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Conference reflects on kairos document

By David Mesenbring

About 110 Christians from across the U.S. recently gathered on Chicago's South Side for a three day conference to examine and reflect on the Kairos Document of South Africa. They were joined by dozens of southern Africans, including several who were at the heart of that document's genesis, and who shared with participants some story of the document's unique evolution as 'Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa.'

Before it was signed by an ecumenical mix of 151 Christians in September, 1985, small groups of lay and clergy persons scattered throughout South Africa discussed scripture and 'the signs of the times' to evolve the thirty page statement of theology. While not flawless in the minds of western scholars, the Kairos Document is impressive for what it reflects about the level of theological sophistication at the grass roots. When asked about this example of liberation theology, Dr. Joseph Sittler called it 'the best I've found.'

The Chicago convocation was called by the Africa Office of the National Council of Churches as an opportunity to reflect on what the Kairos Document means for U.S. Christians. As a result, most of the plenary presentations were made by U.S. academics. The extraordinary collection of South Africans present ministered to the North Americans through worship leadership and in the discussion groups.

The convocation's opening service heard Pastor

Frank Chikane, Director of the Center for Contextual Theology which has been closely involved with the evolution of the Kairos Document. He shared the commitment to non-violence which

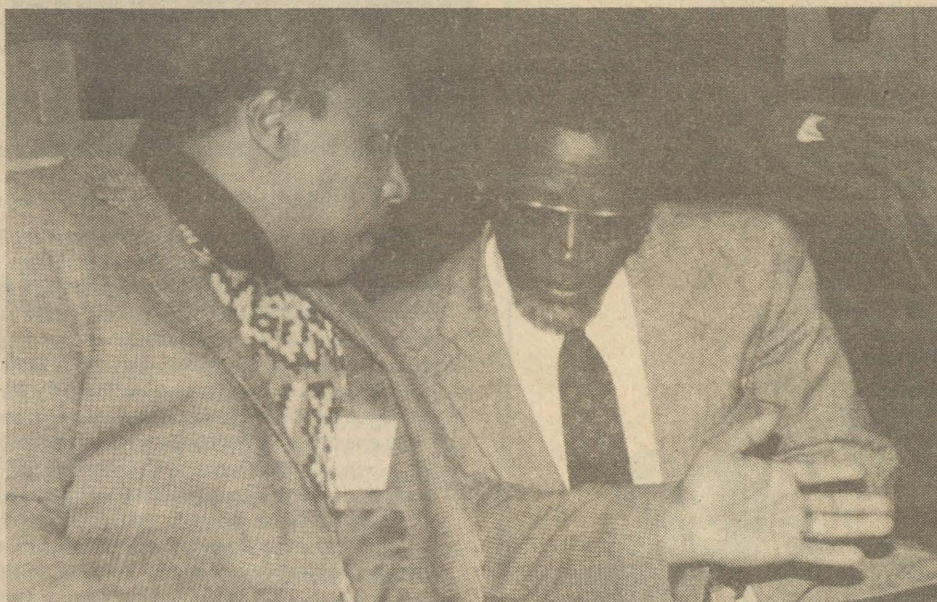
he is famous for but spoke of how ineffective it has been rendered by the international community's lack of support. U.S. military support for South Africa has been growing through funding

of contra-type forces in Angola. State supported violence in southern Africa is growing but the United States remains unwilling to use its economic muscle in a comprehensive sanctions effort. 'Please help us,' Pastor Chikane pleaded, 'because we don't want to take up guns!'

Some conference tension emanated from use of a process which contrasted sharply with the one used to create the Kairos Document. For that reason many at the convocation urged that participants take the document home for study and prayer in small congregational groups.

A new study guide was introduced at the convocation for this purpose and received enthusiastic welcome from organizers and participants alike. Published along side the Kairos Document, the study guide outlines a suggested discussion structure for groups which want to spend five sessions encountering the Kairos Document. It includes a resource guide and extensive notes for the discussion leader who need not be well versed on the subject of southern Africa in order to lead one of these groups. The document and accompanying study guide will be available after February 1st. For cost and further information contact: Lutheran World Ministries, 360 Park Ave. New York, NY 10010.

David Mesenbring is a former staff member with Lutheran World Ministries currently doing Southern Africa Advocacy work in Wisconsin.



Pete Pero of Chicago, and Maurice Ngakane, of South Africa, participated in the kairos conference.

Eugene Crawford Dies: Headed Indian Ministry

Eugene Crawford, Executive Director of the National Indian Lutheran Board (NILB), died November 30th of a heart attack as he took a Sunday afternoon walk near his home in Omaha. He was 58 years old. Crawford was the first Native American hired to an executive staff position in the Lutheran church who often appeared to be at ease with American Indians and the established church.

Crawford was named the head of NILB in 1971 after two years of tension between American Indians and church officials over the church's commitment to helping Native Americans. NILB is an agency affiliated with the Lutheran Council in the USA, with its offices in Chicago.

Half-Sisseton Sioux and half-English, Crawford often found himself in the role of a mediator between the world of American Indians and the predominantly white church.

'What was so unusual about Gene was that he was a man of two worlds: He lived with integrity in both the Native American community and

the established church without compromising his ideals,' said a statement from the Rev. John R. Houck, general secretary of the Lutheran Council in New York.

Syd Beane, NILB president and executive director of the Lincoln, Neb., Indian Center, said Crawford's death was a 'great loss in the loss being to the Indian community (and) to all Indian organizations and tribes.' He added that Crawford's death means the 'passing of a style... There is no one person to follow up on his work. It has to be more of a team effort.'

At the first-ever Native American gathering last August at Concordia College, Moorhead, MN., Crawford saw a wish fulfilled: over a dozen Indian ministries, including congregations from reservations, Eskimo congregations and special ministries in urban settings were brought together for a final worship service during which a Native American pastor, the Rev. George Tinker of Iliff School of Theology in Denver, presided with

the assistance of three female Native American seminarians.

Yet Crawford acknowledged that the service with Native American leaders could not have occurred without a strong push from the Indian people to have the white church better understand their needs.

The major work of Crawford's office was in advocacy and approving hundreds of thousands of dollars for projects to help Native Americans. Those projects included housing, community development, legal help and research on treaty rights, homelessness, urban poverty, economic development, cultural preservation, care for the elderly, communications, education, health and combating hunger.

Advocacy for Indian causes in federal, state, and local governments was an integral part of Crawford's work. The churches' support was particularly crucial to the passage of the 1976 American Indian Health Care Improvement Act, said Shirley Canchola, NILB administrative assistant who was with Crawford's widow Evelyn after his death. 'The Indian constituency itself did not have that kind of political clout,' said Canchola.

Crawford and the NILB were also involved in other issues, such as studying the effects that nuclear waste dumping has had on tribal reservations in Arizona and the development of theological education programs for Indians. Recently, Crawford helped raise funds for a

research program aimed at backing up the claims of dozens of Indian tribes for federal recognition — and funding.

And as one of two Native Americans on the Commission for a New Lutheran Church, Crawford helped formulate plans for greater representation of Native Americans, Hispanics, Blacks and Asians into the staff and voting groups in the New Lutheran Church. There are an estimated 3,000 to 3,500 Native Americans in 15 congregations on reservations and in other Lutheran parishes.

For all Crawford's accomplishments, there were some disappointments and frustrations, such as the 1981 withdrawal of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod from NILB. And, while he welcomed the new church, he was concerned about the implications of ending the NILB and incorporating it into the structure of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

In a letter to his family, LHRAA co-directors, Susan and Chuck Ruehle, noted that 'LHRAA and NILB have shared many important events in the past 16 years. Gene's leadership consistently brought about a stronger and more interdependent relationship between the Lutheran Church and Indian People. His leadership - at this important point in our churches' history - will be missed.'

Messages of condolence may be shared with the Crawford family through the NILB offices, 35 East Wacker Drive, Chicago, IL 60601.

Directors Announce Resignations

The Board of Directors of Lutheran Human Relations Association of America (LHRAA) has received and accepted the resignations of Susan and Charles Ruehle, the association's co-directors. They announced their plans to leave the association on September 1, 1987 at a recent Board meeting.

The Ruehles are ordained Lutheran Church in America (LCA) pastors, and have shared the executive directorship of LHRAA, an independent association of Lutheran congregations and individuals, since May 1981. Since April of 1986, they have also served part-time as Associate Pastors of the Lutheran Church of the Reformation, an LCA urban congregation in Milwaukee.

Reflecting on their years as co-directors of LHRAA, the Ruehles stated: 'It is with great joy and satisfaction that we review our ministry with the Association, we have a sense of completion and accomplishment... and pledge our commitment to LHRAA in the years to come.' They also noted a sense of calling to move on to other dimensions of their team ministry.

Speaking on behalf of the Association, Board President Judy Roos of Saint Louis, said, 'besides modeling the possibilities of wife-husband team ministry for the church, Susan and Chuck have advanced the ministry of LHRAA. They have helped the Association lift up a vision of the inclusive church, a church for all the children of the world. Their networking and advocacy skills have increased the visibility of LHRAA and thereby highlighted the significance of the Association's ministry.'



Susan and Charles Ruehle

Roos indicated that LHRAA continues to respond to Christ's call to be the suffering servant - to share the pain of the poor and oppressed and their struggle for social justice. She also announced the formation of an executive search committee made up of herself, plus Marlene Helgemo of Minneapolis, MN; Lou Jeanne Walton of Gary, IN; and Ted Schroeder of St. Louis, MO. The committee met in early December, and began shaping a job description. It includes the need for a person with a commitment to social justice and skills in the areas of: publication, fund raising, administration, networking, and computer literacy.

See page two for a complete job announcement and information regarding the search for a new director(s). Nominations and letters of inquiry will be received by Judy Roos, LHRAA, 2703 N. Sherman Blvd., Milwaukee, WI, 53210 (414) 871-7300.

Group challenges pension plans

Pension Members for Divestment, an openmembership group of LCA pension members, adopted a position paper at its December meeting on three crucial issues facing the Transition Team for a New Lutheran Church.

In a letter to the Transition Team they wrote, 'The matter of divestment vis-a-vis the situation of apartheid in South Africa has brought the corporate social responsibility of the churches and their pension plans into the forefront of discussion and action. However, the pension boards of most Protestant churches still remain aloof from this discussion and any action toward divestment. The distance and indifference of these pension boards stems from several factors related to their incorporation and ideology.'

In the letter, the pension members raised their concerns about (1) the 'governance structure' for the Board of Pensions of the ELCA, (2) the 'corporate social responsibility' of that board, and (3) the proposal to create a separate, so-called socially responsible fund.

In regards to the structure and corporate social responsibility of the pension board, the members

question the creation of a separately incorporated board of pensions that may not be responsive to the plan members. They state that it is crucial for the ELCA to create a structure for the pension program, 'that will not allow its pension board to make any decisions, or take any actions, contrary to the expressed will of the churchwide assembly or church council'. The group calls for revisions in the present ELCA documents to ensure the accountability of the pension plan to its members and the church itself.

The group also responded to a proposal to create three separate pension funds, only one of which would be a 'socially responsible fund'. They ask that the ELCA resist all attempts to establish separate funds because this criteria must, 'affect all the investments of the church in order for such advocacy and solidarity to be effective.'

In addition to the transition Team, letters were also sent to Bishops Crumley, Preus and Herzfeld, as well as the LCA executive council and the ALC church council.

For more information write to: Pension Members for Divestment, Room 201, 83 Wayne Street, Jersey City, NJ 07302.

JOB ANNOUNCEMENT

TITLE: Executive Director: Lutheran Human Relations Association of America

QUALIFICATIONS:

1. Minimum of a bachelor's degree
2. Theologically articulate
3. Demonstrated commitment to social justice
4. Administrative experience
5. Computer literacy
6. Leadership, public relations, networking skills

DUTIES:

1. Supervision of volunteer and paid office staff
2. Program development and implementation in coordination with a pan-Lutheran board of directors
3. Fundraising and financial planning
4. Publication of the VANGUARD
5. Development, organization, and implementation of annual summer Institute
6. Maintenance and expansion of resources for social justice ministries

STARTING DATE: August 1, 1987

BASE SALARY: \$23,000 plus fringes (negotiable)

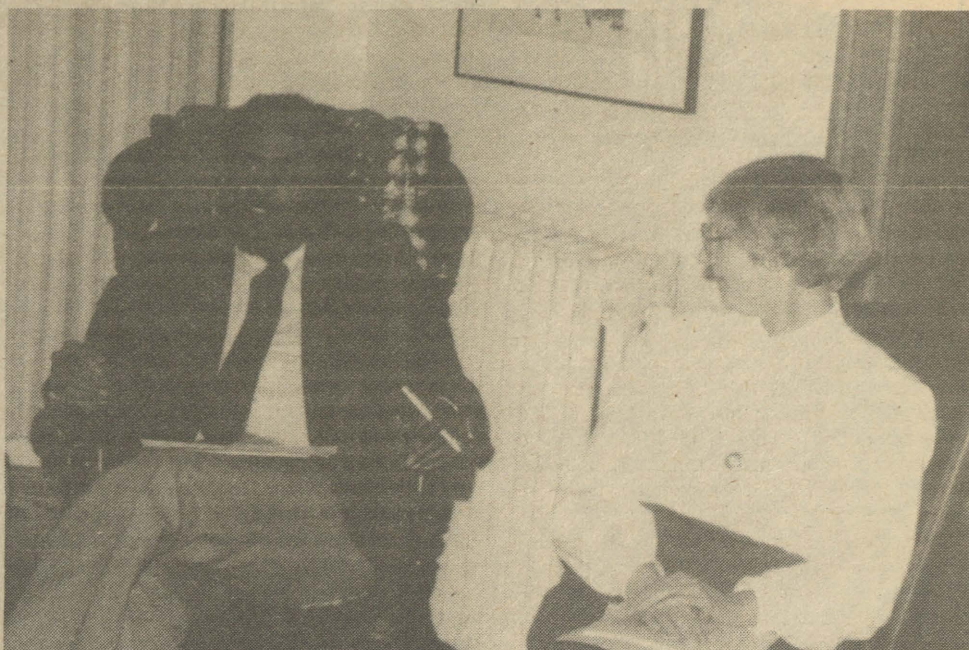
CALL/WRITE FOR APPLICATION FORM FROM

Judy Roos, President
LHRAA
2703 N. Sherman Blvd.
Milwaukee, WI 53210
(414/871-7300)

APPLICATION DEADLINE: March 15, 1987

Equal Employment Opportunity

Institute date and theme set



July 17-19...

In early November, the advisory planning committee for the 1987 Institute met and worked on plans for the weekend. Pictured above, committee members Clarence Pettit and Suzanne Murray talked during the meeting. Because of a potential conflict with a major multi-cultural event scheduled by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), it was decided to move the date for the Institute up one week. The 1987 Institute will be held July 17-19, on the campus of Carroll College in Waukesha, WI.

Recalling the words of Jesus in Luke 4:16ff, the group chose the biblical concept of Jubilee as a focus for the weekend. The theme will be, 'JUBILIEE; HOPE AMIDST SUFFERING'. Some examples of discussion topics for the Institute include: multi-cultural models for ministry; women's concerns; the resurgence of the KKK and other 'christian identity' groups in the U.S.; and common forms of oppression faced by rural and urban communities.

Plenary sessions, worship, bible study and workshops are being planned for the weekend. A Youth and Teen Program will offer learning opportunities for the whole family. Look for details in future issues of the VANGUARD.

Immigration Bill Enacted by 99th Congress

Among the pieces of legislation passed during the final days of the 99th Congress was the Simpson-Rodino immigration reform measure, thought to be dead only weeks before. Variations on the theme of immigration reform have been pending before Congress for several years.

The first such overhaul of the nation's immigration laws was introduced in the 97th Congress by Senator Simpson and Representative Mazzoli, but while 'Simpson-Mazzoli' came close to enactment several times, controversy surrounding its provisions, combined with fundamental differences between House and Senate versions of the bill, had always prevented final passage in the past.

This year, a feeling of 'now or never' seemed

to pervade Congressional debate on the legislation, and resulted in a greater sense of willingness to find consensus between the two versions of the bill than ever before. Proponents of a humane measure were fearful that without enactment in 1986, the issue would come back in a more restrictive form next year.

The final House-Senate conference report included many of the provisions of the more generous House bill. This included a 1982 eligibility cut-off date for legalization, a program under which qualified undocumented persons can apply to regularize their status in this country.

Also retained in the bill was a House anti-discrimination mechanism to deal with complaints of discrimination stemming from employer sanc-

tions. Sanctions make it illegal to hire persons who do not have permission to work in the United States.

Many advocates fear that this law will lead to employment discrimination against individuals who look, or sound, foreign, such as Hispanics or newly arrived refugees. To provide recourse in such situations, the bill creates a Special Counsel in the Department of Justice to receive and adjudicate sanctions-related discrimination claims.

The third major provision of the new law includes a limited program to provide legal residence in the United States to some temporary agricultural guest workers. This population has been subject to chronic exploitation and has not,

in the past, had the right to remain in the United States after expiration of the seasonal work visa.

The President signed the bill into law on November 6, putting an end to years of legislative battles. Churches have begun to work toward a fair and just implementation of the new law's provisions with a special emphasis on legalization. This will be carried out with the assistance of congregations and voluntary agencies such as the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. Legalization processing will not begin until May, 1987, but preparations are now under way to ensure a smooth and successful program.

For further information, please contact Zdenka Seiner, LIRS, 122 C St. N.W., Suite 300, Washington D.C. 20001, Telephone 202/783-7501.

'More Than Charity' campaign completes regional hearings

By Kristen Anderson Ostrom

The seven regional hearings on poverty and welfare reform, part of the More Than Charity campaign of the ALC, LCA, and AELC, provided a forum for a wide cross section of people to testify: the poor, people working with the poor, congregational volunteers, Lutheran social service staff, elected officials, and government personnel.

Through these hearings, the church bodies have attempted to listen to the needs of people living in poverty and to hear the many solutions and innovative methods which may be available to meet those needs.

THE NEED:

While services provided to the poor, and economic problems varied from region to region, the following threads of testimony were woven throughout.

In general, there is an increase in hunger, poverty, homelessness, unemployment, and part time employment for many seeking full time employment. There is an increase in poverty among female headed families and the working poor.

For those unable to work, the government aid which is provided does not meet basic human needs: food, clothing, housing, etc. The charitable dollar, through churches and businesses, has recently been greatly stretched to help keep some people clothed and fed, but not all. Two parent families are ineligible for government aid in many of the states.

The "new poor" — farmers, ranchers and unemployed steel workers, are often ineligible for government aid because of strict asset restrictions. There is a drastic shortage of low income affordable housing.

For those able to work, the present welfare system provides little incentive to move into the labor force. Adequate education/training/job search opportunities coupled with necessary sup-

portive services (day care, health care, transportation) are lacking in many areas for recipients to move from welfare to work. In addition, the lack of employment and/or employment that earns enough to meet basic needs is wanting in many sections of the country. The minimum wage has not been adjusted for inflation since 1981, and now provides only 65% of the poverty line for a two parent family of four.

Many testified concerning the administrative reforms needed within the welfare system including the need for a streamlined system, a central location for all services, an information/outreach center, and the need for more case workers to work with families through the system.

Poverty prevention programs which help to break the cycle of poverty, such as Head Start and WIC (the supplemental feeding program for Women, Infants, and Children), are greatly underfunded and do not provide services to all those who are eligible.

THE SOLUTIONS:

The solutions and innovative methods which were presented at the hearings were varied and include: developing creative educational campaigns for local churches and community groups to battle teenage pregnancy; greater flexibility at the state level to assess the needs of the poor; more coordination by government agencies; cooperation by government, business, non-profit agencies, and local churches to build programs together as well as the need for greater and more responsible government involvement in meeting the needs of the poor.

A comprehensive summary report of all testimony received will be available from the More Than Charity campaign in early 1987.

Kristin Anderson Ostrom is the More Than Charity coordinator for the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs in Washington, D.C.

As we move toward the new,
Let us not forget our
commitment to the old
Indian Concerns Sunday

1987



The March VANGUARD will again include special reports and commentary. Order extra copies for your congregation at \$5.00 per 100 from Lutheran Human Relations, 2703 N. Sherman Blvd., Milwaukee, WI 53210, 414/871-7300.

Resource materials are available from LHRAA and from the national offices of each Lutheran church body.

Slot filled on LHRAA Board

The Board of Directors of LHRAA has appointed the Rev. Michael Cobbler of Camden, NJ, to fill an unexpired term on the nine member board. Cobbler is an associate pastor of the Camden Lutheran Parish, a Lutheran church in America ministry in New Jersey.

Cobbler completes the term of Wi Jo Kang, of Dubuque, IA. Kang stepped down because of his responsibilities at Wartburg Seminary, where he is the Wilhelm Loehe Professor of World Missions, and an upcoming sabbatical in China. He was elected to the board in July of 1984.

Cobbler was a runner up in the board elections held last summer, and the latch note speaker, with his spouse Thelma Megill-Cobbler, at the 1986 Institute. He has been active in LHRAA and urban ministry concerns for many years. He has written a variety of articles on the life and witness

of Black American Lutherans.

At its October board meeting, the Board also noted that because of the recent turnovers in board membership due to elections and appointments to uncompleted 3-year terms, a potential exists in the July 1987 election for an imbalance in the cross-cultural composition of the board.

To maintain the inclusive nature of the board, to restore stability and to reduce orientation time, the board of directors is considering a non-competitive ballot for the July 1987 elections. The general membership would be asked to ratify three candidates recommended by the board rather than vote for competing candidates. If you have questions, comments or concerns about this matter, write/call the national office before March 1, 1987.

Missionary couple asked to leave by Church

An American Lutheran Church (ALC) missionary couple who served the only integrated Lutheran congregation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA), have been told that the church leadership there does not want them back, despite appeals from the ALC and the South African congregation they serve.

No reason was given by the ELCSA Church Council for its decision not to recall the Rev. Thomas and Joyce Soeldner, now on home furlough. The Soeldners have been working for the past two years in a new English-speaking multiracial ministry in Doornfontein, on the edge of downtown Johannesburg.

"We believe this is a tragic event in the life of ELCSA," said Dr. Mark W. Thomsen, director of the ALC's Division for World Mission and Inter-Church Cooperation (DWMIC). "Tom and Joyce had been doing magnificent work in the integrated congregation in Johannesburg and were deeply loved by their people."

The Soeldner situation seems to point up a difference of opinion within the South African church itself on how ecclesial authority is to be exercised, and also how to confront the issue of apartheid.

Thomsen and the Rev. James Knutson, DWMIC secretary for Africa, said the ELCSA

Church Council action apparently stems from Tom Soeldner's participation in a November 1985 meeting at Germiston, South Africa, that involved a number of African pastors and expatriate missionaries. The group called for a Lutheran Confessing Fellowship to promote unity among Lutherans in resisting apartheid, and questioned what they perceived to be ELCSA's lack of response to the crisis in the country.

The meeting seemed to disturb some ELCSA Church Council members, particularly Bishop Manas Buthelezi of the Central Diocese, under whom Soeldner served, Thomsen said. Buthelezi and others saw the Lutheran Confessing Fellowship as a means of subverting official channels and reprimanded those who participated in the Germiston meeting.

Those participants then agreed not to meet again, and decided instead to work individually through church structures.

"In April, Pastor Soeldner told the Ministerial Council of the Diocese that he considered himself under their supervision. He did not believe he has participated in activities detrimental to the church, and would not participate in the future in activities the church disapproved of," Knutson said "thus he felt the matter was closed until the decision of the Diocesan Council and ELCSA Church Council not to recall the Soeldners."

In August, Soeldner asked the ELCSA Council for permission to leave 12 months early for his home furlough. The council accepted Bishop Buthelezi's recommendation and granted the request. However, many council members were unaware that it included no invitation for the Soeldners to return to the ministry to which they had committed themselves for five years.

When the full implications of the council action became known, the Northern Diocese and Soeldner's own congregation appealed the decision, Thomsen said, but those appeals were rejected.

Bishop Buthelezi's views apparently are not shared by other ELCSA bishops, Thomsen added. Pastors and missionaries serving under Bishops Serote of the Northern Diocese, Dlamini of the South-Eastern Diocese and Hart of the Cape-Orange Diocese also participated in the Germiston meeting, but amicably worked through the issue with their bishops.

"We recognize the fact that ELCSA has a right not to recall expatriate personnel," Knutson said. "But we are deeply troubled by the manner in which this matter was handled, by the refusal to deal with the relevant issues in open discussion and the refusal to give reasons in the final analysis."

Tom Soeldner, his wife Joyce, and their four children arrived in the United States on December 3, for a two-month home leave. The Soeldners, from Port Townsend, Wash., are exploring possibilities for continuing service in southern Africa outside of ELCSA.

"We understand such service as one way that Christians in the United States can express their solidarity with the Struggle of the oppressed in South Africa," Tom Soeldner said.

Soeldner said he is sorry ELCSA leaders chose to focus on procedure and authority, rather than on the substantive issues addressed at the Germiston meeting.

"DWMIC recognizes the fact that ELCSA is operating under terrific pressure as it seeks to serve under the oppressive apartheid regime, as it strives to sustain hope among its members and to speak out against the present system," Knutson said.

"We continue to wrestle with ways to express our partnership with ELCSA under these circumstances, so that we can strengthen and encourage each other," he added.

Thomsen said the DWMIC continues to pray for ELCSA as it makes its way through terrifying times. Soeldner added, "These people are our brothers and sisters in ministry. We need to affirm their work in a very difficult situation."

South African Pastor Detained

A second Black Lutheran pastor has joined a growing list of detained religious leaders in South Africa as the government tightened its press restrictions and moved up its campaign against dissidents.

The Rev. Molefe Tsele of Soweto was arrested December 12 by South African security forces, church officials reported. The 30-year old Tsele, an educational leader and an advocate of non-violent change in the apartheid system, is the second pastor of the 550,000-member Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa (ELCSA) to be taken into custody in recent weeks.

Pastor T. Simon Farisani was arrested on Saturday, November 22 at his home in Venda, South Africa. After police surrounded his home at midnight, Farisani locked himself and his family in the bedroom. At 6 am, police broke in and took Farisani away.

Farisani, an ELCSA pastor is Dean of his region in Venda. He is remembered by many from the film "Torture of a South African Pastor" which told of an earlier experience in 1982 when he nearly died under torture. The person who had signed his current arrest warrant was reportedly the man who supervised his earlier torture.

Amnesty International and various Lutheran officials are attempting to get information from Venda authorities, but with little success. On November 25, several South African Lutheran leaders met Venda police, but were not allowed to see Farisani, who is believed to be at the Sibasa police station in Venda. It has been reported that Farisani was seen at least once at a hospital, but no information about his medical condition is known.

Lawyers for Farisani petitioned the courts for his immediate release at a hearing on December 11. Venda courts have denied that request.

The most recent arrest of Tsele points to the problems that religious leaders generally face. A parish pastor in Soweto since his 1981 ordination, Tsele is one of the leaders of the National

Educational Crisis Committee, which was founded in April 1986. Its purpose is to speak on behalf of students, parents and teachers in the Black community in an effort to bring the government into dialog with them. He has been preparing to enter the graduate theological study program at Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago this year.

South African sources say Tsele's arrest may have been part of a government crackdown in anticipation of "Christmas Against the Emergency," a national boycott of white businesses sponsored by the Educational Crisis Committee and other groups. Or it may be an attempt by government forces to interrogate Tsele on the committee's activities.

Tsele's arrest came a day after the South African government imposed a tight new system of press censorship, prohibiting the reporting of an organized opposition to apartheid unless cleared by a state censor. Since 1984, more than 2,000 people have been killed in unrest in the country. About 22,000 are currently being detained, thousands of other dissidents have forced to go into hiding.

Statements of concern have been sent to South Africa by Lutheran leaders throughout the U.S. and the world. The messages included concern for the safety of both pastors while in detention, a call for their immediate release, and the need for guarantees of his security after release.

Readers are encouraged to call or write the South African Ambassador, Hubert Beukes, at the South African Embassy, 3051 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008, (202) 232-4400, to express concern and outrage over these recent events. Please insist that they use whatever influence they have to insure that Farisani and Tsele are not mistreated.

Calls and letters can also be directed to your Senators, Representatives and, Chester Crocker, Assistant Secretary of State, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520, (202) 232-4400.

Public testimony helps officials serve better

"Who me? Testify at a public hearing? You've got to be kidding! I'm no expert, no one would listen to me..."

Many individuals who have taken the advocacy step of writing or calling elected officials are hesitant or unaware of another avenue of letting your voice be heard: offering testimony at public hearings. Hearings usually are sponsored by government entities: cities and municipalities, state legislatures, the Public Service Commission, Congress and the White House. However, often private groups such as the "More Than Charity" Campaign of the church, or the Harvard University's Physician Task Force on Hunger may utilize hearings as a way to receive public input.

Very often these hearings are dominated by self identified "experts." In September and October the Missouri House Interim Committee on Indigent Health conducted hearings around the state. Service providers, the hospital association and insurance industry were represented in full force. However, the committee was expressly interested in hearing from people experiencing health care problems. Consumers were given preferential treatment in testifying because the legislators really wanted to hear about the problems of citizens.

blems of citizens.

In contrast, at the Advisory commission for the White House's task force on Welfare Reform in Denver recently, the all male panel did have a stated bias for what they considered "expert" testimony. This did not deter a nun from insisting that the female welfare recipient that accompanied her be allowed to testify. "Who could be more expert than someone living the problem," she argued effectively. It was important that this input, whether welcome or not, be part of the record of public debate.

It is the experience of Lutheran Family and Children's Services that testimony from the "ordinary citizen" is usually extremely well received. The most effective testimony is delivered by someone who sincerely cares about a problem and shares their story in relation to it; the unemployed father, the mother of a child with a disability, and the crime victim. It is experience in living that makes someone an "expert," and this expertise is desperately needed to help keep decision makers in touch with the people they serve.

Reprinted from "Christians Concerned," on advocacy newsletter of the Lutheran Family & Children's Service, St. Louis.



A National Conference on Namibia

March 20-22, 1987

**For more information:
Rev. Dennis Johnson
Gustavus Adolphus College
St. Peter, MN 56082
(507) 931-7643**

Namibian churches continue efforts to gain unity

Two large black Lutheran churches and a smaller white Lutheran church in Namibia, meeting in Windhoek in late October, have decided to continue their 14 year quest toward one Lutheran church in the South African occupied territory, according to a report from Namibia Communications Center in London.

Delegates from the 360,000 member Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia, the 190,000 member Evangelical Lutheran Church in SWA Namibia (SWA refers to South-west Africa) and the 12,000 member white German Evangelical Lutheran Church, adopted a draft constitution to be reviewed by each church's synod or legislative body. If the draft constitution is approved by each church, then a new merged church could be constituted in 1992. The decision came at a synod meeting of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in South-west Africa, a federation established in 1972 to foster greater cooperation among Lutherans in the territory.

In addition, the synod elected Landesprobst (the equivalent of dean) Willfried Black of the German church as president and Bishop Kleopas Dumeni of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia as vice president.

The election of a white pastor to head the Namibian church federation was not viewed as a comment on the status of the German church, which together with another small white Lutheran church in South Africa was suspended by the Lutheran World Federation in 1984 for failing to

oppose apartheid and delaying any unification plans with the black churches.

Delegates at the Namibia meeting reported that Blank's election as president of the Namibian church federation was considered a challenge to the German church to "change its attitudes and prove that it truly wants to be a part of a new Namibian church," rather than any "reward" for its past actions which drew its suspension from the LWF, according to the Namibian Center.

The outgoing president of the federation, Bishop Henrik Frederik of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in SWA-Namibia, said at the meeting that so far the 14 years of discussion about cooperation have been fruitless. Frederik also said the white church has not been willing to support the black churches in their statements and actions against South Africa's appointed "interim government" in the territory and against apartheid.

In September, a group of 13 Black Lutheran pastors wrote to the synod after a meeting with pastors from the German church, demanding that merger talks be postponed five years because of the "fundamental theological differences on crucial faith issues."

While this motion was not accepted by the synod, it reflected the skepticism of many Black Christians about the soundness of moving toward one church with German Lutherans. Frederik said the German "Christian brothers and sisters who said they understood my suffering and sorrow change their attitude the next moment," according to the Namibia center.

vanguard

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EDITORIAL

By Ted Schroeder

While driving home from the Institute last summer I had a conversation with another participant concerning the topic of homosexuality. Out of it came the conclusion in my mind that we really need to keep this topic going.

But...somehow we need to facilitate a genuine dialogue between straights and gays and lesbians. Comments she and I heard about the Institute workshop indicated that lots of people have lots of un-answered questions, lots of mixed information and opinions, many fears. Yet they were too shy and polite to enter into meaningful discussion/debate/etc. with the gay and lesbian presenters.

Straights need to hear more stories from gay and lesbians about their personal discovery of their homosexuality. In order to get past the notion that gay is something unfortunate people "catch" due to accidents which must be avoidable and cure-able. They need to dialogue with gays about promiscuity and about enduring homosexual relationships.

Straights need to get to know about sexual ethics in the gay/lesbian world and learn whether or not Christian gays and lesbians espouse traditional mores in regard to promiscuity, etc.

Straights need to recognize moral or immoral equivalents between gay and straight spheres. They need to hear more about the struggle some (many?/most?) gay & lesbian persons have coming to accept themselves as gay persons. Straights need to come to terms with the why of some gay life styles, especially in the first few years of dealing with one's own homosexuality — and compare and contrast that with the hit and miss, start and halt experience of heterosexuals as the rest of us messed around and fumbled and experimented and finally more or less came to terms with what it means to be heterosexual.

I suspect that regarding homosexuals, most church people today are about where they were 100 years ago regarding Black people and the stupid notion about Noah's curse on Canaan. Especially white folks who lived in all white communities. Homosexuality, I suspect, is still seen by most of our people as some kind of a curse or at least as a sign of SIN's curse on the whole creation.

Let's keep gay/lesbian issues before the people of LHRAA.

Ted Schroeder is secretary of the LHRAA Board of Directors, and Pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in St. Louis.



WINGSPAN: Building Bridges of Hope

Wingspan is a unique Christian ministry with and on behalf of gay and lesbian people and their families. Begun in 1982 by unanimous vote of St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church Council, St. Paul, Minnesota, it has served as a beacon of hope to lesbian and gay persons, their families and friends that the church can be a sanctuary and advocate.

Wingspan Ministry serves as a bridge between gay men and lesbians, their families, friends, communities, and the greater church to create an open door which may facilitate "persons coming home again." Reconciliation, wholeness and advocacy are hallmarks in Wingspan's efforts to improve the quality of life for gay men and lesbians, especially in the areas of wholeness and human justice.

Anita Hill and Leo Treadway, Wingspan's Ministry Associate team, are involved on behalf of the congregation in four major areas. **Pastoral Care** involves counseling with individuals and family members as well as a strong emphasis of worship such as the monthly service of the word for healing in light of the AIDS issue. Pastoral care support also means providing a gathering place and church home for groups such as Lutherans Concerned, Spouses of Gays Support Group and Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

Education and Consultation activities include

work with Lutheran clergy and congregations, as well as non-Lutheran and secular groups. Workshop presentations at LHRAA's 1986 Summer Institute are examples of ministry in this area. **Witness and advocacy** translates faith and worship into action in many areas affecting the lives of lesbian/gay individuals, such as proposed legislation. **Interpretation** is the ongoing work of helping people, congregations, church and societal structures to understand the needs of gay/lesbian people and their families.

Gay and lesbian people have been castigated and vilified by the church all too often and have been the victims of violence and oppression in society. Yet even in the face of others' denial of their Christian faith, many lesbians and gay men have remained faithful people seeking Christian community.

It has been a major aspect of Wingspan Ministry to welcome these wonderful, creative, and gifted people, children of God, back into the church community. Responses such as these indicate the impact of Wingspan in people's lives.

"I cannot express my gratitude enough for the life, hope and peace that I have found through Wingspan and St. Paul-Reformation. I've truly come home!"

"I needed a church that would do two things: 1) not shame me for being the



By John Ballew

Lutherans Concerned (LC) began as Lutherans Concerned for Gay People when a small group of gay and lesbian Christians gathered in Minneapolis more than 12 years ago. The group challenged the church to become more inclusive; simultaneously those present spoke to the gay community, saying that "the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is for all of us." During its existence, LC has maintained three objectives: to work with the church for justice, reconciliation and understanding, to support and encourage gay and lesbian Lutherans to remain in their local congregations, and to bring the gospel to the secular gay community.

LC's members come from all across the United States and Canada, as well as small numbers from various other countries. Members come from all of the synods and judicatories of North American Lutheranism. Approximately 25% of the membership in non-gay.

Through the Reconciled in Christ Program, an effort has been made to identify those congregations open to lesbian and gay people looking for a church home. Congregations make an "affirmation of welcome" and LC assists in making that welcome known to interested individuals.

A major undertaking was completed last year when the LC Task Force on Theology issued **A Call for Dialog**. The document is a position paper resulting from more than two years theological study and reflection on biblical and pastoral issues. (see resource section.)

Although lesbian and gay individuals were not represented on the advisory committee of the Lutheran Church in America's recent Study of Issues Related to Homosexuality, LC did provide resources to the committee. The resulting document is perceived to make a positive contribution to the continuing dialog. For many, the tentative nature in which gay women and men were included in the process reinforced fears about how the still-forming Evangelical Lutheran Church in America would involve gay people

within its life. As a founding member of the Working Group on Justice Agendas and the new Lutheran Church, LC has been part of a coalition seeking to make the ELCA more inclusive and justice-oriented.

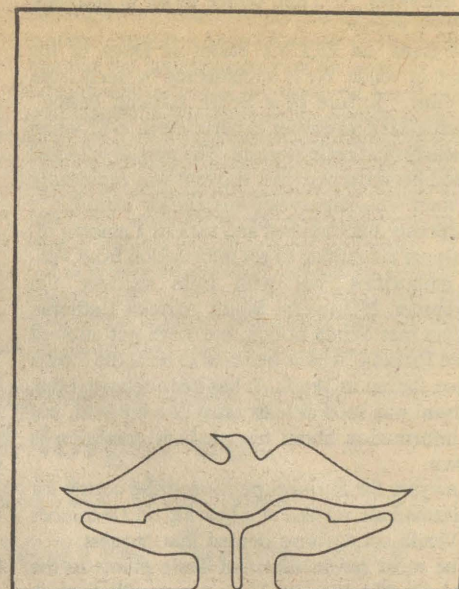
The crisis of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) has challenged Lutherans Concerned in several ways. Local LC chapters have been involved in education efforts and in direct support of persons with AIDS. On the regional and national levels, LC has worked with the church leadership to assist in providing pastoral care resources. If current projections for a steady increase in the number of people with AIDS come true, the resources of both LC and the church at large will be taxed as never before.

At a 1980 assembly of the LC membership, the mission of Lutherans Concerned was envisioned as a 20-year effort. More than a third of the way through that time frame much has been accomplished. Much more remains to be done. Gay people are more visible and better integrated into the life of the church than ever before. They are more likely to be seen as individuals and less likely to be seen solely as representative of an abstract issue.

An increasing number of congregations are willing to make known their caring and support. Many church leaders are more open and willing to enter into dialog (though others remain fearful of any risk of controversy). The closing years of the decade represent both greater risk and greater opportunity than ever before, though the ultimate issues have not changed; justice, reconciliation, and an understanding that the Good News is intended for all people.

For more information, contact Lutherans Concerned/North American, Post Office Box 10461, Fort Dearborn Station, Chicago, Illinois 60610.

John Ballew is a rehabilitation counselor and a member of Lutheran Church of the Redeemer (LCA) in Atlanta, Georgia. He is former president of Lutherans Concerned/North America.



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PERSPECTIVE: Glad Tidings...Straight from the heart

By Ray Makeever

My father never told me much about the way to hold and touch. Perhaps he thought it wouldn't be important. After all, "A man's a man—it's time that you began to stand alone and make your body independent." (But deep inside his body he was crying.)

I remember back in high school. I was afraid that I'd be thought a fool. Then I wore a yellow sweater on a Thursday! I'd forgotten that the game we played was "QUEERS wear yellow on that day"; and I knew I faced the worst humiliation. They rubbed it in so hard I'd not forget it.

The headline in the paper'd said, THE BOY'D BEEN BEATEN around the head. Left for dead, he never saw the morning. FAG-GOT was the word they'd scrawled in red across his bedroom wall. Sometimes I wish I never had been born into a world so full of hate and anger.

I still hear the stories going around that if two men are ever found together holding hands they must be FAIRIES. Though it makes no difference in my mind, my body still is apt to find some buried reasons to beware of these gentle men.

HOMOPHOBIA UNMASKED

A few years ago I performed in a two-person musical revue entitled "BROTHERS: SONGS OF CHANGING MEN." The other man and I read poetry, sang songs, told stories about what it was like to live in this culture...he was a gay man, I was a straight man... we as gay and straight together...as brothers. On the last night of our four night run, he introduced us and surprised me when he said, "This is Ray who is straight and non-homophobic. And I am Paul, the gay homophobic!"

Homophobia has to do with much more than our fear of homosexuals. I define it as the fear of intimacy between persons of the same sex/gender. One of its roots is in my fear of the deep feelings (both positive and negative...and some which feel sexual) that inevitably surface when I allow myself the experience of intimacy/love with another human being...and in this case another man.

Homophobia is one of the reasons most straight men do not have a good personal relationship with another male. Homophobia gnaws insidiously away at this natural human desire. At the same time it deftly weaves its way into the fabric of our society. Homosexual persons feel it more blatantly because of the way societal at-

titudes are structured against meaningful same sex relationships.

Homophobia guarantees a safe (sanitary? sterile?) distance between straight men. Homophobia makes the homosexual man into an enemy of society because he dares to enter the hands off zone and reminds us of the love we are forbidden to share with our brothers.

HOMOPHOBIA'S LAST HURRAH

I have never been fond of the label "straight." It sounds so...well, so straight, if you know what I mean...especially in comparison to "gay." Being "gay" is not a party, I know, but it sure reminds me of some things I would like to do more of...like dancing and laughing and celebrating life and making lots of friends and letting my love flourish. "Straight" just doesn't embody that for me. So from now on please label me "glad." It sounds more like how I would like to be. And also, it makes me actually look forward to the times when I am in the company of homosexual men, and they can openly say, "I'm gay," and I can say, "I'm glad," and we will all feel more proud and loving.

Ray Makeever is a singer/songwriter, performing artist, church musician and worship leader living in Minneapolis, MN.

COMMENTARY

*Editors note: This article is excerpted from a longer paper, **Homosexuality and the Bible**, written by Pastor Tiedeman of St. Paul-Reformation Church. For the complete paper, please contact him at: St. - Paul Reformation Lutheran Church, 100 N. Oxford, St. Paul, MN 55104.*

A matter like homosexuality needs to be seen in the context of the entire witness of Scripture, both Old Testament and New Testament, which bears eternal witness to the grace giving love of God for the whole of creation and for every human being. Jesus Christ was crucified, murdered, because he came to this earth to announce by word and deed and through his very being that God's love is extended to all persons without condition.

It has never been very popular in human history to espouse an idea that no person is better than another. Our societies are all based on various ways of placing some people ahead of others, some as more righteous, some as more desired, some as outcast, some as inferior. As we live together in society today and as we learn more about what influences and guides human behavior, we learn how devastating our exclusiveness of one another can be. Yet we shall never achieve perfection in this world.

The challenge of the witness of Jesus Christ was to the very root and core of the power structure of both religious and secular society. If God indeed loves all people without condition then the assumption of power of one person over another or one group over another is radically called into question. By witnessing in his life and in his death to the total love of God, Jesus forever changed the course of human history and human consciousness.

It is always in this context of the core witness of Scripture that we approach the question of how to deal with any ethical issue or problem. Bishop Herbert W. Chilstrom took note of this in a pastoral letter to the Minnesota Synod, April, 1983 when he said: "Central to all issues, however, is our conviction that Scripture always leads us to Jesus Christ at the center. He is the Word. As we come to know him in Scripture and in our personal encounter with him, we are led to ask: 'What is the mind of Christ? How are we to express his love in this setting?'"

One of the ways that the Holy Spirit guides us is through the considered witness of the contemporary church. I do not think we can say that every work of any preacher or teacher or assembly of the church today is necessarily the authoritative Word from God, but I think that the serious, considered statements of such persons or gatherings should be heeded as one way in which God, through the Spirit, may be addressing us today. I think, therefore, that the Social Statement of the Lutheran Church in America on Sex, Marriage and Family (1970) should be studied carefully as such a witness.

In that Statement it says: "Scientific research has not been able to provide conclusive evidence regarding the causes of homosexuality. Nevertheless, homosexuality is viewed biblically as a departure from the heterosexual structure of God's creation. Persons who engage in homosexual behavior are sinners only as are all other persons alienated from God and neighbor." In this brief Statement the church bears witness to the fact that sexual relations between persons of the same sex is certainly not the "norm" as far as the Bible is concerned. As a "norm" the Bible sets a context for understanding God's intent for creation and it is in that context that we are called today to decide and act out of our Christian understanding, guided by the Holy Spirit.

The word "biblically" in the LCA Statement is an exceedingly important one in understanding the position of the church. Of course, the Bible does not see homosexuality as the norm

and every passage of Scripture which describes same-sex behavior does so in the context of destructive or violent relationships which are destructive of human beings - relationships which I would also agree are contrary to God's intent. The only guidance we have in scripture about human relationships generally is that we should be loving and caring about one another.

I understand today that certain people are "given" the homosexual, same-sex orientation. The how and why of that is still under debate and I shall not address that in this article. My concern as a pastor is how can we find in the Bible guidance for all of our relationships and, specifically, for persons in same-sex relationships. It is in this context that I've examined some of the passages of scripture often cited when discussing the issue of homosexuality. I have drawn the following conclusions from this study:

1. Passage in Genesis 19 (the Sodom and Gomorrah account); Romans 1: 26-27 (condemnation of women, and men who "exchange natural relations for unnatural" and who are "consumed with passion for one another"); and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (those who shall not inherit the kingdom); are all clearly set in the context of violent, destructive relationships or actions. They condemn sexual relationships and actions which are degrading, unkind, unloving, and inhospitable. The condemnation of such actions and relationships is equally applicable to opposite-sex and same-sex situations.

2. The Bible, understandably, does not address the situation of a loving, faithful, committed same-sex relationship. Such a situation was unknown in that day. It is only recently that we have begun to understand the "given" nature of homosexuality and that those whose orientation is to persons of the same sex find themselves to have "always been that way." Recent and responsible studies have shown that there are both genetic (that is "biological") reasons which tend to have created a homosexual orientation and also some psychological and social influences which have contributed to the creation of a homosexual orientation.

We do not condemn a person for his or her createdness. We do not condemn a person for being Black-skinned or Brown-skinned, nor do we condemn persons with red hair or blue eyes. Similarly, we ought not condemn persons for their sexual orientation as such, but seek to provide nurture and guidance as the church for sexual behavior which is life-giving and responsible in the context of enduring and loving relationships.

3. We must look to the Bible for its teaching about faithfulness to one another, about love for one another, about fulfillment of each other. The Bible can teach all of us in our relationships men with women, women with women, and men with men, about the importance of covenantal, loving, life-giving intimate relationships and unions. When persons are self-centered, or when persons feel mistreated or oppressed, those are times when one's actions may have been destructive and violent toward oneself and toward others with whom one has been interacting.

As Christians we seek to provide a loving and accepting climate in which persons can be accepting of God's love of themselves and can begin to see models of loving relationships in which persons give life to one another. It is this kind of Christian community which we, as the church, seek to become. We engage in ministry to people in relationships with the Biblical word, renewed in the Reformation of the 16th century, that there is nothing that one is or that one does which puts a person outside of the loving grace of God (Romans 3:21-28; Romans 8:31-38.)

With age comes understanding...and Love

(Reprinted from an information packet by Philadelphia Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLMG); written by Rev. Tom Sauerman.)

My 74 year old mother was planning to visit for three weeks. Since she didn't know about her grandson's homosexuality or about our involvement in Parents FLAG, my wife and I decided to make everything as free as possible from raising the possibility that this visit would be the time of her enlightenment.

That meant writing to a few people to remove "Parents of Gays" from their mailing envelopes to our home (since we are both employed outside the home), not being able to answer the hotline, and telling a few folks that when they call we may not be able to talk freely. It also meant boxing up all the materials, books, pamphlets and newsletters that cluttered my study.

We went to this extent not because we are ashamed of our son or unwilling to discuss the matter with my mother, but because we had promised Michael that this topic with family members was to be raised at his initiative and on his terms. In fact, during the past four and a half years there have been numerous times I've wanted to be more open and honest with my mother. On the one hand, I had the feeling that she would understand, that her love

for her grandson and our family could sustain her through any family crisis. But, to be perfectly honest, there was that nagging doubt: What if she finds out and rejects our wonderful son? Over the years, then, our visits with her have always created for me this mental game of ping pong.

Before Mother's arrival I said to my wife, "There's one letter addressed to Parents of Gays that comes into the house two or three times a year that I can't change. The Internal Revenue Service will not send their tax exemption correspondence to a post office box; they send it only to a person's home. We'll just have to take that chance. If it comes in and she asks about it, we'll tell the truth and take it from there."

Things went well for two weeks. My anxiety level reduced with each passing day. One day I came home from work to find the mail stacked on the Kitchen counter—and the IRS letter was on top. My heart raced.

From the living room I heard, "Tom there's a letter that came in today that raises questions. Will you tell me about it, and tell me the truth?" Her tone was soft, yet firm; one that I had known for almost 50 years.

"Well, Mother," I said, "Sue and I are members of a wonderful

group of parents who love and support their homosexual children. You have a gay grandson."

I sat down and we talked for about two hours. It was evident that she was willing to try to understand. She asked many questions. I had so much to tell her that at times it just poured out. We agreed that in the remaining week of her visit she'd do some reading and we'd do more talking together. All this was so new to her.

As we talked, I began to realize that she hadn't said that she still loved her grandson. (I've always expected too much too soon from my parents.) I needed to hear those words now. When they didn't come fast enough I began to choke up. With tears in my eyes I blurted out, "Mother, it will be like putting a knife in my heart if you reject Michael. We love him so much." She reached over to hold my hand and assured me that she would never turn her back on him.

A little later we went to pick up Sue from work. Shortly after she got into the car, I told her that the IRS letter had arrived that afternoon. There was silence. "It's alright," Mother said. "There's no tragedy where there's love."

See resource suggestions for other materials from PFLAG.

Ministry in the context of AIDS: 3 concerns

By John Backe

Discussions of the AIDS epidemic are too often limited to medical information with the focus on preventing transmission. This is important and necessary information, but considering ministry in the context of AIDS will include other concerns.

Current projections for the spread of the disease make it clear that even if one never has direct dealing with a Person With AIDS (PWA), there will be opportunities for ministry with family members, friends, health care workers and the community at large. Special opportunities and

responsibilities in educational, pastoral and worship ministries present themselves now. With the understanding that "there is no one to blame but the virus," the following list of suggestions is offered as starting points for planning ministry around AIDS issues.

PASTORAL

AIDS confronts two of the most powerful and enduring emotional/psychological issues in people's lives: sexuality and death. Pastors need to be aware not just of the dynamics of dying, but what they have to offer through the Gospel of hope and comfort in the face of death. Grief issues and process will be a recurring concern. Because a significant percentage of PWA's are under 45 years of age, the special grieving of parent for dying child will be encountered.

Many of the same questions attendant to any illness (why is God doing this to me? am I being punished? etc.) are shared by PWA's but are often more intense since AIDS is presently understood to be fatal. Additionally, issues of guilt, societal/cultural attitudes and fear of abandonment compound this. Counseling with families, patients, friends and the "worried well" will likely lead at some point to the reality that many of the people affected have felt rejected by the church during their lives. Developing a trust, caring, non-judgemental relationship will involve acknowledging that and moving on.

EDUCATION

The church has a legitimate and important ministry about health and wellness in general. Teaching about healthy bodies and healthy rela-

tionships is part of our heritage. Drawing on that we can move beyond issues of prevention to greater questions of community health. Individually, and through community coalitions, churches can confront the misinformation and prejudice that causes so many problems in this area. PWA's face special problems of discrimination in housing, employment, and health care. Larger civil rights questions will continue to confront us.

The church can take its place in informing the community of these issues. Presently education is the only vaccine we have. Information for adolescents is especially important and unfortunately volatile. Ideally churches should include AIDS education in their confirmation curriculum. This can be done in the broader context of relationships intimacy and wellness.

We need to be honest, however, and realize that to be responsible will mean including frank, accurate sex education information. All the necessary facts about safe sex cannot be given without using the words "anal sex" and "condom" at some point. People will be uncomfortable or angered by this. Failing to do it threatens children's lives.

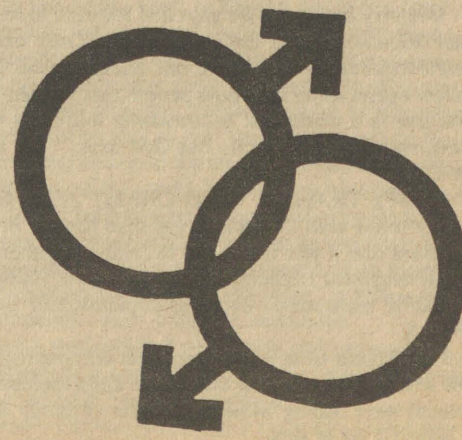
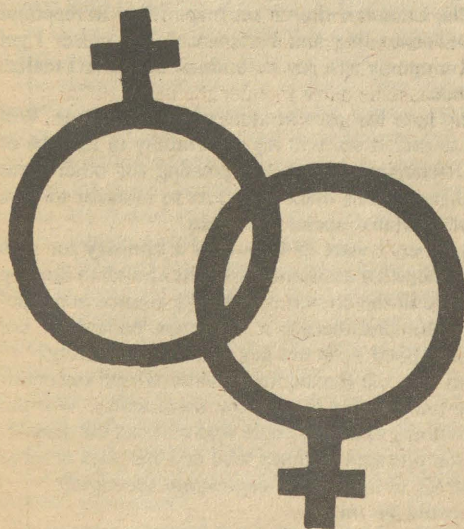
WORSHIP

Fears surrounding disease transmission by use of the common cup in communion are the most obvious issue. Several resources addressing this question are available. There are other less obvious areas of concern. Funerals need to be considered not just liturgically, but in terms of state health department regulations and individual prac-

tice by funeral directors. Families can be spared additional grief and anguish by pre-planning funerals. Prayers and services for healing can be included in the weekly liturgy or done as special services by a number of congregations. Likewise, prayers and services of support for doctors, nurses, volunteers and the health related ministries of the church would also be appropriate.

AIDS is more than a disease that kills some anonymous "them". It is a challenge and opportunity for ministry.

Rev. John Backe is chaplain of the Palliative Care Program of St. Luke's Hospital and campus pastor at New York University.



COMMENTARY

By Anita Hill

"My lover and I almost never find ourselves in public settings outside the gay ghetto where we are perceived to be a couple at all and valued as such. Usually we're forced to choose between being invisible and being despised. Making a genuine commitment in this milieu is like walking a tightwire without a net—with most of the audience not even watching and a fair segment rooting for you to fall." (Linda Van Gelder, *MS Magazine* 2/84).

Ceremonial acknowledgement of lesbian/gay relationships is the topic of emotion-laden theological argument today. Some people have plunged beyond the question of acceptance of lesbian/gay people as church members to discuss ways of bringing justice, love and wholeness into our cultural reality for lesbian and gay people. Debate about church sanction and support for gay/lesbian relationships ranks with questions about ordination on the current "cutting edge" of lesbian/gay ministry concerns.

As has long been the case for lesbians and gay men, invisibility again becomes the barrier through which we must fight for our relationships and our lives. Just as "coming out of the closet" breaks the invisibility barrier so that people must see and respond to gay/lesbian existence, so public services of blessing of relationship call the church to examine the mixed messages it gives to gay/lesbian people. Unable to support relationships, the church seems not only to expect promiscuity from gay people, but to demand it in its role as discourager of relationships.

The questions raised by blessing of same-gender relationships call the Christian community to rethink and apply some of our theological understandings in a fresh and insightful manner. God's two ways of dealing with humankind—deliverance and blessing—are found together throughout the biblical story. The meaning of blessing must be determined on the basis of the whole Bible with a central theme being the role blessing plays in revealing the hidden nature of God to humanity. Moral/ethical decisions such as blessing of relationship deliberations also must be made on the basis

of the entirety of scripture with God's unconditional love and acceptance as a central norm.

Claus Westermann describes the opening and closing blessings of worship services as bridges "that join what happens in worship to what takes place outside." In a similar manner, for a lesbian gay couple surrounded by a homophobic culture, it is on one level the bridging between their relationship (which culture demands be hidden) and the outside community that is joined in a blessing rite. The gathered community's role in the blessing is one of witnessing a commitment and reflecting God's love. A blessing is an expression of faith, "an act of meeting with Christ in the world" in which the community carries on a dialogue.

God blesses and is the origin of all blessings. In a ritual of blessing, it is God who bestows the blessing and the people who carry out the ritual as God's representatives. Blessing is not a magical invocation by an appointed representative, but a praising prayer of community which makes even more important the gathering of friends, family and faith community to be participants in a blessing of relationship. Specifically in the blessing of relationship the individuals praise and thank God for the gifts of each other and their relationship and ask God, in faith, to continue to bless them in their love for each other (which has become for them a sign of God's loving covenant). The intent of a blessing rite is to lift up a covenanted relationship before the community as a sign of God's active participation in everyday life.

Questions about rites of blessing are best worked out between pastors and parishioners in local communities, where human experience is closest to our church institutions rather than in high level policy making or in convention legislation. Contrary to the cries of the fundamentalist religious right, lesbians and gay men are not destroying the American family. Lesbian and gay couples are families and should be treated as such in our congregations and extended family systems. Healing growth in a family system can result from accepting and embracing gay/lesbian family members.

Honest grappling with issues raised in faith by same-gender couples can have a salvific impact towards the making of a just and loving world. Gay men and lesbians are in many ways the very parents bearing the pain of birthing a new reality. Blessings of relationship expand the birth canal and help prepare the way in the wilderness.

Anita Hill is a Wingspan Ministry Associate at St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church, St. Paul, MN

RESOURCES

Boswell, John E. *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. Scholarly review of early and medieval church attitudes; excellent appendix on New Testament terminology and St. Paul.

A Call for Dialog (1985) by Lutherans Concerned/North America Task Force on Theology. Statement by gay and non gay, clergy and lay Lutherans. Order from Lutherans Concerned, P.O. Box 104612, Ft. Dearborn Station, Chicago, IL 60610. Single copies \$1.50; 2-9 at \$1 each; 10 or more at 75 cents each.

Christians and Homosexuality, six articles reprinted from the *Other Side Magazine*, Jan., Feb. and April issues 1984. To order, request item #8004, from "Reprints," the Other Side, 300 W. Apsley, Philadelphia, PA 19144; 215-849-2178. Single copies \$1; 10 or more 75 cents each; 100 or more 50 cents each.

Edwards, George R. *Gay/Lesbian Liberation: A Biblical Perspective*. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984.

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Church is well served by A Call for Dialog

By Ted Schroeder

It seems that in every age some people of faith are awakened to new understandings and awareness... understandings of opportunities and challenges for the faith community... awareness of the pain and separation which certain people have suffered in isolation. Yet this awakening is greeted elsewhere within the faith household with fear, anger, and a theologically based opposition.

In the past several decades racism and sexism have been "discovered" and militant citizen protest and civil disobedience re-"discovered". And through it all, there have been excitement, fear, anger, and opposing views all biblically based and theologically developed.

The realities of homosexuality are being

discovered by an ever larger group of thoughtful, caring people. Persons who are gay and lesbian are articulating more openly the meaning of their discovery of their homosexuality, and are crying ever more insistently for simple justice. Like racial justice and sexual equality, the issue of homosexuality is alive among us and will not go away.

Lutherans Concerned has done the church (and not only the Lutheran community) a service by issuing their Call for Dialog. I urge all intentional Lutherans to read it, study it, and join in the dialog. Lutherans Concerned does a good job of reminding us that we are Lutherans, and as such given to prioritize grace and reconciliation above simple legalism.

I urge readers of the Call to read it through to the end and not get turned off by part three, Biblical Issues. In this section the seemingly plain and simple verses of Scripture which comment negatively on certain sexual matters are challenged. But read on... part four, the Ministry of Reconciliation, reminds us what our primary focus must be... not a legal basis for easy dividing, but a gospel basis for tough loving and accepting.

I fear that in those parts of the Lutheran family (and other denominations, too) where Scripture is the basis for preventing ordination of female Christians, the call for dialog on homosexuality cannot be heard, let alone joined. But let the dialog begin where it can. Let straights learn more of the realities of the life of homosexuals.

Let us come to know that homosexuality is not a contagious "something", nor is it a decision of a choice.

Let us know it because we have come to know and care about lesbians and gay men who have shared with us the stories of their lives.

Viva, Lutherans Concerned! Thanks for issuing the call. Be patient with us as we struggle to hear you. Be careful to articulate your view of the Gospel — yes, perhaps necessarily, over and over and over again. And be careful and honest with us as together we struggle to define for our time what are sound sexual ethics for Christians.

Ted Schroeder is secretary of the LHRAA Board of Directors, and Pastor at Immanuel Lutheran Church in St. Louis.

Stories: A way for us to listen and understand

Editors note: these stories from lesbian and gay persons are shared with VANGUARD readers in an attempt to help us better understand and encounter the realities of being labeled "homosexual" by our church and society.

"MY SEXUAL ORIENTATION IS A GIFT FROM GOD..."

I grew up in a small Scandinavian community in the heart of Lutheranism, when lute and lefse were the third sacrament. From my earliest childhood memories (about age 3) I knew that I had a strong male bonding orientation. However, I quickly learned that this was something unworthy of discussion.

In high school as my sexual struggle was mounting, I became involved in the charismatic/fundamentalist movement. I prayed daily that God would make me "normal." In college I became very involved with Lutheran Campus Ministry. My roommate was active in Inter-varsity Christian Fellowship. Our friendship grew to a point I had never dreamed possible; before we knew it, we were in love.

The only person I felt I could discuss this with was the pastor from campus ministry. He responded in love and grace. He affirmed to me that God's grace is for gay and lesbian people too.

It is very important for gays and lesbians to reconcile their sexual orientation with their spirituality. Only until we truly love ourselves can we truly love one another. And it is not until we allow ourselves to be whole people that we can truly serve God. We live in a world that is constantly telling us that we are sick, bad, sinful and immoral. But God Says, "you are mine... I love you."

"MY TRAVELS WITH CHRIST AS A GAY MAN"

My travel with Christ as a gay man has not been an altogether pleasant one. I was instructed by, and a member of, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod for many years; homosexuality is barely mentioned, much less tolerated or understood in the WELS.

I was taught from a young age that homosexuals were vile people who had turned from God; were child molesters; were women haters; were lispers sissies; and were certainly destined for hell. I believed all of this.

Until one day I realized I was gay. "I hadn't turned from God," I thought; in fact, I was then and still am the only practicing Christian in my family. "I'm not a child molester; I don't hate women; I don't lisp," I thought. "But surely I'm going to hell!" for I knew my affectional desires were toward my own sex.

What followed was five years of hell. Attempted suicide, psychiatric counseling, chemotherapy, electro-shock therapy, and endless periods of prayer to God for deliverance from my "sinful" desires.

Ten years later, I'm still a homosexual. None of the "curses" offered by doctors or theologians worked. But what has helped me is my fuller understanding of Christ's Gospel that excludes no one. I thank God that I am gay. My being homosexual puts me in company with other people that Christ lifted up to his apostles and the Jews: Samaritans, women, children, gentiles. And being able to accept myself as a gay man has made me more tolerant and accepting of other people different from myself, those that don't fit into the church's idea of a "model" Christian.

"THE REAL ISSUE IS THE HOMOPHOBIA..."

I am 20 year old lesbian student at Concordia College I spent the first semester of the year on an Urban Studies Program in Chicago. For the first time in my life, I was able to be myself and be open about my sexuality. When I returned to Concordia, I was unwilling to give that up. Thus, I am being as out and open as possible. I am generally out in my personal life to friends and acquaintances and several faculty members, including one of our campus pastors, who has been extremely supportive of me and other gay and lesbian students.

However, many times, I feel lonely and alienated. The majority of students here are ignorant and/or condemning of gay and lesbian people. While the issue is mentioned on campus, discussed in a few classes, etc., many people retreat into Bible quoting paranoia. The church has taught them that there is one norm for all people, one certain way we are all required by God to be. Where does that leave me? I am excluded from their reality, silenced by righteousness, put on the defensive when I try to share my point of view.

I am longing for the day when my life and sexuality ceases to be an "issue" or a "problem." The real issues and problems are the homophobia of the church, not the homosexuality of some of its members.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CHURCH, FROM A GAY CHURCH MUSICIAN:

Within the last few years, I have shared my situation with friends who are straight who are also Lutherans. Their support has helped to keep me going at times when it was most difficult to do so. I am wondering where my future lies as a gay individual as that relates to my family and my career.

I want to have a meaningful relationship with another male. What are the possibilities for me for receiving assistance from my church as I face some extremely difficult questions and situations simply because I have recognized and acknowledged my need to love and be loved by another person of my own sex?

I am attempting to live my life responsibly as a Christian who is gay. How can the Lutheran church act responsibly in response to my need for understanding and acceptance? The closer I get to being able to live openly as a gay individual, the more I realize the odds that I face.

I know gays who have lost jobs because of their life style. Will that ever happen to me? If so, will my community of faith be of any assistance? Discrimination exists in housing and other areas of our lives. Will the church make an effort to minister to gays beyond the ink of a printed social statement?

As a church member, I want to be part of a ministry for gays and lesbians. Can I hope for assistance from the church to develop such a ministry, or will the church respond by silence and inaction on the issue, not considering it important enough or not wishing to associate itself with the gay element of society?

Gays continue to face life threatening situations with the continuing increase of AIDS cases throughout the country. Will the church consider ministry to those people who contract the disease, or will it bow to the pressure of those who say that gays deserve whatever they get for living such a degenerate life-style?

The questions could go on...

COMMENTARY

By Paul Simon

You do not need to be Sherlock Homes to recognize that the United States is involved with Eugene Hasenfus in the delivery of weapons to those trying to overthrow the government of Nicaragua. Half-hearted official denials abound, but our fingerprints are everywhere.

Hasenfus, a Wisconsin resident, went on a mission that was supposed to remain secret. He believed he was working for the United States government, and even though our government denies it, there is a little doubt he was.

He was a prisoner in Nicaragua because this administration violated the spirit of our laws, and probably the letter of our laws, through this dirty business.

We recognize the government of Nicaragua, yet we are encouraging an armed revolt against it. In the name of stopping Marxism in Nicaragua, by our conduct we feed the Marxist propaganda machine throughout the world.

The image of Uncle Sam in much of Latin America—sometimes earned and sometimes unearned—is of a bully and an exploiter. We seem intent on reinforcing that image.

We support the Contra movement that up to this point does not control a single village or city in Nicaragua. Some of our officials candidly and privately admit that the current round of \$100 million more in military aid to the Contras won't change things. U.S. troops are needed, they say.

We should have learned this lesson in Vietnam: If the people do not support a government or movement that we support, it will fail. My impression is that the people of Nicaragua like neither the Sandinistas nor the Contras. The only thing they hate worse is the reign of terror and bloodshed our weapons are causing.

ELCA

New church faces challenges to meet inclusive ministry goal

By Warren Sorteberg

"It shall be the goal of this church (ELCA) that within 10 years of its establishment its membership shall include at least 10% people of color and/or primary language other than English." (Reports and Recommendations of CNLC adopted by ALC, LCA and AELC conventions August 1986 p. 18).

When simple mathematics are applied to this goal some astonishing objectives appear for attaining this goal. At the time of merger in 1988 the new Lutheran church body will consist of approximately 5,500,000 baptized persons in some 11,000 Lutheran congregations. Of these five and one half million members, approximately 100,000 will be persons of color or primary language other than English (just under 2% of the total ELCA membership.)

Assuming that the ELCA does not grow in size during its first decade, an assumption reluctantly made, the new Lutheran denomination has a goal 550,000 baptized members who are people

of color or language other than English by January 1, 1998. That net gain of 450,000 people of color should be brought into membership in the ELCA over a ten year period of time, or approximately 45,000 new people of color per year, or 865 persons of color and primary language other than English each week for ten years.

If it is assumed that the ELCA will grow by the modest amount of 1% per year during the first decade of its life the goal of increasing non-white membership is even more challenging. At a growth rate of 1% per year for ten years the ELCA would have 6,075,421 members by 1998, and then the minority goal would reach slightly over 600,000 baptized members. That would translate to over 60,000 per year of the new people of color and language in the ELCA, or nearly 1,200 persons per week for ten years.

Warren Sorteberg is the Director of Urban and Ethnic Ministries for the American Lutheran Church.

We oppose the Sandinistas, whose suppression of civil liberties we properly condemn, though their suppression of civil liberties is somewhat akin to the Somoza government that we propped up in Nicaragua for so many years.

The Nicaraguans I have spoken with who oppose the Sandinistas also oppose our weapons shipments which are killing the Nicaraguans—thousands of them each year. What we are doing only gives an excuse to the Sandinistas to carry on with marshal law and the suppression of freedom.

But what the administration is now doing goes beyond even the folly of our present course in Nicaragua. People who do not know and understand the region are making blunders that harm our long term foreign policy. But now the problem goes beyond that.

It is another case of "disinformation," a word that sounds a little more respectable than "lying" but means the same thing.

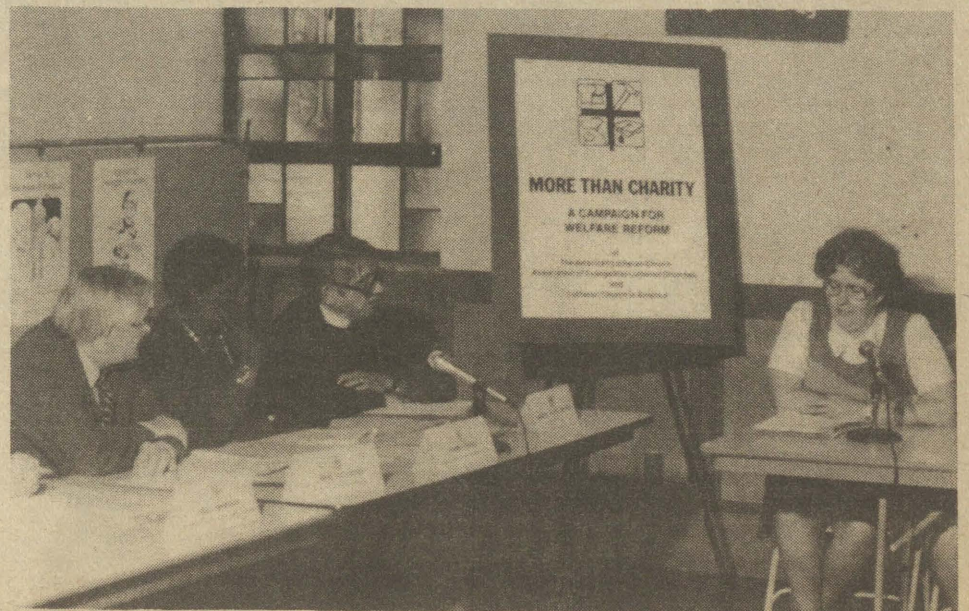
The first recent case of U.S. disinformation was the Libyan incident. If Libyan government officials want to misinform their people—as they do regularly—that is their business and their shame. But I don't want our government doing it.

We should stop saying we are not trying to overthrow the government of Nicaragua when everyone knows we are.

When we are caught red-handed at something we shouldn't have done in the first place, let us admit our mistakes.

Eugene Hasenfus was caught violating international law, and so was our government. The pretense of innocence only clouds our reliability on future statements. Our people and other nations will wonder whether we are telling the truth. I want higher standards for our government.

Paul Simon is a U.S. Senator from Illinois.



Members of a 'More than Charity' panel, Gene Sylvestre, Audrey Russell and Al Buis, hear testimony from Roberta Arensberg at the St. Louis hearing. See page 2 for more information about forum results.

Refugees in Thailand endangered by camp closing

Eleven years after the fall of Phnom Penh to Communist "Khmer Rouge" forces, Cambodian refugees continue to flee their war torn homeland to seek refuge in Thailand.

At this time, 230,000 Cambodians live in tenuous circumstances in encampments along the Thai-Cambodian border. They have not been permitted to move further into Thailand despite constant fear of shelling by Vietnamese occupation forces from the Cambodian side of the border, nor have they been recognized as "refugees" by the Thai or the U.S. governments. The boarder camps are not under the protection of the United

Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or any other international protection agency and reports of rapes, beatings and killings are common place.

The last remaining refugee camp for Cambodians which lies within Thailand and does benefit from UNHCR protection is Khao-I-Dang. With a current population of some 24,000, it was at one time the largest Cambodian "city" in the world. But the Thai government has announced its intention to close Khao-I-Dang in December, 1986 and to move its residents to the volatile border to join the human buffer of displaced Cambodians already trapped there.

Such a move would be tragic. Many of the refugees in Khao-I-Dang have relatives in the United States whom they wish to join; others are eligible for U.S. refugee processing and have not been given the opportunity to apply; and perhaps the largest group, some 15,000, were rejected for the U.S. refugee program by the Immigration and Naturalization Service in a process which has been questioned by numerous lawmakers and human rights experts as biased and unfair.

Khao-I-Dang refugees should be reviewed by the United States to make a final and impartial determination of eligibility for the U.S. refugee

program. Instead, if they are moved they will lose all hope of escape from their current situation, and will instead face greater jeopardy and uncertainty regarding their safety and their lives. Efforts should instead be made to extend decent protection and access to refugee and immigration processing to the border population, not to take it away from the few residents of Khao-I-Dang.

Contact your legislators to express concern about the Cambodians refugees. For further information, contact Zdenka Seiner, L.I.R.S., 122 C St. N.W., Suite 300, Washington D.C. 20001, 202-783-7501.

BOOKS·BOOKS·BOOKS

"It's like holding the key to your own jail"

Women of Namibia

By Caroline Allison,

World Council of Churches,

Come to Namibia and stand silent as you gather the picture in your mind and heart that Caroline Allison aims to portray in her book. Her purpose is "to move a small step forward in unveiling the hidden pain of a nation as yet unborn."

The historical introduction acquaints you with the peoples struggle against colonial oppression and exploits of fear and terror. You feel the evil and devastating power of apartheid as you go through the pages. Namibia is a rich land but the people are denied it and poverty and suffering beyond human endurance is their life.

Come now and let us go into the very heart of Namibia and hear the cry of those whose very soul is tortured. Ubabe, an old woman near eighty, relates back to when she was a young daughter. Her story sets the scene. Ms. Allison has given us the opportunity to learn from wives, mothers, and daughters who experience daily the oppression of a people who are jailed, so to speak, to be silent and "live in a vacuum of South African imposed ignorance."

We become educated as we learn what and who

SWAPO is; how a black face is put on the army; the realities of war; arrest and detention; and life in prison. Their words stir us! "We want the world to know what the South African's are doing to our people." We learn to know the work of the churches and the intimidation it suffers. Did you know that over 90% of Namibian people are church going christians!

"We will not give up the struggle --- we will be firm like the immovable mountain Zion." The women have courage and hope and their commitment to stand firm lives in their hearts, as they think of their children and husbands and families. They wait for the U.N. Resolution 435, for super-vized election, so they can become free.

The closing chapter of Ms. Allison's book - "The way forward" leaves us with a challenge. We can be only silent as we heard the voices of these women of Namibia. Now we are stirred to act, rise up as women of faith and do what we can to help our sisters there to step forward with hope to see the birth of their nation come with peace and justice. It must come soon, for time is crucial. May this book be an education source to tell the story of Namibia for the world to know and act upon.

Reviewer: Ruth Jorenby is an Advocate and Resource person for Namibia, living in Blanchardville, WI.

Gravity and Grace: Reflections and Provocations

By: Joseph Sittler

Augsburg Publishing House:

Minneapolis, 1986.

To those who say that Sittler has not written enough (and I've said it myself), this book is an apt reply. Among contemporary Lutheran theologians, who tend to be systematic, ponderous, and polemical, Sittler is an exception—better yet, an exceptional *agent provocateur*, who knows more than he says, but has the knack of saying the right thing to open up the subject (whatever it is, ranging from spirituality to digital watches) to more light. It isn't that he's out to explain or prove; he simply shows, as if to say, "Here, take a look at it from this perspective."

In other words, Sittler is not out to propose a tightly argued world view; instead, he helps the reader to view the world. As he writes, "All my teaching career and my 13 years in the pastorate were lived on the margin of the church's life, where the church meets the world." There was a time, in the middle to late 1950's, when that attitude met with considerable suspicion from clerical critics who wondered if he met the standards of Lutheran orthodoxy.

But he persevered, and prevailed, now as then clearly trinitarian and incarnational, but (and so often that spacious conjunction is necessary to give Sittler the room he insists upon) always on the boundaries of orthodoxy, more aware of doors and windows than walls. (My own favorite Sittlerian notion, not in this book, is that while we may know the center of grace, in Christ, we are not fully apprised of its circumference; hence the need to keep exploring.)

In this book, more so than in any of his other writing, Sittler is conversational and anecdotal, although without any sacrifice of the limpid prose his readers have come to expect. He takes on all manner of topics, considers them briefly, offers them up, not as the "last words," but as his own contribution to the unending process of making sense of the world. He does not hide his convictions; neither is he embarrassed to quote from a literary figure who said, "I'm an old man; it's a strange world; I don't understand a damn thing," and add his approving, "The older I get the more sympathy I have with this sentiment."

In a world full of measuring and categorizing Aristotles, it's a treat to hear again from this keen and humble Socrates in our midst.

Review Jerome Nilssen is a Lutheran pastor living in Milwaukee.

Phoenix decision: The Idol Unmasked

By Jim Oines

Here in Phoenix, in Federal District Court, a judge unknowingly removed the mask from an idol that has been lurking about this nation: the idol of the state itself; the nation; the system. The judge ruled that the government can secretly infiltrate even churches that are innocent of any violation of the law. Investigators need not obtain a warrant and they need not show to anyone but themselves that there is a good reason to investigate. They need not show that there is some compelling reason which might take precedence over the freedom of religion.

As Luther says, whoever you fear, love or trust above all else, is your God. Contrary to the wisdom of the framers of the Constitution, current practice has it that the government of this particular State, called the United States of America, is the legitimizer of all things. History has shown time and time again that whenever governments are given unlimited authority, that authority gets abused and people are gravely harmed. The sin of idolry always brings about the greatest and harshest judgement, but before that happens many innocent people usually suffer.

Because of the judge's ruling, we now exist in a sort of limbo. It is a state wherein government investigators can decide what religion they like or don't like. They can effectively infiltrate and destroy those forms of religion they feel do not condone what the State feels is legitimate religion.

They destroyed our Bible Study Group and there's no reason why they may not like what some preacher is saying on Sunday morning. They may move against him or her and their congregation in any variety of coercive or subtle ways: ways that modern law enforcement agencies have at their disposal.

The first amendment to our constitution was a great experiment. For some it was simply a way to get religion out of the state. But for others more knowledgeable about the difference between priestly and prophetic religion, it was a way to keep religion untamed to allow the prophetic element to have an effect on culture. This amendment was a way of saying that a government, even one with three branches, cannot be the purveyor of all truth; the arbiter of all good.

Government will always be tempted to co-opt religion by the use of cult priests. Cult priests are those who are on the inside with the government and the powerful. They are simple yes sayers. There are plenty of these to go around today. They say "no" to a minor detail of culture which is a result of idolry, but they will not say "no" to the idol. The tendency of all governments is to want all religion to be that way. Governments are like people, we don't want to be judged, we don't want to be found wanting. So on the other side, while affirming the cult priests, governments often try to coerce the prophetic elements of religion out of existence.

But prophets don't stop coming and the more a state or culture tries to get rid of them, the more obvious the idolry becomes; for idolry always becomes more and more obsessive, hard of heart and more violent, until some form of redemption comes about.

This is not to say that the church should be, or can be the arbiter of all truth. History has shown that the church can become coercive and abusive when it wrongly thinks that it is God. This is a sin of the past and it still persists in some quarters, but was unmasked long ago.

The idolry of the 20th century remains the idolry of the state. The Nazis in Germany believed that the German State should be the purveyor of truth for all the world. The doctrine of the unquestioned supremacy of the state is alive in the Soviet Union. The doctrine has meant the deaths of tens of thousands of people in El Salvador and Guatemala and in Chile.

The only good thing to come out of the hearing is that now it is unquestionably clear that the state exists as a god in our own culture. Whether the government has taken it, or we have just given up the true God for bogus ideas such as national security, it is clear that the government has the power to control all aspects of our lives, even our religion.

An appeals court may change this ruling, and this will be a sign that there is hope for our culture. Let's pray that this will happen. But if God sees fit that it not be changed, it might well mean that we have slid decisively over into the judgement side of history and we are on the downward slope.

Whatever happens we must begin to call ourselves and our culture back to a more humble stance; a stance of listening. For there is some part of all of us that puts our ego in this powerful thing called the State and in a sense we worship ourselves as we worship this state.

By all means, if this ruling is not changed, it will not mean an end to the churches. It will mean that the prophetic parts of the church will have to go underground and that will make the churches spiritually strong. The church will not cease, though it may well be changed. It is ultimately society that suffers most from idolry. A society that will not hear the prophets cannot live long. Jim Oines is pastor of Alzona Lutheran Church in Phoenix, AZ.

BFW announces annual offering of letters campaign

Bread for the World's annual Offering of Letters campaign provides concerned Christians and congregations an opportunity to transform their faith convictions into concrete action for hungry people. The Offering of Letters is a congregational effort in which Christians "unite to write" their members of Congress in order to shape anti-hunger legislation. It is not a call for a donation, but a call for Christian action which is scripturally-based, manageable, and highly effective.

In this year's Offering, we hope to begin a process which will more than double federal funding for the WIC (Women, Infant, Children) program.

If it is as successful as last year's Offering, it will be a momentous accomplishment. Last year's Offering led to the addition of \$37.5 million to a fund to help immunize children throughout the world.

Previous Offerings of Letters have also yielded impressive results. The establishment of U.S. farmer-held grain reserves and emergency grain reserves, reforms in food aid and development assistance, \$800 million in anti-famine funding, and much more have all resulted from church-based Offerings of Letters.

This year, your congregation can make a difference on legislation which affects the lives of

mothers and babies in the United States who have inadequate diets. Fewer causes are as important, and as easy to gain the support of all members of your congregation, as the cause of providing extra food for pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and young children in America who cannot afford an adequate diet.

You can be the catalyst for an effective Offering of Letters by your church or by a group to which you belong. If you are interested in helping in this way, consider taking the following steps.

Order An Offering Kit from bread for the World which contains everything you need to

know about the issue and how to hold an Offering.

Discuss the possibility with your minister or group.

Set a Date for the actual Offering, leaving sufficient time for planning, education on the issue, and publicity.

Recruit help in planning and sharing tasks, and conduct an offering as planned.

Update your congregation on the progress of the legislation.

More details on the Offering of Letters Kit and how it can be ordered are available from: Audrey Lukasak, Bread for the World, 802 Rhode Island ave. N.E. Washington D.C. 20018.



As part of Church World Service's 40-year celebration in Chicago, CWS representatives, (l to r) Norma Kehrberg, Rev. Jenns Timm, Soritua Nababan, Ricard Butler, and CWS Committee Chairman, The Rev. Dr. Robert Marshall, gathered around a truckload of corn headed for emergency relief in Honduras.

Rural Crisis: Litany of Solidarity

The following rural crisis litany was written by Rev. Janet Hooper-Ritchie and was included within "A Pastoral Letter On The Rural Crisis In The State Of Texas," signed by 54 church leaders in that state. I would hope that this Litany, or one similar developed for your specific situation and concerns, will be incorporated in appropriate worship experiences during the upcoming weeks and months. I certainly commend the use of this, or a similar one, in urban congregations.

LEADER: We are all the children of God. Yet, those of us who have no direct exposure to the problems of rural families appear from the outside, not to care.

PEOPLE: We have always given credence to the myth that those who have appeared privileged do not need our compassion.

LEADER: It is hard for us to believe that rural children are suffering malnutrition, that some of their parents are committing suicide, and that their families are being forced to move from the land of their ancestors to the streets of America to join the unwanted non-persons of our society.

PEOPLE: Now the truth looms large before us as we read daily their plight in our local newspaper, as we watch the farm auctions on TV.

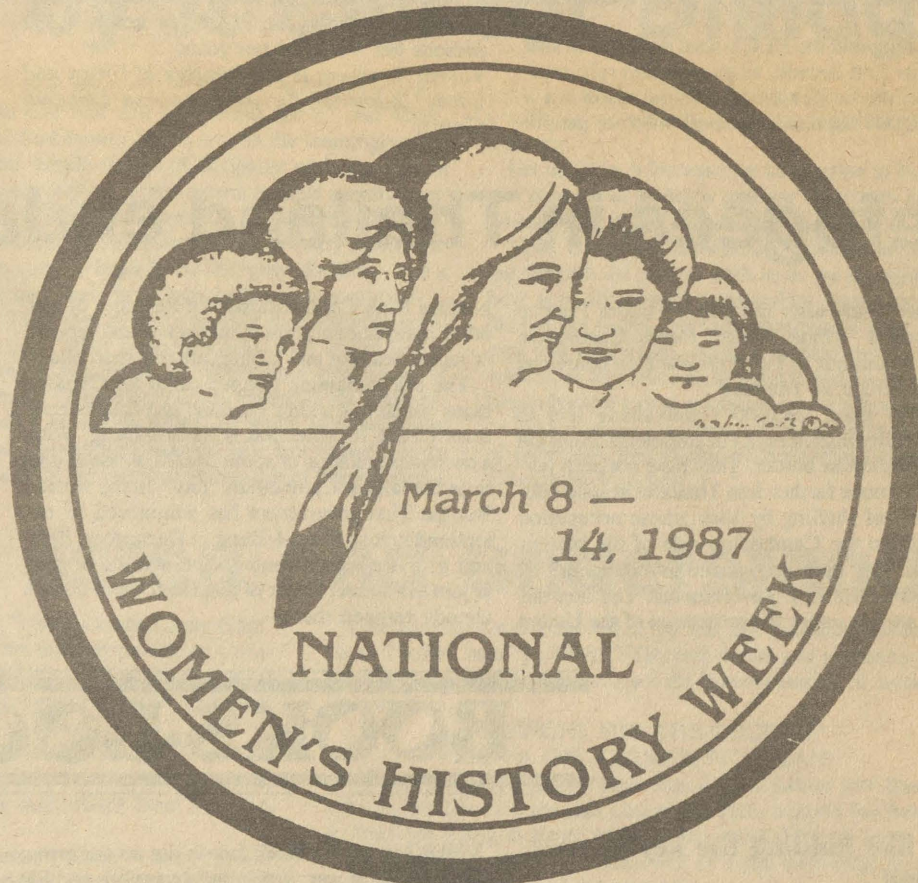
LEADER: If we are one in Christ, then their pain is our pain, their anger is our anger, their struggle is our struggle.

PEOPLE: Merciful Creator, hear us now as we proclaim that we can no longer close our ears to the crisis of our rural sisters and brothers in the midst of their stress and dislocations.

LEADER: In the midst of hard times and unempathetic public policies, we must be the voices, the hands and the bearers of hope to those who cannot muster the courage to believe in the possibility of a brighter day.

PEOPLE: Guide us, O Lord, and fill us with unending streams of compassion. Energize us to action. Encourage us to take on the yoke of true solidarity with our brothers and sisters in their wilderness wanderings. In us, and through us, may your presence be made known and your will be done as we become true neighbors.

Reprinted from *Agricultural Notes*, Merele Boos, editor.



For more information and resources contact: National Women's History Project, Box 3716, Santa Rosa, CA 95402 (707) 526-5974.

CAPITOL PUNISHMENT

Governors action applauded

A Lutheran official in Washington D.C., speaking on behalf of the Lutheran Church in America, has applauded the commutation of five death sentences by the outgoing New Mexico governor.

At a recent press conference, the Rev. Charles Bergstrom, executive director of the Lutheran Council's office for governmental affairs, called the action by Gov. Toney Anaya 'a precedent for more humane treatment for all of our death row inmates.'

Bergstrom cited the LCA's statement on capital punishment, which urges the abolition of the death penalty. The LCA statement 'points out that the manner in which capital punishment is carried out falls disproportionately upon those least able to defend themselves, makes irrevocable any miscarriage of justice, and ends all possibility of

restoring the convicted person to effective and productive citizenship,' Bergstrom said.

Perhaps Anaya had similar concerns about capital punishment when he took this bold action, said Bergstrom. 'We cannot be sure, but the outcome of his action is sure - five death row inmates will no longer have to live with the uncertainty, the desperation, the cruel twists of fate that go with residency on death row.'

Bergstrom added: 'We sincerely hope that other governors will consider duplicating his action in their own states. And finally, let us remind those who will see this action as a sign of irresolute 'softness' toward the criminal that there are many among us who see this as a hopeful sign of compassion and humanity toward all our fellow human beings.'