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Freedom

The Newsletter of the Metropolitan Community Churches in Lancaster and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Vol. 1, No. 9

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.
—Galatians 5:1

December, 1982

REFLECTIONS ON FAME

by Arthur Runyan

For a brief time last month I was famous. I got an interview in the Sunday News and I got my picture in the paper. And a whole lot of people wrote letters to the editor of that paper about me. Other folks wrote letters to me at home, at the seminary, and at the Unitarian Church.

Because what I did affects not only me but our whole congregation (not to mention the seminary and the Unitarian Church), I thought it fitting to reflect on the events.

The whole thing started early this fall when I was approached by a woman who works with Integrity, the gay Episcopal group. Her organization was leading a workshop at the seminary, through the Center for Professional Development in Ministry, on ministry to the gay community. It seems that registration for the seminar was down, he she felt that an article in the local paper would boost interest and registration.

You may remember that we tried to get in the paper a year ago. A reporter came to one of our potluck suppers, interviewed a whole lot of us, and submitted an article which was canceled by the editor.

"Aha!" I thought, "This is our chance." For some time I had wanted to get some publicity for our church, since we had many indications that few people who could benefit from our ministry knew we were here.

So, a few days later when the reporter called to set up the interview, I was overjoyed to do so. I must add that I had already agreed to speak (along with a few others) at Millersville State on ministry to the Gay community to the Campus Ministry Center there. That engagement was set for the middle of November.

The day of the interview came and I was primed. We talked for over two hours. The next day a photographer came out to the seminary to take my picture. There was no turning back from that point on. I was in for keeps.

The projected date of publication arrived and I was up at 7:00 to run to the newsstand to get a copy of the paper. I didn't have to look hard to find the article, it was on the first page of the second section.

About Wednesday, the letters started arriving. Now, I thought that I was ready, but as it turns out, I was not as ready as I thought. By the time the Letters-to-the-Editor hit the stands the following Sunday, I was stuck somewhere between anxiety and depression. Fortunately, our detractors had only resorted to postal harassment; all the phone calls I had received had been positive and supporting. Then, just when I thought it was safe to go back in the water, we had picketers show up at church. While I wasn't as bothered as I thought I would be, I did get shaky after it was all over.

But then, fundamentalists have always made me queasy. I have talked to several people about it at the seminary and I am happy to announce that I am not alone. Fundies make a lot of people queasy.

So now that it is all pretty much over, am I happy or sad that I did what I did? Well, it was a heavy price to pay, but our church has been richly blessed in the process. We have lots of new people who had no idea that we were here. And having survived the ordeal, I feel stronger too—at least a little bit. But there is another outcome that has me ecstatic! In my weakness, the members and friends of our congregation were able to minister

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It is much easier to ignore someone than it is to listen to them. And listening is a markedly rare trait among people today. I guess we are afraid that if we listen, then we will not be prepared for our next speech and we will look stupid. Actually, we do look stupid when we respond without regard to what a friend is saying to us.

I use the word "friend" loosely, because I honestly don't know how two people can be friends without listening to one another. Acquaintances, yes. Friends, never.

Listening is an honor that many people withhold purposely. That withholding comes to us via many avenues and is never labeled "note: this is a withholding tactic". But it occurs repeatedly.

When I first "came out" TO the gay community as I know it, I discovered a variety of people. Many of them stung too often to care that they were stinging their fellowmen/women in as painful a way as they were stung. This hurt is revenged upon those people brave enough to risk themselves to the whole group with parties, speakers, rap sessions, socials, etc.. And the group that recognizes their power then withholds that from the host/hostess.

I always believed these culprits knew they were doing this and then I found great confirmation of the fact. The saddest part of the story is that the stingers aren't striving to heal their hurts, but only nurturing them with vindication upon others.

Saddest of all they are blind and deaf to life in so doing. They learn nothing from others

to enhance their lives because they have forgotten or never learned how to listen.

Jesus said something about this charity in listening in one of his parables that never mentioned "listening" but explained better the rewards for withholding any kindness.

He spoke of a man who prepared a great supper and bade many to come and eat. His servants returned to report that his "friends" were too busy to come. The host was angry and then sent his servants out to bring in the poor, the maimed and the blind. And it was done and there was still room, that the master sent his servants out into the highways and hedges to bring them all in.

The message was that the Son of God was come. And all the "religious" folk were insulted that Jesus should presume that they had need of a Savior! So, Jesus said in His parable--"For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper." (John 15:24)

When this man sent out his invitations -- did his friends listen? Yes, they knew what was going on. They understood what was happening. But they couldn't risk listening to this man or enjoying his hospitality. And he was so angry, that those friends were barred from further chance to abuse him anymore.

God is patient. But patience does run out. Listening is kind. It is necessary and causes growth and happiness. The absence of it causes hurt and continued pain. Are your ears cleaned out? Let's use them and respond to others with open ears and open hearts.

Al and I help out sometimes on the Lancaster Gay/Lesbian HelpLine, and we have noticed a recurring problem. Time and again, someone calls up asking what sort of activities for gay people there are in Lancaster outside the bar and bookstore scene. We have to tell them that there is MCC and not much else.

So, in order to meet that need, a bunch of us threw around some ideas at a meeting recently and the idea of GayRap was born. (Actually, the name GayRap was my creation this morning; those at the meeting could not come up with a name.)

Initially, we were thinking in terms of a gay youth support group. Gay minors are in a particular bind because they are not old enough to go to the bars even if they wanted to. But then it was pointed out that older persons feel a need for some sort of outlet other than the local establishments.

While we felt a social setting would be the most favored on the one hand, we also recognized the need for some other types of activity to get the group going.

While we still don't know exactly what is going to transpire, we do know that whatever it is, it is going to start in February. I envision that it will start out as some sort of rap group, and then as it grows, social functions will be planned.

We would like to assure our friends who own and run the local pubs that we are not trying to enter into any kind of competition with the bars. It is just that some people really feel the need for some sort of alternative, especially those who are not old enough to go to the bars.

A lot of ground work still needs to be done to get this thing off the ground by February. If you would like to help us get this thing started, please call MCC-Lancaster or the Lancaster GayLesbian HelpLine.

--Arthur

Since the inception of FREEDOM, I have been waxing the galleys at work, but since Philip has taken over the editorial (and paste-up) duties, that is proving to be monumentally inconvenient, if not absolutely impossible.

What we really need is a waxer of our own. We are hoping that someone will be nice and donate one. Who knows, maybe one of our readers has an art waxer just lying around the house, collecting dust. If that be the case, please wrap it up and send it to us c/o MCC-Lancaster.

If nobody has one, we will need about \$50 to buy one new. If just ten people sent in \$5 (marked "waxer fund") then we would have one toot sweet!

What a wonderful way to remember FREEDOM for Christmas!

FREEDOM Needs a Typist

As you know, all the articles submitted to FREEDOM are supposed to come in already typed, single-spaced on a column length not to exceed 3½ inches. However, what of the articles we write ourselves? You may have noticed in the last issue that the bottom half of the letters was often illegible. This is because of Philip's typewriter, and there ain't much we can do about it.

But Philip is the editor, not the typist, anyway, and should not be labored with the typing. So what we need is a typist with a typewriter who can be available a couple of days each month to type up the local articles for FREEDOM. This should be a Lancaster person since the Harrisburg copy usually comes in all right (on the months when Harrisburg sends copy).

So that I don't have to put an appeal in next month's paper asking for someone to donate an electric typewriter, won't someone please volunteer to do typing for us.

Notice: you must own or have access to your own typewriter. Of course, if there is someone out there who has an old electric typewriter laying around. . .

to me. That was probably the richest blessing that I received.

We tend to forget that we are all given different, but special, spiritual gifts. I have been blessed with all manner of gifts from music to preaching to writing editorials to my own unique leadership style. But I have not been given all gifts. Others have the gift of standing up to fundamentalists. That is not one of my strong points.

The day we had picketers, I was most pleased (in fact overwhelmed) to see not a cowering group of frightened people looking to me for support that I was not able to give. Rather, I saw us as a body of Christians working together, each using our own special gifts, to stand up to those who would oppress us.

We were lucky this time, we only incurred the wrath of the fundamentalists. Other churches in other cities have suffered vandalism, arson, and even murder in the face of their efforts to spread the gospel.

Hopefully it will never come to that here in Lancaster. But whatever comes, I now know that together we can, with the power of Christ, withstand whatever darts the devil may sling our way.

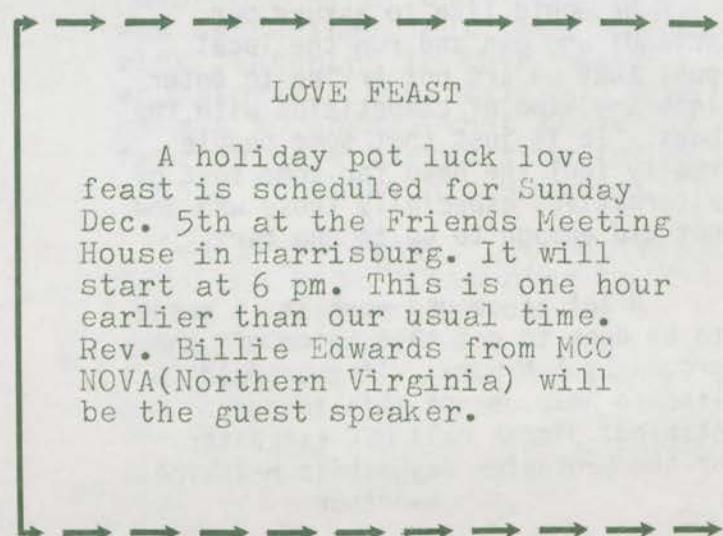
We are no longer an easily intimidated, well meaning but ineffective group of gay Christians trying to keep the dream of a church alive in the face of little or no success. We boldly stepped forward and became the body of Christ.

Something has changed and we will never be what we were before. We took a risk by going public and we continue to take a risk every time we meet. But still we press on toward our goal. For as Paul says in Romans 8: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

RELIGIOUS

How often has this word kept your friends away from church and you because you are a follower of Christ and his Church. Too many followers of Christ have left the Church because they felt ostracized and not wanted, I believe that if that was the reason then they should find a church where they are wanted and needed. Too many followers of Christ have left the Church and their faith altogether for a Lover who wants nothing to do with Church or this man called Jesus. I think that this is sad because as a follower of Christ you might have to make a choice in the end between the Man or Woman you love and the Christ that you are called to serve. I believe that you shouldn't turn your back on Christ and the Church just because your lover has problems with it. Just to please a lover you walk away hurting because Christ and the Church are an important part of your being. I believe that there can be a compromise in a relationship that a lover can give you the time that you need with the Church and Christ on Sunday which is important to you. As a follower of Christ we must be free in our hearts to spread the Good-News to all whether family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and the world without any feeling of feeling different or strange. We must try to stand tall in our faith and if being a follower of Christ and his Church is being Religious than proclaim it, for in the end you will know that you didn't let God down because of the tongues of humans that try to get in the way of your commitment to Christ and the Church.

Al Johnson



LOVE FEAST

A holiday pot luck love feast is scheduled for Sunday Dec. 5th at the Friends Meeting House in Harrisburg. It will start at 6 pm. This is one hour earlier than our usual time. Rev. Billie Edwards from MCC NOVA(Northern Virginia) will be the guest speaker.

MEN'S RAP GROUP
IN
HARRISBURG, PA. FORMED AT LAST

Today the Gay Community of Harrisburg has a Men's Rap Group. The Group meets every Monday at 7:00 PM til 9:00 PM at the Friends Meeting House, 6th & Herr Sts. I am very excited for the Gay Community of Harrisburg for at last we men can get together and explore our experiences in planned Rap Sessions.

I would like to thank MCC-Harrisburg for their part in coming up with this idea. At last there is another outlet for the Gay Communities which in smaller cities is very much needed. Hopefully we will see more organizations like this in the future.

Al

COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS SERVICE 5

A community service of Lessons and Carols will be held on Sunday evening Dec. 19th at 6 pm at the First United Methodist Church at 256 Boas St. (at the corner of Susquehanna and Boas, between 2nd and 3rd Sts.) in Harrisburg. Participating groups include MCC Harrisburg, MCC Lancaster, Dignity Central Pa., and Evangelicals Concerned Harrisburg.

Following the service there will be Christmas Caroling in Mid-town Harrisburg with a stop at the home of Rich H. for hot chocolate.

This is a first for our community so we expect a large turnout from the entire central Pa. gay community.



OTHER NEWS FROM HARRISBURG

Thirty six people attended the Second Anniversary Service. Rev. Joyce Setala from MCC Christ The Liberator in Princeton, N.J. was guest speaker. A delightful reception followed the service.

Attendance has been thirty or more for the last four Sundays.

Rev. Patricia Lichty from New York City candidated in Harrisburg on Nov. 20 and 21.



1983 BUDGET

An every member canvass is being conducted by the Board of Directors of MCC Harrisburg. It is hoped that enough pledges will be received to allow us to adopt the proposed budget. This proposed budget would enable us to pay the revised package being offered to prospective clergy and to pay all current operating expenses without depending on fund raisers. Fund raisers could then be used for extras that are not in the budget.

To meet this budget we need \$187.50 a week. To date six people have pledged \$86.00 per week. We have two offerings in the last few weeks that have run over \$200.00, but we have also had offerings of less than \$100.00. Take a few minutes to think about how God has blessed you and what it means to you to have an MCC in Harrisburg, then pray about your gift to God for the growth of that ministry.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- December 5** — Holiday Pot Luck Love Feast, 6:00 p.m., Friends Meeting House, Harrisburg
- December 5** — MCC-Lancaster Congregational Meeting following worship service. Y'all come!
- December 12** — Induction of New Member, MCC-Harrisburg.
- December 12** — MCC Services in Williamsport, 1:00 p.m., location to be announced. Call 238-3746.
- December 19** — Community Christmas Service, 6:00 p.m., MCC-Harrisburg, MCC-Lancaster, Dignity Central Pennsylvania, and Evangelicals Concerned participating. *First United Methodist Church of Harrisburg*, 256 Boas Street, Hbg. Call 238-3746 for more information.
- December 26** — "Left Over Love Feast," MCC-Lancaster, 5:00 p.m. at the Unitarian Center. Bring all your Christmas left-overs and we'll have us a banquet following a brief communion service!
- Men's Rap Group** every Monday evening in *Harrisburg* at the Friends Meeting House, 7:00 p.m.
- Evangelicals Concerned** Bible Study, Mondays at 7:30 p.m. in *Harrisburg*. Call 236-6495 for more information.

FREEDOM Recovers From Copy Drought

You may have noticed that last month's FREEDOM was a good deal shorter and more sparse than previous issues. The reason was pure and simple: nobody submitted anything for us to print.

To be fair, I must point out that Al Johnson submitted an article that we did not have room for, but if we had included it, it would have meant that one whole side of a page would have been blank. Hopefully, we will be able to include that piece this month (if not, I'm going to have a lot of explaining to do!).

To review our editorial policy:

Articles about upcoming events get first priority, articles about past events and editorials come next. All copy should be typed, single-spaced on a column length not to exceed 3½ inches. Type nice and dark, because what you see will be what you get!

FREEDOM needs more than money to stay afloat. It needs articles. Send them in today. We can't promise to print everything that comes in, but we will try to put out a classy newsletter with what we get. Thank you.

--Arthur

WORSHIP SCHEDULES

Harrisburg:

Sunday Evenings
Friends Meeting House
6th & Herr Streets
Harrisburg, Pa.
7:00 p.m.

Lancaster:

Sunday Evenings
Unitarian Center of Lancaster
538 W. Chestnut Street
Lancaster, Pa.
5:00 p.m.

GAY SWITCHBOARD
OF HARRISBURG

234-0328

6:00 to 10:00 pm
Monday – Friday
Your gay connection
in Harrisburg!

**LANCASTER
GAY/lesbian
HELP LINE**

397-0691

Tuesday, Wednesday,
Thursday, and Sunday
6:30 to 9:30 pm

FREEDOM

Vol. 1, No. 9
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FREEDOM is the newsletter of the Metropolitan Community Churches in Harrisburg and Lancaster, Pennsylvania. It is published monthly and mailed from Harrisburg on the Monday prior to the first Sunday of the month.

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Manuscripts submitted for publication should be typed, single-spaced, with a column width of no more than 3½ inches (19½ picas). Manuscripts will not be returned unless a stamped, self-addressed envelope is included. Manuscripts should bear the name of the author.

The views expressed in the articles are those of the writers and not necessarily those of MCC-Lancaster, MCC-Harrisburg, or the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. Publication of the name of any person, business, or organization should not be construed as indicative of the sexual orientation or ideological stance of that person, business, or organization.

The Metropolitan Community Church is an ecumenical, Christian church for all people with a special ministry to the lesbian and gay community.