

Beyond Inclusion News

Denver, Colorado

Thursday, July 13, 2000

Visit us in Booth 137!

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH BY ART MATTOX

The moment of truth came when a Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) motorcycle officer was injured in the line of duty and was hospitalized. Her same-sex partner was a sergeant with the same Department. It was not widely known that they were gay. Would the sergeant step forward at this critical moment; would she feel safe in doing so? Would this couple be supported by their fellow officers, commanders, and friends?

My personal involvement with LAPD started over ten years ago, first as an instructor at the police academy regarding the gay and lesbian community. After a while, I was asked to join the Reserve Officer Program, and was eventually asked by the Mayor of Los Angeles to serve as the city's first openly gay Police Commissioner. During the time on the Commission, we addressed a variety of concerns regarding diversity, and recruited officers at gay and lesbian pride events. Carrying the flag, so to speak, was not easy: I dealt with hate mail, fruit thrown at my home, and Fred Phelps supporters screaming at me in the gay pride parade. I played a role which was small in comparison to the gay and lesbian officers who were ultimately hired and sworn to protect and serve the people of Los Angeles.

An officer's life depends on the support of the fellow officer, in the life or death situations he or she faces. This bond is the ultimate test of support and courage. The environment has been created in which more gays and lesbians have become part of the force and have this support. Although change is not easy, the department is better because of its diversity. Fortunately, the motorcycle officer and her life partner had the support of co-workers, and she was able to return to duty.

Organized religion is a new part of my life, although I have always been very spiritual. I can't conceive of the actions of this week being any-

thing less than being thrown a few crumbs by a hierarchy that does not understand the needs and the value of its people. One of the main reasons I chose to become part of All Saints Church, Pasadena, California, as opposed to a gay-based church like the Metropolitan Community Church was because of its inclusion of all people. Metaphorically, this week, we moved from the back of the bus, to the second-to-the-last row of the bus. I'm angry. The easiest thing to do would be to get off the bus. I won't. I enjoy All Saints Church and because to leave would deprive the members of the Episcopal Church of the experiences, passions and yes... anger, that I have to offer. I am also angry at my fellow Christians for settling for so little. With courage and leadership, gays and lesbians fought for full inclusion in the LAPD. Gay and lesbian police officers gained the right to risk their lives to protect ours. Why is it so difficult at this Convention to demonstrate the courage and leadership necessary to simply give all gay and lesbian people the right to have their relationships fully recognized by this Church?

Beyond Popcorn—What's Next?

We sense the beginning of a sea change in the attitude of members of the Church since our presence three years ago in Philadelphia—not only in numbers of bags of popcorn distributed (1200 a day), but also in the numbers of individuals wanting to engage in substantial conversations. Clearly the market for resources and disks has expanded hugely. There is great cause for celebration in the incremental progress the Church has made in acknowledging "couples in the Body of Christ and in this Church who are living in other life-long committed relationships." Beyond Inclusion is committed to providing resources for priests "who disagree with the tradition teaching of the Church on human sexuality and choose to act in contradiction to that position," as well as supporting parishes who wish to begin courageous conversations on human sexuality.

The national steering committee of Beyond Inclusion will meet soon to plan for the best way to proceed between now and the next General Convention in Minneapolis in 2003. A third national Beyond Inclusion conference is in the works. Workshop teams are available for on-site, one-day sessions to facilitate the sharing of stories of individuals and parishes who have made a journey toward wholeness for all people. Our website will continue to welcome documents like parish mission statements, guidelines for blessing same-sex unions, liturgies, and all other illuminating materials. Call us, e-mail us at info@beyondinclusion.org, or snail mail us. And stay tuned

EXCERPTS FROM "RECONCILIATION: THE DESTINY OF THE CHURCH." BY GILBERT I. BOND, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY AND AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES, AT THE BERKELY DINNER JULY 7, 2000

...In all of the world's religions, holiness and purity are homogeneous. Christianity is the only faith which defines holiness as heterogeneous, as made up of unlike members, unlike parts, unlike elements. This is still very hard for us to grasp, which is why our different church families have tried to replace the body of Christ with a different organizational principle. Some have substituted doctrine, often forgetting that doctrine is a map to guide us, not a weapon to wound the members who take issue with parts of the doctrine. Some have placed the Bible at the center, forgetting that the Gospels point to One who is larger than the Gospels: the living God who was present at Creation, and that eyes cannot see, nor the mind of human being conceive what God has in Store for those who love Him.

At Emory University, I offered a course called "Becoming Community, for Ourselves and For Others." We examined the genesis of different Christian communities, the character of the ministries directed beyond the boundaries of their own fellowship. We made a pilgrimage to Oakhurst Presbyterian Church in Decatur, Georgia--a historically all white, middle to upper class Southern Presbyterian church in a neighborhood whose population began to change one day.

After prayerful struggle, the church embarked on a mission of outreach to their neighbors and discovered that reconciliation was at the heart

of the Gospel, and they become a reconciled body. But they did not stop at racial reconciliation. They also engaged the church's legacy of unhealed sexism and the neglect of the gifts of leadership among the female members of the community...

After the fellowship hour, we reconvened in the sanctuary to engage the members in formal dialogue about the challenges of Christian reconciliation. My students and I sat around the pulpit facing the congregation now gathered in the pews. In the midst of the discussion, one of the members of Oakhurst shared something I shall never forget. His name was Daniel, and he offered the following revelation: "I can't tell" he said, you how many people in this church disagree with homosexuality as a way of life. But the reason I as a gay-man keep worshiping at Oakhurst Presbyterian is that the people here love me. I've finally come to see the Christian community consists not of agreement, but acceptance."

Daniel, in one moment of testimony had summarized my entire course. Daniel had resurrected a profound lesson in Christian wisdom and practice, one that Paul was trying to teach the Corinthians, one that we are still trying to learn today. Reconciliation is not conflict resolution. There will be conflict. Count on it. It is not superficial tolerance. Jesus had so much more for us than tolerance. He invites us to a fellowship in the Spirit, His Spirit, a fellowship, which allows us to share our gifts with one another for the equipping of the saints and the edification of the body.

FOLKS AT THE BOOTH

Robin Trigg, and her partner Michelle Babitz have been members of All Saints Church since 1998. Robin graduated for the Episcopal Divinity School in 1997. Last summer she volunteered in the Beyond Inclusion office and is working to build bridges by being open about who she is in all areas of her life. Robin says she receives her inspiration to work for justice and fight oppressions from the people and many ministries of All Saints. She has also cultivated a talent for filling bags of popcorn...