

# Ohio Congregationalist

## GAY PRIDE

MINNEAPOLIS—As you know, the first openly gay priest has been chosen by the US Episcopal Church's 74th General Convention to be an Episcopal bishop, as he won a key vote that opponents said could split one of the nation's oldest and most influential churches. With a national congregation of just over two million, the US Episcopal Church stands about 10th among the United States' non-Roman Catholic denominations.

This vote is old news at this point, but the issue is far from dead. We Congregationalists are painfully aware of the issue, in that the first openly homosexual elected to national office in our sister denomination, the UCC, happened almost 30 years ago.

Most of the readers of this newsletter are aware of the CCCC position on homosexuality. Nonetheless, it is a good time to review it. The CCCC document follows:

## HOMOSEXUALS AND THE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Our aim in the following statement is to combine theological thinking and Biblical commitment with contemporary understanding and compassionate pastoral concern.

1. God in His Holy Word plainly condemns the practice of homosexuality as an abomination in His sight (Leviticus 18:22), as a degrading and unnatural passion (Romans 1:26,27), as one that brings grave consequences in this life, and as a sin that, if persisted in, will exclude one from the Kingdom of God (I Corinthians 6:9,10).

Therefore, neither individual Christians, nor ministers of the Word of God, nor congregations of the Lord Jesus Christ, may take away from or lessen God's prohibition of and warnings against the practice of homosexuality.

Neither may they individually or

collectively as responsible citizens in a free society, urge or concede that the State should give special protection or approval to this practice, or promote it as a matter of personal taste, free choice, or "sexual orientation." Homosexuals are not entitled to special treatment under the law. That would be tantamount to rewarding evil.

2. The Apostle Paul testifies that those once involved in homosexuality were among those who were washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 6:11).

Therefore, individual Christians, ministers and congregations, understanding that all human beings are sinners, and that as Christians we have received God's mercy while helpless, ungodly and hostile to God (Romans 3:23;5:6,10), must warn against homosexual practices as from the mouth of the Lord (Ezekiel 3:17), and, at the same time proclaim forgiveness, cleansing, restoration, and power for godly living for all who repent and believe the Gospel (John 1:12;3:16; Romans 1:16; I Corinthians 6:11; Philippians 2:13).

We specifically renounce any unbiblical prejudice against persons who are homosexual simply because of their orientation, which is just one particular form of the same sinful orientation we all have. But we do believe that every expression of that orientation is sinful, just as every expression of adulterous desire is sinful, and we believe that all practicing adulterers and homosexuals should be called to repentance.

3. God desires that all mankind repent and come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved (I Peter 3:19; 1 Timothy 2:4).

Therefore, individual Christians, ministers and congregations, will compassionately and in love, proclaim the Good News of forgiveness and the admonition to go and sin no more (John 8:11) to those once involved in homosexual

practices, admitting such into fellowship after confession of faith and evidence of repentance, as with all those who have sinned grievously in other ways (1 Corinthians 6:11). We counsel those homosexuals who do not experience full healing and reorientation to remain celibate, trusting the Holy Spirit to give a joyous and fruitful existence as is promised to believers who cannot experience marriage (Isaiah 56:3-5). Jesus repeats this promise (Matthew 19:12).

## WHAT'S A PILGRIM TO DO?

The Rev. Marshall Pierson (Pilgrim Congregational Fellowship, Bellefontaine, Ohio), has disfellowshipped the Episcopal Church, U.S.A.

By vote of his congregation at a duly called meeting, Rev. Pierson has sent the following letter to the Bellefontaine Examiner and to Presiding Bishop Griswold of the PECUSA on 8/6/03.

## PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH U.S.A. DECLARATION OF NON-FELLOWSHIP

To Whom It May Concern:

In light of the institutional decision August 5, 2003 of the Protestant Episcopal Church U.S.A., in duly constituted assembly to openly and publicly defy the divine revelation of God in both Testaments of the Bible at a level of defiance singled out by the Apostle Paul as the most egregious of offenses, Pilgrim Fellowship of Bellefontaine, Ohio, by vote of its members in a duly constituted meeting, declares WITHDRAWAL OF FELLOWSHIP with the national organization known as the Protestant Episcopal Church U.S.A., declaring further that said organization has institutionally placed itself by said vote outside

the bounds of Christianity as historically understood at all times and in all places pursuant to the standards of the Bible and the ancient, universal creeds accepted by all the historic branches of the church of Jesus Christ.

We urge the Protestant Episcopal Church U.S.A. to repent of this decision and reverse its institutional action. Unless and until such action occurs, we as a particular congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ are forced, by the nature of the case, to examine individually a person or particular congregation affiliated with the Protestant Episcopal Church U.S.A. by the same criteria we would examine persons in general who are not currently in possession of a credible profession of faith and pattern of lifestyle, to see whether said person(s) are of the Christian faith, biblically and creedally defined. We further urge, with deep sadness, said individuals and particular congregations to prayerfully ascertain whether biblical warrant exists to secede from said organization and affiliate with the visible Christian church in one of its many expressions.

Pilgrim Fellowship  
By: Rev. M. J. Pierson, Ph.D.,  
Pastor

## PETE'S POST

Dear Christian Colleagues and Friends,

For those of you who were able to attend Annual Conference at Virginia Beach this past July, I thank you for attending and hope you were blessed as much as I as we celebrated the theme: Faith of our Fathers. There were over 600 attendees and Ohio was second after New York for having the largest turnout. I believe the Ohio 4C church with the most people attending was Vermilion E.& R. There were also over 100 youth who came from across the country.

As most of you know Reverend Cliff Christensen, our Conference Minister for the past 23 years, retired from that position and...

...continued on page 3

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(A CONTRASTING VIEW)

## FROM UNITED CHURCH NEWS (UCC), JUNE 2002

By Andy Lang

The United Church of Christ was a minority of one 30 years ago when the Rev. William R. Johnson became the first openly gay man ordained to Christian ministry.

The ordination was controversial. Critics wondered if the UCC was taking a risk that endangered its relationship with other churches. Some feared the church would be drummed out of the ecumenical movement if it continued to ordain gays and lesbians.

But that never happened. Instead, a number of Protestant, Anglican and Old Catholic churches have moved in the same direction, including nine of the UCC's partners in the World Alliance of Reformed churches.

The trend started with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Netherlands, which decided soon after Johnson's ordination that lesbians and gays could serve openly as pastors. Since then, the practice has spread to 25 other churches—among them the oldest Protestant churches in Europe.

Sexual orientation is no longer a barrier to ordination in the Evangelical Church of the Union (EKU), the German ancestor of the UCC's Evangelical tradition. Its territory includes the capital city of the Protestant Reformation—Luther's Wittenberg. Homosexuals also can be ordained in the

Reformed churches of Germany and Switzerland, the forebears of the UCC's Reformed tradition. The city once known as the "Reformed Rome"—John Calvin's Geneva—is no longer hostile territory for lesbians and gays called to Christian ministry.

Most of the historic Lutheran and Reformed churches in Germany and northern Europe now welcome homosexuals into ordained ministry.

Europe heads the list with 19 churches where homosexuals can be legally ordained. But several denominations in Africa, North America and the Pacific are also joining the trend, including the Anglican church in South Africa formerly led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the United Church of Canada, the Episcopal Church in the U.S. and the Uniting Church in Australia.

Besides these Protestant and Anglican churches, at least three of Europe's "Old Catholic" churches permit the ordination of gays and lesbians. These are churches in the Roman Catholic tradition that broke with the Vatican in the 19th century.

Many churches have adopted uniform policies that expressly permit homosexuals to serve as priests or ministers. In others, the policy is either neutral or implicit, leaving the decision to a regional or local authority.

Practices are not consistent from church to church, but in all of them church leaders have either ordained openly homosexual candidates for ministry or signaled their willingness to do so.

The issue deeply divides some of the churches where lesbians and gays have been ordained. Open conflict has broken out in the Anglican Communion. The church's international conference of bishops in 1998 rejected "homosexual practice" as "incompatible with Scripture," but defeated a resolution condemning bishops who "knowingly ordain" gays and lesbians. Some Anglican bishops in Asia and Africa, despairing at the trend towards greater acceptance of homosexuals in the Episcopal

Church, have threatened to break relations with U.S. bishops. Other churches have lost members and even entire congregations who feel they cannot coexist with openly gay clergy.

But in most churches, the trend is to recognize a diversity of practice—to "agree to disagree." In these churches there is continued debate, but homosexuality is no longer considered a church-dividing issue.

Many Protestant churches are still sorting out unresolved issues, with the result that policies are sometimes ambiguous or contradictory. Celibacy, for example, is generally not required by those German churches that ordain homosexuals, but some forbid gay pastors to live with their life partners in parish housing. That policy, critics say, has the unintended effect of splitting monogamous couples from each other, and sends mixed messages to the gay community about the church's commitment to lifelong fidelity as the ideal for human relationships. While the trend is towards inclusion of lesbians and gays in the ordained ministry, acceptance of homosexual pastors in Germany is often a quiet affair, not a confident proclamation that a consensus exists on the morality of same-gender relationships.

The 26 churches have a total membership of nearly 57 million.

Andy Lang is managing editor of the United Church of Christ website.

## Churches where homosexuals can legally be ordained

Anglican: Church of the Province of Southern Africa\*, Episcopal Church (USA)\*, Scottish Episcopal Church\*; Baptist: Alliance of Baptists (USA)\*; Christian: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)\*; Lutheran: Church of Denmark\*, Church of Norway, Church of Sweden\*, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (Austria), Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland\*, Evangelical Lutheran

Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany\*; Old Catholic: Old Catholic Church of Austria, Old Catholic Church in the Netherlands\*, Old Catholic Diocese of Germany\*; Reformed and United: Evangelical Church of the Helvetic Confession (Austria), Evangelical Church of the Union (Germany)\*, Evangelical Reformed Church (Germany)\*, Evangelical Reformed Churches of Switzerland\*, Evangelical Waldensian Church (Italy)\*, Netherlands Reformed Church, Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, Remonstrant Brotherhood (Netherlands), Uniting Church in Australia\*, United Church of Canada, United Church of Christ (USA)\*, United Protestant Church of Belgium\*

\* These churches have no explicit churchwide policy permitting or prohibiting ordination of gays and lesbians. The decision is left to regional or local bodies, some of which are willing to ordain homosexual candidates. In some churches this amounts to a churchwide practice, since no ordaining bodies discriminate against homosexual candidates for ministry.

In Germany, a majority of Lutheran, United and Reformed Landeskirchen (regional churches) permit the ordination of homosexuals without requiring celibacy. In the United Protestant Church in Belgium, homosexuals generally can be ordained in Dutch, but not in French, congregations. The General Synod of the Church of Norway, voted in 1997 to oppose the ordination of homosexuals living with a partner, but four of the eleven Norwegian bishops have declared that this policy is not binding in their dioceses. The issue is still in dispute. There is no churchwide policy in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, and at least one bishop has declared his willingness to ordain homosexuals. Other Finnish bishops have said they will do so only if the ordinand commits to lifelong celibacy. (Here ends the UC News article.—ed.)

## ...PETE'S POST (CONTINUED)

...Reverend Steve Gammon from Peterborough, New Hampshire, was elected to succeed Cliff. In my 10 years with the 4Cs, I have always been very appreciative and grateful for Cliff's Christian leadership of our Conference and am glad he and his wife, Carol, remain active, now serving as an interim in a Vermont 4C local church.

As we look ahead let's do all that we can to give our support to Steve and his family, who are excited and challenged by this new opportunity to serve the Lord and His Kingdom. On a personal note I am happy to report that the church where I serve (Jones Road Congregational) was one of five officially received into the Conference on Tuesday afternoon.

I also wanted to encourage as many clergy and lay people as possible to attend our fall regional meeting (Oct. 11) mentioned in this newsletter. The Saturday morning program will include an in-depth explanation and discussion of Natural Church Development. This is a church growth program that our Conference supports and encourages our local churches to use for growing our churches both spiritually as well as in numbers. Reverend Paul Hoffman will be the presenter, his church is currently using the program.

I realize that there are no quick and easy or slick answers to true church growth; it is the work of the Holy Spirit among the people of God who are willing to be led and directed by the Spirit of the Lord. But just like the Holy Spirit can use music and the preaching of the Word to move the people of God in worship, here is another resource or tool that the Spirit may use to bring healthy life and growth to your local congregation.

One final note is that you will see the 4C statement on "Homosexuals and the Christian Fellowship" as stated in our annual yearbook in this newsletter. I asked our editor Phil Ross to include it in light of the continuing "warfare"

that the Church faces as our culture continues its drift toward accommodation to the ways of the world instead of the ways of God. In particular, you read or saw in the news the appointment of the open practicing gay bishop in the Episcopal Church and the removal of the Ten Commandments from the entranceway in the southern state house building. More than ever we as evangelical Christians need to stand united and clear on the foundational truths of our Christian faith.

Let's continue to pray for the Church, for each other, and for the coming of His Kingdom.

*Pete*

**CONTRIBUTIONS**

As a reminder, financial contributions are always welcomed and needed by both the national office and the region. If you or your church can make a contribution, please send regional funds made out to: Ohio 4Cs and mail to:

Rev. Dave Lippert  
3620 Ruth Road  
Marion, Ohio 43302.

National church contributions are made out to:

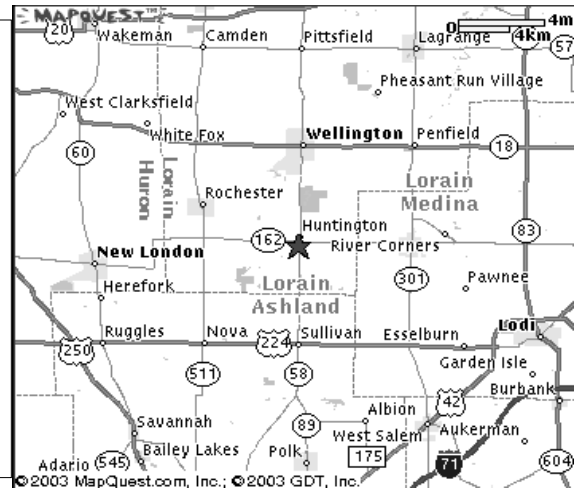
Conservative Congregational  
Christian Conference  
7582 Currell Blvd. #108  
St. Paul, MN 55125

**THANK YOU**

**GAMMON TO SPEAK AT WINTER BANQUET**

Steve Gammon, our new Conference Minister will speak at our Winter Banquet, Friday, March 19 at Malone College. Mark your calendars. Other speaking engagements are needed for the weekend he will be with us.

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2003**  
9:00 A.M. - 2:00 P.M.  
**REV. STEPHEN CARMANY, PASTOR**  
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DEVOTIONAL - REV. JOHN HOOD  
**NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT**  
SPEAKER: REV. PAUL HOFFMAN  
ST. JAMES LUTHERAN CHURCH, LUTHERAN, MISSOURI SYNOD  
CLEVELAND, OH  
QUESTIONS? - REV. PETE PARRY 216-692-1733



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