

WCN goes to CWU Gathering 2008!



A number of women from WCN attended the Church Women United Gathering 2008 held at Community of Christ's International Headquarters in Independence, June 19-22. The ecumenical

group was filled with joy in worship, sharing, and learning. Over 1,000 women from more than 20 denominations celebrated together for 3 1/2 days. Around 350 participants were members of the Community of Christ. The theme of "Envision, Equip, Empower and Engage" brought together outstanding speakers, presenters and ministers from across the nation and around the world.

WCN Board members, DeziRae Astle, Meredith Bischoff, and Sharon Troyer, were actively involved in the conference. Sharon and Meredith were facilitators in small group ministry. Many additional WCN supporters were also present, including Pat Marmoy, Terry Rathbone, Denise Leichter, and Melba Jean Dixon.

Meredith Bischoff's workshop, "Lepers, Harlots, and Tax Collectors: An Introduction to the Welcoming Church Movement" was well attended. By the morning of the workshop all the tickets were gone, and almost every seat in the room was filled. It was unfortunate that Meredith's co-presenter, the Rev. Rebecca Voelkel, was unable to attend the gathering due to illness. Topics in the workshop included: welcoming worship, an introduction to the Welcoming Church Movement, becoming a welcoming and affirming congregation, and suggestions about what life in a welcoming and affirming congregation can include. The

workshop participants were very interested and all felt that they were taking new possibilities for inclusion and acceptance in their home congregations back with them.

Late Saturday afternoon, many WCN supporters met with GALA's Kansas City Chapter for a potluck picnic at McCoy Park in Independence, MO. Relaxation and visiting along with a terrific supper were priority for all involved.

After the closing worship of the conference on Sunday, Steve Veazey and several key women's leaders led a session to help participants commit to action in their local congregations and communities. Commitments to minister to the needs of women and children and the full inclusion of persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities were lifted up numerous times from the group assembled.

As everyone was saying their last good-byes, Meredith was challenged by a new friend to help have a stronger presence and ministry to the needs of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women at the church's 2009 International Women's Conference. Meredith agreed and set a goal to have submitted by friends of WCN proposals for 3 workshops related to ministry and the full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members, their families and allies in the church.



Welcoming Resources for All to Share

While visiting with church leaders on Monday, June 23, WCN Board members made a stop at the **Temple Library** to donate resources for all those working in the International Headquarters and members of the Kansas City library system to access. These resources offered a wide range of information about the presence of lgbt persons in their churches and educational and worship materials for those interested in helping their congregation become welcoming and affirming. The resources donated are listed below:

- Shaping Sanctuary: Proclaiming God's Grace in an Inclusive Church
- Taking a New Look: Why Congregations Need LGBT Members
- A Place in God's Heart, A Place at Christ's Table: Worship Resources for the Welcoming Church Movement
- "For the Bible Tell Me So" - DVD
- "So Great a Cloud of Witnesses: The Story of the Shower of Stoles Project" - DVD
- "Unlearning Homophobia Series" includes 3 short documentaries - "Straight from the Heart," "All God's Children," and "De Colores" - DVD



Suzanne McDonald graciously received these items and made a commitment to get them indexed and placed into the Temple Library collection right away.

Training in Independence November 7-9, 2008

We are pleased to announce that a "**Towards a Welcoming and Inclusive Church**" training will be held in Independence at the Cornerstone congregation. The dates for this training are November 7th to 9th.

It is apparent that there is a growing interest in congregations becoming open and affirming to everyone including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered persons. These workshops provide information and skills in faith-based grass-root organizing, assessment of congregational readiness and resources for the transformational process. Making use of this training can help avoid the pitfalls which often accompany such changes.

This particular training has been developed with Community of Christ in mind. Since trainings are held at various locations around the country, it will probably be a matter of years before another one will be in Independence. So, please mark this date and register early as space is limited.

Information about the training and registration procedure can be found through the WCN web site at www.welcomingcommunitynetwork.org or call Sam or Pat Marmoy (816-795-6276) for registration forms.

HOMOSEXUAL SAINTS

The Fort Collins, Colorado WCN Group is using Bill Russell's book, *Homosexual Saints*, as text and dialogue starter in the Adult Sunday School class this summer.

What is your congregation doing to promote WCN educational objectives?

Visiting Ministry Calls made by WCN Members

On Monday, June 23, Meredith Bischoff, Arthur Butler, and Sam Marmoy met in the Temple lobby for visiting ministry calls. **The mission was to share the good news of Welcoming Community Network and provide packets of welcoming church resources.**

Visits were made with members of the First Presidency, Steve Veazey and Becky Savage; the Presiding Bishopric, Paul Davis and Dave Brown; Youth Disciple Formation Specialist, K. Poul Wilson; and Community of Christ Seminary faculty member, Sue McLaughlin. Resource packets were left for Dave Schaal (Counselor to the President), Steve Jones (Presiding Bishop), and Don Compier (Seminary Dean) who were out of town.

The goal of the visits were to let the church leaders know of the work of WCN and to offer assistance to the church in dealing with issues related to full inclusion of persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities. The sharing was warm and open with all involved. All were familiar with WCN and its work, and many referrals for additional visits were offered.

Contents of the resource packets were also reviewed during the visit. A partial list of materials in the resources packets includes: the Congregational Assessment, A Straight Guide to GLBT Americans, What the Bible Does and Does Not Say About Homosexuality, Out in Scripture, Living Openly in your Place of Worship, Transgender Americans: A Handbook for Understanding, a description and calendar of upcoming faith-based grass-roots organizing training opportunities, and the WCN Resource CD. Welcoming church materials provided by More Light Presbyterians and the Open and Affirming Program (ONA) of the United Church of Christ's Coalition for LGBT Concerns were also included.

Special interest was taken of the Safe Space stickers provided by the UCC Coalition. A request was made for additional stickers to be shared among Graceland University faculty members and discussion was started about having a Safe Space program for teens available for SPECTACULAR at Graceland's Lamoni campus and next year's International Youth Forum (IYF) in Independence.

Discussion about the development of "Pastoral Care Guidelines for LGBT Members and their Families" was met with a positive response by all, and recommendations were made for additional members of a development committee for this resource.

Invitations were made to all visited for three upcoming activities: [Many Stories, One Voice: Equipping the Saints for the Ministry of God's Extravagant Welcome in New Orleans](#) (September 4-7), [Towards a Welcoming and Inclusive Church training at the Cornerstone congregation in Independence, MO](#) (November 7-9), and the [WCN Annual Meeting and Worship in Independence](#) (January 17-18, 2009).

Meredith made additional visits with and gave resource packets to Apostle Mary Jacks Dynes and Denise Leichter, Counselor to the Southern California Mission Center President, during the Church Women United gathering.

Additional visiting ministry calls are planned this Summer and Fall with selected Mission Center leaders. More visits at International Headquarters are planned for January 2009.

The WCN Board is looking for additional Board members. There is also a need for the position of Secretary on the Board. If you are interested in either or both, please contact Meredith Bischoff at: Info@WelcomingCommunityNetwork.org

Many Stories, One Voice conference will feature a jazz funeral to commemorate the Upstairs Lounge Fire of June 1973

WASHINGTON, July 1 — Many of the hundreds of pro-lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Christians who will converge Sept. 4–7 in New Orleans, La., for the Many Stories, One Voice conference will revisit the site of a devastating fire that killed 32 people at a local gay bar known as the Upstairs Lounge.

The tragedy that occurred on June 24, 1973 — 35 years ago — was the deadliest fire in New Orleans' history. Many members of the local Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), including its pastor, the Rev. Bill Larson, died at the fire, which was widely reported as arson. The members of MCC had congregated after their religious service at the Upstairs Lounge as they did every Sunday.

“The Upstairs Lounge Fire, epitomized by the lifeless body of the Rev. Bill Larson, silhouetted in the window of the lounge, and the charred bodies of so many others, was one of those moments in history when hatred and fear seemed to hold sway. That nearly every religious leader in New Orleans refused to offer words of condolence or healing to the LGBT community at the time, but instead offered condemnation, further solidified the power of death. But, as people of faith, we know that death is never the final answer,” said Rev. Rebecca Voelkel, Institute for Welcoming Resources and faith work director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

“Amidst the deafening silence of so many religious leaders and the vocal hatred of others, leaders of the Metropolitan Community Churches were welcomed by the folks at St. Mark's United Methodist Church of New Orleans. In a great act of courage and affirmation of life, St. Mark's opened their doors for the memorial service for those killed in the

fire,” she added. “Their witness bore life in the moment, but it also planted seeds that have, 35 years later, come to life as the Welcoming Church Movement. Now there are some 3,100 congregations across the U.S. that are publicly welcoming and affirming of LGBT people.”

For more of this story go to:

http://www.thetaskforce.org/press/releases/pr_070108

For more information or to register for the Many Stories, One Voice conference, go to:

www.manystoriesonevoice.org.

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

Great News from Anita

The Carpentar Foundation has fully granted our request for \$100,000 to fund the last two years of the Project. The check for \$40,000 for this year has arrived and there is \$60,000 promised for 2009. This will supplement the Arcus money which is now beginning to taper.

The Rev. Anita L. Bradshaw, Ph.D.
National Field Organizer

Upcoming Events

- **Welcoming Church Program Training**
Lord of Life Lutheran Church
August 7–10, 2008
Columbus, OH
[More information](#)
- **Many Stories, One Voice**
New Orleans Marriott
September 4-7, 2008
New Orleans, LA
[More information](#)
- **Towards a Welcoming and Inclusive Church**
Cornerstone Community of Christ
November 7 - 9, 2008
Independence, MO
[More information](#)