



News from the Community of Welcoming Congregations



CWC Newsletter - September 2011

Feature Article



This issue marks the launching of our new E-newsletter. Each of our 116 member congregations have a story, a story of hope, inspiration and transformation. Our new format allows us to feature one a month.

It seems fitting that we begin our post summer issue with a wedding story. In July, two newer members of the CWC community were married among family and friends. Rev. Jennie Ott, pastor of Lake Oswego United Church of Christ, and Rev. Hilary Himan, also a United Church of Christ minister, graciously tell part of their story to the CWC family.

Rev. Tara: To start, please share with us how you met, sort of the story that led up to your wedding day.

JO and HMH: We first met at a national gathering for UCC clergy in their 20s and 30s, although we knew of each other because we had both worked at the same church in Minneapolis about six years apart. At the time we met, Hilary was living in Connecticut and I was in Minnesota, so we became friends through Facebook. About six months later, Hilary moved back to Minnesota, and we struck up our friendship. We often met to give each other encouragement for how to find jobs (we were both seeking employment) and how to find dates (we were both single). Before we knew it, we realized we were interested in each other, and from there the relationship took off. The courtship was a bit atypical, for six weeks after we started dating I was offered the job at Lake Oswego UCC and Hilary was offered a PhD program in Worship and the Arts in New York City. We prayed, sought the advice of friends and family, and then took the leap to come together to Oregon. We got engaged about 8 months after our move and then got married 5 months later on July 16, 2011! It has been an amazing ride so far!

Rev. Tara: What was the most memorable part of your wedding day?

JO: The most memorable part of our wedding day was just being surrounded by so many family and friends. The love and support was incredible. We had our guests officiate, so they are the ones who invited us to share our vows and pronounce us partners for life.

HMH: The most memorable part of our wedding day for me was the part in the ceremony where we had asked our parents and a good friend to give us their words of wisdom and advice. Each parent really spoke from his or her heart, and they all exhibited such love and support for both Jennie and I. It was quite powerful to have our parents publically state what they were feeling and thinking in the gathered body. And my friends, Ethan and Naomi, (I officiated at their wedding in 1999), also spoke. Ethan is a lobbyist for a Jewish organization, and he was very honest in also expressing his dismay that same sex marriage was not legal in the state of Minnesota

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or federally. I'm really glad we included that element in our ceremony.

Rev. Tara: Were there elements that didn't go quite as planned? Or elements that were extraordinary?

JO: The only downside was the weather. About ninety-five degrees and humid! Still it was better than the day before (thunderstorms) and the day after (even hotter and more humid!)

HMH: I would agree with Jennie on the weather. And because of the heat no one seemed to have an appetite, so we had a lot of leftover food! Elements that were extraordinary: our wedding was really a DIY affair. It was so amazing to have such investment from our friends and family. For example, the wedding cake, the flowers and the photography were all gifted to us by dear friends. I felt incredibly humbled to be on the receiving end of such amazing gifts!

Rev. Tara: What role does faith play in your lives?

JO: What a question to ask two pastors! My faith both grounds and inspires me. It gives me a foundation on which to stand and a way to find meaning in all that I do.

HMH: What role does air play in breathing? Faith is part of who I am, if one defines faith not at belief, but an orientation toward life. Faith is one of those "hard to define" words, but I am a person committed to following in the way of Christ, which includes being challenged, having doubts, and knowing that I am loved just the way I am!

Rev. Tara: How significant is civil marriage equality to you? Has being married religiously changed your view at all?

JO: Civil marriage equality is important to me as a justice issue. Hilary and I should be allowed to have all the same rights and privileges as a heterosexual couple, and it should be as simple as signing a marriage license. Instead, we have to do our research, fill out countless forms, and meet with lawyers and accountants to secure all the proper paperwork to have those rights. That said, I see religious and civil marriage as two different issues. Hilary and I took the most important step for us—having a religious ceremony celebrating our commitment to one another that was blessed by God and witnessed and supported by our family and friends. Personally, I think religious and civil marriage should be separate for all couples, regardless of whether it's a same-sex or heterosexual couple.

HMH: Civil marriage equality is also important to me as a justice issue. It does not make sense that when I was previously married to a man (I am bisexual and have identified that way since college), I was afforded many benefits, including tax benefits, inheritance benefits, etc. It is a shame that I cannot enjoy those benefits with Jennie. I am being patient that the tides will turn. It was not that long ago that it once was illegal for an African-American to marry a Caucasian.

I am in agreement with Jennie that religious and civil marriage are two separate issues. It would make sense to me that all couples would go to the courthouse and get their marriage license, and those who wanted a public ritual (be it religious, spiritual but not religious, civil or what-have-you) would then do that. I am currently preparing to be a wedding officiant and have my own business, so in some ways I am being hypocritical here, (as I will be signing wedding licenses for brides and grooms), but in my perfect world all married couples would enjoy the same legal rights.

Being married "religiously" has not changed my view at all.

Rev. Tara: Finally, when someone tells you to follow your bliss, what would that mean for you?

JO: That's a theological question. Following my bliss means doing those things that make me most fully Jennie Ott—most fully the person God created me to be. For me, that's spending time outdoors, being connected with friends and family, and working with others to make meaning out of our lives.

HMH: I love Jennie's answer! Follow my bliss...I think that means for me to pay attention to what gives me joy, what makes me feel fully alive, fully awake. And then to have courage to take the steps to have more of that! It is indeed a theological question!

In The Community: Presbyterian News

In July the Presbyterian Church (USA) became the latest mainline Christian denomination to formally allow openly gay and lesbian people in committed same-sex partnerships to be ordained "as deacons, elders, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament," following ratification by a majority of the presbyteries of Amendment 10-A, passed by the General Assembly in 2010. The amendment removed language requiring "fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness" for ordained persons and replaced it with a broader call for examination of a candidate's suitability for ordination based on "requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions."

As the new policy went into effect this summer, More Light Presbyterians, comprised of individuals and congregations working for fuller inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in the church, reflected on their website that, "for the first time...the Presbyterian Church was a place of acceptance, grace and service for them, too."

"I will forever remember the day that the PCUSA battle against homophobia was finally won," enthused the Rev. Dr. Barbara Campbell of St Mark's Presbyterian Church in Portland. "Personally, I cried tears of joy," she said, even as she recalled with sadness the loss of gifted GLBTQ leaders in the church during what she described as "a very long journey and struggle."

The Rev. Peg Pfab of Southminster Presbyterian in Beaverton said the sense in her congregation was that the change was "long overdue," and remarked, "After all these years of the denomination studying and debating and arguing it seems almost anti-climactic," and noted that her joy was laced with sadness, "because many of us have friends [who] will leave the denomination," a choice she described as "sad but inevitable."

In 1978 the General Assembly received the denomination's first serious study of homosexuality, which recommended that gay and lesbian persons be fully accepted in the life of the church. The Assembly, however, rejected the report and concluded instead that homosexuality was not God's intention for humanity, that homosexual behavior was in and of itself sinful and reasoned that non-celibate homosexuals were ineligible for ordination. A second report in 1991 echoed the earlier report's findings and also recommended full inclusion, but failed to win approval from the Assembly, which instead allowed congregations to consider the document along with opposing views.

Michael J. Adee, Executive Director & Field Organizer for More Light, said Amendment 10-A ushered in "a new era of equality" and called it "the end of categorical discrimination against God's LGBT children." "We want to help the whole Church see that the affirmation of LGBT persons and their families is a practical application of the Gospel message that God in Christ creates and loves us all," said Adee of More Light's mission, noting that there is still work to do, a sentiment shared by Dr. Campbell. "There are still many words of courage, love and truth yet to speak to folks who are still misguided or hard of heart," she explained.

Pfab does not see the new policy having a major effect on her suburban church. "It does not change our actions or commitments as a congregation," she said, adding, "Though, it is nice to know we are legal."

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Upcoming Events

National Coming Out Day Breakfast

Oct. 11, 2011, 8:30-10:00am
Portland Location TBA

Songs of Faith and Freedom

Saturday, October 22, 7:00 pm
Hillsdale United Church of Christ

Choirs from churches and synagogues all over the Portland metro area will raise their voices together in an interfaith celebration of the power of the human voice to make a difference in the world. This evening of shared music and fellowship is a fundraiser for the ongoing work of the Community of Welcoming Congregations. Participating churches include Hillsdale United Church of Christ, Lake Oswego Church of Christ, Meridian United Church of Christ, West Hills Friends Church, Unitarian Universalist Church of Vancouver, P'nai Or, Congregation Neveh Shalom, and more.

Each choir will present a short set of pieces, and the massed choirs will sing two anthems, including Ralph Vaughan Williams' "Antiphon" from Five Mystical Songs and "We Are One" by Vancouver BC composer Brian Tate. Susan Peck, music director for the Lake Oswego United Church of Christ, is the artistic director for the event, hosted by Tim Ditch, music director at Hillsdale United Church of Christ.

Love for All: An Interfaith March for Marriage Equality

[Learn more on the Vancouver UCC website.](#)

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Marriage Equality Notes

An Evening of Faithful Phoning

People of faith believe that we are all created in God's image and that we are all equal. As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel once wrote, people of faith have an obligation not just to preach, but to act – to pray with their feet!

Come join Basic Rights Oregon and the Community of Welcoming Congregations as we gather for an evening of Faithful Phoning. We will call people from across Oregon and encourage them to share thoughts and ideas about marriage equality.

Additionally, participants will take some time before and after our calls to reflect together on the sanctity of this work.

Tuesday, Sept 27 6-9:00pm Rev. Don Frueh (UCC) and Rev. Nathan Meckley (MCC) hosting.

Thursday, Oct 6 6:00-9:00pm Rabbi James Green (Temple Beth Sholom) and Rev. Nathan Meckley (MCC) hosting

Please contact demi@basicrights.org to RSVP and join us for a fun evening of faithful phoning!

Faith Task Force with BRO

Over the summer Basic Rights Oregon and CWC collaborated on forming a team to work with BRO on outreach to faith communities to support the Marriage Equality Education conversation. If you have some time to donate and would like to support both organizations, then this may be a good fit for you. Contact Rev. Tara or Kyle (kyle@basicrights.org) if you are interested.

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Get Involved

Writers Wanted

Interested in telling inspiring stories of inclusion? Interested in writing a short piece once a month or every other month? Then we have role for you. Contact CWC if you'd like to join our communications team.

Board Members

Last year CWC reorganized our Board structure and this fall we have some openings. If you are interested in providing leadership in event planning, publicity and organizing with people of faith, then this might be the right place for you. Contact Rev. Tara for more information.

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