

The Word is



a newsletter from the Pacific Northwest Reconciling Ministries Network

Annual Gathering Offers Opportunity for



by Vince Hart, Tacoma First UMC

Plan ahead! On Sunday afternoon and evening, February 17, the Reconciling Ministries Network in the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference will offer its annual Gathering event at the Des Moines United Methodist Church. This assembly provides an opportunity for individuals and members of Reconciling congregations and ministries to gather for a few hours of fellowship, inspiration, equipping experiences, and worship, joining with others who share their vision and passion for a truly inclusive church and society.

This year's theme is Practicing Radical Hospitality. The afternoon will begin with a keynote presentation in the form of Bible

study led by Joanne Carlson Brown, a United Methodist clergywoman who is both a pastor and an adjunct faculty member of Seattle University. Her recent appointment to the Tibbetts UMC in Seattle follows several years as pastor of the United Church in University Place. Tibbetts became a Reconciling Congregation about six months ago.

Mid-afternoon, a panel of members representing the Longview UMC will share how their congregation was profoundly transformed and set on a growth trend by their becoming a Reconciling Congregation and by their using and applying carefully the United Methodist resource called "Igniting Ministry Program."

Resources useful to other congregations will be available.

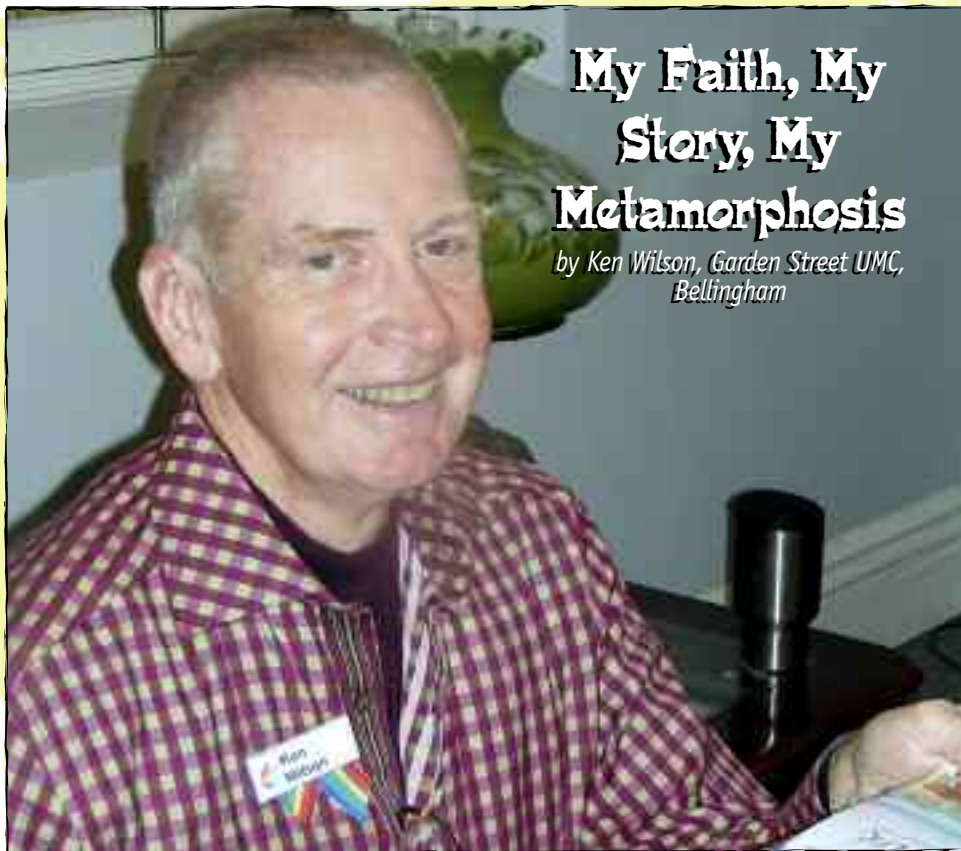
The afternoon will conclude with a preview of the 2008 General Conference, presented by a panel of GC delegates and experienced participants. Retired Bishop Jack Tuell will bring the perspective of his more than three decades of General Conference participation—over the whole period of UMC debate about "the practice of homosexuality." Several members of the PNW Annual Conference delegation to the 2008 Conference will also be on the panel, sharing their personal perspectives as well as a glimpse of the information that is pouring in. All the members of the PNW delegation to General Conference have been invited to attend the Gathering as RMN guests. After the panel presentation, there will be opportunity for questions and discussion.

The design this year does not call for a set of individual break-out sessions as in previous years. All three segments will be in "plenary" format so that all participants can benefit from all portions.

Following a light evening meal there will be a concluding service of worship which will incorporate a Holy Communion.

Enclosed with this newsletter is a poster/brochure with details regarding the schedule, registration, presenters, and directions to the Des Moines UMC Church. *Be sure to note the savings for pre-registration.*





My Faith, My Story, My Metamorphosis

by Ken Wilson, Garden Street UMC, Bellingham

Ken Wilson, a member of the "Inclusion Task Force" at Garden Street UMC in Bellingham.

Born in a modern-day stable (a double garage that my parents built and transformed into a temporary home) in July of 1933 on the outskirts of Toronto, Ontario, my early upbringing was in the strict evangelical Baptist Church and the equally strict Christian Missionary Alliance Church.

During my ninth year, because of my father's medical condition, our family of four moved to a rural area where we raised chickens. Only one year later Dad's health so improved that he and a business partner were able to start a truck body and school bus manufacturing company in Hamilton, Ontario, which I came to consider my hometown.

It was throughout my adolescent years that I began struggling with urges that seemed to be completely at odds with the strictness of my upbringing. For years though, I fought off these urges and followed my spiritual belief in Christ as my Savior. After completing high school (partially at the prep school of Bob Jones University in South Carolina) I went on to receive my BS degree in sociology from Houghton College, a Wesleyan Methodist College in Western New York State. A couple of incidents caused my parents to have great concern,

and I was sent to a psychiatrist for a "cure." Obviously this does not work!

I really tried to live a "normal" life. My baptism was by immersion in the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church where I became a member. I joined the church choir, became a Sunday School teacher, and was elected president of the large young adult group that gathered each Sunday before the evening church service.

I also extended my education by taking a two-year graduate course in interior design at Ryerson University in Toronto, thus preparing me for my eventual career as an interior designer and high-end furniture sales consultant.

But before I get too far ahead of myself, between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four, I became engaged to be married three times – another attempt to become heterosexual in order to please family and friends. All three fiancés came to the realization, in different ways, that I was not heterosexual.

At the age of twenty-seven, in the midst of this, I came out to my family. I was tired of battling my urges.

At thirty-seven I met my life partner and we lived together in New Jersey for thirty-four years, until Pat's death. During those years I still believed in my spiritual self, but did not believe it was necessary to attend church to maintain my faith. One of my excuses was that I worked every Sunday as well as five other days per week. My career, home life, and social life with my partner seemed enough – along with my personal faith.

Twenty-one years ago, when I was fifty-two, I suffered a severe heart attack and was quite near death during four life-threatening cardio-related incidents. However, the Lord gave me a calmness that allowed me to continue. You see, I have a God-given optimistic attitude in my life that keeps me going. I'm convinced that attitude and my faith keep me living.

At sixty-seven, in 2000, I retired to devote myself full-time to care giving for my partner Pat in his final years. Pat had suffered two strokes that left him double-sighted and without balance, as well as a pulmonary disease. Pat died on Good Friday of 2004 and I, having already considered what I would do at his death, left New Jersey behind and moved west to be near the remaining members of my family. After I settled in Bellingham, I began to warm to the idea of finding a church home.

I tried a Baptist Church and immediately heard "Hellfire!" for any person in my walk of life. However, I soon found, and was warmly welcomed at Garden Street UMC. I felt so warmed and welcomed that I soon joined the choir and became a church member. Thanks to loving Christian friends, I have the Garden Street UMC church family which have helped me get through the years of grieving Pat's death, and in getting on with my new life and my faith in Christ.

Recently an "Inclusion Task Force" was established at Garden Street and I am privileged to be working with the group. We have high hopes of becoming a Reconciling Congregation. ▽

EDITORIAL

by Vince Hart, Tacoma First UMC

Our Methodist forbears were accused of wild "enthusiasm" because they claimed that God could act in human lives in the present and could communicate directly to living persons, doing both in ways that did not always fit the model of established tradition. The leaders of the Church of England considered John Wesley and his "Methodists" (a derogatory term at the time) to be a bunch of heretics because of their claims of direct "inspiration" and personal "assurance" of salvation. And yet Wesley and his colleagues persisted because they saw the "fruit of the Spirit" evidenced in the lives of thousands of people who were being neglected or rejected by the "established" religious leaders, people considered not worthy of pastoral concern or of a place in the "nice" churches. What Wesley saw, once he broke through his own establishment prejudices and proclaimed God's love and grace in the marketplaces and at the crossroads, were the tears of joy and hope on the dirty faces of miners and farmers and village merchants. He saw God bearing witness to an inclusive love, a radical welcome and hospitality, which knew no human boundaries. And Wesley trusted that witness.

The bold inclusiveness of social rejects in class-conscious England (and the Church of England) which was practiced by Wesley and the first Methodists paralleled the startling inclusion of Gentiles in the Christian Church itself, born as it was in the intensely distinction conscious Judaism of Jesus' day. Again, it was the evidence of God's *present action* in the lives of the supposedly unacceptable which broke down the ancient barriers. The first disciples, empowered and transformed by their own Pentecost, were pressed by God's parallel action in others to recognize and acknowledge and proclaim that God's welcome, God's radical hospitality, was far more inclusive than they had ever imagined.

Is it not fair, appropriate, and urgent to recognize, acknowledge, and proclaim a new and clearer vision of that divine welcome and hospitality today? Is it not time to be honest about the presence of the same "assurance" of salva-

tion (right relationship with God) and the same "fruits" by which we are to know true disciples of Jesus Christ, when we see them in LGBT persons now? Jesus cautioned about failing to have "eyes to see" and "ears to hear" the evidence of God's present action and present message. It behooves us to heed that caution. I see a great deal of godly evidence in the lives of LGBT persons I know, including those who are "practicing"; and I rejoice in their gifts and graces and in the ways God's church prospers because of their presence. I rejoice, too, in their freedom to "practice" the fullness of loving relationships in covenants that God has blessed. ▽

Tex Sample to preach and lead workshop at Stanwood UMC

Stanwood United Methodist Church is hosting Tex Sample for a workshop on February 10, 2008. He will preach at the morning worship services at 8:30 a.m. and 10:45 a.m. and then lead an afternoon workshop from 2-5 p.m. entitled "Getting the Story Right/Getting the Practices Right." Registration and a suggested donation of \$20 is requested for the workshop. If you have questions, please contact Pastor John J. Shaffer at 360-629-9555 or Jjsshaffer@aol.com

Sample, is co-editor of "The Loyal Opposition: Struggling with the Church on Homosexuality" (Abingdon, 2000), which includes chapters by Victor Paul Furnish, Bishop Roy Sano, Gil Caldwell, Jeanne Audrey Powers, Sue Laurie, Ignacio Castuera, Phil Wogaman, and others. He says that, "The challenge to the church is always to be faithful to God's story and not to make idolatrous accommodations to the culture in which the church finds itself. One of the aims of the workshop is to work with the notion of placing the world in God's story and not the other way around. The second aim is to discuss the importance of practices in faithfulness and in the formation of disciples. This means, at the least, engaging in the practices that are intrinsic to God's story." ▽

Upcoming Events

PNW-RMN Council meetings are scheduled for the 3rd Saturday of each month at noon (with the exceptions of February, June & July)

JANUARY

19 PNW-RMN Council Meeting 12:00 noon
Kent UMC, Kent
www.kentmethodist.com

FEBRUARY

17 Gathering – 2008
(see first page for details)

MARCH

15 PNW-RMN Council Meeting 12:00 noon
Tacoma First UMC, Tacoma
www.fumctacoma.org

APRIL

23–5/2 General Conference
Fort Worth, TX
www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1LtH/b.2336161/k.1E1C/General_Conference_2008.htm

MAY

17 PNW-RMN Council Meeting 12:00 noon
Tacoma First UMC, Tacoma
www.fumctacoma.org

JUNE

12–16 Annual Conference
University of Idaho
29 Seattle PRIDE Parade
www.seattlepride.org

AUGUST

15-16 PNW-RMN Retreat
Matt Patera-Craig Waterbury "estate" in
Federal Way

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Staff: Linda Gasparovic, Foster Stockwell, Vince Hart, Amory Peck.
Submission of articles and photos by E-mail welcome, by the first of the month preceding publication to editor@pnw-rmn.org.

Reflections by Our Delegates Going to General Conference

Amory Peck

I dipped my toe into the General Conference when I went to Cleveland in 2000 as an observer. During those two weeks I rose early to help with the 6:30 distribution of Affirmation's daily newsletter, and ended my days late at night attending the strategy sessions sponsored by Affirmation, MFSA, and RMN. In-between I observed, with real anguish, the conference proceedings.

I stepped into the water when I traveled to Pittsburgh in 2004 as the first reserve delegate.

Instead of distributing newspapers in the morning, I attended 7 AM strategy sessions of the Western Jurisdiction, and ended my day at near-midnight debriefing meetings with the others from the PNW. In-between I sat at the ready, stepping in when a lay substitute was needed. There seems to be a sweeping call for inclusion of LGBT United Methodists. But, then we'll remember that those who dedicate themselves to maintaining the current exclusionary language don't need to submit legislation. They just need to defend the rules as written.

Your prayers, which I know will be offered for us all, will be the strength undergirding witness.

Gail Grossman

In just a few months it will be time to fly to Fort Worth and engage in the exhilarating, grueling, and probably discouraging work of General Conference. As a lay delegate at Cleveland in 2000, I can

characterize General Conference as a gathering in which I will know great highs and dismal lows. It was, and I'm sure will be, a very humbling experience to be sitting in the plenary sessions, realizing that I am there on behalf of PNWAC United Methodists, representing my best understanding of God's call to us about many, many issues in the ways that I vote.

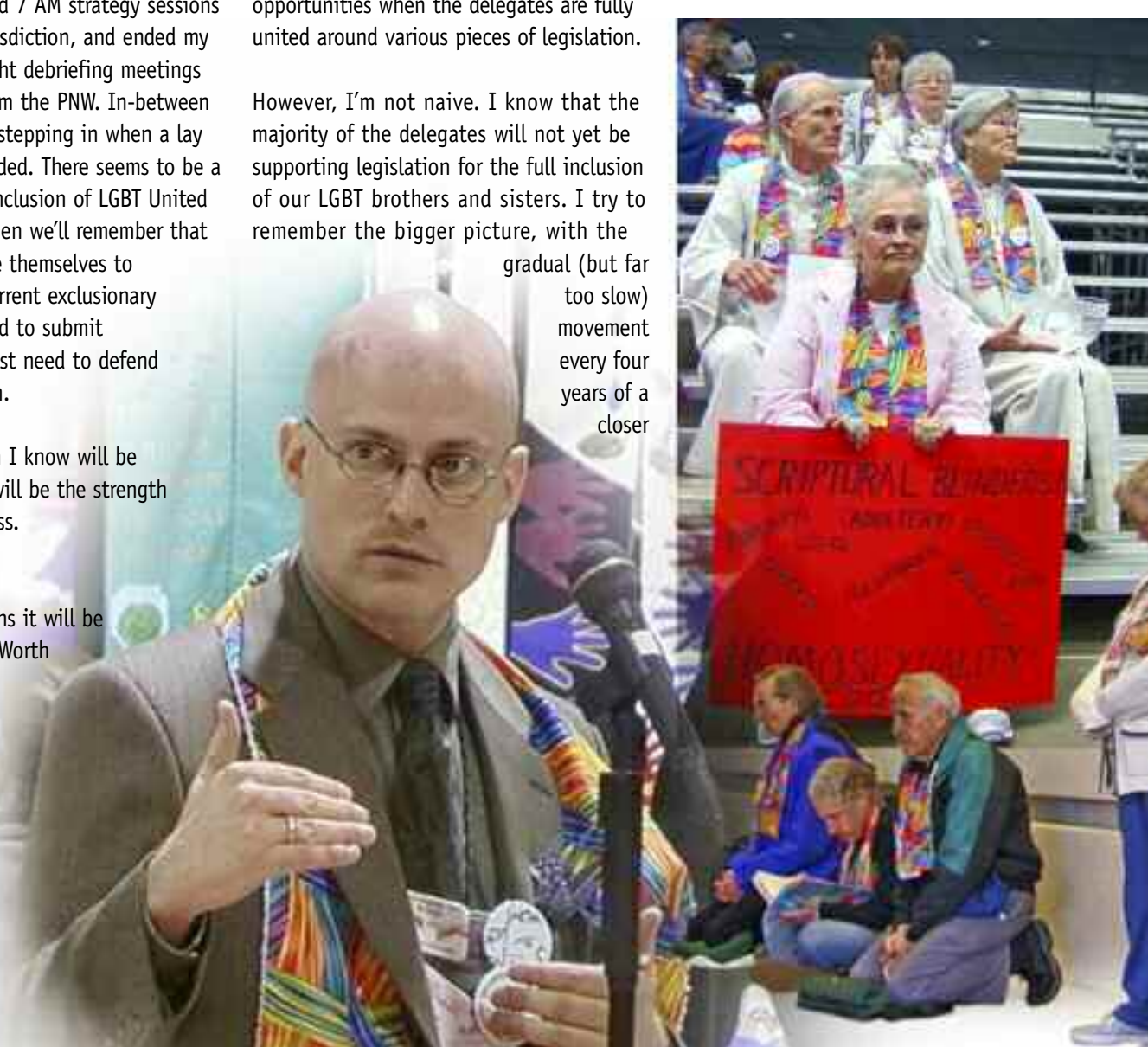
It is truly inspiring to be gathered with United Methodists from around the world in worship, singing, and celebration. At the same time, it's discouraging to be continually "outvoted" regarding certain issues, such as those pertaining to full inclusion. Certainly I look forward to opportunities when the delegates are fully united around various pieces of legislation.

However, I'm not naive. I know that the majority of the delegates will not yet be supporting legislation for the full inclusion of our LGBT brothers and sisters. I try to remember the bigger picture, with the

gradual (but far too slow) movement every four years of a closer

and closer vote for inclusion. I pray that I may be a worthy interpreter to others about why this change for inclusion must become part of our denomination's very being.

While individuals and conferences have submitted much legislation supporting full inclusion, I will also be watching for legislation clarifying the responsibilities of pastors to discern readiness for local church membership. You will recall the Judicial Council's recent support of a local pastor's decision to deny membership to an active layman in his church solely because he was a homosexual. I will strongly advocate for clarifying legislation to ensure that this



Conference

type of injustice can't occur in the future. But I fear that the majority will vote as the Judicial Council ruled as a way of controlling their narrow agenda.

Despite the many exciting things that happen at General Conference, I'm finding myself already preparing to function within the hostile environment that surrounds advocates for full inclusion. Fortunately, the various support systems for full inclusion (such as RMN) will be very visible and supportive. I continue to pray for the strength and fortitude to witness to my convictions that God calls all persons to the table, through Jesus Christ.

Elaine Stanovsky

I attended my first General Conference in 1972 as a young adult observer, sent by the Pacific Northwest Conference. This was the first time the church addressed concerns of sexual minorities. At that time the church affirmed "Homosexuals no less than heterosexuals are persons of sacred worth, who need the ministry and guidance of the church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship which enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. Further we insist that all persons are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured. . ." Renowned Wesley scholar, Albert Outler, advocated inclusion of the language that is so familiar to us now, "though we do not consider the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching." In the debate, this was considered compromise language that left open the question of what God's will might be. Hesitant about homosexual relationships, the body cautioning that, "We do not recommend marriage between two persons of the same sex."

This was also the first General Conference at which a "Gay Caucus"



The Rev. Page Hines, associate pastor at First United Methodist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, reads a hand-written prayer on an envelope containing seeds for planting in preparation for the 2008 General Conference. United Methodists from across the United States wrote prayers on the envelopes. The seed packets are the brainchild of Marcia McFee, one of the music directors for the denomination's top legislative body meeting April 23-May 2 at the Fort Worth Convention Center. A UMNS photo by Steve Smith.

was present and visible, in the persons of Gene Leggett, a former clergy member of the Southwest Texas Annual Conference and a layman attorney from New York State.

Since 1972 the UMC has fought mightily about these matters. They have become a wedge within the community, dominating issues from the election of persons to the Judicial Council (the supreme court of the church) and the episcopacy to the formula for representation on the governing boards of the general agencies of the church.

The church's understanding of the way in which Jesus Christ works in the world for transformation and reconciliation will not be decided by a vote of the General Conference. It will be decided as persons of faith learn to recognize the self-giving love of God in relationships among family members and church friends that do not match social norms. It will be decided in spiritual friendships with gay, lesbian, bisexual and

transgendered persons. The Holy Spirit will work in and among church people in living relationships to show us the path of life. The church is not likely to change it's official position until the people in the church have come close to consensus that a change is consistent with God's purposes in the world.

As this process unfolds, I will continue to bear witness to my belief that relationships bearing the fruits of wholeness, healing and creativity are pleasing to God and have a place in God's household. I will invite the church to recognize the damage its condemnation and prohibition do, and to invite God to teach us a new thing. And I will try to balance my impatience and my patience as the Holy Spirit moves among us to show us a more excellent way than we have yet understood. On the one hand this change is coming quickly. On the other hand, every minute is intolerable for those who are misunderstood, maligned and marginalized.

“INLAWS AND OUTLAWS”

by Paul Beeman, Des Moines, WA

Seattle producer Drew Emery has provided a delightful and intimate series of vignettes about committed relationships— those that don't work and those that do, both gay and straight.

Interspersed with jazz singer Felecia Loud's introduction of various themes, the show roams through five scenarios.

It opens as a series of kids comment on what they think of marriage. “You do that so you can have kids and a dog,” explains one little girl. Next, in a series of monologues, the largely gay and lesbian commentators describe the marriages of their parents, and what drew them into early relationships.

Backed up with a fine jazz combo, Felecia croons, “Why do they fall in love?” the theme of the third section of interview responses. Two uncommitted lesbian women admitted they went together on a ski trip, and added a roll-away bed for the sake of discretion. “That turned out to be a waste of money,” they laughed.

At forty six minutes into the program, the issue of marriage surfaced. While some couples admitted never going public, one lesbian actually traveled to her partner's parents' home to ask for her hand in marriage. Now that's traditional! But several couples praised the support of their families.

“Life is about going through the grieving process,” admitted one lesbian woman, as she introduced the segment on divorce, as the band played, “I'll never fall in love again.”

Perhaps the most poignant segment dealt with monologues and dialogues on “What holds us together.” It took years, but when a committed lesbian couple could finally refer to each other as, “My wife,” the bond between them was completed. Two delightful older women admitted joyously, “It's still physical. We still have that va, va, va Vroom together!”

The final section found various gay persons

admitting, as did one, “I'm single, but I don't want to cut off the possibility of a relationship,” while the singer opined, “We have something permanent, I mean the way we care.”

I couldn't help identifying with the deep emotions expressed by the wondrous variety of personalities in the show. It's unstated message— the similarity of straight and gay love— was beautifully expressed. Producer Drew Emery has a movie of excellent quality for use in churches, service clubs, various other gatherings, and occasionally in public theaters. The show needs to be seen.

I found the lighting quite good, the sound excellent, but the background scenery, or lack of it, a bit disconcerting. While the intimacy of the talking heads was preserved, I found the editing to be undisciplined. Far too much material was left in, somewhat diluting the message.

Three things might have made it a far more effective messenger. First, the intended points were never made, only tediously implied. Second, the deep insights needed to integrate gay marriage into our society were left unexplored. That's a process for which I yearned. And third, in the often repetitive segments and testimonials through the 137-minute movie, as my wife used to say of my sermons, “They missed some wonderful places to have stopped.”

Note: Churches all over the country have shown “Inlaws & Outlaws”— and yours can too. The film is being made available to any congregation, group or individual that would like to host a screening for as little as \$75 each. Whether you charge admission or not, the film is yours to use as you see fit; to educate, advocate, raise money, or to celebrate loving relationships of all kinds. For more information on booking “Inlaws & Outlaws,” contact the Hearts + Minds Campaign Mon-Thu 9-5 at 206-274-5858. Or write campaign@inlawsandoutlawsfilm.com. ▽



Lending Library in the Works

by Vince Hart, Tacoma First UMC

One of the PNW-RMN goals for 2008 is the development of an effective Lending Library and Book Reference Resource. The latter would be available on the website while the former would be circulated by mail. By late spring, it is hoped to make this small "library" available to readers. Contributions to the Lending Library are welcome, especially if accompanied by a brief review to assist prospective readers. Send books to Vince Hart, c/o First United Methodist Church, 209 South J Street, Tacoma, WA 98405. Look for more details in the Summer 2008 issue of *The Word Is OUT*. ▽

Many Voices: One Call

by Matt Lockett, member of the PNW Connectional Table and student at Western Washington University

The idea started almost two years ago, and now we are a group of six young people. We will be coming together to present the first ever Young People's Address at the United Methodist General Conference. We really are quite diverse. Collectively, we represent an extremely broad spectrum of backgrounds, ages, and geographic locations. The group members span from Seattle, all across the United States, and to Russia. We first met in August of 2007 in Nashville, where we gathered to start piecing together the address. The first thing we agreed on was that we did not want this to be like anything that has ever been done before at General Conference. We will be incorporating many types of multimedia, artistic expression, and languages. It is hard to tell at this point what the final outcome will be as it is changing daily. What I can tell you for sure is that we are going to be very honest and that we are not going to let this opportunity go to waste.

We want our address to be a time of worship.

We want it to be a time for God to work through us to give the message that we are supposed to deliver. We are not going to stand in front of the body and tell them what they might prefer to hear. The delegates can plan on being challenged in their faith. They can plan on smiling, and crying, and wondering. Our goal is for people to leave the presentation knowing God better than when they walked in the door.

For many young people today, the church is not about controversy. The church is not about differences. The church is about what we have in common. We want to make a difference in the world. The purpose of our address is not to bring controversy, but to bring unity. We are extremely excited for this address and cannot wait to share it with all the delegates. We wish you all could join us in this time of worshipping the God we love. ▽

The Kent Reconciling Fellowship

by Bartholda Manderville, Kent UMC

In 2004, after the Karen Dammann trial, a reconciling fellowship at Kent United Methodist Church was started at the suggestion of retired clergyman Jack Severns. The KUMC Reconciling Fellowship started with the full support of our Pastor, Keat Yeoh. The Fellowship is a small but vital group whose goal is to enable our membership to study, pray, and support efforts to be a fully inclusive congregation.

We have brochures in a display in the narthex that includes information about upcoming events, and there is a listing of books about homosexuality available for checkout



Kathy Sakahara of Kent UMC marches in the 2007 Seattle PRIDE parade. Photo by Geoff Sakahara

in our church library. We continue to meet monthly, weekly if we are doing a book study. We just finished a session on the book *Homosexuality and Christian Faith*.

The fellowship actively supports PNWRMN events such as The Gathering and the RMN at Annual Conference. In our local church, we have sponsored a movie night, showing the movie about Beth Stroud with a Q & A afterwards led by Bishop Jack Tuell, and a study of the book, *Science, Scripture and Homosexuality*. In October 2006 we invited churches in the area to a dinner at the KUMC with Rev. Mark Williams as our speaker. Several people came all the way from Tacoma First UMC to hear Mark. We are planning another movie night in the spring to show "For the Bible Tells Me So." Also we were a presence at the Gay Pride Festival in June when we joined the Wallingford and Ravenna UMCs in their displays at the Seattle Center.

We have some big plans for 2008. Besides the movie night in the spring, we plan on Rally Day at Kent UMC next fall to have a small display of the Shower of Stoles.

If your church is not ready to become a Reconciling Congregation, maybe a Reconciling Fellowship within your local church would work for you. If you want to start one in your church, contact Kent United Methodist Church, (253-852-3900), for more information. ▽