in Thousand Oaks, California. Egertson, staunch ally and advocate for full inclusion of LGBT people in the life of the church, had championed the ordination of LGBT candidates for ministry and an end to the policies and practices of the church that relegated LGBT people to a second-class.

While bishop of the ELCA Southwest California Synod, Paul Egertson participated in the 2001 ordination of Pastor Anita C. Hill of St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church, St. Paul, Minnesota. For this act, he subsequently resigned his position as bishop, and tirelessly advocated for the policy change that finally occurred as a result of the decisions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly.

*Paul Egertson **stood up for us** when that was neither **popular** nor safe.*

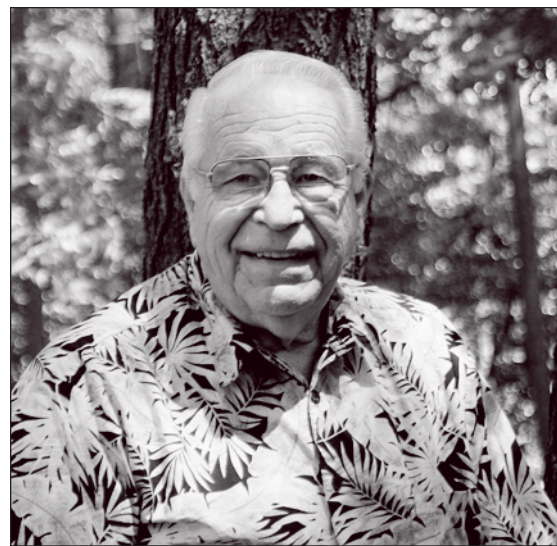
Along with his wife, Shirley, Egertson was awarded the Jim Siefkes Justice-Maker Award by Lutherans Concerned/North America for his efforts on behalf of LGBT Lutherans. He was a longtime member of the California Lutheran University religion faculty. He was born in 1935 and is survived by Shirley and their six sons.

Emily Eastwood, Executive Director, Lutherans Concerned, said, “Paul Egertson stood up for us and in opposition to the discrimination of the church against us when that was neither popular nor safe. His witness to Christ’s redemptive grace and his commitment to helping the church see the error of its position are a shining beacon of prophetic righteousness in the face of determined opposition - and he did it with grace and eloquence, as befits a follower of Christ. He was a friend and mentor—always available, with words of calming wisdom. He made a profound difference. He will be missed.”

A memorial service was held for Paul Egertson in the Samuelson Chapel of California Lutheran University on January 15. At the memorial service, R. Guy Erwin, Professor of Religion and History at California Lutheran University, remembered Paul in this way:

“As a colleague and friend at California Lutheran, Paul and I spent on average at least an hour a week in conversation, and though we were both busy, somehow those conversations helped us manage our daily tasks. We talked about everything under the sun, but somehow, every conversation came back to being about the church. And that was, apart from his quite remarkable kindness, what drew most of us to

Paul: the sense he communicated that everything we did in our teaching vocation was connected in some way to our ministry of service to our neighbors. And what was even better from my perspective was how Paul lived out that vocation not only in the classroom but also in the pulpit and in church leadership. I found it remarkable how Paul, in his clear but non-judgmental way, could move from teaching to witnessing—from religion abstractly considered to the deepest truths of the faith experienced in his own life—without ever having visibly to shift gears. As a thinker and a teacher, he was extraordinarily sensitive to the differences among his listeners, but was himself always the same kind and passionate teacher to all of them. I think this integrity was one of the reasons he did so well with our adult evening students—he approached them all as people worthy



of respect, and listened to what they had to say, and then engaged them closely with serious and important questions—but always in honest awareness of his own convictions and clarity about his own deepest beliefs.

“Wherever he worked, whatever his job title was, I imagine that the Paul I knew must always have been first a teacher: as a pastor, as a bishop, as an administrator, and probably as a parent. His respect for learning was so great, his own curiosity so deep, his conviction so sincere that calm discussion would open minds and respectful engagement would reach hearts made him for me a model for teaching in the church. Not that Paul didn’t have strong opinions that he was willing to articulate forcefully, particularly in defense of those he felt the church has wrongly singled out for discrimination. He was the fiercest and most stubborn man I’ve ever known, but never loud or shrill. And he never, ever bullied others with his point of view. Instead, the transparency and integrity of his own convictions and motives made him someone whom even his opponents could trust. The world needs more people like that, in all areas of our common life, and especially in the church.” ▼

Paul Egertson

Synodical Assemblies

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displays, pastoral care, morning and evening prayer, and an information desk will all be located in Goodsoil Central. We also plan to have an education room to serve as a center for voting-member caucuses, legislative training, and educational events.

In all that we do, Goodsoil's approach reflects an attitude of "graceful engagement from within." We have designed ways to work with voting members by meeting them where they are, sharing stories, and walking with them toward change. Graceful engagement includes prayer, storytelling, and one-on-one conversation. In the upcoming months, you will be able to volunteer on the Goodsoil website. Come and help: Goodsoil intends to do graceful engagement every day of the Assembly during the morning plenary session, through worship, lunch, and the afternoon plenary sessions.

Graceful Engagement Training will be focused on public narrative storytelling, non-confrontation, and community organizing. Graceful engagement requires a peaceful, non-anxious presence and the ability to remain that way if the person being engaged becomes anxious or angry. Voting members will use these methods to prepare talking points during debate. Goodsoil volunteers will use graceful engagement at meals, meetings, and through personal contact between Goodsoil participants and voting members. All our participants will be trained in graceful engagement.

As in 2007 and 2009, the **Goodsoil Devotional Booklet** will be made available to voting members, visitors, and Goodsoil participants. The devotional will feature daily messages for Churchwide Assembly

Christine Hurney distributes the devotional booklet One Table Many Blessings.



PAUL NIXDORF

participants, short stories of people who have experienced or responded to bullying, and theological shorts from Lutheran theologians about the intersectional work of opposing bullying.

In preparation for the anti-bullying legislation, Goodsoil will host a **hearing** to discuss the problem of bullying in our society. The session will include both theological insights and personal stories about dealing with bullying. Voting members and visitors will be invited to discuss how the ELCA can best respond to the scourge of bullying.

On Wednesday, August 17 at 8:00 p.m., the **2011 Goodsoil Festival Worship** will be held at the Churchwide Assembly site. This public worship service has established itself as one of the major highlights of the churchwide assembly. There will be wonderful preaching, music, and liturgy, all focused on justice and reconciliation rooted in the Gospel for all people. All voting members, visitors, and Goodsoil volunteers are invited to attend.

The Shower of Stoles display—a collection of more than a thousand liturgical stoles representing the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people of faith—will be on display at the assembly. These religious leaders have served in thirty-two denominations and faith traditions, in six countries, on three continents. Each stole contains the story of a LGBT person who is active in the life and leadership of their faith community in some way: minister, elder, deacon, teacher, missionary, musician, administrator, or active layperson. The collection celebrates the gifts of LGBT persons who serve God in countless ways, while also lifting up those who have been excluded from service because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The collection bears witness to the huge loss of leadership that the Church has brought upon itself because of its own unjust policies.

We hope to see all of you in Orlando in August as together we gracefully engage as the whole body of Christ in the work of reconciliation.

Founded in 2005, Goodsoil is a collaboration of allies working for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and their families in the full ministerial and sacramental life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Working toward reconciliation, Goodsoil anticipates another busy legislative season, which kicks off with synodical assemblies in April and runs

Goodsoil Schedule for CWA-2011

Sunday, August 14

Voting Members arrive
Goodsoil Central opens
Volunteers needed to distribute devotional booklets in afternoon/evening
Goodsoil Welcome Reception 7:00 p.m.
Voting Member Meeting 8:30 p.m.

Monday, August 15

Volunteers needed to distribute devotional booklets
Morning: Hearing on Goodsoil Anti-bullying Memorial
Lunch: Volunteers need for meal engagement over lunch
Plenary
CWA Opening Worship
Dinner – Meal Engagement
Plenary (until approximately 9:30 p.m.)
Voting Member meeting following plenary

Tuesday, August 16

CWA Worship
CWA Bible Study: both Voting Members and visitors can participate
Lunch – Meal Engagement
ELCA Global/Congregational Mission themed event
Plenary
Dinner – Meal Engagement
Mission festival
Voting Member meeting following plenary

Wednesday, August 17

Plenary
Lunch – Meal Engagement
CWA Worship
Plenary
ELCA College/University Receptions 6:00–8:00 p.m.
Goodsoil Worship 8:00 p.m.
Voting Member meeting after worship

Thursday, August 18

Plenary
Lunch – Meal Engagement
CWA Worship
Plenary
ELCA Ecumenical & Synodical Dinners
Goodsoil Closing Party

Friday, August 19

Goodsoil Central closes; need volunteers
Final Plenary
CWA Closing Worship
Adjourn by Noon

through August with the 2011 ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Orlando, Florida.

The Goodsoil website can be found at www.goodsoil.org. Please remember to check there often for information and updates on activities. ▼



2011: Practice Spirit, Do Justice

Although the 2011 *National Conference on LGBT Equality: Creating Change* took place at the tail end of a massive snowstorm that buried vast areas of North America, the conference's

redoubtable host city, Minneapolis, Minnesota, was undaunted. Named by *The Advocate* magazine as the "Gayest City in the U.S.," Minneapolis retained the clarity of mind and spirit, (not to mention weather) to successfully receive and host over 2,500 attendees at the conference—including the staff of Lutherans Concerned/North America and an LC/NA board member.

It requires faith of some kind to be an activist for social change...

Creating Change is the annual conference of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF). Since 1973, the Task Force has been working to eliminate prejudice, violence and injustice against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people at the local, state and national level. LC/NA relates to the Task Force primarily through the Institute for Welcoming Resources.

In its 23rd year, the five-day *Creating Change* conference featured more than 250 workshops and training sessions, four plenary sessions, and a great variety of networking opportunities, receptions, affinity groups, and entertainment. This year, for the first time, the conference featured a faith-based mini-conference. This conference-within-a-conference, called Practice Spirit, Do Justice, was the culmination of many years of relationship building and organizing across pro-LGBT religious and spiritual communities, with the goal to build stronger

alliances between secular and religious communities.

The *Practice Spirit, Do Justice* workshops were attended by a spectacularly diverse group including Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists, UCC's, Church of the Brethren, Disciples of Christ, Mormons, Southern Baptists, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Jehovah's Witnesses, Native Americans, Unitarians, Wiccans, Buddhists—in some cases, all in one room. This great and beautiful diversity extended to the entire conference, with a stunning array of folks from all ethnic/racial backgrounds and ages. And let's just say that, compared to typical ELCA Lutheran gatherings, attendees tended to be ... younger.

The opening plenary session carried the *Practice Spirit, Do Justice* theme forward with a roundtable panel, led by the Rev. Rebecca Voelkel, Program Director of Faith Work for the Task Force's Institute for Welcoming Resources. Rev. Voelkel, was joined by Faisal Alam, Bishop Yvette Flunder, Rabbi Joshua Lesser, and the Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson.

The Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson, moderator of the Metropolitan Community Church, reminded the *Creating Change* attendees about the importance of forming partnerships between secular and faith-based groups as we together engage those who try to use the Bible and other faith-texts to demean the humanity of LGBT people. "No one understands the religious conservatives like we do, she said. "You need us to defeat their agenda."

Rabbi Joshua Lesser, who leads the Congregation Bet Haverim in Atlanta, told of the pain that many people feel because of the distance between faith-based and secular LGBT communities. All too often, he said, "We have not valued each other's experiences. Faith communities have either been uninterested or uninvolved. [Historically,] the secular LGBT community only seemed to seek policy and political change, and did not embrace the great capacity for relationship building that faith communities often bring to the conversation."

Bishop Yvette Flunder, founder of City of Refuge Community Church UCC, said "I'd like to lift up the presence of faith and deep spirituality as the underpinning of most, if not all, authentic civil-rights movements. I believe the power to endure and be courageous amid continual, physical, emotional, and spiritual attack must come from a deep well, one that is continually filled from the Divine of our understanding."

Faisal Alam, founder of Al-Fatiha, spoke of the great need for the LGBT rights movement to "speak up and stand up for other social justice movements," including that of Muslims in the U.S., "if we want to achieve a more just world for all of us."

Wilson reminded the audience that "it requires faith of some kind to be an activist for social change, so we need to find common ground on our shared values between secular and faith activists." In closing, Flunder witnessed that, if we want to change the world, "We must confront the negative religious

Faith-leader panel members, from left: Rev. Rebecca Voelkel, Faisal Alam, Rabbi Joshua Lesser, Bishop Yvette Flunder, Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson with NGLTF executive director Rea Carey, conference director Sue Hyde.

messages with the positive religious messages of love.”

Lutherans Concerned took an active role at *Creating Change* by presenting workshops. These sessions were designed to share our accumulated wisdom and best strategies learned from years of intense, faith-based community organizing. Emily Eastwood and Ross Murray (LC/NA Executive Director and Deputy Director, respectively) collaborated with members of the leadership from Integrity USA to present the stories of policy gains in both the ELCA and the Episcopal Church, providing case studies from which participants could glean best practices. Emily related how the expansion of the RIC program provided a concrete means by which to simultaneously encourage welcoming congregations and set the stage for policy change on the churchwide level. The life’s blood of any denomination is in its congregations, and so working for cultural change within the congregations inevitably leads to changes in policy. Emily also emphasized the strategic importance of identifying and leveraging catalyzing events, such as the trial of Rev. Bradley Schmeling, to help raise public awareness of injustices and harm, which can only be fixed by changing policy.

Ross Murray presented a workshop that taught participants about the LC/NA strategy of “graceful engagement from within,” through careful listening, sharing one’s own story, hearing one another’s perspective, finding commonalities and shared experiences, and, most important of all, building relationships around values that bring us together as opposed to things that polarize us. Graceful engagement is the active expression of a core LC/NA value—reconciliation—and continues to be a primary strategy for turning policy into practice. Participants were asked to consider how graceful engagement might work within their own contexts. A significant amount of time was spent discussing graceful scriptural engagement, where participants were asked to apply messaging strategies to Bible passages of their own choosing. Through these simple methods, the life-affirming qualities of just about any favorite scriptural passage can be proclaimed in support of the full participation of all people in the church and in the world.

Both workshops were very well received. LC/NA has been contacted with follow-up questions and requests for consultation for helping others work within their own settings.

Nicole Garcia, transgender representative to the Board of Directors of LC/NA, attended *Creating Change* in her capacity as a member of the Latino/a Roundtable, which is sponsored by the Pacific School of Religion, Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Ministry and Religion. The Latino/a Roundtable helps make the broader LGBTG community aware of Latino/a issues. Along with one of the chairs of the Roundtable, Dr. Orlando Espin, Nicole took part in a day-long institute for people of color, gathering with fifty other religious and secular leaders for

... so we need to find **common ground** on our shared **values** between **secular** and **faith** activists.

an intense day of sharing experiences and brainstorming. Valuable contacts were made with activists from across the country, finding ways to work together as religious and secular leaders in order to further



Conference MC and comedian Kate Clinton (left) with conference directors Russell Roybal, Sue Hyde.

LC/NA’s work at the intersection of oppression.

Nicole also met with the executive directors and staff from many faith-based organizations to present several new pamphlets produced by the Latino/a Roundtable. The pamphlets are among the first pro-LGBT materials written in Spanish by native speakers for Spanish-speaking people. They are not merely English materials translated mechanically into Spanish, but are written with and from a Latino/a cultural perspective. Hard copies of the Roundtable resources are available now; online versions will be made available

soon through the LC/NA website.

Busy leader that she is, Nicole also met with other members of the “TransFaith Huddle.” The TransFaith Huddle is an informal network of transgender and gender non-conforming religious and spiritual leaders working to bring religion and spirituality back to those who have been ostracized from faith groups due to not conforming to the binary gender system.

Of particular note: the Task Force, in partnership with the the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) released a

groundbreaking report at the conference called “Injustice at Every Turn.” The study reveals the depth of discrimination against transgender and gender non-conforming people in a wide range of areas, including education, health care, employment, and housing. The study is based on the results from the National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS), including responses from over 6,450 participants. The study brings to light what is both obvious and far too often dismissed from human rights agendas in both secular and faith contexts: transgender and gender non-conforming people face significant injustice at every turn—in homes, in school systems, in workplaces, at the grocery store, in doctors’ offices and hospital emergency rooms, at the hands of police. Discrimination was found to be pervasive throughout the sample, although the combination of anti-transgender bias and persistent, structural racism was found to be especially devastating. A staggering forty-one percent reported attempting suicide (compared to 1.6 percent in the general population), and the sample was nearly four times more likely to live in extreme poverty. Please see this important document at www.TheTaskForce.org.

Creating Change will meet again January 25–29, 2012, in the exciting seaport town of Baltimore, Maryland. It promises to be fabulous! ▼

The Concord thanks Ross Murray, Nicole Garcia, and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force for contributions to this article.

Metro Chicago: Deepening the Welcome

By **Rev. Carla Thompson Powell**

On Saturday, February 19, 2011, about 130 people gathered for “Deepening the Welcome: Living out Jesus’ Welcome for LGBTQ People in Our Congregations” at Good Shepherd

Lutheran Church in Oak Park, IL. The Chicago area Deepening the Welcome event was co-sponsored by the Metropolitan Chicago Synod Justice Team and the Lutherans Concerned/Chicago chapter.

After the 2009 Churchwide Assembly, it was clear that more education and advocacy would be required around the newly adopted policy changes and social statement. After hearing about events in Milwaukee and the Twin Cities, the Lutherans Concerned/Chicago leadership decided to move forward and implement a large scale education and

*We must engage **justice** work through all avenues, not just the topic or area that **affects** us most deeply.*

advocacy event. A resolution was put forth at the 2010 Metropolitan Chicago Synod assembly calling for such an event.

The workshop opportunities will focus on how congregations can gain understanding of the decisions, explore this new landscape as a missional church, continue dialogue with those who disagree, and intentionally choose to become more welcoming to all people, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) neighbors/people and rostered leaders. Participants will discuss ways to create a more

welcoming atmosphere within their own congregations and strategize actions that illustrate that welcome.”

From the very beginning, Deepening the Welcome organizers sought to involve a wide variety of voices and participants in this event, not just the “usual suspects.” We intended to have workshops that appealed to people in congregations that had been RIC for twenty years or more (like Good Shepherd, who hosted the event as a part of their 75th congregational anniversary) or for congregations that had never talked about the issue of including LGBTQ people.

Dr. Richard Perry, ethicist and professor at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, kicked off the Deepening the Welcome event with a bang in his keynote address “Dimensions of a Whosoever Church — JOHN 3:16–17.” He reminded us of Dr. King’s quote: “In a real sense all life is interrelated. All [people] are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.” And he encouraged us to realize that we must engage in justice work through all avenues, not just the topic or area that affects us most deeply. Dr. Perry invited us to work for justice for the sake of working for justice and doing what’s right, not asking “What can I get out of it?”

Deepening the Welcome participants chose three workshop from a host of options, including: “Coming out in Mission as a Welcoming Congregation” (led by Bishop Wayne Miller from the metro Chicago synod), “Beginning the Conversation in Congregations” (led by Emily Eastwood, LC/NA Executive Director), “A Biblical Basis for Welcome: Neither Man nor Woman in Christ,” (led by LSTC professor Klaus-Peter Adam), “Supporting our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Youth” (an anti-bullying workshop), “Welcoming All Leaders” (about a congregation that chose to call an openly gay partnered pastor and their steps toward that decision), “Marriage Equality,” “Reducing Conflict and Guiding Discernment: A Suburban Congregation’s Journey to the Blessing of Unions,” “Beyond Gay & Lesbian - Welcoming Bisexual and Transgender as Equal Identities within the LGBT Community” (led by a bisexual activist and a transgender educator), “Talking With Our Kids About Homosexuality” (from a parenting/youth ministry perspective).

Pastor Carrie Smith, who traveled almost two hours from Capron, Illinois (Capron Lutheran Church) to Deepening the Welcome, said, “It was good to see people from so many different churches—clergy and lay people. And it felt good to have conversations about sex and faith that weren’t filled with so much fear and anxiety, which we’ve had so much of recently.” ▼

Emily Eastwood and Bp. Wayne Miller at Deepening the Welcome in Metro Chicago.



Welcome Home: You Have Joined the Ranks of the Ordinary

By **Rose Beeson**

With the golden afternoon sun streaming through the stained glass windows of Saint Francis Lutheran Church, in San Francisco, California, it seemed as if nature itself were rejoicing, as Mark Holmerud, bishop of the Sierra Pacific Synod, knocked three times on the outside of the doors to the sanctuary. The doors were flung open by a member of St. Francis, and Bishop Holmerud and the Rev. Nancy Feniuk Nelson, Bishop's Associate, entered.

Thus began a rite of reconciliation on February 27, 2011, that recognized the richness and complexity of St. Francis' history: the institutional discrimination that initially caused the expulsion of St. Francis; the pain and heartache that followed; the missional focus of a congregation continuing to do ministry despite being unwelcome in the larger church; the joy felt

*We must continue to grow **fabulous**, feisty, thriving RIC congregations.*

after the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly ended policies precluding rostered leaders from being in same-gender relationships; and the sadness over the congregations that have left the ELCA post policy change. The entire assembly was then sprinkled with water "in remembrance of the cleansing and new beginnings promised in baptism."

In offering his wonderfully rousing sermon (you can find it on YouTube), Bishop Holmerud turned the story of the prodigal son on its head, acknowledging that St. Francis has been at the same address, faithfully preaching the Gospel, administering the sacraments, daily doing ministry,

Rite of reconciliation receives St. Francis Lutheran back into the ELCA



ROSE BEESON

and even continuing to tithe to the ELCA since being removed from the roster in 1996.

While being received back into the ELCA is most definitely a joyous occasion, it is also the end of an era. Bishop Holmerud acknowledged the fact: "You have joined the ranks of the ordinary." Rather than being one of two congregations defiantly doing ministry outside the institutional church, St. Francis is now one of the 10,000+ congregations of the ELCA. Ordinary rather than extraordinary.

However, lest we be tempted to think that the work is done, we were reminded that being ordinary is no excuse for mediocrity. This is an important message, both for us in the LGBT Lutheran movement as well as for the entire ELCA.

We must continue to grow fabulous, feisty, thriving Reconciling in Christ congregations that publicly proclaim that LGBT people are welcome to participate in congregational life; we must work with the synods and the ELCA to find congregations that will call, consecrate, or commission LGBT rostered leaders to better reach the un- and de-churched; we must ensure that there is mobility for rostered leaders to live out their vocation in different congregations and different parts of the country once they have been rostered. We must tackle HIV/AIDS, Malaria, anti-bullying, marriage equality, and transgender rights. Above all, we must proclaim the Gospel message of grace and salvation to a broken and hurting world.

Welcome home; there is work to do. ▼

Any Other Option?

continued from page 13

then we thwart their drive toward life and we will begin to witness their counter-violence. Bullying is one manifestation of this counter-violence. The love of Christ does not thwart life, but gives life. It frees us, and our youth, from anxiety, consumption, disposability and bullying, and frees us for community, communion and ecology. The love of Christ frees us to be human!

This happens as communities proclaim the love of Christ in the lives of young

people by entering into meaningful relationships with all young people—victims, bullies, bystanders, etc. Christ's love draws us into these relationships. By being in these relationships we communicate Christ's love for our youth and Christ's call for our youth—to be responsible for your neighbor, a steward of creation, and a "communer" with God.

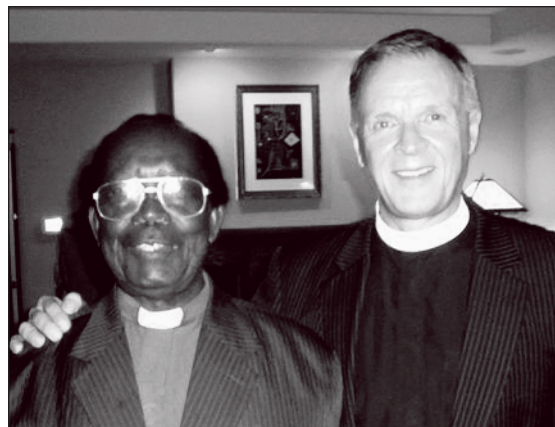
Society calls me to fight bullying by standing on a bench and humiliating Dean in front of my peers. Christ calls me to fight bullying by seeing myself as deeply connected to and responsible for Dean. This is the

cross we bear as disciples of Christ. But we do not bear it alone; we bear it with Christ, with one another and with all of God's creation. Until we are convinced this is the only way to understand what it means to be human, we will always have bullies, victims, and far too many bystanders. ▼

Jeremy Myers is Assistant Professor of Religion and Youth and Family Ministry at Augsburg College, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Areas of research include adolescent experiences of God's presence and activity, how adolescents construct theology, contemplative youth ministry practices, interfaith youth work, and a vocational understanding of adolescence.

Uganda: To Do Justice, to Love Kindness, to Walk Humbly

By **Philip W. Moeller, PhD.**, Director of International Programs



issues. There were fledgling organizations that sought to provide structure for justice for women, orphans, the poor, and even the LGBT community. The air in Uganda was more fresh, a little sweeter.

Among the freshness was the witness of the former Anglican Bishop of Uganda, Christopher Senyonjo. His first act in retirement was to offer counseling services to the disenfranchised. In his initial encounters, he heard the stories of the LGBT persons who had come to know oppression. He became convinced that oppression took many forms, and sexual orientation and gender identity were causes that needed to be addressed along with poverty and women's rights. He was concerned that homosexuals were considered criminals and denied medical services by a complex of Ugandan laws and policies. He saw the need for dialogue between the straight and homosexual community as justice and oppression were addressed. He established the St. Paul Center for Reconciliation and Equality.

It was in this work that the Bishop met David Kato, a leading advocate for SMUG (Sexual Minorities of Uganda). As a result of his outreach, the Bishop was subsequently informed that he would lose his pension. Gratefully his plight was addressed by LGBT organizations and persons in the U.S. under the leadership of Canon Albert Ogle and Integrity, the Episcopal counterpart of LC/NA (see photo). The loss of the pension, however, was not the greatest threat to the bishop, his wife, and family. Greater risk has come from the fact that his photograph along with that of David Kato and dozens of others were featured in the front page of issues of a newly created newspaper. The newspaper, ironically called Rolling Stone, decided to throw stones, calling for the hanging of those whose photos were featured. The newspaper is the result of funds channeled from fundamentalist Christian groups in the U.S. It offers journalism based on distortion and misrepresentation.

So, that is how I changed my RIC sermon, to tell of David and the Bishop, and that is the message I give to all I encounter. The intersection of oppression is real for so many LGBT persons overseas, so very real. It is not just church policy change but the risk of death that they face. Their fear is not fueled by limited access or economics but by life and blood.

Please join me with your prayers. ▼

This year I was asked to preach the sermon for RIC Sunday. This was not the first time I had done so, but it is always special for me as a lay person and as the son of a Lutheran pastor to speak from a pulpit and, especially so on RIC Sunday, to do so as a gay man. I had begun with reviewing the texts for the Sunday, following my father's admonition to thoroughly ground my comments with scripture before relating to the specific context I wanted to address.

As I read the texts, I was nearly overwhelmed by the richness offered. The words in Matthew from the Sermon on the Mount were favorites of many and yet complex in application. There were many paths I could choose for my comments. Foremost in my agenda, however, was my desire to link my words to

*It is not just **church policy change** but the **risk of death** that they face.*

the international arena and to the "intersection of oppression" to be found there, which has become an increasing concern of mine and the leadership of LC/NA.

Then, but a few days before RIC Sunday, my preparation was horrifically interrupted by the brutal murder of David Kato in Uganda. Anger swirled within me, and tears began to form as I struggled to find the "Power of the Spirit" in this death. I had to reconstruct my RIC sermon.

My initial links to Uganda go back to reconstruction under the post-Idi Amin period. There was so much needed for reconstruction, and reconciliation needed to accompany it. The horror of HIV/AIDS is a whole story unto itself. Justice and civil rights for the LGBT community were put aside as the focus was on survival.

Yet, in all the pain, advocacy began. Each case restored a piece of my hope for Uganda. There were the children like David Kato who managed to reach adulthood and who turned to press for justice

From left, Bishop Christopher Senyonjo with Canon Albert Ogle

How You Can Help

Individuals or groups interested in contributing to the LGBT advocacy work of the St. Paul Reconciliation and Equality center made do so through LC/NA either by going to the LC/NA website [go to www.lcna.org/lcna/donations; please click "other" and type in "Uganda."] or by sending a check to LC/NA with "Uganda" in the memo line.

LC/NA, PO Box 4707, St. Paul, MN 55104-0707

