



ADVENT

February 2009

Reflections on 2008

From the Co-Chair

The Rev. Dr. Robert Goldstein

There is a Chinese proverb, “May you live in interesting times.” We all can say that these times we live in are indeed interesting –to say the least.

The year 2008 was marked by great strides in LGBTQ rights when the State Supreme Court invalidated restrictions on who can be married in the State of California by judging such restrictions as unconstitutional. Some 18,000 gay and lesbian couples would tie the knot, and I had the privilege of helping a few of them. These were golden times as several members of my congregation, St. Francis, married. The oppression we all had felt for years had lifted. Life had become interesting in a most positive way.

Then along came State Proposition 8. Many of us worked hard to defeat this voter initiative. But alas, a new and unpleasant interesting time fell upon us as the Proposition was passed into law and apparently, which is very odd to me, removed the rights of a minority by a majority vote. What interesting times indeed we are now living!

And back came that invisible cloud of

oppression into the lives of those of us who are sexual minority –and into the lives of our other supporters.

Will the court declare this Proposition 8 unconstitutional? In this odd political culture of California, it would seem obvious that it contradicts what the justices declared –I even thought the judges said a voter initiative could not invalidate this constitutional judgment. But Proposition 8 won. Constitutionally, it would seem to be clear that it actually lost. After all, let us not forget that we are a constitutional republic and what we vote on must pass muster with our constitution –not the other way round.

But we are in California and times are always interesting here, it seems. If Proposition 8 is the law of the land, then, it seems to me, which minority is to be the next target?

Lutherans Concerned continues to work in the church to bring about not a political but a Christian truth of freeing people in Christ from homophobia, fear and misunderstanding. We may not win by voter initiatives but we can be a source of

vision and light while the op-

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pression continues upon us and many others throughout our nation. We can be a source of patience and encouragement for one another as we struggle for eventual equality.

The ELCA Sexuality Statement is now in process of being revised. But it is my considered judgment that the basic question in this struggle in the church is simply whether one is willing to accept a modern scientific explanation of sexual behavior or not. From our standpoint it is amazing how the ELCA will

Reflections from the co-chair

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From the co-chair

I still remember the day. I was probably around eleven years old. My big brother, Kris, and I were riding our bikes home and we ran into one of the biggest bullies in our school. She stopped us, grabbed a hold of my brother's bike, and said, "You're a fairy, Kris! Fairy - fairy - fairy!"

I froze. I wasn't exactly sure what being a fairy meant – but the fact that Cindy was calling my brother one, and using such a mean tone, couldn't be good. Kris turned to me and said quickly, "Kathy - go home. Get out of here." At the time, I thought he was being mean to me. He sure sounded mean. Of course, looking back on it now, I realize what my big brother was doing. He was protecting me from the "bully." He was recognizing that there was a great potential for harm to come his way, and even

perhaps my way. Years later, my brother came out to me. I learned that many times in his life he had been taunted, teased and threatened because he was gay. And I know it still happens today.

But I believe a reformation is occurring in our world. As a pastor, I work with many young people. Their incomprehension and anger of homophobic comments and acts by others fills me with hope and joy.

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I believe a reformation is occurring in our world. In June I marched in the Pride Parade. By my side were three teenage girls - one of whom was my own daughter. As we marched through the city, I thought of how proud my brother would be of his niece who was marching through his favorite city in support of the LGBT community.



I look forward to that day when violence won't be a part of someone's life because of whom they love. I look forward to that day when we won't need a Pride Parade - because all GLBT folks will be treated with dignity and respect. In the meantime - I know who walks beside us. I know who is our refuge and our strength - as Luther wrote in his hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is our God." And I look forward to seeing more manifestations of the reformation our holy God is working in the world.

God's blessings upon all of us who are part of the Reformation!

In Christ's Love,

Pr. Kathryn Gulbranson
Marin Lutheran Church - Co-Pastor
Co-Chair, Lutherans Concerned - SF

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How to Contact US

Lutherans Concerned
San Francisco Bay Area
566 Vallejo Street #25
San Francisco, CA
94133

415.956.2069

info@lcsanfrancisco.org

www.lcsanfrancisco.org

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Paul Gibson

For me, the highlight of any Christian gathering is the worship offered. It never fails to give me new ideas, new music, new expressions of faith, refreshment and renewal. Hearts on Fire was no exception, setting a standard that synod assemblies and other church-related gatherings will be hard-pressed to match.

The opening worship at St. Mark's church on Thursday afternoon overflowed with joy. The congregation sang out so boldly that the organist could risk letting us have a hymn verse to ourselves from time to time. The choice of hymns was excellent, showcasing some of the gems found in the "cranberry hymnal" (ELW). And, while the liturgical music was not always the most spirited of options, they were settings that everyone could pick up quickly, repetitious enough that we could learn them and join in. The Eucharistic liturgy brought together textual treasures from Scotland and New Zealand – it's so good to hear the familiar rephrased into the transformative.

This service was the first time that I had the pleasure of the Rev. Bradley Schmeling's company. My friends tell me that he always preaches sermons as insightful and moving as the one he gave us, exploring the dark side of the Emmaus story. What a lucky congregation he has. He so clearly manifests the gifts that LGBT bring to the pulpit.

On Friday evening we

had a worship service entitled Reflections on Healing and Reconciliation. It was, without a doubt, a Service of the Word – perhaps too many words! There were three extensive "news stories," each followed by a scripture passage too brief to do justice to the horror that had preceded it. Then came a gospel passage and a beautifully-preached sermon, followed by an extended time of prayer, with the option of doing so at the cross, one-on-one anointing, through written prayers tied to branches or with a memorial book. Altogether it created a service that lasted over an hour and a half and required a lot of sitting and listening.

Still, I was glad I took part. I received a lot of blessing from the music provided by Bread for the Journey, from the offering of foot or hand-washing as a preparation for worship, and from the opportunity to explore my own woundedness and pain while kneeling by the cross, before receiving anointing and a loving and faith-filled prayer for my healing and wholeness from a brother in Christ.

Saturday brought us a Service of Blessing for All Families, which, as a last minute addition to the worship schedule, was blessed by a spirit of spontaneity and informality, and by a generous outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as well. Songs, as beautiful as they were powerful, were chosen from a wide range of sources and blended well with the words of blessing and sending created by the worship leaders. I was struck by the observance that we are one family because "we take on God's unknowable last name together."

On Sunday, the assembly was concluded and drawn together by a powerful service of commissioning and sending, the highlights of which were the installation of blessing of the LC/NA leadership, Barbara Lundblad's reflections

on the Emmaus story ("They sat at the table with pieces of broken bread...and each other."), and the hymns and choir anthems chosen by David Lohman. Without a doubt, we left San Francisco with hearts on fire, empowered to spread that fire throughout the church and the world.

By Paul Gibson

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Current RIC Congregations

Thanksgiving Lutheran Church, Santa Rosa
Marin Lutheran Church, Corte Madera
Peace Lutheran Church, Danville
St Mark's Lutheran Church, Pleasant Hill
Lutheran Church of the Incarnation, Davis
Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Sacramento
St John's Lutheran Church, Sacramento
Community Lutheran Church, West Sacramento
Christ Lutheran Church, San Francisco
Ebenezer Lutheran Church, San Francisco
First United Lutheran Church, San Francisco
St Francis Lutheran Church, San Francisco
St Mark's Lutheran Church, San Francisco
St Paulus Lutheran Church, San Francisco
Trinity Lutheran Church, Alameda

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, Berkeley
University Lutheran Church, Berkeley
Christ Lutheran Church, El Cerrito
St Paul Lutheran Church, Oakland
United Lutheran Church of Oakland, Oakland
Grace Lutheran Church, Richmond
Holy Redeemer Lutheran Church, Newark
First Evangelical Lutheran Church, Palo Alto
University Lutheran Church, Palo Alto
Peace Lutheran Church, San Bruno
Christ the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, San Jose
Holy Redeemer Lutheran Church, San Jose
Immanuel Lutheran Church, San Jose
New Creation Lutheran Church, San Jose
St John's Lutheran Church, Sunnyvale
Epiphany Lutheran and Episcopal Church, Marina

From the Perspective of a Lay Minister: Leading the Marriage Rite

By Joseph Haletky, RIC Co-Chair

God certainly does work in mysterious ways, and often leads us along paths that we never expected to be led down! In August I took off on a three-week long road trip around the country. A couple of days out, I checked my e-mail at an internet café and received a message from George Knudson, a friend from First Evangelical Lutheran Church in Palo Alto, CA. We have sung together in the choir for a number of years now. George and his partner of 28 years, Wayne Studer, were going to take advantage of California's new legalization of same-sex marriage and were planning a civil ceremony on September 19 (the 28th anniversary of their becoming a couple). Would I perform the ceremony for them? I immediately e-mailed back "Of course!" and over the course of my journey the planning proceeded.

Some background about George before I continue with the story: George is a former ALC and ELCA pastor who came out as a partnered gay man about 20 years ago. George is a very gentle and non-confrontational person, so when he opted to be out, he eventually resigned from the roster of ordained clergy rather than go through the painful and probably inevitable (then) procedure of being defrocked. George and Wayne later moved out to California and eventually found their way to First Lutheran, attracted by the fact that we advertised ourselves as an RIC congregation. George has been active in the choir and also has had the opportunity to use his



liturgical expertise to chair our Worship & Music Committee, to assist in worship and, fairly frequently, to preach. George is a very good preacher. His sermons are chock full of very solid Lutheran theology – as befits his training at Luther Northwestern Seminary – but delivered with such gentle humor and warmth that they do not lay heavy on the soul like a large banquet meal. I've been urging George for some time to consider returning to the ministry through the extraordinary candidacy process, and he has taken a couple of initial steps, but his journey on that path has been very slow and deliberate.

This brings me to another thing about George: he is a very careful and cautious person who thinks through matters very thoroughly before acting – some might say he sometimes overthinks. It was not an easy process for him to decide to go through with a wedding.

George and Wayne were already registered domestic partners in California. The status of same-sex marriages was not assured since, although the California Supreme Court had decided that a state statute defining marriage as a union of a man and a woman was discriminatory and therefore unconstitu-

tional, an initiative constitutional amendment was going to be on the ballot this fall writing this limitation

It was especially satisfying to be able to invoke God's blessing on, and the support of our portion of the Body of Christ for, a couple whose love and devotion for each other is a wonderful example for all of us, gay or straight. **The walls of the church did not collapse.**

right into the California Constitution. Pre-

sumably this amendment would re-establish the ban on same-sex marriages. George worried that if this happened their marriage might then be invalidated and leave them even without the legal protections that they had enjoyed as a couple under California's domestic partnership laws. So George and Wayne actually consulted with an attorney before deciding to get married. Once they made the decision to proceed, George said that he asked me for two reasons: 1) I had had experience with civil weddings (in 2004 I was commissioned in San Francisco to perform a civil ceremony for my son and his wife – my son actually gave me the nod over his stepfather, who is an ordained Lutheran pastor!); and 2) as a layperson, I would not be put in any jeopardy of church discipline, as George feared our pastor, Kemp Segerhammar, might be if he were to do the ceremony.

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Hearts on Fire: Keynote Speakers Move, Invigorate, and Inspire

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

Gene Robinson spoke eloquently and passionately about the reason we were gathered and why some in the church are so afraid: because everything that was or appeared to be nailed down was coming loose. And rightly so!



Twenty years ago, most in churches would have said that they didn't know anyone who was LGBT and would have been right, for the most part. But now, so many have stood to tell the world who they were that no longer can just anything be said or written about us, because a face they know comes up and they know it is not true of Sally or Jason. He said we who work for full inclusion are people of uncommon courage engaged in something that comes with risks – a concept Christ understood full well. He said that standing vested for his consecration as bishop, wearing a bullet-proof vest, accompanied by a vested “deacon” who was actually an armored and armed, brave security man, there because of the FBI-determined credibility of the death threats, he realized that death is not the worst thing for a Christian – not living your life is! And, he said the church has never been a safe haven from conflict. Christ said that heaven was here and now. We should not fear conflict, but remember that sometimes God calms the storm and sometimes God lets the storm rage and calms God's child.

He said the reason that we are opposed so vigorously is that this is really about the end of patriarchy. And there is a direct connec-

tion between misogyny and homophobia. “White, straight, educated, western men have made most of the decisions for most of the world for a very long time – and that gig is up,” he said. He said it is no wonder that the resistance is so great when you challenge so many privileged people by inviting people of color and women in, let alone LGBT people.

On how to keep going, doing the work when some days are dark, he said we need to keep razing Hell – that's *r-a-z-i-n-g*. We need to preach the Gospel of Jesus in a manner that razes the personal and sociological hells people are in. And remember that we know, we know, how this is all going to turn out – with full inclusion. It isn't going to be easy and we aren't always going to get our way, but God says at our baptism the same thing God said to Christ at baptism: “You are my beloved – in you I am well pleased.” Robinson said to live life in this ministry with such joy that no one will doubt the love of Christ shines in us. Our “gay agenda,” he said, is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. And, in prayer, try being silent. Just let God love you.

Kelly Fryer, author, theologian

She spoke of lines, lines that separate us from each other, lines that are mostly put there by other people. She said that every time some line is made to disappear, another will pop up someplace else. Why? Because, she said, people can be dumb and think they can separate other people from God. She said that Christ died to remove the lines, the one Cain drew between hunters and farmers when he killed Abel, the one between Ishmael and his kin, the one between the sons of Hagar and the sons of Sarah that runs down the Middle East to this day, the line between slave and free, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile – “Who has tricked you, you foolish people, Christ died to remove these lines,” paraphrasing Galatians 3:1.

She said that lines have always been with us and the people of God draw them. She challenged us to examine ourselves for lines that separate us from, say, people who are weirder, from people who may

have voted against our political beliefs and the candidates we favor or for the candidate we now loathe. She said Christ died to rid us of those lines. They are already gone. Christ said the kingdom of heaven is here, now. Christ's death frees us from the things that would kill us if they could: fear, hatred, self-loathing, pride.

Our job is to live like the Christ-freed people we are, live so that others ask when we walk by “Who is that? I want whatever they have.” She told us to stop waiting for permission to live fully as Christian, stop waiting for the church to bless us – Christ already has. Moreover, we have been made priests through Jesus Christ and given a call. That's how God works: we are blessed in order to be a blessing.

Luther said we are slaves of none and slaves of all. We are set free so that we can love and serve our neighbors. We need to carry the message that God loves them to the world in a way that is full of fire and passion. This ministry is not a right that someone can give or withhold. It is our responsibility.

She said it was time for us to find our voice, to reclaim the “E” word, and be the evangelical voice, to share the good news we have been given, the uniquely good news of God's radical love and grace.

On the struggle raging in the church, she said it was won 2000 years ago, by Christ. Doesn't mean there isn't still lots of work to do; there always will be. She then challenged us to think auda-



ciously: not about just increasing the number of RIC congregations but of asking every RIC congregation to grow by 100% over the next 5 years. Or, how about asking every RIC congregation with fewer than 100 members to grow by 100%, and those with more than 100 members to split to plant a new

church, founded on the principle that all the lines man has drawn are gone?

*From the Perspective of a Lay Minister
Continued from page 4*

I would have assumed that in the Sierra Pacific Synod, especially in the Bay area, that was not a danger at all, but, as I said, George is careful and cautious.

I am not particularly a careful and cautious person, so it took me only about a nanosecond to agree to do the ceremony. I told George that I was pleased and honored to be asked. As a layperson, I have been the recipient of much excellent pastoring by a number of very impressive Lutheran pastors. This was an opportunity to give something back – to do a pastoral act for a pastor. We kept in touch by e-mail as I traveled around the country, planning the details. Here is where God’s mysterious ways started to lead us down new and different paths! We made the arrangements to have me commissioned at the county office to do the civil ceremony, but the county facilities were all booked up for the date George wanted, so he got permission for us to do the ceremony at First Lutheran. Thus, as a layperson, I ended up doing a church wedding, complete with scripture, a sermon, prayers, but not opting for the celebration of the Eucharist, of course.

The wedding went very well and was an incredibly joyous occasion. It was especially satisfying to be able to invoke God’s blessing on, and the support of our portion of the Body of Christ for, a couple whose love and devotion for each other is a wonderful example for all of us, gay or straight. The walls of the church did not collapse. And even though California’s Proposition 8 passed, this wedding will not be invalidated.

Pastor Kemp was not able to attend the wedding due to a previous appointment, but he eventually had his say as well. On Reformation Sunday, he included a short sequence of prayers celebrating and blessing the three weddings of same-sex couples in our congregation that occurred this summer (though only George and Wayne were married at the church), and we celebrated at the coffee



Interfaith Press Conference
Against Prop8 at San Francisco

hour with cake cut by all three couples. It reminded me of the “wedding reception” that we enjoyed at Hearts on Fire in July. In the service, Kemp held up these three weddings as a sign of the church’s continuing Reformation, and said, nine days before the vote on Proposition 8, “George and Wayne have been together 28 years, Dori and Phyllis have been together 30 years, the newlyweds Nancy and Karen have been together only 12 years. That adds up to 70 years of love and devotion and that is something that should be celebrated, not feared. My wife Christine and I have been married now for 41 years, and we don’t feel threatened one bit by these three couples!” Amen!

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...use all the modern technology to convene an Assembly, its members will not hesitate to get the best scientific medical help in a time of sickness, but when the mind of science turns its great powers of analysis onto human sexuality –we are suddenly rigidly quoting seven texts –even though we know the world is not flat and that disease is not because we have sinned!

Science has taught us the world is not flat and that disease has all kinds of natural causes, and science, the gift of the Creator to the human mind, has simply a much better explanation about how we develop and behave sexually. That is a crux of the intellectual issue. The church’s responsibility is to take that science of sexuality and “baptize” it, as we have with the planets and the universe; with leprosy and the common cold. The Sexuality Statement, in its latest rendition, was an impressive focus on the Incarnation that suddenly was running back to the idealized sexual culture of the 1950s. We all can do better than that –if we keep the Incarnate Christ as our focus in matters modern and sexual.



Bishop (then elect)
Mark gets ready for
Pride Parade

May the Advent of Christ humble and affirm us. May Christ’s birth renew us in love for one another.

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Key note speakers
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She left us three questions to ponder: What fire is burning in your heart? What part of the world does Christ want to light up through you? What is Christ calling you to do for the sake of something truly audacious?

John Selders, Bishop

John Selders brought us to the memory-presence of those who came before us, the native Americans whose land we now occupy and those who preceded us in the awakening of our souls. He said it was apparent that God is up to something now. He thinks we are on the edge of the 4th Great Awakening in America. Shifts happen. The first, through Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield and Nathan Webb, stirred the hearts of the people of colonial America.



The second, through George Sheeny and others, led to changes in American life like prison reform, the temperance movement, and women’s suffrage. The third, in Los Angeles, the Azusa Street Revival, led by William Joseph Seymour, prompted out of the Pentecostal movement the working together of black-white-brown people for social reform based on the gospel.

Shifts happen. As with all awakenings, we can change with it or be relegated to the margins.

Research among Christians and

non-Christians in their 20s–30s reveals that they are far more critical of Christianity than that group was as little as 10 years ago. Only 16% now hold a positive impression of Christianity, only 3% if you ask them about Evangelicals. Among the 12 attributes they ascribed to Christians were judgmental, hypocritical, too involved in politics, and old-fashioned. And 80%

of these people had spent at least 6 months prior attending church – 50% had considered becoming Christian but rejected it. The researchers remarked at how thoughtful, nuanced and experiential the opinions expressed were. When the label “judgmental” was used, it was the result of truly un-Christian observed behavior. Ninety-one percent of non-Christians and 80% of their Christian peers believed that the church was anti-

homosexual, showing excessive contempt and an unloving attitude toward gays and lesbians, and making homosexuality a bigger sin than anything else. In that regard, Selders said, it was hard to find a practical application for “hate the sin; love the sinner,” when everyone who was not an ideologue knows that homosexuality is a pre-determined biological trait.

Without being prompted, those polled in the research said that Christianity has changed so drastically that it does not look like Jesus. That

young people thought Christianity has departed from its roots, presenting a dissonance between the Christianity that had been taught to them and the Christianity they saw lived out, came as a surprise to the researchers. This came from young Evangelical Christians as well.

Selders said we have to make our circles wider and more relevant – “it is not us when it is just us.” He enjoined us to stop meeting in our own ghettoized groups and clubs. He spoke of a three-day long meeting recently, of “tongue-talking black folks with reserved Congregationalists and New Age Metropolitan Community Church people,” as maybe being the model to break out the yesterday-mold. “What a meeting that was!”

He said it was important to be intentional about getting on the trajectory to change. We all have to stop being stiff-necked. He said that those on the road to Emmaus had truly felt the impact of what happened in days just prior, but even more so felt the impact of what happened on that road. Shifts happen.

Selders is concerned that our welcome to young people be intentional and lived out. He said that most of us learned the things we really do well from someone else. So, teach, learn, make a place and be pleased to have done so. He reminded us that “hurt people hurt people,” and enjoined those in the work who needed to do so to go and get the help they needed.



Lutherans Concerned
San Francisco Bay Area
566 Vallejo Street #25
San Francisco, CA 94133-4083

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