

Table of Contents

- 2 **Strategic Planning Committee Embarks on Process To Seek New Direction**
- 2 **Presbyterianism, The Black Church and Homosexuality**
- 3 **A Synopsis of the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church Report and Recommendations**

Welcome to Nauraushaun Presbyterian Church

by Jim Uleman

One hundred fifty years ago, a small church was founded on the banks of the Nauraushaun Creek, in New York State just north of the New Jersey border. That church joined Presbyterian Welcome this spring, bringing the number of affiliated churches in the Hudson River Presbytery to three (along with Palisades and South PC). Nauraushaun's contemporary commitment to mission and social outreach probably crystallized during the 1960s, during Rev. Wilbur Daniel's 20-year ministry. He marched in Mississippi during Freedom Summer, and the church sponsored Cuban and Laotian refugee families. NPC has developed affordable housing through participation in work camps and Habitat for Humanity. It has several local outreach programs, including one to patients at nearby Rockland Psychiatric Hospital. It has sent members to Nicaragua and spoken out on issues of war and hunger. It became a More Light church in 2003, and participates annually in the Gay Pride Rockland Sunday.

This is an exciting time for Nauraushaun because it has just called a new pastor, The Rev. Laura A. Cunningham, who will begin serving this August. She will join a church with an ecumenical and interdenominational commitment to education for all ages; a tradition of innovative worship and a love of music; and a calling to social justice.

Please join us in welcoming Nauraushaun Presbyterian Church by sending notes of congratulations to: Nauraushaun Presbyterian Church, 51 Sickletown Road, Pearl River, NY 10965. email: npcpearl@verizon.net

Sharing Our Ordination Journeys

On March 21, 2006 Presbyterian Welcome sponsored a panel discussion with three newly ordained lesbian and gay pastors, The Reverends Ray Bagnuolo, Cheryl Pyrch and Mieke Vandersall. Organized by Presbyterian Welcome, the event took place at Rutgers Presbyterian Church and was moderated by The Rev. Karen Jones, Director of Field Education at Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York. Approximately sixty guests dined on lasagna and salad as they listened to the stories of hope and courage presented by the intelligent and thoughtful panelists. The audience included current and retired clergy, seminary students aspiring to ordination, and concerned laity.

The evening was deeply moving and powerful as each pastor spoke of their journey. The stories included the sense of isolation within our community that is so common to the LGBTQ constituency; touching examples of allies welcoming their LGBTQ brothers and sisters in Christ after their coming out; and the times when people were harsh and unwelcoming. What was clear from each story was the strong personal commitment

By Paul Mowry*

of Christian faith and the desire to be fully present and truthful about themselves and their lives in the Presbyterian community. Prior to any individual's coming out, there is a long and sometimes lonely journey of self-discovery and of searching for the way to be fully one's self with others.

While nothing short of a dramatic breakthrough, these stories of individual courage and faith helped illuminate the fact that the Church will be deeply blessed by leadership of this ilk. Many years from now, when all people are allowed to answer their call, a whole generation will look back to these days and be proud of the shoulders upon which they stand.

Bravo, Godspeed, and thanks to Mieke, Cheryl, and Ray for your courage, integrity and good work on all of our behalf!

*Paul will be the Field Education Intern from Union Theological Seminary serving Presbyterian Welcome during the 2006-07 school year. He is also a member at First Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn. Join us in welcoming Paul and praying for him and his journey!

Retreat for LGBT

Presbyterian

Inquirers and

Candidates for

Ministry of Word

and Sacrament

July 27-30, 2006

in rural Michigan

Strategic Planning Committee Embarks on Process To Seek New Direction

By Esther Sohn

Why did it take 40 years for Israelites to enter the Promised Land? Because they wouldn't stop to ask God for directions. That's one of my favorite jokes. We, as individuals, need and want to know where we are heading as we take the journey of life. Every organization should have a clear idea of where it is heading and why. Business people would call it "strategic planning." I, as a Christian, would call it "discerning God's Will," seeking directions from God.

In response to the time, Presbyterians came together in New York City in 1996 to find ways of promoting justice and inclusiveness in and beyond the denomination, specifically for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members. Since then, we have not stopped working for equality and justice in the church we love and serve.

The Steering Committee decided it was time to take a short break and reflect on our changing church and world and how our ministry fits and serves those who need us most. Times are changing; hence, our response to the times ought to change. As we, a small organization with a big mission, strive to be responsible to the need of the times, we find ourselves facing questions: Does our vision and mission really respond to the need of the times? Is it time for us to broaden our focus from removing

Amendment B into other areas of interest for the future of Presbyterian Welcome? As an organization, how are we effective and efficient? Do we need organizational restructuring?

In brief, it was time for us to stop to ask God for directions, asking who we are, where we are and where we should be heading. Accordingly, a group of about 10 gathered together and had a Strategic Planning Retreat, led by Rev. Mark Hostetter, at Brick Presbyterian Church on March 3-4, 2006.

Here is what happened at the retreat. We started our Friday evening meeting looking at the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats that affect our work, particularly in the areas of our Goals, Leadership, Communications and Fundraising. We explored the Core Value statements of other non-profit organizations and began the process of editing our own statement. Agreeing that an overriding core value from which we draw to accomplish all of our work is our faith, we began to ask questions; Do we currently have a political document or a spiritual one? Are we mission-oriented or fund-raising oriented? Is there an absence of spiritual language in our Vision-Mission statements? What revision is necessary in order to address the current times? As the first step in a strategic planning process

we explored where we are. Mark led us in clarifying these points, which would become the basis of possible restructuring.

On the following Saturday, our morning session involved review, brainstorming and prioritizing. We discussed the Vision and Mission Statements in detail, questioning the focus and words used in this document created several years ago. In the afternoon session, Mark offered specific advice on ways to restructure Presbyterian Welcome in response to the discoveries we had made. Carrying this work forward, small groups have met continuously over the past two months and will present their ideas at the Steering Committee, June 11. We will then bring our new ideas and direction for our organizational structure and mission to our member congregations for consideration.

None of our questions were answered. We just began to search for the answers. We will have to spend lots of time and energy, probably more than we imagine, before we have clear picture of whom we are and where we are heading. What is important is that we stopped to ask God for directions in the midst of our journey. More importantly, we are not alone in this journey. We have each other and God is with us, listening to our questions and directing us to an inclusive church.

Presbyterianism, The Black Church and Homosexuality

By Helen Bowen-Ingram

On Saturday, October 14, 2006, Presbyterian Welcome and St. James Presbyterian Church will sponsor a panel discussion on Presbyterianism, the Black Church and Homosexuality. It will be held at St. James Presbyterian Church in Harlem. You may wonder why we are targeting these three topics. The Presbyterian faith has always been one of inclusiveness. We work hard to maintain diversity in every aspect of the church and to welcome all who choose to join us in faith and worship. But sometimes we fail in achieving these goals. Sometimes we turn a blind eye to things that are right in front of us and pretend they don't exist. We fail to acknowledge intrinsic parts of our sisters and brothers in faith. And in this failure we hurt them and ourselves. We lose the opportunity to really connect and know each other and we lose the gifts others can offer. So, the purpose of this panel is to heal and to open a dialogue.

This panel, made up of the Rev. Dr. Margaret Aymer from the International Theological Center in Atlanta, the Rev. Dr. Emilie Townes from Yale Divinity School, and others, will discuss biblical insights regarding sexuality and homosexuality, theological and ethical perspectives, and personal stories. The entire presbytery will be invited, but we hope to target the African American congregations of the city.

Save the date: October 14th, 2006, with more details to follow.

A Synopsis of the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church Report and Recommendations



Presbyterian Welcome offered the reflections of The Rev. Dr. Byron Shafer in our most recent newsletter considering his experience on the original Task Force on the Church and Homosexuality in 1978. We promised to give a synopsis of the most recent Peace, Unity and Purity Task Force Report and Recommendations in this newsletter edition. The following is an excerpt from a sermon The Rev. Dr. Jon Walton preached on May 21, 2006 at First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York, summarizing where we stand now as a denomination. After the upcoming June General Assembly meeting in Birmingham, AL, we will present a summary and analysis of the situation before us, appearing in the fall newsletter. We ask that you pray for the Commissioners and Advisory Delegates to the upcoming Assembly that the Holy Spirit may move in our midst.

From Dr. Walton's Sermon:
"When All the Rules Blew Out the Window"

For more than thirty years, our denomination has been fussing and fighting and dividing over the issue of the ordination of gay and lesbian persons to the ministries of the church, and because we believe there is one ordination to differing roles this has included a prohibition against ordaining gay and lesbian members as elders, deacons, and ministers of word and sacrament.

Over the years that prohibition has taken the form of definitive guidance offered by the General Assembly, authoritative interpretations rendered by the Stated Clerk and subsequent Assemblies, and by an amendment to the Book of Order dating back ten years.

We have made attempts to remove that clause from the Book of Order twice before, gaining the approval of the General Assembly, but failing when referred to the presbyteries for ratification. In a few weeks the General Assembly will meet again, and this time it will consider two recommendations, two bills which address the ordination question once again.

One is known as the Heartland Overture, named for the presbytery that introduced it, but also endorsed by New York City Presbytery, which would call for a vote at the Assembly level to remove the prohibitive clause from the Book of Order, a clause which, incidentally, bars from office not only gay persons but also those who are

single and who are not celibate. It might pass the Assembly, but it will most likely fail if referred to the presbyteries again. There are just not enough votes to approve it nationally.

The other action the Assembly will consider is the report of a Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church established six years ago, which will recommend six actions to the Assembly. But it's really only recommendations five and six that are controversial.

Recommendation five, in essence, invokes an interpretation of the constitution which says that while standards for ordination are set by the national church, they must be applied locally, by the Sessions and presbyteries that know their candidates' abilities and promise for ministry best. Sessions would examine candidates for elder and deacon based on the qualifications of the individual as a person, and not as a category of person, ruled out simply because they are gay or lesbian. Presbyteries would do the same for ministerial candidates.

If a candidate for the ministry believes that he or she cannot uphold the Book of Order's prohibition on the ordination of gay and lesbian persons, they would declare that belief at the time they are examined, and if the presbytery determined that the exception is not an essential tenet of the Reformed faith, that's the technical phrasing, "essentials of the Reformed faith," then the presbytery may proceed to the ordination of the candidate regardless of the Book of Order's standard.

Needless to say, this recommendation five is controversial. And the sixth is like unto it. If five is controversial to those on the right in the church, six is troubling to those on the left. It advises that the best thing to do for the next two years, until the next Assembly meets, is not to take action on overtures (or bills) to remove any ordination standards including changing anything regarding ordaining gay and lesbian persons to the offices of the church.

This is to allow us as a church to live into this new approach to ordination, to find out what its promise and its problems are, and, from my perspective, to demonstrate to the whole church that we always have had and hopefully always will have able, gifted, and qualified gay and lesbian leaders in the church who can and should serve as Elders, Deacons, and Ministers of Word and Sacrament.

18 Supporting Churches

The Brick Presbyterian • Broadway Presbyterian • Central Presbyterian
First Presbyterian, Brooklyn • The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York
The Church of Gethsemane • Jan Hus Presbyterian • Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian
Nauraushaun Presbyterian • Palisades Presbyterian • The Presbyterian Church of Astoria
Riverdale Presbyterian • Rutgers Presbyterian • Second Presbyterian
South Presbyterian, Dobbs Ferry • St. James Presbyterian
Trinity Presbyterian • West Park Presbyterian

Vision of Presbyterian Welcome

As Followers of Christ, convinced by Scripture, we envision a world as inclusive as God's grace and a Church where God's gifts of ordained ministry are recognized in persons regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Mission of Presbyterian Welcome

As a network of Presbyterian churches and individuals in the New York metropolitan area, our mission is to clear the way in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for the ordination of ministers, elders and deacons without regard to sexual orientation or gender identity by:

- educating for deeper understanding and change in ourselves and others;
- advocating for reform of the Church constitution;
- expanding our membership and developing leadership in local congregations;

- supporting Presbyterians who are in the ordination process or are facing ecclesiastical charges;
- and collaborating with like-minded organizations to accomplish these goals.

Our History

Presbyterian Welcome developed from a group of Presbyterians that came together in New York City in 1996 to promote justice and inclusivity in and beyond our denomination.

Our Members

Our members include hundreds of clergy, elders, deacons and Presbyterian Church members across the presbytery of New York City with affiliate members from neighboring presbyteries of Long Island, Hudson River, New Brunswick, Southern New England, Newark, Palisades, Elizabeth and beyond.



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