

Social Questions Bulletin

Seeking Global Justice through the United Methodist Church

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FORGIVE US ALL

REFLECTIONS ON THE ATTACKS IN NEW YORK CITY AND WASHINGTON, DC
by MFSA Director Kathryn Johnson

In the wake of the horror of the events of September 11th I find myself wanting to speak of forgiveness.

I want to ask God's forgiveness for the ways in which we, individually and as a nation, have created and/or enabled a world of such violence.

I want to ask forgiveness of each child who has lost a parent, of husbands who have lost wives and wives husbands, of the families of each precious person killed in the terror. Forgive us for whatever part we have played in allowing hatred to triumph over love in our world.

I want to ask forgiveness of each police officer and fire fighter who lost his or her life in the act of heroically going to the aid of others. Forgive us for the times we have taken your service for granted. Forgive us the ways in which we have failed to extend ourselves, to risk our lives as you have been willing to do.

I want to ask forgiveness of Arab Americans and Muslims who in these days following the attacks become targets of racial prejudice and bigotry in our own country. I pray that we will remember and repent of the past sins of our own nation, the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, the enslavement of African-Americans, the genocide against Native Americans.

I want to ask forgiveness of those around the world who have known deep suffering resulting from policies and actions of the United States. For the times and for the ways in which we have exploited others in the name of economic gain, political power and military might. As these

actions come back to haunt us, it is naive to ask why Americans are hated in some parts of the world. As a friend said to me today, the actions of September 11th were "not about envy, but rather, a cry of protest, even if the form of that cry is morally indefensible."

Finally, I want to ask God to forgive us for our talk of retribution. Our pain as a nation is unspeakably deep and we cry out in anguish. But as people of faith we know that it is not vengeance that heals. It is love.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa knows this as do few others. Living through the horror of apartheid, Bishop Tutu has seen the human capacity for evil in ways most of us cannot even imagine. Bishop Tutu also knows the power of love and forgiveness. In writing about his work as the head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa he says that there can be no future without forgiveness.

And so, I find myself praying for forgiveness and recommitting myself to give my life to the things that make for peace.

There is a beautiful passage in the Hebrew Scriptures which speaks of forgiveness and healing: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (II Chronicles 7:14).

May God grant us the wisdom to discover the opportunity in this almost incomprehensible attack on humanity to repent of the violence in our own lives, and in that repentance, see our way to creating a world of kindness, justice, and humility.



Gloria Soliz and Dan Vera of United Methodists of Color for a Fully Inclusive Church address MFSA workshop participants.

MFSA Network Gathers at RMN Convocation

MFSA staff and members were among the over four hundred constituents of the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) who gathered in Tacoma, WA on July 26-29, for the organization's 7th Biennial Convocation. Throughout the history of the reconciling movement within the United Methodist Church, MFSA has endorsed and supported the efforts of RMN (formerly RCP). This summer's convocation was no exception.

As one of RMN's "partner organizations" MFSA staff led one of several "pre-convo" daylong workshops. During the workshop, MFSA members heard from the national staff about initiatives being taken at the national level and then spent time sharing with one another about things that are taking place in chapters across the country. During the afternoon members of the MFSA workshop met with the other workshop representatives to look at

continued on page 4

UMC Called to Account on "Igniting Ministries" Campaign

In light of the United Methodist Church's "Igniting Ministries" initiative (www.ignitingministry.org), its national \$20 million advertising campaign, we call the UMC to accountability. The campaign's theme "Open hearts, open minds and open doors," is exactly the reality the constituents of the Reconciling Ministries Network strive to embody. We wholeheartedly endorse this message and yet recognize, particularly for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) church members, that the UMC denies them welcome and equal participation, specifically in terms of ordination and same-sex unions.



Greg Dell (Clergy Alliance), Marilyn Alexander (RMN) and Kathryn Johnson (MFSA) at news conference calling UMC to account on its Igniting Ministries Campaign.

This struggle for full inclusion within the UMC is not new, nor limited to LGBT people. The UMC has historically negated and continues to discriminate against People of Color and women. Rather than reflecting a richly differentiated body, the UMC's membership falls short in reflecting the same diversity that is found in the population of the United States.

As a diverse community gathered from July 26-29, 2001, in Tacoma, Washington, for the 7th Biennial Reconciling Ministries Network National Convocation, we affirm the core message of the campaign: to be a Church that welcomes all people, actively and joyfully and with purpose. We dedicate ourselves today and in the future, as we have since our founding in 1984, to strive to truly fulfill the assertion of the UMC's campaign. We hereby affirm to:

- Work diligently to create a Church without barriers, in which all people, because of their many identities, are welcomed into full participation;
- To offer ourselves as a resource for individuals and congregations that want to genuinely welcome all people, including LGBT persons to Christian community;
- To join with others in the struggle for inclusion and social equality.

We applaud the message of the United Methodist Church's advertising initiative and the many members who are working to make our Church one with open hearts, minds and doors. We challenge the Church to make real this message not because marketing research has deemed this relevant, but because it is a reality that accurately recognizes the God given worth of every individual. We celebrate the gifts of the gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race,

and other identities with which God has imbued every person and invite others to join us in creating a fully inclusive Church.

Signed,

- *United Methodists of Color for A Fully Inclusive Church*
- *Clergy Alliance*
- *Parents Reconciling Network*
- *MOSAIC—Methodist Students for a Fully Inclusive church*
- *Affirmation: United Methodists for LGBT Concerns*
- *Methodist Federation for Social Action*
- *Reconciling Ministries Network*

Clergy Alliance Formed

Movement for an Inclusive Church Continues to Grow

The Clergy Alliance of the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) became a reality at the July 26-29 National Convocation of RMN held in Tacoma, Washington. Sixty-seven United Methodist clergy representing every region of the United Methodist Church in the United States declared the birth of the movement. Over the next several months United Methodist clergy throughout the denomination will be invited to become part of the Alliance.

The goal and purpose of the Alliance is to provide a network of support and strategy for clergy committed to a fully inclusive church and ministry. The movement will challenge UM Church policies and practices that exclude or discriminate against people because of their race, gender, sexual orientation, or other condition of identity.

The Clergy Alliance will organize and work nationally and regionally in three distinctive ways:

1. Working within and working to change the denomination's discriminatory policies and practices regarding sexual orientation and other identities. This effort will attempt to develop and support the fullest ministry of and for inclusion within the parameters allowed by the denomination's *Book of Discipline*. It will include participating in denominational legislative and election strategies, sharing resources for permitted inclusive ministry and establishing a network of support and communication.

2. Commitment to radical obedience to the gospel's mandate for full inclusiveness. This arena challenges the unjust laws and policies of the denomination through non-violent confrontation. The commitment will include both support (financial and other) to those injured by such witness and strategy to develop plans for individual, collective and mass witness.

3. The establishment of a Professing Church. This "church within a church" draws on the model of the Confessing Church movement that emerged during

continued on page 4



UMOC Charts Course for the Future

BACKGROUND

United Methodists of Color for a Fully Inclusive Church (UMOC) was formed in April 2000, when a group of United Methodists of Color gathered in Chicago to have a conversation on the intersections of racism, sexism, heterosexism in the United Methodist Church (UMC). This discussion resulted in the creation of a statement, "United Methodists of Color for a Fully Inclusive Church" which was widely disseminated and signed by United Methodists of Color from around the country and the world.

The purpose of the statement was to break the silence of people of color around issues of sexual orientation and gender identity and speak prophetically to the common journey to justice that people of color and LGBT people share in and out of the UMC.

LOOKING AHEAD

At the Reconciling Ministries Convocation 2001, UMOC gathered and identified the following key areas of work for the future:

RACIAL/ETHNIC RECONCILING CONGREGATION WORK

UMOC is committed to fostering dialogue on the issues of heterosexism in the church and creating resources that nurture the establishment of racial/ethnic churches and groups committed to the well being of Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgendered (LGBT) people.

LGBT PEOPLE OF COLOR

UMOC is committed to creating programs for LGBT people of color to explore the intersections of experience and reality, identity and spirituality. UMOC's aim will be to help LGBT people of color heal from the wounds often perpetuated by the church in the name of dogma or ignorance to the experiences of LGBT people in their midst.

COALITION BUILDING WITH RACIAL/ETHNIC CAUCUSES AND GENERAL COMMISSION OF RELIGION AND RACE

UMOC will seek to serve as a bridge between the movements to abolish racism and heterosexism in the UMC. UMOC supports and stands in solidarity with the UM Racial/Ethnic caucuses. It will also move to build connections with the General Commission on Religion and Race.

DEEPEN THE RESPONSE TO INTOLERANCE

UMOC will advocate for all efforts at diversity and will stand as a watchdog on all efforts of the "religious right" that seek to enact an orthodox understanding on the limits of the church's diversity. The structures of intolerance that stand as a threat to people of color and LGBT folks and their allies are rooted in the same lie: that there are limits to the church's hospitality and God's love.

CENTRAL CONFERENCES

UMOC will counter misinformation from United Methodists who say, "homosexuality does not exist" in the countries of UM Central Conferences. UMOC will raise consciousness in the church about the many well-documented killings, beatings and terrorizing of LGBT people from countries within our Central Conferences.

In the face of continued violence towards LGBT people in Africa, Latin America and Asia, UMOC will work with potential contacts in central and autonomous Methodist churches. UMOC will foster the potential for those sister churches to become advocates for the elimination of such violence and discrimination and becoming articulators for the well being of LGBT people. UMOC recognizes that the silence of these churches is often a product of colonial understandings of gender and sexuality. UMOC is committed to supporting these churches in decolonizing their understanding of sexuality and gender and becoming forces for justice and reconciliation with LGBT people in their midst.

AIDS IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

According to the Centers for Disease Control, the AIDS pandemic is increasingly affecting communities of color disproportionately. Churches in these communities have been slow to act in the fact of this growing crisis. Much of the reason for this inaction has been credited to homophobia and the inability of church leaders and communities to engage in a discourse on sexual issues related to the pandemic. UMOC sees churches of color and people of conscience in these communities as instrumental in ensuring that the real AIDS crises in communities

of color are stemmed. UMOC commits itself to fostering dialogue and providing resources to assist in this process.

CONCLUSION

United Methodists of Color for a Fully Inclusive Church stands as a beacon of hope for the UMC.

In supporting UMOC, we have the opportunity to nurture a progressive caucus of people of color within the church

- Which stands for FULL diversity in the church.
- Which is unapologetically liberationist in its approach to the current church.
- Which forges alliances with all organizations and agencies working to create a more diverse church.
- Which tears down the wall between people of color and LGBT people that has been built through silence.

To find out more about UMOC, visit their web page at www.umoc.org or contact UMOC staff person Dan Vera at UMOC, PO Box 29531, Washington, DC 20017-7531, (202) 422-1062.

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Clergy Alliance Formed
continued from page 2

World War II in Germany in resistance to the national church's collusion with the Nazi government. The Professing Church will focus on developing the parallel infrastructure and resources needed for full inclusive ministry. It will function as both an incubator and model for an emerging church celebrating the fullness of the diversity created by God. It will be less focused on attempting to directly interact with the denomination than it will be committed to enabling faithful ministry by participating clergy and congregations.

Clergy in the Alliance will be directly involved in one or more of these initiatives.

They also will commit to support those involved in the other profiles and to support the Alliance as a whole.

Those adopting the above model for the Alliance named an organizing group to select a permanent leadership team and to begin the work on developing the work of the Alliance. The organizing group will meet in early fall. The Rev. Gregory Dell, pastor of Broadway United Methodist Church in Chicago, Illinois and the Rev. Marilyn Meeker-Williams, pastor of Bering Memorial United Methodist Church in Houston, Texas were named as co-coordinators of the Clergy Alliance.

MFSA Network Gathers at RMN Conference
continued from page 1

how to most effectively work together for an inclusive church. Specifically the groups that engaged in dialogue with MFSA were United Methodists of Color for a Fully Inclusive Church (UMOC), United Methodist Seminarians and the RMN Southern Organizing Initiative.

Many MFSA members were also present with the group organizing the Clergy Alliance (see page two). MFSA's commitment remains strong to working with all of those within the UMC working for radical inclusion of all God's people in the church.

BECOME PART OF THIS EXCITING MOVEMENT AT THE HEART OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH!

Are you a member of MFSA? If not, now is the time to join! Working primarily through the ministries of the United Methodist Church, MFSA supports and augments peace and justice ministries at the local, conference and national levels. As an independent organization, we call our church to expand its understanding and embodiment of the radical call of the gospel to be the inclusive, justice-seeking, risk-taking Body of Christ.

MFSA has chapters in annual conferences throughout the country. Becoming a member of MFSA means you will be joining other activists who care about justice issues and actively work to make a difference.

At the annual conference level, chapters publish newsletters, work cooperatively with Boards of Church and Society and other conference agencies, introduce legislation at annual conference sessions, sponsor seminars and hold other events to inform, educate and motivate people to take action for justice. **JOIN MFSA!**

To join MFSA send the following form to the national office (address just below):

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Annual Conference: _____

Annual National Membership dues are \$35/individual, \$53/family and \$20 or less/low income and student. If you are in a conference with a local chapter you will receive information from the chapter soon.



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