

WORSHIP AND RITUAL FOR WELCOMING COMMUNITIES





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This book is dedicated to the memory of Ruth Duerksen Linscheid (1931-2016), whose fierce and loving spirit continues to inspire hope and courage. For her life and witness, we are forever grateful.

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CALL TO WORSHIP CALL TO WORSHIP IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Ken White and John Linscheid Germantown Mennonite Church

One: In a world of conflict,

in a polarized nation,

in a city plagued by violence, we cry
All: God, God, why have you forsaken us?

Where have you gone?

Do you hear us?

One: In our restless seeking,

in our quest for answers,

in our spiritual exercises, we wonder

All: Why don't you answer

day or night?

One: Quiet us. Center us.

Open us to your emptiness, your holy absence,

and allow it to hold us.

All: Yes, our ancestors trusted you.

May we too come to a place of trust,

our emptiness and absence absorbed in yours.

GATHERING

THIS IS MY BODY

Carol Wise Executive Director, BMC

This my body:

Passionate Struggling Broken Healing Tempted Steadfast

This is my body:

Alive in the margins Black, brown, yellow, pink

Lesbian, gay, bi

Male, female, trans, queer Rich, poor, hungry, lost This is my body:

Loving, laughing Aging, newborn Thirsty, satisfied

Aching, strong

This is my body:

The earth, God's body

The cosmos gleaming Rivers and air

Mountains and valleys

Stars and coral reefs

This is my body:

This gathered body

This body of seekers

This body of Christ

This hopeful and yearning body

This gathered body, here in this place.

Thanks be to god.

CALL TO WORSHIP
BMC 40TH ANNIVERSARY

Anna Beth Roeschley Hyattsville Mennonite Church

October 9, 2016 BMC 40th Anniversary Worship Service

Welcome to this place—a place where all are welcome.

Welcome to this sacred place, the walls that invite in, the table of abundance, the house of the holy;

A house made ever more holy by our persistent presence.

Welcome home.

You who have come home often, and you who have not been for a very long time;

Welcome home.

You who saw the early walls, who have dismantled, who have danced in the margins,

You who are still resisting, who are dancing even harder;

Welcome home.

You who have gone before,

You who have left, who have been left behind, pushed out; you who are dancing elsewhere;

Your spirits are remembered in this home.

We have walked in the valley of shadows. We have seen evil.

For forty years (and more!) we have wandered, and found, wandered, and found.

And where we have gathered, we *find*—beloved friends, the finest foods, cups pouring over, the anointing oil. We find the most colorful god who welcomes with reckless abandon.

May we be blessed in this home!

May our bodies be blessed and at home here.

Our born bodies, Our reclaimed bodies, Our transitioning bodies.

May our inner selves be blessed and at home here.

Our whole selves, Our partial selves, Our questioning selves. \\

May joyfulness, passion, and love meet us here; may this house of abundance be our dwelling forever.

Welcome, and blessed be!

CALL TO WORSHIP RETURN TO LOVE

Anna Beth Roeschley Hyattsville Mennonite Church

Leader: Let us return to Love. In this act of our gathering here People: Let us return to Love.

Leader: In this season of longing and lengthening

People: Let us return to Love.

Leader: In our wondering and wandering

People: Let us return to Love.

Leader: In our surest moments of knowing the One who is

Love, and moments of knowing it least

All: Let us return to Love.

CALL TO WORSHIP

YOU WHO SEEK THE LIVING GOD

Regina Shands Stoltzfus Assistant Professor, Goshen College Assembly Mennonite Church

April 23, 2017

Friends, brothers, sisters, siblings You who seek the living God Welcome

See his hands See his feet

Not whole But holy

And so come

Come aching and weary Longing for signs and wonders, fearing the world beyond the door

Come giddy with the whimsy of spring When long winter is past and the earth gives birth to green

come as skeptics or true believers or somewhere in between

Friends, brothers, sisters, siblings In the words of Jesus Peace be with you CALL TO WORSHIP PSALM 107

Anna Beth Roeschley Hyattsville Mennonite Church

Adapted from Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

One: We gather in thanks for the Holy One's goodness!

People: The One who is love endures forever.

One: We, the estranged, the foreign, the foolish—
People: The One who is love brings us home.

One: We marvel in wonder - we've been rescued by love.

People: The One who is love is with us, forever.

CALL TO WORSHIP

ADVENT WELCOME

Anna Beth Roeschley Hyattsville Mennonite Church

Leader: Come, all who dwell in darkness, and find a place of comfort here.

People: We come seeking, that we might find.

Leader: Come, those who long to hear, and those who yearn

for the quiet place.

People: We come with open ears, restless spirits.

Leader: Come, in the unexpected hour, with an unexpected

people.

People: We come with renewed awareness.

Leader: Come, whether or not to give, whether or not to receive, but if only

to pause, to breathe.

ALL: May our movement of breath be sacred, the sound of our silence holy.

CALL TO WORSHIP DIVINE RUMORS

Joanna Harader Pastor at Peace Mennonite Church

Leader: We are here because we have heard rumors of God's grace,

People: of Divine love poured out

Leader: on people of all colors

People: from all places
Leader: people of all classes

People: all abilities Leader: all genders People: all sexualities.

Leader: We have heard stories of this Jesus,

People: of Divine inclusion for former outcasts—

Leader: people who were confused

People: and unclean Leader: and broken People: and unwanted Leader: and powerless People: and searching.

Leader: We want to hear more of these stories.

People: We want to sing and shout and live these stories, Leader: so that we might help spread this scandalous rumor

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People: of Divine grace, ALL: of boundary-less love.



ASSURANCES

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CONFESSION & ASSURANCE GERASENE CONFESSION

Ken White and John Linscheid Germantown Mennonite Church

Based on Luke 8:26-39 Confession

All: You visit us, naked and chained to the comfortable demons of our day. We name as crazy those who do not fit. Release us from bondage to the fear that exiles others. Put us in our right minds to see the Body that makes us one.

(silence)

Words of Assurance

Leader: Divine Love releases us from all that binds us—and sets us on our journey home.

CONFESSION & ASSURANCE PRAYER OF CONFESSION, ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Joanna Harader Pastor, Peace Mennonite Church

Prayer of Confession

Holy God,

Open our eyes to the presence of your Spirit

upon us, within us, among us.

For our apathy in the presence of oppression,

Forgive us.

If we have contributed to the brokenheartedness of anyone,

Forgive us.

For our participation in systems that enslave,

Forgive us.

When we are deaf to your good news,

Have mercy and open our ears.

When our mouths remain too tightly closed,

Loosen our lips with songs of praise.

Hear our prayer, O God, and forgive our sins.

Hold us in your mercy, now and forever.

Assurance of Pardon

O taste and see that our God is good! Through the limitless compassion of Christ, we are forgiven. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are energized for God's work of justice and peace in the world. Thanks be to God.

CONFESSION & ASSURANCE THE WORD WAS LOVE

Lisa Ann Pierce St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship

Based on John 1, 1 John 4:7-9, Psalm 19:14

One: God of Grace, we surrender our words and our silent thoughts to you. They are broken and whole, senseless and meaningful, profane and sacred, painful and joyful, confessional and prophetic. They are infused with a holy complexity that is beyond our understanding and we need you to make sense of our hearts. We are not called to stand silently in the face of injustice, yet sometimes we swallow words of love. We are not called to speak lies and half-truths, yet sometimes we distort words of love. We are not called to strike out with our words, yet sometimes we violate words of love. We surrender to you now, wordless, silent, still . . . (silent reflection)

One: May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, Holy One.

All: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word was Love. We came into being by this Word of Love, and the Word calls us to wholeness, welcoming us again and again. Amen.



AFFIRMATIONS OF FAITH

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH HEBREWS 11

Ken White and John Linscheid Germantown Mennonite Church

Based on Hebrews 11

Leader: By faith Israel passed through the Red Sea...

People: And so we tell the story

Leader: By faith the walls of Jericho fell...

People: And so we tell the story

Leader: By faith Rahab did not perish . . .

People: And so we tell the story

Leader: And what more can we say? There is not enough time to tell the stories of all who through faith conquered . . . and won strength out of

weakness.

[individuals may name those whose stories inform our faith]

Leader: The stories begin. The stories end. Story succeeds story—stories become Story. Our faith grows.

All: Christ, we look to you, our Story. You begin our story. You complete our story. You keep The Story going.



LITANY A LITANY OF HOPE & STRUGGLE

Carol Wise Executive Director, BMC

One: Because injustice can break the most eager spirit and force the abandonment of dreams,

All: We hold tenderly our siblings and grieve the loss of vibrancy and faith.

One: Because fear can overwhelm goodness and silence those whom God has called,

All: We decry the betrayal of God's own and announce our resolve to speak the truth of our lives.

One: Because hate destroys the human heart and limits the wonders of love,

All: We open ourselves to compassion and offer our lives as witnesses to the healing presence of God.

One: Because complacency gives consent to systems that oppress and harm,

All: We refuse to cede our world to hurtful powers and principalities and dare to dream new creations into being.

One: Because courage in the face of fear and injustice is a holy deed,

All: We celebrate the passion that chooses life in the midst of violence and claims goodness of human dignity with power and grace.

One: Because hope in a world of cynicism and doubt is a sacred act of resistance,

All: We humbly stand and today proclaim:

Where hatred roars, we will sing of love.

Where fear stalks, we will stand with courage.

Where bigotry rages, we will call for justice.

Where pain overwhelms, we will extend kind comfort.

Where systems oppress, we will work for change.

Now and ever, now and ever, now and evermore.

Amen.

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LITANY REJOICING IN HOLINESS

Carol Wise Executive Director, BMC

One: For the holiness of bodies: broken, tired, elastic, growing, loving, wounded, gay, straight, trans, queer, multitude of colors, gender, age, size and shape...

All: We hold our bodies up to God, who knits us together and makes us whole.

One: For the holiness of justice making: shared vision, bold imagination, willing hands, careful work, passion, commitment...

All: We hold our justice-making up to God, who inspires and sustains us in the holy struggle.

One: For the holiness of grief shared: tender tears, healing embraces, sacred mourning, honest lament, the emergence of wisdom...

All: We hold our grief up to God, who understands our sorrow and comforts us in pain.

One: For the holiness of risking love: our conversion to humanity, a trusting vulnerability, celebrating relationships, sharing, holding fast, letting go, the ferocity of hope...

All: We hold our love up to God, who rejoices in our passion and dances with us in celebration and joy.

One: May our lives, our love, our faith and acts reflect the wonder and holiness of God's presence in the world.

All: Amen and amen!

LITANY WALLS BECOME TABLES

Lisa Ann Pierce St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship

October 9, 2016 BMC 40th Anniversary Worship Service

Reader 1: Gather at the Stonewall. Come as you are, you bright, wild, beautiful children of God, for here we will not be policed. At the Stonewall, your outrage is as welcome as your joy. Your desires are as welcome as your generosity. Your pride is as welcome as your humility. Bring your whole, holy, queer and queer-loving selves, for we are about to pray. Holy One, hear our prayers.

All: Holy One, hear our rage and peace, our longings and belongings, our brokenness and our fierce resiliency.

Reader 2: We thank you, God, for those who, with wisdom and courage, created BMC. Against all odds, they created a community of love and justice. They forged a path out of isolation and into possibility, out of Egypt and toward a land of milk and honey.

All: Thanks be to God!

Reader 3: We thank you, God, for all those who have followed, each injecting new hope and vitality in their own way, some arriving, some parting, all keeping BMC on the path through these 40 years of wilderness travel.

All: Thanks be to God!

Reader 4: We thank you, God, that we meet your love in the power of community to break down shame, to bind up wounds, to strengthen us for the hard work of desert living.

All: Thanks be to God!

Reader 1: Holy One, hear our rage! While you send manna in the desert, our denominations continue to build walls! Sometimes we have bloodied our heads on those walls. We have made ourselves vulnerable, shared our stories, pleaded for change. In response, denominational leaders have asked us to wait, to be patient, then to be vulnerable again and again. They watch for us to put on sack cloth and ashes while we exhibit our pain for their examination. They call on us to sit in silent moratoria while they wait for their terms to end.

All: Hear us, Holy One, in our rage and pain!

Reader 2: But you, Holy One, cannot be contained by walls. You meet us at these walls, erected in fear. You tend our wounds, call us out of suffering, and invite us to dance. So we have learned to dance at the walls, watching the walls shake with every footfall. We have learned to celebrate the church we are, claiming our God-given gifts. Now we dance and play, finding joy, like Jesus, in resistance to injustice, in subversion of hatred.

All: Holy One, we dance with you!

Reader 3: Let this be our most joyful dance! Let us dance with such bliss that the walls shudder and fall. Let us take up those broken walls and transform them, that they may never be made into another wall. Let us build a table for all, a table of welcome, joy, parting, all keeping BMC on the path through these 40 years of wilderness travel.

All: Thanks be to God!

Reader 4: We thank you, God, that we meet your love in the power of community to break down shame, to bind up wounds, to strengthen us for the hard work of desert living.

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All: Holy One, we dance with you!

Reader 3: Let this be our most joyful dance! Let us dance with such bliss that the walls shudder and fall. Let us take up those broken walls and transform them, that they may never be made into another wall. Let us

build a table for all, a table of welcome, joy, justice, and peace—a table to transform the world.

All: Holy One, your Love transforms the world!

Reader 4: Spread the table in beauty and in love. Fill it with abundance. There we will break bread, drink of the cup, remember Jesus and our cloud of witnesses. There we will look backward upon oppression and forward toward a just world. There we will look one another in the eye and know God's greatest gift is love.

All: Holy One, your Love transforms the world! Amen.

LITANY COME TO THE WATERS: LITURGY FOR MANY VOICES

Regina Shands Stoltzfus Assistant Professor, Goshen College

January 2006 AMBS Pastors Week

Voice 1: Here is an invitation to the thirsty Wherever they may be found

Voice 2: Come, all you who are thirsty And you who have no money Come, buy and eat

Voice 1: Why spend money on what is not bread? And your labor on what does not satisfy?

Both Voices: Come, come to the waters

Voice 2: At the dawn of creation God spoke And it was so – "Let there be light" The wind from God swept over the face of the waters And God said it was good

ALL: Come to the waters

Voice 1: Blessed is the one who delights in the law of the Lord They are like trees planted by the water Which yield their fruit in its season

And their leaves do not wither

ALL: Come to the waters

Voice 2: The earth is the Lord's And all that is within it God has founded it on the seas And established it on the rivers

ALL: Come to the waters

Voice 1: The Lord is my shepherd - I have everything I need He makes me lie down in green pastures He leads me beside still waters – God restores my soul

ALL: Come to the waters

Voice 2: As the deer pants for streams of water So my soul pants for you, O God My soul thirsts for God, the living God When shall I come and behold the face of God?

ALL: Come to the waters

Voice 1: Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls All your waves and breakers have swept over me By day the Lord directs God's love At night God's song is within me A prayer to the God of my life

ALL: Come to the waters

Voice 2: A woman came to draw water in the heat of the day Jesus asked her for a drink and then said the most astonishing thing: All who drink the water I give – the living water – will never thirst again.

ALL: Come to the waters

Voice 1: Jesus took a towel and girded himself He poured water into a basin and washed the disciples' feet After doing so, he said I have set you an example – that you also should do as I have done to you

ALL: Come to the waters

Voice 2: The angel showed me the River of Life Bright as crystal Flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb Through the middle of the street of the city

ALL: Come to the waters

Voice 1: As the rain and the snow come down from heaven And do not return to it without watering the earth And making it bud and flourish So that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater So is my word that goes out from my mouth It will not return to me empty

Voice 2: Come to the waters

Voice 1: Come to the waters

ALL: Come to the waters

Both Voices: Amen



SERMONS

SERMON BROKENNESS, RESURRECTION, AND HOPE

Brian Flory Pastor, Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren

November 17, 2013 Progressive Brethren Gathering Luke 22:15-19; 24:1-3

There are many parts of the 2002 Annual Conference in Louisville that I would like to forget. But there is one memory that sticks with me. Paul Grout was the moderator that year and, in addition to being a pastor, he is also an artist and woodcrafter. Some of you may remember that the sermon he preached at Annual Conference that year was the same sermon he preached wherever he traveled during his year as moderator. He designed a large, life-sized wooden Jesus that he would construct as the beginning of his sermon and then attach to a cross that he had set up beforehand on the stage. Thus, the first half of his sermon was in silence, as the gathered body would watch the art form of Jesus on the cross slowly take shape. It was a powerful image.

At Annual Conference, however, Paul couldn't get the parts to work. No matter how hard he tried, the pieces of Christ's body just didn't come together as they should. Finally, he simply turned and walked back to the lectern to speak, leaving the unfinished, incomplete wooden body of Jesus, half dangling on the cross. The strangest part for me was that he didn't even acknowledge that everything hadn't gone as it should. He just started preaching and kept preaching, as if his art work of the body of Jesus wasn't even there. And I have to confess to you that I couldn't even tell you what his sermon was about, because from the point where it was clear Paul was having difficulties with his art to the point where he finished his sermon, I kept wishing he would turn to his Jesus and say, "Friends, the body of Christ is broken."

The body of Christ is broken. It is a fitting symbol for a denomination that cannot, will not, and has even refused to admit its corporate brokenness. We are a denomination that has had numerous opportunities to publicly admit our brokenness. But we don't. Instead, we try to pretend that everything is just fine. We breathe a collective sigh of relief when an Annual Conference passes without a major incident or a District Conference passes without a potentially divisive query, or an issue of Messenger comes without a letter to the editor that makes us grit our teeth. We project an image of unity – false unity, in my mind – and fervently try to persuade

ourselves that there is still more that unites us as Brethren than divides us. In the meantime, the whole denomination whistles past the grave-yard while women in leadership and lgbtq Jesus followers are treated like pariahs by large swaths of our churches. Sisters and brothers, is this the church we want? No, I don't believe it is. For our own sanity and integrity, I invite you to speak these words with me aloud, as both confession and affirmation: "Friends, the body of Christ is broken."

The body of Christ is broken. The body of Christ, broken for you. These are familiar words, words that we have spoken many times. We speak these words as parts of our Love Feast, in our observances of the bread and cup of Christ. We speak these words as parts of our Holy Week remembrances, these words that remind us of the synergy that exists between Jesus, our individual faith journeys, and the body of Christ that is the church. The body of Christ, broken for you. Jesus speaks these words to his disciples, then and now, when trying to offer a final lesson for how to be community in his name. We rightfully interpret these words as a call for unity with Jesus, often reflecting upon them during the last week of his life, in a specific context, with a specific purpose.

So, if we reflect upon the brokenness spoken by Jesus in this text at all, we connect that brokenness to Jesus' physical body, broken on the cross, a precedent to the miracle and the mystery of the resurrection. How often do we reflect upon this text in the context of the church, in the context of our own bodies? The body of Christ, broken. Our bodies, broken. The church body, broken. Not that Jesus wishes for the church to be broken, nor that our bodies, our minds, our spirits would be broken. No. Just the opposite. Jesus is suggesting that when our bodies, our minds, our spirits are broken, he not only abides with us in our brokenness, he is broken, too. Likewise, when the body of Christ that is the church is broken, whether the church universal, the Church of the Brethren, or our individual congregations, Jesus recalls and offers his brokenness in solidarity with us.

Friends, the body of Christ is broken. But instead of that being something to ignore, deny, dismiss, or find shameful, our brokenness is a place where we can find kinship, with Jesus and with one another. In Jesus, we follow One who himself experienced brokenness, One who still is broken, and thus, One who finds strength at the broken places, in his life and in ours. We join together at the sources of our brokenness, where the strength we find with Jesus is compassion, affirmation, and deep, all-encompassing love, rooted in the Divine, but most powerfully experienced in relationship with one another.

Theologian, scholar, and transgender lesbian Virginia Ramey Mollenkott writes, "To one degree or another, all of us must constantly choose between joyous connectedness and isolated, angry despair. Our purpose in life is so simple: just to be in the presence of God's loving kindness wherever we are, as Jesus was. But all of us have been damaged to one degree or another, and that damage breeds fear in us. So it is a constant challenge to grow up into the Christ-likeness, to offer to the Spirit in each moment our little willingness to see as God sees. Then and only then can we look through the terrors and pangs of embodiment and see the sacred movement of God's self through human experience...Our bodies become powerful instruments for communicating divine love only when we join affirming and compassionate thought to the passionate charge of our emotions. Instead of trusting the evidence of our senses that make us appear separate, we become powerful as we embody faith, the evidence of that undergirding unified field of energy that we cannot see but can passionately feel. Only then, can we experience the full power of resurrection."

Just like the 2002 Annual Conference, there are many parts of the 2004 film "Passion of the Christ" that I would prefer to forget. But there is one scene, the final scene, which resonates with me. It begins with a dark screen, no light whatsoever. Finally, slowly, light begins to creep in, and we can barely make out the silhouetted face of Jesus. What we see of him looks almost exactly the same as the beaten up, beaten down visage of his body that we remember at his death. It's the same body. Only it's not. The brokenness of his body remains. The punctures on his hands, feet, and side are still there. But his body has been transformed, resurrected. He has been transformed, resurrected. We have been transformed, resurrected. When we engage resurrection as an intellectual exercise, it often seems distant and foreign to us. When we try to offer a rational explanation for it, we falter and fail. Resurrection power cannot be measured or studied. It must be experienced, with mind, body and spirit. We all share in the resurrection story of Jesus. We all have experienced resurrection stories of our own. These are often not stories of literal resurrection, but stories of God's resurrection power in us that are no less miraculous. We tell these stories of resurrection because they teach us more about God. They teach us more about our own brokenness. They teach us more about one another and what binds us together. And we tell these stories because they give us hope - hope in the face of brokenness.

Earlier in worship, you heard the resurrection story of the congregation of Beacon Heights. This is not a fairy tale story. There is no 'happily ever after' to our tale. The story of this congregation is not complete. Our scars clearly remain, as does our brokenness. But so does the resilience of our faith, the power of our convictions, and the strength of our inclusive love for our people and for all peoples. We have not experienced resurrection. We are experiencing it. Ours is a story of becoming, a sacred story filled

with faithful, imperfect, beloved, children of God. Ours is a story of hope.

And while the specifics of this resurrection story belong to Beacon Heights, the greater dimensions of it belong to the whole of the body of Christ. It is a microcosm of the progressive movement in the COB and it is a microcosm of the story of Jesus. We who identify as progressives within the Christian church and the Church of the Brethren have experienced brokenness. We know that the church itself is broken. But while we are unafraid to admit our brokenness, neither do we choose to remain there. We are a broken people who are also a resurrection people, a hopeful people, a faithful people. We are a people who trust in the light, who abide in the light, who have faith in the light shining in the darkness and the darkness shall not overcome it.

The following unattributed quote captures the essence of Christ's prophetic call for us, as progressives and as people of faith: "When you come to the edge of all the light you know and are about to step into the darkness of the unknown, faith is knowing that one of two things will happen: There will be solid ground to stand on or you will be taught to fly." Yes, friends, the body of Christ is broken. Yes, the body of Christ remains divided. Yes, it is unclear whether the corporate body of Christ will have the faith to step out into the unknown. But this body of Christ, our bodies, rises from the depths of our brokenness as a resurrected people, as a hopefilled people, as a faithful people, as a people blessed and beloved by God.

And so we rise. And still we rise. Amen.

SERMON

IF WE LIVE BY THE (QUEER) SPIRIT, LET US BE GUIDED BY THE (QUEER) SPIRIT

Ry O. Sigglekow Co-Pastor, Faith Mennonite Church

June 26, 2016 Galatians 5:1; 13-25 Luke 9:51-62

A sermon for Pride Sunday

"I've come to the conclusion that process is how Mennonites justify and inflict violence. As long as we have a process, we have been fair, good, and kind people." - Carol Wise, Executive Director, Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests

Is the Holy Spirit by which Paul exhorts us to live and be guided heterosexual? If you attended the recent gathering of Central Plains Mennonite Conference you might be left wondering if this is, in fact, the case. At the very least, it apparently remains a question open for "discernment." In stark contrast, if you attended the worship service that took place last Sunday in our fellowship hall, you would have heard different soundings of the Spirit, the fruits of the (queer) Spirit borne not out of impurity or idolatry, enmity or strife, but out of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This morning I want to reflect on what it might mean for us as a congregation to live and be guided by the queer Spirit of Christ, especially what that might mean for how we move in relation to one another as a congregation, in relation to our conference, and the wider Mennonite church.

Before I begin, I want to let you know that we will have some time following the service and our fellowship time today to report back on our experiences at Central Plains Mennonite Conference. And I hope that you will stick around to join us in this conversation. My remarks this morning should not be misinterpreted as glibly rejecting the delegates that came together representing our various congregations nor do I mean to repudiate the efforts of our conference leadership to provide guidance. Overall, I very much enjoyed my time at the annual meeting. But I think a few words are in order about what it might mean for us as a congregation to live and be guided by the (queer) Holy Spirit within the context of a conference that is still patiently, and many of us might say much too patiently, discerning the question of the place and space—the inclusion or exclusion—of non-heterosexual persons into the life of our church communities.

I begin with quote from Stephanie Krehbiel's recent dissertation:

"In [MCUSA] structured conversations, denominational conventions, committee meetings, Sunday school circles, and many other less formal settings, queer people have been discussed; they are a concern; they have been the subjects of dialogue and discernment. They have, on numerous occasions, been asked to share their stories....the terms of these processes constitute queer Mennonites as an unsolvable problem. Thus, I echo W.E.B. Dubois in posing this question: how does it feel to be an unsolvable problem? For queer Mennonites, what material and affective experiences result from being constituted in this way?"

Born out of what scholars have called, the Radical Reformation, from its beginnings the Mennonite Church has been strongly opposed to hierarchical structures of power in the Church. What makes us different from our Protestant and Catholic brothers and sisters is that we emphasize the authority of scripture over all other authorities and traditions, rulers and powers, whether secular or churchly. We have long emphasized what has been called "the priesthood of the laity," which means that we are all ministers, each and every one of us, called by God to mutual love and service to one another. Unlike other churches, in our deliberations together over what we believe and how we are to live into our calling, we have tended to eschew "creeds" and "dogmas." Instead, we have chosen the unstable path of communal discernment of the Spirit. And, so, the question that guides our living together is: "what is the Spirit saying?"

So much of this is modeled after Paul's instructions; and in Galatians we see how he addresses some of the problems that come along with community living. Aware of the difficulties of rightly discerning the Spirit, Paul implores his readers to recognize the Spirit by the fruit that it bears.

Take a second to look at the list of what is "opposed" to the Spirit and then take a look at what the Spirit looks like. On the surface, that's a pretty good list, right? What Paul doesn't say here is that the power of "the flesh" can so easily disguise itself as the fruits of the Spirit. And this is where things get dangerous. Of course, Paul knows this to be true and he takes it up elsewhere, even if he doesn't say all that needs to be said about it. If you think about it for a second you will realize that it is not uncommon for expressions of love, kindness, and patience to be rooted in deep hatred and anger and resentment against others. It is also not uncommon for something like anger and dissent to be rooted in deep love and commit-

ment. We can all recognize this in ourselves and others. We see it in the passive-aggressiveness characteristic of "Minnesota Nice" and we see it among Republicans and Democrats in politics; we probably see it in our relationships and even in our families too. And, hey, if we're honest, we probably see it at church! I don't mean to say that everything that looks like a sheep is really a wolf — we all know that can lead to horrible cynicism. But we also know that the Donald Trumps of the world are not the only wolves among us.

Now that is a strange way to begin a reflection on Mennonites! But I think it's very important. You see, I am talking less about particular persons and more about particular operations of power. What I am talking about here is how sin has a way of insinuating itself into our lives and relationships and into the structures in which we live and breathe. Even when organizational structures are based on a rejection of hierarchy, dynamics of power that privilege some voices at the exclusion of others can still remain in tact. The Pink Mennos among us have been trying to name this stuff for quite sometime. What they and others have been trying to name is how the operation of power and violence can enter into well-intentioned communities committed to nonviolence and peace and justice, communities that are genuinely seeking after the faithfulness of God in patient and loving discernment. You see, often times the violence of exclusion happens despite the best of intentions! That's the power of sin! And because sin is about the operation of power in relationships it doesn't affect us all in the same way, even while it threatens to destroy our communities. There are real victims and there are those who are complicit in real violence against others—even if they are at the same time kind, patient, joyful, and loving people.

Many of the spiritual practices outlined in the approved covenant can be affirmed (e.g., worship of God, prayer, fasting, generous giving, hospitality, Bible study), but we must remember that spiritual practices in and of themselves are not signs of the Gospel at work in our communities, nor do they guarantee the emergence of the truth of the Gospel, for as our history has shown us spiritual practices and discernment processes can just as easily be borne of oppressive dynamics of power, operating according to another spirit that is not of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Virtues and spiritual practices mean nothing when they are predicated on violence, when they justify the status quo, when they operate as mechanisms to manage difference at the expense of human lives and bodies, and when they regulate belief and preserve a semblance of unity at the cost of truth and justice. Cornel West says, "Justice is what love looks like in public." Well, this is true in the "public" that goes by the name of the Mennonite Church USA.

¹ Stephanie Krehbiel, "Pacifist Battlegrounds: Violence, Community, and the Struggle for LGBTQ Justice in the Mennonite Church USA," Ph.D. dissertation

When the fruits of the Spirit are torn from the tree on which the crucified body of the queer Christ hangs, they can all too easily be put into the service of an oppressive ideological system. If kindness and gentleness, love and joy, lose their basis and roots in the queer Christ, they can quickly become their polar opposite. That is, they become signs of the power not of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, but of domination and oppression. With Paul I am convinced that Jesus means freedom and that the power of the queer Holy Spirit is always a power of liberation from bondage, freedom from enslavement. This must be the central criterion for the discernment of the Holy Spirit in our communities. Simply put: if it oppresses, it is not Gospel. If it enslaves, it is not of Jesus Christ, it is against Christ. It is anti-Christ.

Perhaps what we are called to in this time is a kind of holy impatience that lives and is guided by the (queer) Spirit. According to queer theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid, "Queer Christians seem to be condemned to be outside the gates of the church and away from the presence of God, while in reality they know by their own lives of suffering and commitment to integral justice that they can claim not victimhood but agency in their praxis. Queer dissidents in search of paths of holiness through social practices of justice in sexual, religious and political areas of their lives might well be reducing the hetero-God and church to impotency." "It is not the church which has forgotten us," Althaus-Reid goes onto say, "the truth is that we do not know that church. We do not give authority or recognition to sinful structures that call from that very sinfulness." In this sense, the queer Spirit guides us in the way of the affirmation of queer agency and queer life. As such it refuses to acknowledge the authority of other spirits that "justify their position on false claims which cannot be found in a path of justice." As such, as Althaus-Reid puts it, "Queer saints are a menace and a subversive force by the sheer act of living in integrity and defiance."2

There is another tradition in the Bible that runs alongside covenant — it's not called contract, but prophecy. There are times when the Spirit guides us to respond to covenant and talks of discernment and patience with prophetic judgment and holy impatience, for the Spirit always calls us to live and be guided by that queer combination of love, freedom, and justice. The question for us is how might we bear witness to a Gospel that disrupts covenants predicated on the silencing and displacement of other voices? Don't look back, Jesus says in the Gospel of Luke, for the Spirit pushes us forward into an unprecedented future of grace, a future that comes to us as a gift not to be possessed, but to be shared, a gift that opens out onto mutual love and justice. Yet it is a gift that operates according to the kind of love and forgiveness and vulnerability that is always attentive to the way the dynamics of oppressive power are at work in our relationships

with one another, including our discernment processes. Anger and rage and cries for justice can indeed be signs of the peace of the Gospel alongside love and joy and kindness. They can even be the signs of the breaking of enslaving chains and signs of re-birth.

I'd like to close with the words from one of FMC's queer saints and prophets—from a delegate session during the 2013 national meeting in Phoenix:

"My name is Katie Hochstetler and I'm a delegate from Faith Mennonite Church in Minneapolis, MN," she said. The camera focused on her, so that everyone could see her from the projection screens, and she read her statement, her voice clear and level. "We come to you as Mennonites who are burdened by our church's practices of exclusion, silence, and violence towards gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer people. We carry with us not only the faces of lgbt sisters and brothers, but also their hopes and dreams of a church whose language of welcome and justice matches its actual practices. It is right that as a church we carefully and prayerfully examine the meaning and disparities of race and citizenship as it is practiced in our country and in our church. We seek to understand the ways that our prejudices and privilege have hardened our hearts to the suffering of immigrant people. We repent of the ways that we have contributed to the diminishment of others by our votes, indifference or blatant support of injustice. Lives matter to God, and the cries of the marginalized do not go unnoticed. We call upon the Mennonite Church to repent for its harsh and unwelcoming treatment of the sisters and brothers, parents, teachers, leaders, friends and family among us who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer. As Pink Mennos, we refuse to allow our leaders to pit marginalized groups and people against one another in the name of unity or convenience. We reject the premise that our church is incapable of understanding the insidious connections of oppression and privilege as they are played out on the bodies of immigrants, women, children, people of color, lgbt people and the many who are excluded from full participation in our church and society. We bear witness to the pain and loss that accompanies the violence of rejection, exclusion, silencing, condemnation and complacency. We affirm MLK, Jr.'s jailhouse words that 'injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Today we bring before you our faces, our yearnings, our bodies, our dreams, our faith, and declare that we refuse to be strangers to one another. As followers of Jesus, we cannot, and will not rest until the Mennonite Church abandons its exclusionary impulses and embraces the width and breadth of God's welcome, so that all may participate fully and God's kin-dom is made whole."3

² Marcella Althaus-Reed, The Queer God, 166.

SERMON PEACE BEYOND WELCOME

Mark Rupp Pastor, Columbus Mennonite Church

July 7, 2016 Mark 7:24-30

Theme: Strangers No More (Peace Sunday at First Mennonite of Bluffton)

Before I begin, I feel as though I should make a confession: I have a love/hate relationship with welcome statements. I realize at this point, you may or may not be regretting asking me to speak at the celebration of the adoption of this congregation's Welcoming Statement, but I hope you will hear me out.

As a person who just happens to be gay, my experience of welcome statements has tended to fall along one of two paths. First, in the few spaces in my life where I have found myself in search of a new spiritual home, discerning how to translate prospective congregations' welcome statements has been one more way that I have found myself trying to navigate the endless minutiae of subtext. For instance, when my fiance and I decided to have dinner in an unfamiliar town a few weeks ago, I realized later that I had been looking at the list of restaurants and weighing words like tavern, pub, and bistro as if one or the other might tip the balance toward being a safe place for a gay couple to eat dinner.

Similarly, I have found myself having to try to read the subtext of words like welcoming, inclusive, open, and affirming to decide what they might really be communicating, how they might get lived out in the day-to-day life of that community. In my experience, words like these have a far reaching breadth of interpretation and certainly do not mean the same thing in every congregation. Granted, some congregations do this better than others by being clear and specific about their commitments to welcome, and I am glad to see the accompanying policies on membership, marriage, and ministry that this congregation has adopted. I would encourage you to make sure that however your welcoming statement is publicized, that these policies that make clear your commitments would not be buried on some separate, sub-linked page on a website or banished to wherever official church documents gather dust. Live them and proclaim them as the good news that they are.

In this first way, my experience of welcoming statements has been mixed. Likewise, the other way I have generally experienced welcoming state-

ments carries some complex baggage. This second path relates more to the process by which welcoming statements typically come about and the ways that I have been involved in these dialogues. And let's be clear, these processes that produce welcoming statements always involve lots and lots of "loving dialogue." It's what we do as Mennonites, right?

John Linscheid summed up this kind of experience very succinctly in an article titled, "Done With Dialogue" that was written for a newsletter of the Brethren-Mennonite Council for LGBTQ Interests. Linscheid writes,

If loving dialogue is so loving, why do I end up hating it? ...Maybe because what the institution defines as "loving dialogue" is inherently condescending. By entering the dialogue, I accept the implicit proposition that our human worth and our status as children of God are questionable and must be proven....When I present evidence of the hypocrisy, unfair power structures, and patterns of privilege in the institutional church, I buy into the assumption that straight people rightly possess the power to judge who we are, what place we have in the church, and what our "lifestyle" ought to look like. I become merely a supplicant before their bench.

While welcoming statements represent the positive fruit of these dialogues, which I am so thankful for and which have helped pave the way for increased justice for LGBTQ people, they also often serve as a reminder that my place in the Church is something to be debated, that my welcome has depended on a vote, and that the inclusion of my gifts within the life of the Church has hinged on my willingness to become a supplicant before the bench, or a beggar hoping to gather scraps from underneath the table.

In the scripture read earlier, I think we encounter the story of someone else who might also be "done with dialogue" and the ways it can call into question human dignity by forcing one side to prove their worth to another. It is a funny little piece of scripture, and one that, if I'm honest, makes me really nervous. What can really be done with a passage where Jesus so blatantly uses an ethnic slur to dismiss a woman seeking help for her suffering daughter?

"Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

We can re-read this line again and again, accenting different words, trying to hold the thinly veiled language in a generous way, but in the end, it is hard to get around the reality that Jesus tells this woman no because she belongs to a different tribe, a tribe that Jesus' words make clear is beneath his own tribe. To be fair, I suppose Jesus doesn't tell her no, but only that

the real children should be fed first, but this hardly helps us get past his description of the woman's people and her ailing daughter as dogs.

There seems to be a lot at stake in the interpretation of this passage. Namely, how do we read this alongside the other stories of a welcoming, inclusive, compassionate Jesus?

There are a two main ways that people have been able to read Jesus' words to the Syrophoenician woman while holding on to that image of Jesus. The first centers around the fact that the word Jesus uses to describe her people is the diminutive form of the word dog, a little dog, a puppy. For some this helps soften the blow of Jesus calling people dogs because who doesn't love puppies?

This might be a tempting way to read the passage, but then again I really doubt dogs in the first century were anywhere near the lovable pets we have today, even if they were little dogs. Dogs were scavengers and nuisances, and were a symbolic insult used to describe those who embody an unclean life outside of Torah observance.

If you're not convinced, just try putting the word "little" in front of any of our modern ethnic slurs and see how it changes them.

The other way that many people read this story while getting around the ethnic slur that Jesus uses is to see his comments as a test. In this way of reading, Jesus is in control of the conversation the entire time, using the term dog in an ironic way that spurs and nudges the woman to claim her right to the good news. Jesus would never so casually use insulting words to describe other people, so he is just opening up space for the woman and the disciples to learn a lesson.

While I do find this to be a little more helpful than the puppy line of reasoning, I'm not totally convinced. For one thing, there is nothing else in the passage to give the impression that Jesus' words are part of some ironic lesson. In addition, in the version of this story in Matthew, Jesus' dismissal is intensified when that author adds that Jesus first tries to completely ignore the woman's cries and that when the disciples complain to Jesus asking him to send her away, he tells them, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." In both accounts, the comment about dogs is said directly to the woman's face.

For another thing, as much as the comments themselves seem uncharacteristic of the kind of Jesus we have come to expect, reading them as a test requires us to believe in the kind of Jesus who meets a woman in a moment of desperation with cold-hearted verbal games.

And while we could endlessly get caught up on debating the tone of Jesus' comments and the acceptability of calling people dogs, I think the bigger thing that is at stake in the interpretation of this passage is the question of whether we are able to have faith in a Jesus who changes his mind. Do we need Jesus to be the kind of savior who is in absolute control of every situation, who wins every argument, who has his entire ministry mapped out before him in perfectly precise steps. Do we need Jesus to be the kind of savior who never learns or grows in understanding, who has never known a detour because he is always at least three steps ahead in every situation and conversation?

Or can we believe in a Jesus who changes his mind, a Jesus who is swayed by the desperate yet cutting response of this woman, a stranger outside the boundaries of his own tribe? Can we believe in a Jesus that grows in his understanding of a dynamic and uncontainable Spirit of God coming at him and interrupting him from a direction outside the trajectory he has already set himself on?

Whether or not you are ready to believe in a Jesus who changes his mind, if we set this passage in a little broader context within Mark's gospel, we see that the story of the Syrophoenician woman's encounter with Jesus acts as a kind of hinge.

A few verses before this passage, Jesus enacts the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. The setting of this miracle places it in Jewish territory and the symbolic details included by the author point toward its significance for a Jewish audience. The five loaves nourishing the five thousand like the five books of the Torah nourish the Jewish community. The twelve baskets of leftovers for the twelve tribes of Israel. The Bread of Life blessed, broken, and given freely and fully in that place.

Almost immediately following the passage about the Syrophoenician woman, we find Jesus feeding a multitude in a different setting, one that is largely Gentile territory. Here not only the setting changes, but the symbolic details as well; 4000 men fed with 7 loaves and 7 baskets of left-overs. People from the four corners of the earth gathered to experience the fullness of creation that came to completion in 7 days. The Bread of Life blessed, broken, and given freely and fully in that place.

And in the middle of these two feedings, we have the story of the Syrophoenician woman. We have Jesus' initial jarring response. We have the woman's retort, insisting that even the crumbs from the table would be enough. And then we have a healing, and what seems like a reversal not only in response to one woman's plea, but the narrative of Mark's gospel seems to point to a reversal in a broader sense.

Can we believe in a Jesus who changes his mind in response to the Spirit moving within, around, and through him?

To me, this is what is at stake in our reading of this scripture because this is what it feels like is at stake for us today as the Church in a dynamic, quickly changing world. This is what is at stake for a Church that seeks to be peacemakers in a time when we must account for the ways we, at best, have been blinded, and at worst, have propagated policies and actions that caused direct harm.

How can we be a Church that changes its mind in response to the Spirit moving within, around, and through it? And what does this mean for a Church that seeks to make peace by moving beyond welcome, beyond crumbs under the table?

One of the ways that our congregation at Columbus Mennonite has sought to explore this question is by taking a year to focus on the theme of race, white privilege, and Black Lives Matter. In a society that too often insists that the crumbs of "all lives matter" should be enough, we want to figure out how to be a Church that can boldly proclaim the good news in all its specificity that Black lives matter.

In my own study in preparation for taking on this focus, I have been greatly convicted by reading Jennifer Harvey's book, Dear White Christians. Harvey's work focuses specifically on matters of race within the Church, but the framework she develops has been transformational for me in ways that transcend race and, I believe, can inform all of the ways we hope to work toward peace and justice.

The main thrust of Harvey's argument is that white Christians must move from what she calls the reconciliation paradigm toward a reparation paradigm. As Harvey notes, one of the most clear and well-worn manifestations of the reconciliation paradigm is the oft repeated lament from Martin Luther King Jr. that II o'clock on Sunday morning is the most segregated part of the week. This lament becomes the reconciliation paradigm when the focus of the Church's racial justice work is centered around the problem of our separateness, as if simply getting people in the same room will solve the world's problems.

While the goal is perhaps an admirable one, Harvey points out that too often this simply turns into predominantly white churches trying to figure out what they need to do to "attract" people of color to their congregation without ever considering that maybe White folks ought to be the ones who should make the move of relinquishing their power by joining Black churches. What is more, framing racial justice work through the reconcil-

iation paradigm typically fails to account for the reality of whiteness by either completely erasing its legacy of oppression or treating it as a neutral moral zone. It fails to account for the differences of power and the fact that "racism and racial injustice are actual material conditions that shape all of our lives and mediate all of our relationships with one another."

The separation we experience is merely a symptom and not simply the problem itself, and thus reconciliation on its own will be inadequate. It takes more than welcome to become strangers no more.

Instead, Harvey argues fiercely that our racial justice work must adopt a reparations paradigm that is rooted in a desire to become "repairers of the breach." If our separation is merely a symptom, we must work to repair the concrete, material realities that have caused that separation before reconciliation can ever truly be possible. We must account for dynamics of power, legacies of oppression, and the systems that remain in place to ensure the continuation of that breach.

It is not enough to simply get people in the same room if one of them is still begging for scraps. Not only should we insist that all are welcome at the table, but we must go out and help create conditions where the other has no doubt of their place. We must be willing to repair any and all breaches between us even if it means repenting of the ways we have been complicit in their creation, even if it means giving up our need to control the direction we thought we would be going.

When Wanda first contacted me about preaching this morning, she noted that there was a general understanding in this congregation that the adoption of your welcoming statement and accompanying policies represented not an ending but a beginning. She said that you wanted to give some intentional thought to how you continue to live out these statements. While I have talked a lot this morning about the limitations of welcome and reconciliation, let me say very clearly that the work you have done along these lines is good news.

Indeed, many of us in those pictures out there are no longer strangers, but we have to consider what comes next. How do we build a peace that goes beyond welcome, beyond simply getting everyone in the same room. The problem with welcome and inclusion is that it too often means outsiders get to be included and absorbed into some already existing, static reality rather than becoming fellow conspirators and creators in a dynamic movement toward justice and shalom. Building a peace beyond welcome means that we might be interrupted, that we might need to push ourselves into unfamiliar territory, and that we might need to repent of the words we use and our complicity with system that alienate us from one another.

SERMON

LISTENING TO THE ANCESTORS, TELLING IT TO OUR CHILDREN

Regina Shands Stoltzfus Assistant Professor, Goshen College

October 9, 2016 BMC 40th Anniversary Worship Service

In a space like this, in a time like this, we are grounded by being present with those who came before us, those who shaped up, those who taught us who we are.

I have heard people say over and over this weekend: "These are my people."

We have been listening this weekend to stories – stories as we gather into one large body, stories at table, stories over meals.

They are stories of both of journeying to a place, and coming from a place.

Hearing and saying the repeated sentiment – "These are my people"

These days, I have been listening to the ancestors

There seems to be too much heaviness in the world for me to stay present

I don't have to share the litany of events with you for you to know; but it seems fitting that we honor the ones who have fallen – even as Stonewall has been evoked.

we remember just a few short months ago Pulse nightclub

the list is so long

so very long

the streets, the dance halls, the school parking lots, the playgrounds, the churches are littered with the broken bodies of someone's beloved

Waking up whole feels like a victory when hashtags of death dominant our social media timelines.

The Lord is my shepherd, I won't be neglected. God makes me lie down in green pastures; and leads me beside still waters;

God restores my soul.
Yahweh leads me in right paths
for the sake of God's own name
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for the great "I am" is with me;
I am comforted by your gentle protection.
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will be at home.

OT scholar Walter Brueggeman – says of the psalms they are the refusal of silence before God.

An understanding that "an adequate relationship with God permits and requires a human voice that will speak out against every wrong perpetrated either on earth or by heaven."

Orientation
Disorientation
Reorientation

Psalms can present us with, a disorienting trust.

trust psalm that arises out of lament

It names reality and expresses trust even in the midst of ongoing struggle

Psalm 23 walks us through all three: orientation, disorientation and reorientation

Ancestor Lucille Clifton

won't you celebrate with me what i have shaped into a kind of life? i had no model.

born in babylon both nonwhite and woman what did i see to be except myself?

i made it up here on this bridge between starshine and clay, my one hand holding tight my other hand; come celebrate with me that everyday something has tried to kill me and has failed.

A favorite May people's first memorized scripture Often one heard at funerals

I don't know how many of these lost beloved ones perhaps may have had psalm 23 recited at their home going services

It is a defiant psalm

The lord is my Shepard Mine I dare you to say Jesus don't belong to me

It seems like it is so gentle Your got your quiet paths Your gentle streams

But I think, like much of scripture This is a psalm of defiance

This is a psalm that says my God shows up And sometime my god shows out

And as a follower of Jesus you best believe I'm going to do my best to do the same

I'm showing up

My beloved siblings Thank you for showing up

For each other

For yourselves

For me

Showed up and I know some of y'all showed out

Now. Here is what I deeply desire

That we are strong in all the places the forces of evil have decided we are

The forces that have pitted communities against each other As if there cannot be more than one identity in the same body

In the same (corporate) body In the same individual body

Because it will make them mad, or uneasy, or withdraw their support

Our being here in this place together is testament to the fact that we show up for each other But we have to do better

Ancestor Langston Hughes

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother. They send me to eat in the kitchen When company comes, But I lauah. And eat well. And grow strong.

Tomorrow. I'll be at the table When company comes. Nobody'll dare Say to me, "Eat in the kitchen," Then.

Besides. They'll see how beautiful I am And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

Hearing about the gift the children of Germantown are receiving and being in their communities is maybe the most important thing I heard yesterday. It reminds me very much of what my home congregation gave me. I was nurtured in a racially integrated congregation in Cleveland. My normal was black, white and multiracial families doing church together.

This was my normal. This is what I thought church was – diverse people coming together because they were church

It took growing up to show me this was not the norm for most people, nor is it yet.

We know from the history of BMC, the history of congregations like Germantown and so many others that this kind of community does not happen on its own.

It takes tending.

It takes seed planting.

It takes shepherding.

The exhilaration of being with "your people," that rare space that you sometimes have to claw your way into, and when you get there, when you find it, when you find your people it is precious.

The danger of protecting that space so carefully is that it becomes just like the oppressive spaces you were fleeing. You may not notice it, but others will. And our children will not put up with that, because we raised them better.

December 5, 1955 Rosa Parks – Montgomery Bus Boycott lasted 381 days

Stonewall. June 28, 1969 ushered in gay and lesbian rights movement

The death of 17 year old Trayvon Martin on February 28, 2012 was the catalyst for the current iteration of speaking out against state sponsored black and brown was started by 3 queer women of color and a hashtag

This past June 12 in Orlando—the killings in the Pulse nightclub showed up again that we cannot take gains in one part of any movement for people's lives for granted.

We cannot afford to let false dichotomies keep us away from one another.

We cannot do our best work in creating a world where everyone is free if we do not acknowledge the ways in which we belong to each other, the ways in which we are familiar with the valley of the shadow of death.

One more ancestor – Audre Lorde:

I read these words from Audre Lorde to my class a couple of weeks ago. Here they are for us all.

"I was going to die, sooner or later, whether or not I had even spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silences will not protect you.... What are the words you do not yet have? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? We have been socialized to respect fear more than our own need for language."

I began to ask each time: "What's the worst that could happen to me if I tell this truth?" Unlike women in other countries, our breaking silence is unlikely to have us jailed, "disappeared" or run off the road at night. Our speaking out will irritate some people, get us called bitchy or hypersensitive and disrupt some dinner parties. And then our speaking out will permit other women to speak, until laws are changed and lives are saved and the world is altered forever.

Next time, ask: What's the worst that will happen? Then push yourself a little further than you dare. Once you start to speak, people will yell at you. They will interrupt you, put you down and suggest it's personal. And the world won't end.

And the speaking will get easier and easier. And you will find you have fallen in love with your own vision, which you may never have realized you had. And you will lose some friends and lovers, and realize you don't miss them. And new ones will find you and cherish you. And you will still flirt and paint your nails, dress up and party, because, as I think Emma Goldman said, "If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution." And at last you'll know with surpassing certainty that only one thing is more frightening than speaking your truth. And that is not speaking."

Audre Lorde

Yes - though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
Though I walk through the valley
Though I walk through
I walk through
I walk through
I walk
When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death my siblings are
with me
When I walk through
Yahweh God
"I am who I will be"
You are with me

Creator, lover, sustainer, fighter God

You are with me You are with us We walk We walk We walk through together

And we bring each other home.



OCCASIONAL SERVICES

LITURGY PRIDE SUNDAY

Calgary Inter-Mennonite Church

August 31, 2014

CALL TO WORSHIP

We believe that horizons of hope are never fixed.

They always move beyond, in the creativity of God.

We believe that powers of evil cannot kill God.

God walks on free and leaps ahead of us in the risen Christ of faith.

We believe that the Spirit can never be confined.

She dances forth in the world and is found in surprising places, leading us on until the end of time.

(D McRae-McMahon)

PRAYER

Holy One, known to us in many ways but still unknown to us, we are together and we ask for your blessings as we rejoice as a community. Bless our pride together. May it also be a humble reflection of gratitude for who it is you have created us to be, each of us and us together. Bless our celebration that it be an expression of our joy in love and in health. Bless our laughter and let it be something that builds friendships and relationships. Bless our tears also and for the same reasons. If we encounter anyone who opposes us, bless them too. We humbly ask that fear and anger don't find a voice today. We humbly ask that love gets the last word and the clearest expression. Bless our differences as a source of our strength and a sign of our respect for one another and our love for you. Bless those for whom it takes great courage to be here that they may feel the abundance of life in such a way that it's no longer just words on a page. We feel that we are called to speak and to hear your vision of justice and of peace. Help us do that well and do it faithfully. Bless each one of us here today with your presence and our presence, one with another. You are faithful to us, we want to be faithful to you, to each other and to the community around us. Amen.

TARGUM

Corey Herlevsen

1 John 4

A Targum is somewhere in between a translation and a sermon. It's a spoken paraphrase in updated or fresher language that Rabbis used when people were unable to hear and understand the Hebrew of the text. It can be helpful when bible passages become too familiar and we don't really hear them anymore. So yesterday I wrestled

with the text of 1 John 4. I'm not sure who won but here is the Herlevsen Targum of 1 John 4.

"We're all in this thing together, walking the line between faith and fear. We are all image bearers of God. We don't see God directly face to face, not yet, but when we love one another we reflect God to each other and to the world from a place deep within our truest and best selves, a place only the heart may know. Those are the moments and those are the relationships where we see and experience the dignity of our humanity and the transcendence of divinity, of a true spirituality that is mature—richer and truer than any of the stock phrases we've picked up in churches or love songs. There's nothing new in what I'm saying, we've heard this before. But we don't always embrace it, we don't let it sink in to the places where we are most vulnerable, heart, soul and bone marrow. When we do, though, truth becomes tangible, sensual to reclaim a perfectly good word. We can see it, feel it, and breathe it in. We can form it with our lips and speak it to each other.

Everybody knows the phrase "God is love" but when we really let that sink in, when we embrace it, when we are real and present to each other and to God, the sparks of truth within us can catch on fire. We can become a little freer, then a little freer again. Love can have the run of the place. And we don't have to sit around wringing our hands or hiding our face because we are afraid of being judged and told that we are not enough. We are enough. We each bear the image of God and we are in this thing together. Relax. Because in Christ we are all in the same room and we don't need to be afraid.

Mature love tosses fear out. But, if you take a look around, it's pretty easy to see that the opposite is also true. If we let fear go unchallenged, fear acts like a bouncer who's been given a bit too much power and won't let love in the room. With love locked out, the room gets smaller, tighter, cramped, stale, angrier. And, ironically it usually gets louder too because fear loves to shout and it really loves to hear its own voice...Fear is a bully and it's our fear of the bully that cripples us, we can't walk around in our freedom. We can't make choices, we just end up doing what the bully says and start picking at each other. No...we can love maturely in a way that tosses fear out the door. We can say to the darkness "we beg to differ" and choose to love in a way that shines the light of truth and makes the bully scurry. We, ourselves, no longer need to scurry because in Christ we are being made mature in truth and love.

God loves us, we are image bearers of God, we love each other and God is invited into the room. Clearly then there is no longer any room for fear. Then our community becomes a place where people are honored. Where they are safe and where the relationships are unagendaed.

God is pretty clear on this point. Loving God means loving people because we all bear the image—all people even (and maybe especially) the

ones we've been told we should be afraid of. Mature love tosses fear out. We are all in this thing together, waging wild and reckless peace, walking together in truth...Each step we take today a step of love, strength, grace, courage, profound human dignity.

LITURGY TRANS DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

Jonathan Bay La Verne Church of the Brethren

LITANY

One: Today we remember; diverse gender identities and expressions, each a sacred representation of our creator.

All: WE ARE GOD'S BELOVED!

One: Today we acknowledge; that we are all on a journey of transformation, though it may be more physical for some, each journey is unique and beautiful.

All: GOD LOVES EVERYONE!

One: Today we remember; That not everyone has an advocate And sometimes we must be the advocate In the face of injustice.

All: WE ARE GOD'S BELOVED!

One: Today we acknowledge; that it takes incredible strength to be a vulnerable person in the world.

All: GOD LOVES EVERYONE!

One: Today we remember; the lives that were taken through ignorance, violence, and hate and hold these trans people in our hearts, as well as their families.

All: GOD LOVES EVERYONE!

One: Today we acknowledge; the fear that may reside in us, fear of ourselves and fear of the other, and say to this fear:

All: GOD LOVES EVERYONE!

PRAYER

Creator, genderless being, spirit of love,

We pray to all that is unknowable, all that is questionable, all that encompasses love, may healing come to our hearts, understanding to our minds, and peace to our communities.

God of all genders, fill us with love.

Amen.

NAME READING

By reading these names aloud, we acknowledge the humanity of each person who was killed simply for being who they were.

We read their names to bring dignity to their death.

We read their names to remember that we are all lead by the Spirit in our journeys.

We read their names to acknowledge their identity.

We read their names to not forget their souls spent time on this earth.

We read their names because there are too many.

We read their names.

LITURGY

RECOGNITION OF NEW SCN COMMUNITIES

Carol Wise Executive Director, BMC

COMMENTS

PRESENTATION OF CERTIFICATES

LITANY OF APPRECIATION AND COMMITMENT

One: For believing that we are called to sustain, comfort, uphold, care and

bring joy to one another...

All: We thank you for your compelling compassion.

One: For seeing the divine in our diverse expressions of relationship and for celebrating the multitude of ways that we are family together....

All: We thank you for your clarity of vision.

One: For insisting that our faith calls us to be a church where children are protected, dignity is guarded, families are embraced and equality is practiced...

All: We thank you for your persistent witness.

One: For showing us that love and justice can prevail over fear and prejudice...

All: We thank you for your unwavering courage.

One: With the power of these prophets to embolden us; the dreams of these dreamers to inspire us; the prayers of the faithful to sustain us; and the love of these lovers to awaken us;

All: We commit ourselves to the holy call of justice and welcome. May we be gentle and bold, steadfast and fierce, as we work to fashion a world that reflects the heart and desires of the Divine moving among and within us. Amen.

LITURGY

A CELEBRATION OF SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP

Ken White and John Linscheid Germantown Mennonite Church

Tables near the front hold a guest register or other means for attendees to mark their presence. A second table holds a central candle, lighted, and many unlighted tea lights with matches to light them from the central candle, and perhaps a symbol of friendship.

PRELUDE

During the prelude, guests are invited to come forward to sign the register and to light a candle for friends who are not present or who have died.

WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP

All: How good it is, and how lovely when friends live together as one. How lovely the home where your presence dwells, God of all creation. Happy the people you have inspired, who journey through life, with you in their heart.

Who have known both sadness and tears, and covered them with blessings, like springs of water.

They go from strength to strength, until they appear before God in Zion. For God withholds no good, from those who walk in honesty.

THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES

The friends who are to take vows of friendship, come forward to light candles and name those particularly dear to them who are unable to be present or who have died.

*GATHERING SONG

"Here in This Place"

SCRIPTURE

John 15:12-17

THOUGHTS ON FRIENDSHIP

*SONG

"Will You Let Me Be Your Servant"

STORYTELLING

Sharing Memories and Dreams

The friends who are to take vows, share brief memories and hopes for the future of their friendship.

BLESSINGS OF FRIENDSHIPS

Pledges of Continuing Friendship by [Names here]

Those pledging special friendship exchange their vows.

Silent Pledges of Support

Those present silently offer their pledges of support.

Litany of Friendship

Pastor: Holy God, Friend of All Peoples

We praise you for making us your friends

All: We return our love to you, Divine Friend

Those taking vows: We give you thanks for these our friends For our families--the friends of our origins and birth For friends in spirit now added to this spiritual family

All: We give you thanks for [Names here of those

taking vows

For their love toward us

For being a part of our spiritual family

Pastor: Holy God, Friend Who Undergirds the World, we

thank you:

All: For friends who have loved us

> For friends who have laughed with us For friends who have played with us For friends who have worked with us For friends who have cried with us

For friends who have shared wisdom and guidance For friends who have struggled together for justice

For friends of the past For friends of the present For friends yet to be known For friends who are children For friends who are adults

For friends who dream with us

For friends who build the future with us.

Pastor: *Prayer of blessing for friendships concluding with:*

... Bless our circle of companionship, those present and absent, in this world and beyond, as we raise before you the names of our friends:

All: Simultaneously all present may name out loud the friends for whom they ask God's blessing.

Pastor: Holy God, Sealer of Friendships, we renew our covenants of friendship with you and with each other

A11: Ignite us with the fire of your love as we now pledge our love and support to you and to each other, Amen.

*PARTING SONG

"Lead On, O Cloud of Yahweh"

LITURGY

HONORING AND CELEBRATING KAREN

Brenda Dyck and Corey Herlevsen Calgary Inter-Mennonite Church

July 24, 2015

Brenda (pastor): Besides being a community who likes to party, tonight we have gathered with a special cause, to honour and celebrate Karen and her transition, her crossing over time into a new life as a new person. Four years ago, a person came to our faith community having first checked us out on our website, attracted by our affirmation of persons who identify as LGBTQ. A year later as part of a transgender education series, this person shared with the community their spiritual journey as a transgender person, the joys, the pain, the fears, the relief of being true to oneself. Today, on behalf of TOGETHER and CIM, Corey, Gary and I want to pay tribute to the gifts that person we now know as Karen has brought to us and our faith community. Karen, when you shared your story with me at the Joshua Tree Café, I was moved by your honesty, courage and vulnerability. I felt as if I had been handed a precious treasure.... which was true. From that experience and as I have come to know you, I realize that I and CIM had been greatly honored by your trust in us, your belief that we were up to being your community of faith. As you sorted through how you would tell your children, your father and your siblings, I was aware how carefully, that is how full of care you were approaching these people whom you loved with news that might surprise and distress them. You did this disclosing with such integrity, for example, sending a letter to your dad so that he had time to process a bit before you arrived at the family gathering. Finally when you ended your talk to us, three years ago, with your wonderful dry humour, you gave us a "heads up" and said, "The next time you see me, you may not recognize me." When Art and I attended the Day of Remembrance ceremony at Outlink November 2014, I saw how you had found a place of belonging and service in the transgender community and in the broader Calgary community, and noticed the love and respect you were shown there. Thank you, Karen, from all of us, for trusting us enough to take us along on your journey with its challenges and joys. It has been a privilege and a delight to witness your transformation. You have blessed us with your grace and your dignity. You have found a place in the CIM faith community and in our hearts.

Corey's Blessing: This is a celebration tonight and, exactly because it's a celebration it is also a holy evening. We want to take a moment to specifi-

^{*}Congregation please rise as ability permits.

cally pray blessings upon Karen. For me, and for us as a faith community, we felt that rooting tonight's celebration into the ancient/future faith we try to be part of and embody would be very appropriate.

The ancient Hebrew community had a series of 18 daily prayers called the *berekah* each of which would start with the formula, in Hebrew,

גרוד אַתַּה יִיַ אֱלֹהָינוּ מֵלֶדְ הַעוֹלֻם

(Blessed are You, Lord our God sovereign of the universe)

Each specific prayer after that was intended towards gratefulness for who the individuals and the community were as well as gratefulness towards the God who had brought them to each milestone on their journeys toward becoming. I will read just a couple of these out and when I pause I would like for us as a community to respond with an "amen"...

Blessed are You, Eternal One, our God, Ruler of Time and Space, the Transforming One for those who transition... for being powerfully present during Karen's transition (amen)

Blessed are You, Eternal One, our God Ruler of Time and Space who has made each of us, as we truly are, in God's image... for making Karen in your image, she reflects you beautifully (amen)

Blessed are You, Eternal One, our God Ruler of Time and Space who has kept us alive and sustained us and helped us to arrive at this moment who has helped Karen arrive at this moment (amen)

For the gift of who Karen has been, is, and will be amongst us as a community we say... (amen)

Corey: Karen, we have a gift for you to mark this milestone in your life and your spiritual journey. As you know, every year in January we celebrate our life in community, with stories, symbols, songs and rituals. This year as our ritual we chose rocks, stones which were gathered from a river bed. Reflecting the OT practice of building stone altars when and where they experienced God, together we built a stone altar – a collective milestone and touchstone which reflected our thoughts and feelings and added them to the community. We took time to reflect upon and paint the stones. Then we added words describing what we had received at Calgary Inter-Mennonite Church. Some of the stones have been here tonight for people to see and think about.

Brenda: Our gift to you is a pair of amethyst geodes made into book-ends. Geodes are ordinary looking rocks, often spherical in shape and holow-sounding when you tap them. They are rough and ordinary looking on

the outside but when you crack them open they have crystals inside, which have been formed when mineral-rich water fills the cavity of a rock.

Corey: As you might guess, besides its natural beauty, we chose it also for its symbolic value. Amethyst comes in shades of purple, an important colour in the LGBTQ community, particularly in the western hemisphere, a colour which symbolizes magic, mystery, spirituality, the sub-conscious, creativity, dignity, royalty.

Brenda: Here is some of the mythology surrounding this beautiful stone. Whether factual or not, there are some lovely and intriguing possibilities... Amethyst is a stone which from the earliest known Greek tradition has been worn to guard against drunkenness and to instill a sober mind. The word amethyst comes from the Greek meaning "without drunkenness" It is also used to help insomnia and create good dreams.

Corey: The amethyst is known as the Bishop's Stone and is still worn by Catholic Bishops. The amethyst symbolizes piety, humility, sincerity and spiritual wisdom.

Brenda: Amethyst is considered a royal stone and features prominently, for example, in the British Crown jewels.

Corey: A gemstone often worn by healers, amethyst purportedly has the power to focus energy.

Brenda: What was compelling for us was the reality that this geode appeared to be an ordinary stone and yet when it was cracked open, its hidden beauty and treasure were revealed.

Corey: Karen, we want you to take this to your home as a gift from Calgary Inter-Mennonite, a milestone and a touchstone for this important time in your life and a reminder that you are a valued member of this faith community.

Brenda: Now, for the community piece. We will pass these stones around and as each person holds one of the stones, silently please offer a blessing for Karen. The stones will carry these blessings to Karen's home.

PASSAGE RITE PLACING OUR TIMES IN GOD'S HANDS: RITUAL FOR THOSE LEFT AFTER A DIFFICULT MINISTERIAL SEPARATION

Ken White and John Linscheid Germantown Mennonite Church

GATHERING

The congregation gathers in a fellowship hall or similar venue. At the center of a circle of chairs is a small table with scraps of paper, twigs, and dried leaves, as well as a small paper box.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader 1: God be with you People: And also with you Leader 1: Lift up your hearts People: We lift them up to God.

SONG

Creator, we adore you, lay our lives before you. How we love you. Jesus, we adore you, lay our lives before you. How we love you. Spirit, we adore you, lay our lives before you. How we love you.

INTRODUCTION

Leader 2: We gather to collect these last [number] years and offer them to God. Our season with [pastor's name] was both wonderful and sad. His/her presence benefited us and hindered us. He/she brought gifts and also burdens. We shared joy and laughter as well as frustration and anger.

Leader 1: We were to him/her both blessing and curse. We were friend and adversary. We gave him/her much and not enough. There was growth and good in our time together. There was brokenness in our relationship. Now we must lay aside the weight of that time, and any sin which still clings close, so that we may turn to "run with patience the race that is set before us."

CONFESSION

Leader 1: Let us pray.

People: Savior, we lay ourselves before you. You know our hearts and our thoughts. You see our failings and our brokenness. At times we did the best we could, and it was not enough. At times our mutual weakness prevailed. Together, we have failed to be all that you desired of us. Forgive us, forgive [pastor's name], and empower us to forgive each other. Heal [pastor's name], heal us, and grant grace to [pastor's family names]. Help us each to offer up these times; so that we may run your race. Amen.

COLLECTING OUR TIMES

INTRODUCTION

Leader 3: We gather to grieve the good and the bad, to acknowledge positive times, and to name negative ones. We come together to hand over this period with [pastor name] and with each other. We bring all our experiences, in all their complexity, to surrender them to God. May God gather them all into God's heart as God has gathered [pastor], [pastor's] family, and us.

INSTRUCTIONS

Leader 4: We have provided small scraps of paper and other fragile objects. We invite you to choose among them one or two to symbolize your experience with [pastor] and with this congregation during his/her tenure. Let them represent joyful remembrances, difficult disagreements, feelings of affection, feelings of anger and betrayal, times of personal importance shared, opportunities for ministry missed, gifts blessed or gifts rejected, failings forgiven or quarrels reconciled, talks, sermons, walks, bicycle rides, children's songs, meals. Anything you hold from this time.

Please place your selected objects into this small paper box as a sign of offering them to God. You may do so silently or make a brief statement as you do so.

COLLECTION

During a time of silence, each participant may select an object from the table and, either silently or with a few words, place it in the paper box.

PROCESSION

A team of leaders takes the box of collected memories and invites the congregation to join them in the parking lot where a metal fire pit waits.

OFFERING

The people gather around the fire pit.

Leader 2: Savior, our times are in your hands. We make them an offering to you.

People: We offer these feelings, these memories, these moments to you. We surrender them all to your care and keeping.

The leaders place the box in the fire and light it as an offering to God. When the box has been burned, the ashes are collected and mixed with fresh earth.

Leader 4: The times we had with [pastor name] must be left behind, but they remain part of us. [Pastor name] is part of us and we are part of him/her. As these ashes of our time together join the soil to grow with these plants, so our common history will feed our life as we turn to grow into the future.

The congregation takes pinches of the soil-ash mixture to scatter among the flower beds, saying whatever words of farewell feel appropriate.

Leader 3: God, into your hands we commend our times. Into your hands we commend our brother/sister [pastor name]. Into your hands we commend his/her family. Into you hands we commend ourselves.

Leader 1: God, bless us and keep us all. Make your face shine upon us. Lift up your countenance upon us all. And grant in this ending, peace to [pastor name], peace to his/her family, and peace to each of us. Amen.

The congregation proceeds to the sanctuary.

ANOINTING

The congregation makes a circle around a small table with a pitcher of oil, four small bowls, a candle, and a Bible.

INTROIT

Leader 1: Lift up your hearts **People: We lift them up to God** Leader 1: Give thanks to God

People: It is good to give our thanks and praise.

Leader 1: (Lifting the Bible) This Bible represents wisdom for the future. Leader 2: (Lighting the candle) This candle represents God's light to lead us.

Leader 3: (Holding up the pitcher of oil) This oil will bless us for the work to come.

BLESSING

One leader anoints those who have led the congregation during the transition (e.g. elder's, council chair). Oil is then poured into small bowls and the leaders bless remaining people in leadership. Then all people present are invited to receive anointing.

Leader 2: Hear the words of the Apostle Paul: "This is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God." (Philippians I:9-II)

CLOSING WORSHIP

CLOSING BLESSING

Leader 1: The Creator go with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader 1: The Spirit guard and keep you.

People: And guard and keep you. Leader I: Christ's peace be with you.

People: And also with you.

BENEDICTION SONG

"My Life Flows On" HWB 580

The people depart.

Silence for a moment as people look around the circle

40s 40s 40s 30s 40s 30s 30s 40s 30s 50s 30s 50s ≤20s 50s ≤20S 50s ≤20s 60s ≤20S 60s 60s

Music—"We're All Swimming to the Other Side" by Pat Humphries Circle the fire ring during the song

HONORING AND NAMING THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES

Reader 1: We gather as gay men to honor and celebrate gay wis dom. Gay wisdom does not begin with us. Gay men have been the priests, shamans, spiritual leaders, healers, and artists down through the ages and in many cultures. The fire in the midst of our circle was burning as we gathered. The great cloud of witnesses—who prepared the way before us—now burn in our collective memory as faggots in the fire.

Leader 2: We invite you to take a stick, name aloud your gay mentors, men who whispered to you the secrets of being gay, who passed along the language, who initiated you in gay culture and taught you about gay sexuality. As you name them, cast their sticks into this fire, the fire of gay wisdom.

Time to name the mentors ended by the ringing of the wind chimes

Reader 2: Gay wisdom has been tempered in the fire of bashings, struggle, AIDS and HIV. As we journey from youth to age, we remember those who will never age. They have fallen in the struggle, and so remain forever young in our hearts. They continue to burn as fiery pillars in our experience.

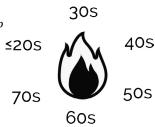
Leader 2: We invite you to take a stick or two, name aloud the gay martyrs, those who have fallen. As you name them, cast their sticks into this fire of gay wisdom.

RITUAL WISDOM OF OUR SAGES:

A RITUAL TO HONOR OUR GAY MENTORS

Ken White and John Linscheid Germantown Mennonite Church

A fire has been prepared in a fire circle. Small sticks lie beside the fire in readiness to be cast on the fire. A portable tape stereo system holds the recorded music necessary. A blanket holds candles, cords, and staves. A set of wind chimes lies ready along with a seven-day candle. As people gather, they are asked to arrange themselves by age groupings as shown.



SILENCE

INTRODUCTION AND NECESSARY EX-PLANATIONS OF RITUAL ACTS TO FOLLOW

Leader 1: We are a gathering of men. Tonight we celebrate a ritual recognizing gay wisdom present here. As part of that, we will honor as wise men—or Sages—the men among us who are 60 years old and older.

Leader 2: We will need your help, for ritual like good liturgy is the work of the people doing it.

GATHERING

Leader 1: We begin with a circle. The circle or ring is a symbol of eternity, for it never ends. It is a symbol of community, for in it we all face one another. In the Hebrew scriptures, God is said to have scribed a circle upon the waters—the meeting place of the world and the heavens. It is a symbol of power and transformation, reminiscent of the mysterious world of the fairy ring through which one enters new time and new reality.

Leader 2: Please join hands to welcome each other into the circle of gay wisdom. Brothers, look around the circle and remember the experiences that bring you together with these men.

Leader 1: We give thanks to you, Lover of our souls. As we gather in this holy place, we also turn to You to be refreshed and to draw nourishment for our journey. Be present with us as we remember your face in familiar faces and seek your face in new faces. Shepherd of our journey, we travel from youth to age, from birth to death, moving together toward the other side.

Time to name the martyrs ended by the ringing of the wind chimes

Leader 1: We give thanks to you O Spirit of God, O Pentecostal Fire, for these men, our forebears, martyrs, lovers, and friends. Though they may be invisible to us now, their lives burn in ours, whispering wisdom to us through the elements of earth and fire, of wind and water.

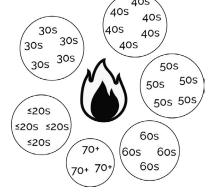
Music "Ancestor Song"

HONORING THE WISDOM OF AGING

Reader 3: Gay wisdom is not only from the past. It presents itself to us in the men gathered here tonight. Each decade of life offers unique wisdom.

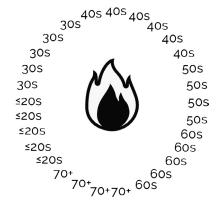
Leader 2: We now ask you to gather in group marked roughly by decades: Men in your 20s or younger here. 30s here. 40s here. 50s here. 60s here. 70 and above, here.

Take 15 minutes to share your thoughts about the wisdom of your age group. Ask one man among you to be ready to briefly report to the larger circle a few kernels of wisdom that your age



group has to offer to the larger group. What are you learning about being gay at this stage in your life? What wisdom do you have to share out of your experience of being gay at this age? At the end of 15 minutes, we will report to the entire circle.

Leader 2: Please reconvene to share your wisdom with the larger group.



Leader 2: Beginning with the 20s group and proceeding to the group age 70 and above, we will report. Following each report, we will all respond together: "Blessed are you, Holy Wisdom. You make yourself known through our brothers."

Each group reports followed by the response which Leader 1 leads:

Leader 1: "Blessed are you, Holy Wisdom. You make yourself known through our brothers."

HONORING OUR SAGES

Leader 1: We are gere tonight to honor our collective wisdom as gay men, regardless of age, and to honor the Sages among us.

What is a sage? According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, it is a person, usually an elderly man, who is venerated for his experience, judgment, and wisdom. It is also a plant used for seasoning.

A sage actively participates in the events and activities of life and understands what is true, right or lasting. He shows good common sense, perceiving and distinguishing relationships and alternatives. He makes reasonable decisions, especially with regard to the practical affairs of life. Our gay sages also season and spice with the life situations they are in.

A thesaurus lists synonyms such as deep, profound, shrewd, astute, well-balanced, far sighted, and level-headed. Almost all cultures throughout the ages have recognized and honored the wisdom of the sages among them.

Tonight we honor the sages among us. As we do so, we honor all the men gathered here, for we together make the journey of wisdom as we age from birth toward death.

We look now to the men, sixty years old and older. Men who have functioned as high priests for us. Men who, like Peter, are a rock on which we build the church among gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons. Men who have been our healers, our comforters, our teachers.

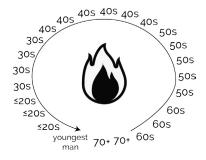
Leader 2: With each staff is a purple cord. These purple cords bring together threads, individually weak and easily broken. These threads were turned together in a circular motion to form three larger strands which in turn make the purple cord. Together they are strong, vibrant and useful.

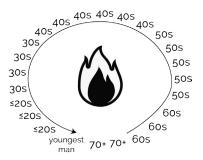
Your journeys also have woven together multiple aspects of life—the physical, intellectual, spiritual, sexual, and emotional—into one

strong, vibrancy, and useful whole. These cords bind us to the past, to each other, and to the future.

As a sign that we invest these staves and cords with our collective prayers and love, we will pass them around the circle from the oldest to the youngest. The youngest man will then carry them around the circle from youth to age.

Passing of the staves with cords around the circle from oldest to youngest.





The youngest man processes with the staves and cords inside the circle and holds them ready to be presented.

Reader 4: As the wisdom of youth marches down the line of age, listen to the words of the Evangelist John, the elderly beloved disciple, exiled in Patmos. In his old age, he had a vision of Christ his lover as a wise old man—an old man with white

hair. He recorded that vision in these words from the book of Revelation.

Reader 5: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

[I John,] was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write in a book what you see and send it of the seven churches..."

Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven gold lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever;

and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this....

The leaders now address the men over age 60.

Leader 2:Your presence here reminds us that through our celebrations and hardships, we survive and thrive—becoming a little older and a little wiser. We honor your achievements and your struggles, your joy and pain, The victories you have won and the losses you have endured to bring your wisdom to this gathering.

Reader 6: We all grow older
Our bodies grow softer
In your willingness to touch us and to hold us
we come to embrace the changes we experience
in our bodies as we age.

We all grow older Some aspects of our life grow harder In your openness to talk about growing older you help us to age well.

Leader 2: As we name each individual to be honored, everyone will join in the response: "We call you forth as a Sage for us."

Each candidate is called forward by name, handed the staff, and has the cord placed around his neck.

Leader 1: [Name], we bless and honor your journey

All: We call you forth as a Sage for us.

When all have been presented, the following blessing is read.

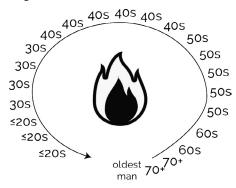
Leader 1: Blessed are you, our gay Sages and Elders, who have taken a chance on God. May each of you look joyfully over the years behind you. May each of you look forward expectantly to the work God gives you to do in your elder years. May each of you remain strong in your commitment to do justice. May your daily actions be both a strong light to dispel shadows and a comforting darkness to those in need of rest. May you never stand, sit, or lie alone in the struggle. In every posture of life may you find us, your brothers, by your side in body and spirit.

Candles are now distributed to call present.

PASSING THE WISDOM TO FOLLOWING GENERATIONS

Reader 7: Our wisdom is not our own. It can heal the past and give growth to future generations. As a sign of the passing of gay wisdom to generations here and to come, we now pass fire, from the older men to the younger men.

Leader 2: The oldest man will light a candle from the fire and pass the fired around the circle from the older to the younger, while we listen to a reading from Daniel.



Reader 8: In the book of Daniel, the image of God handing authority to a messianic figure is represented as One of Great Age handing over authority to a young Son of Man who comes on the clouds of heaven.

Thrones were set in place
and One of Great Age took his seat.
His robe was white as snow,
the hair of his head as pure as wool.
His throne was a blaze of flames,
its wheels were a burning fire.
A stream of fire poured out,
issuing from his presence.
A thousand thousand waited on him,
ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.
A court was held
and the books were opened.

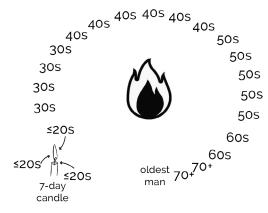
I gazed into the visions of the night. And I saw, coming on the clouds of heaven, one like a Son of Man. He came to the One of Great Age and was led into his presence. On him was conferred sovereignty, glory, and kingship, and all peoples, nations and languages became his servants. His sovereignty is an eternal sovereignty which shall never pass away, nor will his empire ever be destroyed.

Leader 1: We now bless you who are the youngest among us. We invest you with our passion and our fire. We commit ourselves to share our wisdom with you.

Leader 2: But neither is gay wisdom yours to hold fast. We invite you—the youngest of us—to light this seven-day candle, which symbolizes the generations to come, whose future you and all of us hold in the spirit of this community.

Leader 1: We commit them to God, to the protection of Christ and the angels, pledging our solidarity with them as you light this candle.

Those in their 20s light the 7-day candle.



The following chant is begun and repeated for a time:
Listen, listen, listen to my heart song
Listen, listen, listen to my heart song
I will never forget you, I will never forsake you
I will never forget you, I will never forsake you
Chant by Paramahamsa Yogananda

When an appropriate time as passed with singing, the leader speaks:

Leader I: Brothers, we pledge to listen to our heart songs, to forsake no one of our queer company gathered here.

Leader 2: Together, in silence, we now exstinguish our individual flames, transforming them from light to smoke, which rises toward

heaven as a prayer of dedication for sages and youth and all who bear gay wisdom in between.

Each extinguishes his candle, leaving the fire and the 7-day candle burning.

Silence.

Leader 1: O youthful Son of Man, O Ancient of Days, the way of our forebearers—and our way— is to emerge from hiding places, to stand up without fear, to admit we're not sure of the next steps on the journey but to walk on, knowing we are not alone.

We carry your wisdom from the great cloud of witnesses. We learn from the sages among us. We add our wisdom to theirs. And we pledge to walk with generations yet to come on the ageless journey toward you our Great Lover. Enflame us and make us fiery faggots, that we may give light and warmth to those who follow.

Leader 1: The ritual ends. Go into the world wisely and in peace.



WEDDING CEREMONIES

WEDDING MEDITATION CEREMONY OF CHRISTIAN YOUER AND JONATHAN MILLER

Cynthia Lapp Pastor, Hyattsville Mennonite Church

September 18, 2010

It is indeed an honor to join in this joyful celebration this evening. The legal significance of our gathering cannot be overlooked. To have the government recognize the loving relationship of Christian and Jonathan is a big step for them personally, a huge step for the District of Columbia and a leap for the country. And as this is a legal ceremony, Jon and Christian could have chosen, as many do, to go to the courthouse. They could have chosen to quietly have their many years of commitment legally validated by a judge behind a bench.

Instead they are here in front of us. Instead they have nudged their faith community to conversation and clarification about marriage. As a result I am grateful to be here this evening in my official capacity as their pastor. And they have invited all of us, family and friends to celebrate and be witnesses to their love and to hear their vows.

It should hardly surprise us that after 27 years Christian and Jon have decided to marry. Their relationship is an example of what marriage is: faithful commitment through pleasure and loss, illness and career changes. They already embody the vows they will soon share with each other.

So have they gathered us for sentimental reasons? Because everyone loves a happy wedding? Or because this is a good excuse for a dinner party?

No, I believe that you, Jon and Christian, have gathered us together because your love is profoundly spiritual. You have gathered us because we are part of your community of accountability and commitment. Your relationship has moved you to deeper and wider levels of love for each other, and your communities. Your love for each other has stimulated in each of you a deeper and wider love for God and the world. And our response is to be here with you tonight, to bless and affirm your commitment to each other.

After so many years together, I hardly need define for you what love is or warn you of what might be ahead. You already know that, in the words of writer, Han Suyin,

"Love from one being to another can only be that two solitudes come nearer, recognize and protect and comfort each other."

You don't need me to tell you what scripture says about love. You have lived out the words from Song of Songs:

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame.

Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.

And since you chose the beautiful Walt Whitman poem, "When I heard at the close of the day," I hope that even after all these years you still occasionally feel overwhelmed in your mind and body with the beauty of cool ocean waters, rustling sand, "autumn moonbeams," and the wonder of what is most dear to you, your friend and lover.

As you embark on the next 27 years of life together, may you continue to recognize, protect and comfort one another. May you be seals upon each other's hearts. May the love you have for each other burn as unquenchable flame.

LITANY
LITANY OF AFFIRMATION

Carol Wise Executive Director, BMC

Because love is a fragile gift...

We celebrate the careful and attentive nurturing of love that has brought [Name] and [Name] to this place.

Because relationship brings beauty and wonder to the world...

We rejoice in the goodness of this moment and pledge our support that this relationship might continue to flourish.

Because shared laughter and tears nourish the spirit...

We promise to walk with [Name] and [Name] in times of both sorrow and

celebration.

Because joy is enhanced by the bonds of friendship and love...

We affirm the strength of our shared history and pledge our continued friendship and love.

Because justice offers dignity and the fullness of life...

We will continue to work and dream in order to create a world where all love is respected, protected and honored. [Name] and [Name], may your lives continue to be filled with love. May you be surrounded by kindness and gentle strength. May you greet life with courage and find comfort and joy in one another today, tomorrow and always.

BLESSING BLESSING AND CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGES

Bonnie and Ken Kline Smeltzer Pastors, University Baptist and Brethren Church

August 3, 2014

GATHERING MUSIC

PRELUDE

WORDS OF WELCOME

Friends - somehow, someday, somewhere is here and now! Somewhere is here in this place, in this gathering of friends and family, for it is time to bless and celebrate a new way of living.

It is time to bless and celebrate love long shared and committed.

It is time to bless and celebrate the marriages of [Names]. This is our purpose for gathering. This is cause for rejoicing!

Welcome to this service of blessing and celebration!

OPENING PRAYER

Spirit of Life, of Sunshine and of Summer Rains, you give us life and love to fill our days with beauty and joy. We thank you for making us people who think deeply about life's meaning and love's purposes. We are grateful for the love you have created in each of our hearts and for the marriages we come to bless and celebrate today.

WORDS OF THANKS

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 2:17-22

REFLECTION

Officiant/Pastor 1: So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God,

It was not all that long ago that we called the marriages of gay and lesbian couples 'holy unions' 'commitment services' or 'covenant ceremonies'. This very language set couples apart, and carried an element of being second class, even though the same commitments of love and faithfulness were being made between persons.

Officiant/Pastor 2: Today our hearts are filled with joy – a joy that is flowing from the very heart of God - because this body gathered here, the UBBC church family, countless others who are with us in spirit, and yes, the State of Pennsylvania has given FULL recognition to each of your marriages!

Your years of love and commitment to one another, are fully recognized here and now.

You can now enjoy the rights and benefits of a legal marriage.

And we can bless and celebrate your marriages without apology or fear of any consequences, but instead with great joy and hope and peace.

1: We knew this day would come, but we didn't know when. We didn't know how long we would have to wait. Unfortunately many people and much of the Church still have difficulty joining us in this blessing. We can hope and pray that someday their hearts and minds will change, but they will not hold us back today!

For God is building a home for all of us – a home where your love and commitment is cherished, honored, and respected as much as any other.

- 2: As we talked about what marriage equality and what this service meant to each of you we heard you say this service was a time for:
- —celebrating our love for each other, a love that is equal in the eyes of God
- 1: —celebrating with those who have been so supportive and who have

spoken up for justice on our behalf

2: —celebrating with our church family and so the whole world recognizes and sees

1: —a public acknowledgment of all that has brought us to this point, recognizing that we stand on the shoulders of the saints and giants who have worked long and hard for this moment

2: —claiming that we are real citizens and that something has shifted in our own minds, giving us a new level of courage

1: [Names],

we are blessed by your love and commitment to each other. Your marriages strengthen the fabric of the whole human tapestry, making all of our lives richer for the love you share and stronger for the commitment you've made.

We invite you to stand and face your friends gathered here so that together we may offer you our words of Love and Support.

STATEMENT OF LOVE AND SUPPORT

All: [Names],

You and countless others, have had to wait too long for the societal acceptance of who you are and the church blessing of your relationships of love and marriage. Too long have you waited for justice and equality to prevail in your lives. We give thanks that we can now celebrate marriage equality with you and so many others who have waited and struggled for this day to arrive. We pledge to you our love and support as your friends and family and as people of God, embracing you with the open arms of welcome and blessing. Amen.

RITUAL OF BLESSING

[place stoles on each person, couple by couple, join hands and offer the blessing]
and,
K: May all the world respect and celebrate your love for each other,
B: a love blessed by God and now recognized by the United States of Amer-
ica

An Irish Blessing
All: May you arise each day
aware of the sacred gift of life.
May you open your eyes
each day to the miracle
that is your self.
May your heart know the love
that every moment surrounds you.

And may you accept with open hands the daily gifts of hope, of wonder, of grace and of presence.

POSTLUDE

Somewhere Over the Rainbow

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WEDDING CEREMONY WEDDING OF LARRY MILLER AND STEPHEN WILCOX

Cynthia Lapp and Michelle Burkholder Pastors, Hyattsville Mennonite Church

November 5, 2013

GATHERING AND WELCOME

Welcome to this wedding celebration. It is our privilege to gather on this gorgeous fall afternoon to mark the 19th anniversary of Steve and Larry's meeting – at a backyard barbecue in Ohio, on November 5, 1994 - and to be with them as they become legally married.

Since this is an intimate occasion we should at least know each other's names. Could you each introduce yourselves and say how you know Larry and Steve.

PRAYER

READING OF SONGS 8:6-7

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.

SHARING WORDS OF SUPPORT — from the gathered community

PRAYER (MICHELLE)

O gracious and ever living God, You have created us in your image and called us to love you and one another. Hear our prayers for Larry and Stephen who now celebrate before you their covenant of marriage and ask for your blessing. Give them grace to continue to keep the vows they make, that their life together may continue to be a witness to your love. 82

vows

I, Larry, take you Stephen to be my husband. I promise before God and these friends to be your loving and faithful husband to share with you in plenty and in want in iov and sorrow in sickness and in health and to join with you so that together we may serve God and others as long as we both shall live. I give you this ring as a symbol of my love With all that I am and all that I have, I honor you.

I, Stephen, take you Larry to be my husband. I promise before God and these friends, to be your loving and faithful husband, to share with you in plenty and in want, in joy and sorrow, in sickness and in health. and to join with you so that together we may serve God and others as long as we both shall live. I give you this ring as a symbol of my love. With all that I am and all that I have, I honor you.

BLESSING PRAYER

Leader: God of all life, in you we live and move and have our being. Bless Larry and Steve with your grace. May they continue to keep the vows they have made and always know the joy of this day.

All: Bless them with your love. May their love or each other grow deeper and their love for you shine forth. Bless them with your mercy. May they be patient and forgiving and share each other's burdens whatever life may bring.

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Leader: Bless them with your peace. May they be calm and confident and live in harmony among all people.

All: Bless them with your presence.

May Christ abide in their hearts and home, and may they offer praise and thanksgiving through all their life together.

In the name of the one in whom we live and move and have our being. Amen.

Adapted from Hymnal: A Worship Book #798

PRONOUNCEMENT

With the blessing of this gathered community of friends - And the authority given to me by the laws of the state of Maryland - I pronounce Larry Miller and Stephen Wilcox legally married. What God has joined together, let no one separate.



LITURGY WITH COMMUNION SUSTENANCE

Anna Beth Roeschley Hyattsville Mennonite Church

Pink Menno, Pittsburgh 2011

OPENING SONG

What is this place?

CALL TO GATHER

Spirit of Lightness and Life,

Be with all makers and dreamers:

All who make bread

And long to share it;

All who make music

And long to dance:

All who make words

And long for poetry:

All who are born in flesh

And long to be human;

All who make love

And trust their longing

For life.

(Joy Mead)

WELCOME

Welcome, makers, dreamers, doers, lovers.

Welcome, workers of justice.

Welcome all, to this circle.

We gather to commune with one another, to find sustenance for our work and wanderings, to find strength for our journeys. We gather to be present to the mysteries that lie in faith the paradox. May we remember that pain is mixed with joy, brokenness with wholeness. May we be open to the unexpected, divine surprise, miracle.

After a few moments of silence, we will listen to some readings and poetry, share communion with one another, and close with a song.

SILENCE

READING FROM JOHN 6:5-13

BLESSING OF THE BREAD

All over the Jesus story is people gathering, eating, breaking bread. Many times in unexpected places with unexpected folks, the typically unwelcomed folks. In a similar way, we gather – in "unofficial" spaces, in the midst of institution and power, around a "table" where all are welcome, expected or not, breaking bread in faith that all, at last, will be fed, and then some.

Be warmly invited to this table, there is a place set for you. Let us share a piece of bread, hold it as we hear a poem, and then eat together.

POEM

Let it Happen by Joy Mead

READING FROM JOHN 2:1-10

BLESSING OF THE JUICE

Where are the empty wine crafts in our lives?

What unexpected element might be turned, transformed?

What is the cup of joy, the fruit that sustains us?

To bless our cup, I invite us to toast one another, saying, "May you be sustained," and then drink together.

SENDING

Joy Mead

HWB 546 Guide our feet -

(Hold my hand, Stand by me, We're your children, Guide our feet)



PRAYERS

PRAYER FOR COMING OUT

Brian Flory Pastor, Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren

God of wholeness, God of blessing, God of becoming. From birth until death, you encourage us to be in a constant state of growing and being. You are a part of our journeys of self-discovery. You give us the strength to name the core and essence of who we are, beginning with ourselves. You offer us a peace that passes all understanding, in our doubts and our fears, in our hopes and in our questions. We are grateful for your ever-present role in the course of our lives.

God of wholeness, God of blessing, God of becoming. We place our trust in your knowledge that the closet is a complex place – a place of safety and of fear, a place of stability and of silence. We offer our prayers for those who are in whatever closet is constructed around them. We pray for your beloved children who struggle to name their sexuality, first to themselves, then to others. We pray for the parents who hear those brave words of coming out with a mixture of pride and fear. We pray for families and friends who can play such a profound role through their acceptance and support. We pray for churches and schools, for communities and organizations who face the challenge of coming out themselves as advocates and allies. Fill each one with your abiding presence, O God. Enable us all to embrace sexuality as a gift and a blessing to understand and explore, guided by your loving care.

God of wholeness, God of blessing, God of becoming. We offer this prayer in the name of Jesus, the One who did not condemn, but embraced; the One who sought healing, not division; the One who brought restorative justice, not dogmatic judgment; the One who encourages our coming out, not our holding back. Amen.

PRAYER PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION

Sarah Klaassen President of Board, BMC Pastor, Rock Bridge Christian Church

- 1: Creating God -
- 2: Creating God -
- 3: Creating God -

1: we give thanks and praise for voices lifted in song

- 2: for hearts longing for justice
- 3: for people praying for peace
- 1: Today we celebrate our holy calling to risk, to stand on the edge of acceptability and acceptance to come out with pride and speak up even in the midst of conflict
- 2: We celebrate gracious and faithful witnesses and gentle yet bold testimony.
- 3: We celebrate those who do not conform and those who dare to think

All: that all people have a place at the table of our Lord

- 1: Sustaining God -
- 2: Sustaining God -
- 3: Sustaining God -
- 2: You are the divine mystery that knits us together in unity with each other and with creation. And yet we find ourselves uncertain as we prepare to enter this delegate session. We do not come as impartial decision-makers but instead bring with us

All: many pieces of ourselves:

- 1: Today we bring our fear that inclusion will be replaced by a false unity that appeases loud voices
- 2: Today we bring our anger and resentment that real voices and real people are lost between the cracks of debates and resolutions about authority and singular truth
- 3: Today we bring our pain and our grief that our beloved church is sometimes a place of violence and exclusion toward those of us who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and toward those who love us
- 1: Redeeming God -
- 2: Redeeming God -
- 3: Redeeming God –
- 1: It is here and now that we need your peace
- 2: Break into our midst and redeem us
- 3: Transform our fear into resilient hope

- 1: Transform our anger into a wide, wide mercy
- 2: Transform our resentment into gracious dissent
- 3: Transform our pain into confidence that we are all members of the household of God
- 1: Let your extravagant love and unending peace descend upon us and upon all who are gathered here.

All: In hope we pray... Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE COMMUNITY LOVE FEAST

Lisa Ann Pierce St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship

Luke 7:36-50, John 13:1-20

Sharing our joys and concerns

One: You who taught us to wash one another's feet,

All: Hear our prayer.

Unison Prayer

All: Holy One, we come to you in prayer, holding one another's joys and concerns like well-traveled feet that need tender care. We take these prayers—the spoken and the unspoken—and we caress them, anoint them, and ready the bodies they belong to for the long road ahead. We thank you that you taught us to meet one another on bended knee and to share the Love that will build a new Kin-dom. Amen.



READINGS

COMMUNITY READING HISTORY IN THE MAKING

Anna Beth Roeschley

October 11, 2009 Pink Menno Action Sunday

Based on Psalm 22:1-15, 30 and excerpt voices from Hyattsville Mennonite, the Open Letter to Franconia Mennonite Conference, and other Pink Menno voices.

Reader 1: To One who hears us,

ALL Readers: We cry out

Reader 1: We cry out in lament and confession.

People: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

Reader 2: As long as our table isn't big enough to share, we will never know peace.

People: Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

Reader 3: We have received the Anabaptist teachings of our churches and schools, and we have embraced the call to emulate the radical hospitality of Jesus and the unconditional love of God.

People: In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame. But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people.

Reader 1: Give me the nerve to be a prophet of my own time and I will preach / the good news / a little differently.

People: All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads; "Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver-let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"

Reader 2: To me, this campaign is a chance to stop asking permission for a place at the table in our broader church community.

People: Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast.

Reader 2: As a family, as sisters and brothers through Christ, we share the

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table with those whom we agree and perhaps with those whom we have strong disagreement.

People: I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.

Reader 3: While we are disheartened, we find hope in our vision of the Church as it might be.

People: Posterity will serve God; future generations will be told about the Lord.

Reader 2: We are part of history, made and in the making

Reader 3: With a Creator who made and is making

People: They will proclaim God's righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: God has done it!

Reader 1: That by our witness they may be told:

ALL: God has done it!

COMMUNITY READING READING IN CELEBRATION OF LGBTQ PERSONS

Brian Flory Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren

One: Rejoice, O people of God. We worship a God who created us, lovingly and wonderfully made. God made each one of us and pronounced us as good.

All: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, straight – all created by the loving hand of God.

One: We are filled with wonder at the diversity of God's children and the gift of human sexuality. We celebrate the unique blessing of each one among us.

All: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, straight – all blessed by the loving presence of God.

One: God's love is abundant and clear in Jesus' words: Love one another,

as I first loved you. We celebrate the sexuality of our sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers, grandparents and friends.

All: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, straight – all seeking fulfillment in the beloved family of God.

One: As disciples, God compels us to be gateways to faith, not gatekeepers. We celebrate the inclusive church and the LGBTQ Christians that are members of it.

All: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, straight – all in service of the loving example of God.

One: Out of one, we are many. From many, we become one. Let us give thanks to God.

PSALM READING PSALM 23

Joanna Harader and Ruth Harder Add info

The Holy One is our shepherd, we have enough:

enough love and longing enough community and compassion enough sacred and sassy enough fierceness and fabulousness

They make us lie down in green pastures and lead us beside still waters and restore our souls:

at BMC gatherings at Connecting Families at Pink Menno rooms at this place, right here, right now.

You lead and accompany [us] / into the path of justice and solidarity, / and [we] find integrity in your way. $^{\text{I}}$

the way of speaking out and listening well the way of deep love and deep pain the way of celebration and protest the way of dancing and wall-demolition

Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death where we are talked about, but not to

¹ From Murphy Davis

where our giftedness is not received where our relationships are not honored where we are labeled and cast aside

We will fear no evil, for you are with us; your rod and your staff, they comfort us.

We lean on your Word that speaks love and justice We lean on your people, who speak acceptance and life We lean on your church where it is open, affirming, and welcoming of our whole selves

We lean on your Spirit of praise, protection, and protest

You prepare a table before us

this table made from fallen walls this table covered with all the colors of the rainbow this table of fountains and fruits and abundance this table where we are welcome

In the presence of our enemies...

people and principalities polities, procedures, and processes "dialog" and "discernment" resolutions and yet another task force

You anoint our heads with oil

the oil of blessing for lives that are holy and whole, sacred and fabulous the oil of commissioning that we might go forth in our fierceness to tear down walls and set spectacular tables

Our cups overflow

our joy overflows our hearts overflow our queer and queer-loving selves overflow with the abundance you pour out

Surely rainbows and unicorns will follow us all the days of our lives and we will dwell in the fabulous house of the Divine forever.

READING I IMAGINE A SPINNING GOD

Regina Shands Stoltzfus Assistant Professor, Goshen College January 2007

I imagine a spinning God Pulling silken strands of blue from the cosmos and creating the sky Flinging it across the expanse and calling it good

I imagine a weaving God
Nimbly pulling strips of gold and green
Raising up mountains
putting down valleys
tucking in silver streams among the meadows
and gracing the landscape with vegetation
fruits and nuts and seeds and berries
grain

grain
pushed down
shaken together
running over
enough to feed a multitude of multitudes

I imagine a painting God

Delighting in the smoothness and the squishiness of cool, wet pigment Rich, thick dollops of color dripping down between God's fingers

Burnt sienna

Ochre

Umber

Butter yellow

Pale almond

Peach Vanilla

Midnight black

All the colors of the world lavishly displayed on all the people of the world

And God is plum delighted

Creative God

Spinning

Weaving

Painting God...

May we recreate with you the world you dreamed into being. Amen.



MUSIC

HYMN STRENGTH FOR THE JOURNEY

Linda Williams, revised by Kay Guyer

REFRAIN C Am F Am
Strength for the journey, hope for the way;
F Dm $D7$ G
love for the challenges we meet each day,
C C+ F D7
May God=s love and our fellowship sustain us today, C Am F G7 C
and give us strength for the journey, hope for the way.
V.1 (re-worded by Kay Guyer) C Am F Am
Oh, life is a journey of wisdom which grows
F Dm D7 G
as we walk on this path of mysteries.
C C+ F D7
when we turn toward one another and share openly, C Am F G7 C
holy strength is gained in our communities.
V.2
C Am F Am
Just as the falling snow blankets objects below, F Dm D7 G
assuming with each a different form,
C C+ F D7
So the Holy Spirit surely descends upon
C Am F G7 C
each of God's unique creations, with no need to conform.
REFRAIN
C Am F Am
Strength for the journey, hope for the way;
F Dm D7 G
love for the challenges we meet each day,
C C+ F D7
May God=s love and our fellowship sustain us today,
C Am F G7 C
and give us strength for the journey, hope for the way.
V. 3
C Am F Am

Forgive us, Lord, when we presume to try to limit You F Dm D7 G to ways that we can comprehend; C C+ F D7 help us keep our minds and hearts open to embrace C Am F G7 C the infinite possi--bi---lities of Your love which transcends.

V.4
C Am F Am
We know that AGod is love@ and those who abide
F Dm D7 G
in love abide in God,
C C+ F D7
and God abides in those who live ways of love,
C Am F G7 C
though they may take different paths than most have trod.

FINAL REFRAIN

C Am F Am

Strength for the journey, hope for the way;
F Dm D7 G

love for the challenges we meet each day,
C C+ F D7

May God=s love and our fellowship sustain us today,
C Am F G7 C

and give us strength for the journey, hope for the way.
C Am F G7 C F C

Strength for the journey...hope for the way!

Words and music 1999 by Linda K. Williams.

Verse 4 is based upon a quote by Thoreau.

Verse 6 (first 3 lines) paraphrases the message of 1 John 4: 8-16.

Dedicated to openness to all types of diversity in our Church Families, and in our society and world

Tear Down the Wall

For Brethren Mennonite Council's 40th Anniversary Celebration



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BENEDICTION GRACE, LOVE, AND POWER

Joanna Harader Pastor, Peace Mennonite Church

As you go from this place: may you live within the Creator's divine grace; may you live out Jesus' boundary-less love; may you live through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

BENEDICTION BENEDICTION FOR PRIDE SUNDAY

Carol Wise Executive Director, BMC

Go with pride in who you are and whose you are;

Go knowing that love is stronger than hate, and hope more lasting than fear:

Go determined to live with the dignity that is yours as God's beloved; Go committed to this holy struggle of liberation, joining that great cloud of witnesses who will not rest until peace and justice embrace, and love finds a home in every human heart.

BIOGRAPHIES

Jonathan Bay (he/him) is a California trans poet, currently studying and living in Scotland. He is a member of the La Verne Church of the Brethen and works for Womaen's Caucus.

Brenda Dyck (she/her) a retired pastor of a church in the Mennonite tradition which was dis-membered from three Mennonite denominations for its stand of solidarity with and affirmation of those persons who identify as lgbtq. Her passions include ritual making, singing, reading, writing, live theatre, movies, travel, A/art, hosting family and friends with good food and wine. She lives with her beloved Art in Calgary where she has a small spiritual direction practice and presides at weddings, funerals and memorials.

Brian Flory (he/him) is in his tenth year of serving as a Pastor with the Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren in Fort Wayne, IN. He is proud to be serving as the convener for the COB SCN steering committee. Brian enjoys family bike rides with his spouse Kimberly and daughter Maya and planning the family's next travel experiences!

Joanna Harader (she/her) serves as pastor of Peace Mennonite Church in Lawrence, KS, and is active with the Inclusive Mennonite Pastors leadership team. In addition to writing for church, Joanna also writes for Rev. Gal Blog Pals, Brain Mill Press, Christian Century, and her blog, Spacious-Faith.com.

Ruth Harder (she/her) serves as pastor of Rainbow Mennonite Church in Kansas City, KS. She has a reputation for being ruthless, turning most everything into a friendly competition. She is married to Jesse Graber, an illustrator and the least competitive person she knows.

Sarah Klaassen (she/her) is a lifelong Mennonite and the pastor at Rock Bridge Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Columbia, Missouri where she lives with her partner.

Ken Kline Smeltzer (he/him) is a pastor in the Church of the Brethren for many years (Highland Ave in Elgin IL, Modesto CA, Burnham PA) and now a local Handyman, Ken was a member of the Voices for an Open Spirit Board, instrumental in founding the Progressive Brethren Gatherings, and a former Board member with Open Table Cooperative. He originated and directs the annual Song & Story Fests, a weeklong intergenerational family camp, hosted by a Brethren camp usually near Annual Conference.

Bonnie Kline Smeltzer (she/her) is currently the pastor of University Baptist and Brethren Church (UBBC) in State College, PA. One of Bonnie's greatest joy's as a pastor is planning worship that involves people, their senses, and their hearts and minds. When she's not working she enjoys a good movie, a Y workout, being creative, and traveling.

Cynthia Lapp (she/her) has been pastor at Hyattsville (MD) Mennonite Church since 2002. While she is a graduate of Wesley Theological Seminary, her real theological training came from working at WATER (Women's Alliance for Theology Ethics and Ritual) for seven years.

John Linscheid (he/him) and **Ken White** (he/him) have been nurturing queer spiritual growth for over 30 years through retreats, church involvement, and individual relationships. They have been particularly involved in queer liberation in a Mennonite context.

Lisa Ann Pierce, M.Div., (she/her) is a member of Saint Paul Mennonite Fellowship in Minnesota. She is a graduate of McPherson College and United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. Lisa lives in the West Side neighborhood of Saint Paul with her spouse, Karen, and their dog, Henry.

Pax Ressler (they/them) is a genderqueer composer, designer, director, and performer in Philadelphia. They have worked for Philadelphia theatre and dance companies as a freelance artist. Pax is the Director of Music at Tabernacle United Church, a United Church of Christ and Presbyterian congregation in West Philadelphia.

Annabeth "AB" Roeschley (she/hers & they/them) brings a creative, queer approach to liturgy and worship leading, whether at Hyattsville Mennonite Church or BMC and Pink Menno gatherings. Annabeth is an advocate for community-led spaces and local business, and can most often be found biking all over Washington, DC.

Mark Rupp (he/him) is the Pastor of Christian Formation at Columbus Mennonite Church. He lives in Columbus with his husband, Jeremy, and their two cats, Rory and Oswin.

Regina Shands Stoltzfus (she/hers) currently teaches at Goshen College in the Peace, Justice Conflict Studies (PJCS) and Bible, Religion and Philosophy departments. Regina is co-founder of the Roots of Justice Anti-Oppression program (formerly Damascus Road) and continues as a core trainer with Roots of Justice.

Ry Sigglekow (he/him) (Ph.D., Princeton Theological Seminary) is Pastor of Proclamation, Witness, and Formation at Faith Mennonite Church in

Minneapolis, MN. He teaches theology at the University of St. Thomas and Bethel University.

Carol Wise (she/her) is the Executive Director of BMC and the Coordinator of the Supportive Communities Network. A graduate of the Iliff School of Theology, she lives in Minneapolis where she enjoys the long winters.