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Freedom

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

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

Vol. 1, No. 5

August, 1982

THE CLOSET AS KILLER

Elsewhere in this issue you will find an article by Al Johnson about a friend of ours who was victimized by other members of the gay community in the city where he lives. While it is regrettable that we have to admit that there are members of the gay community that lean toward the criminal, it is even more criminal that we so often allow them to get away with it.

Why? The main reason is that old bugaboo, the closet. So many of us have led ourselves to believe that we must protect the secrecy of our sex lives that we will put up with just about anything if the alternative forces us to come out of our closet.

This, my friends, is not freedom; it is bondage — and it flies in the face of the grace offered to us by God.

Am I saying, therefore, that it is sinful to stay in the closet? Well, that would be too simplistic and general to stand very close scrutiny, but basically I believe it is right. It is sinful to treat ourselves as trash when we are, indeed, children of the living God.

Perhaps you have seen the ad for one of the national gay political organizations that has a picture of a straight-looking man or woman (usually it's a man), and the caption reads, "But I can't 'come out.' How can I help?" That ad always makes me cringe. And then it makes me angry. I want to scream at the picture, "Why? Why can't you come out?" But since I have heard the litany of excuses before, I don't bother. Pictures seldom answer one, anyway.

In order to talk about coming out, we must first define our terms — not that I'm setting the standard for the nation, but just so that you'll know what I'm talking about.

Coming out is not an event. It is a process, and it takes a lifetime. In the first stage, one comes out to one's self. This means coming into full realization that you are a gay person. The second stage is often coming out to the gay community. This means going to the bars, baths, bookstores, and other gay haunts. For others, it means worming your way into a circle of friends (see: clique) who are gay. At the very least you find and develop a friendship with one or two gay people who can help you learn about what it means to belong (or not to belong) to the gay community.

The third stage quite often is sharing the secret of your homosexuality with a few close friends of the heterosexual persuasion. This is traumatic, because you never know how many of your old friends have been closet homophobes all these years. My experience has been that real friends seldom (if ever) dump you because you are gay. Fair-weather friends, on the other hand evaporate like alcohol on a hot day.

The next-to-last stage involves coming out to employers, landlords, next door neighbors, and the like. This group may also include a few relatives like your favorite aunt, uncle or cousin.

In many (if not most) cases the last step or stage is coming out to one's parents. For a lot of gay people this is the hardest step.

Coming out is a lifelong process because every time you meet someone, they will assume you are heterosexual until you inform them otherwise. This is called the heterosexual presumption, and it rules the sexual ethics and mores of every fabric of our society.

So what's the big deal? Why should we have to mouth off about our sexuality when straight folks don't? The answer to that question is that the question is a lie. Straight folks parade their sexual orientation in front of us at all times, shamelessly announcing to the world the identity of their sexual partners.

Do I care? Well, actually, no. But the truth of the matter is that sex partners are often life partners, and part of our identity is shaped by who we choose for a life partner. And even if that lifetime commitment has not been made, straight folks do not even show shame when they tell us about their boyfriends, girlfriends, fiancées, steady dates, and one-night-stands.

Why is this? This is because, barring illicit affairs, straight folks don't really care if we know who they are sleeping with. It is no big deal. The fact that Max is courting Ethel does not reveal all the intricate ways they express themselves sexually; it just proclaims that whatever they do, they are doing it with each other.

I look forward to the day when gay people can be as matter-of-fact. We don't have to give lurid accounts of how we do it, but we should have no qualms whatever about revealing who we do it with.

Continued on pg. 2

But we do. And the excuses we dream up are classic. How many times have you heard (or used) one of the following rationalizations for not being honest about homosexual orientation?

- *Oh, I can't tell my parents, they just wouldn't understand.*
- *We can't come out in Lancaster. This town is just not ready for it.*
- *Where I work, one does not talk about such things.*
- *If my boss ever finds out I'm gay I'll be fired on the spot.*
- *They don't discuss their sex life, why should I discuss mine?*
- *What I do in the privacy of my bedroom is my business and nobody else's.*
- *She (or he) has enough problems already, why should I burden her (him) with this?*

There are hundreds of others, but these are the most popular. The main thing that is wrong with each of them is that they are basically dishonest.

They are dishonest for two major reasons: first, they usually don't hold water when examined closely, and second, because they put a higher value on some intangible (and sometimes invisible) entity than they do on the integrity of the humanity of the speaker. What makes them so popular is that there is a little bit of truth in each of them.

I once dated a man whose father was 70 years old and had a heart condition. He chose not to reveal his homosexuality to his father because he knew for a fact that his father

hated homosexuals and that knowing his son was one might easily kill him. Much as I hated to, I had to admit that he was right. However, I hear this same excuse from people whose parents are young and healthy.

Probably about 3-5% of the people who use this excuse are really in touch with the truth. I hate even to admit that because then everyone who uses it will claim that they are in that 3-5%. But it is just not so.

In like manner, there are some few (precious few) occasions when any of the other excuses might actually be true.

But the real reason most gay people don't come out has nothing whatever to do with parents, employers, friends, or society in general. It has to do with the individual making the excuse. Most gay people don't come out because they are ashamed of what they do. They have been told for so long that they are sick or perverted that they just buy into it, internalize it, and live it out.

This is not Good News. It is evil. And it is the reason we must persevere as a church until we succeed in getting our message across.

Scripture says that *all* who repent, confess, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved, will inherit the Kingdom of God, and have the potential to become children of God.

If there are exceptions to this promise, then scripture lies. And I

don't happen to believe that scripture lies.

Every time we deny our identity at the cost of our human dignity, we are saying to our oppressors, "You are right! We don't deserve to share this same planet with you. We'll just be silent and take your abuse because we really are inferior to you."

That's baloney. That is the lie that Satan wants us to believe so that we can be forever held in bondage. This paper is called FREEDOM for a reason.

Freedom is what God promises us. And with God's help we shall know the truth and the truth shall make us free.

Sisters and brothers, I submit to you that as long as we hide in our closets, we can never be free. We can't even breathe!

If you truly believe, beyond the shadow of any doubt, that you cannot afford to come out of your closet now, then you have your work cut out for you. Get yourself ready. Get those around you ready. Coming out is not easy, but with God's help it is not impossible.

True, there is some pain involved and there are some risks, but we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

With the end of the '70s came the end of the era for wearing political buttons. That's a pity, because I saw one once that I have never forgotten.

It said, quite simply, "The closet is a lonely place to die." And it is.

RELATIONSHIPS

Who wants them, whether friends or lovers we all need them to survive in today's society were we are consider not capable of caring for someone from our heart. I submit to you that friends are the most important beings on earth to keep humankind company when the society that we live in rejects us. Friends who really care are always there to help you to continue to hold on to your place in this world against all odds which might be in your path to happiness.

Lovers are important too for they give you the one to one contact that goes beyond friendship and grows into a lasting relationship for whatever time you may have. I personally feel that humankind needs relationships to be fulfill in life's sharing of needs and feelings which are shared so much better among two or three.

Al Johnson

WHOSE CHURCH IS THIS?

It's MY church. Yes, you read right...I said it's MY church. It's also YOUR church. A church isn't just the building the service is held in; it's the people who make up the congregation. It's the men and wimmin who are there week after week after week--- and it is those who come but once. It is OUR church...all of us...it belongs to each and every one of us who come.. for whatever the reason. Whether it's for worship, fellowship, or curiosity, it is indeed OUR church.

How many of us, were it not for MCC, would have no church? How many have been ostracized from the churches where we were raised?

So what is my point? Just this...when something is yours, don't you usually take care of it? Darn GOOD care of it if you want to make sure it'll be around for awhile? Well, MCC needs our care, too. That care includes tithing...tithing of time, talents, & treasures. We should not - we CANNOT - sit back thinking that MCC will survive "without MY help..I'm only ONE person." Well, ONE and ONE make TWO... and ONE more makes THREE... and so on.

Look, God knows we're not all millionaires (what an understatement!), nor are we all Jacks/Jills-Of-All-Trades. But if, just once or twice a MONTH, we could not have that extra drink, or buy one less pack of cigarettes, or buy a small fries instead of a large at Mac's...might not SEEM like much, but believe me, it sure adds up! And that little bit

extra can help OUR church MUCH more than a little! Someone once told me that if I put away one cent (yes, a penny) on the first of the month, and just doubled that savings (TWO cents) on the second day, then FOUR cents on the third day, EIGHT cents on the fourth, etc. etc. ---- that by the end of the month I will have put away over \$1,000,000.00!!! Gosh! How "little" things can add up!

As for time and talents.. we have picnics, pot lucks, flea markets, etc...how many of us have "dust-collectors", otherwise known as "junque", lying around the house (yard, apartment, garage) waiting "till I get around to it" to decide what to do with them? And a talent for sales, put to work at a flea market, makes it fun! Artistic talent? There are posters to be made! A musician? Opportunities too numerous to mention!

Have you ever gone into someplace new, not known anyone, and wished someone would say "Hi!", or that you weren't QUITE so shy? I think a LOT of us have! Well, a few minutes taken to greet people, or just to say "Hi! We're glad you're here" can make all the difference in the world to someone.

Time, talent, treasure... the next time you think about "THAT" church (MCC, of course), remember that it is OUR church, yours and mine, and it...WE... need our care.

Diane B. Riggins

Harrisburg News

SPAGHETTI SUPPER TO FUND DELEGATES TO THIRD WORLD CONFERENCE

At the June Advisory Board meeting, it was decided that we would support the upcoming UFMCC Third World Gay and Lesbian Conference in Washington, DC by sponsoring at least three delegates--two from Harrisburg and one from Lancaster.

Rather than just throw money at the problem (as if we had some to throw around), the idea came up to sponsor a fundraiser that would raise consciousness as well as money.

Since we have a Spaghetti Supper coming up anyway, we decided to combine the two events and use the proceeds from that supper to sponsor our delegates.

We also plan to have some sort of presentation at the supper, appropriate to the event.

Plans are still tentative, but we also might have workshops on Third World issues earlier in the weekend as well.

Mark your calendars for September 25 at 5:00 pm at the Friends Meeting house, 6th and Herr Streets. The tickets will sell for \$3.50.

More information will be forthcoming in the future, so watch this space.

LOOKING AHEAD TO FALL

MCC Harrisburg is starting two new programs for the fall. The first, is a Men's Rap Group. This group will meet weekly at a member's home and will discuss various topics. The second program is a Bible Study. This group will tentatively meet on Wednesday evenings at the Friend's Meeting house in Harrisburg. If you are interested in either of these programs, or have any ideas on what you would like to see them do, we want to hear from you. You can get in touch with us by calling the church office at 238-3746.

BOOKS

If you haven't been to church recently, you'll notice something different about our Deacon's Table in Harrisburg. We still have pamphlets, booklets, and other tidbits of information, but now there's more....the addition of many books, buttons, and bumperstickers. Now there's something for everyone! You're sure to find something you'll enjoy. And if by chance there's a particular book that you're interested in and we don't have it, just let us know, and we'll try to get it for you.

MEMBERSHIP CLASSES STARTING

Gary Norton will be conducting membership and inquirer classes on Monday evenings throughout the month of August. Classes will be held weekly at 7:00 PM at 1622½ North Second Street, in Harrisburg. If you are interested in more information, contact Gary at 238-3746 or else just come to the class.

Note from the paste-up person:

Diane Riggins submitted a book review that would have more than filled the blank space on this page, but somehow I lost it. My apologies to Diane, and everyone take note: keep a copy of everything you submit to FREEDOM. Things do get lost sometimes, it is best to be covered for that eventuality. Diane, we'll try again next month. --Arthur.

MEMBERSHIP CLASSES BEGIN IN LANCASTER

MCC membership classes will begin this month in Lancaster. They will be held on the evenings of August 4, 11 and 18 at 7:30 pm at Art and Al's house.

In order to become eligible for membership, one must attend these three group classes and one individual session.

If you are interested and have not previously enrolled, contact Arthur Runyan at 392-2927.

As you may recall, MCC-Lancaster is considering seeking Study Group status in October. If this status is attained, an Advisory Board made up entirely of MCC members will be required. Also, only members will be able to vote at congregational meetings.

Membership classes are not just for those seeking membership, but for anyone who wants to learn more about our church.

If you have any questions, please call Arthur at the number above.

CRIME ON GAYS BY GAYS

It was 2pm one wintry night and my best friend was just mugged by two Gay Guys at the corner of Spruce & Chestnut St. He immediately went to the Police Station to report this crime but because he had only a description without any names the Police Dept. decided to put this case in their holding file. My friend later confide in me that it took him a lot of courage to go to the Police Station and report this crime for he had to inform them that he had just left a Gay Bar and had to proclaim his sexuality to help aid in tracking down the offenders. I know that this was hard for him but the more crimes that we report the more our Gay Brothers and Sisters know they cannot commit offenses against us.

Al Johnson

LANCASTER CONGREGATION MEETS

The MCC-Lancaster Congregation met on Sunday, July 18th for a third work session.

Previously the group developed a statement of purpose and a series of seven goals to achieve this purpose.

At the July meeting these goals were reviewed and several projected dates were changed. Also, a series of objectives were discussed to help work through the goals toward their purpose.

The next session will be on Sunday, August 15th at 5:00 pm. Everyone's help will be greatly appreciated.

WEEKLY WORSHIP

Beginning September 12, 1982, MCC-Lancaster will be having weekly worship services. This is a part of the congregation's efforts to increase attendance, as discussed in their planning sessions.

The services are expected to continue to be held at the Unitarian Center, 538 West Chestnut Street, Lancaster.

Also beginning September 12, our worship time will change from 5:00 pm to 4:30 pm. This will facilitate those who would like to attend services both in Lancaster and Harrisburg. At the same time, MCC-Harrisburg plans to move its service up to 7:15.

NOTICE: Everything in this article is still tentative and subject to change, as necessary. Check the next issue of FREEDOM for the final word.

In the meantime, if you have any questions, please feel free to call Arthur at 392-2729 in Lancaster or Gary at 238-3746 in Harrisburg.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- AUGUST 1 Harrisburg/Lancaster Joint Sunday Service, 7:00 pm, Friends Meeting House, 6th & Herr Sts., Harrisburg, A congregational meeting will follow the service.
- AUGUST 4 Membership Class, Art & Al's House, 7:30 pm. The second and third classes will be held on August 11 & 18, same time, same place, Lancaster
- AUGUST 8 Sunday Service, Lancaster, 5:00 pm, Emerson Hall, Unitarian Center, 538 West Chestnut Street
- AUGUST 8 Sunday Service, Harrisburg, 7:00 pm, Friends Meeting House, 6th & Herr Streets
- AUGUST 12 Board of Director's Meeting, 6:30 pm. at Gary's house, call 238-3746 for information
- AUGUST 15 Planning Session, Lancaster, 5:00 pm at Art & Al's house.
- AUGUST 15 Sunday Service, Harrisburg, 7:00 pm, Friends Meeting House, 6th & Herr Streets
- AUGUST 18 Gay Skate, 7:00 pm at the Olympic Skating Center in Enola
- AUGUST 22 Regular Sunday Services in Both Harrisburg and Lancaster(see August 8 for time and place).
- AUGUST 29 Pot Luck Supper, Lancaster, call 392-2729 for details
- AUGUST 29 Sunday Service, Harrisburg, 7:00 pm, Friends Meeting House, 6th & Herr Streets
- SEPTEMBER 5 Joint Sunday Service, Harrisburg, 7:00 pm, Friends Meeting House, 6th & Herr Streets
- SEPTEMBER 11 There's a Rabbit in Your Heart, 8:00, Friends Meeting House, Tickets \$2.00 in advance, \$3.00 at the door.
- SEPTEMBER 25 Spaghetti Supper, Friends Meeting House, Harrisburg, 5:00 pm, Tickets \$3.50, The proceeds are to send four delegates to the Third World Conference in Washington, D.C. in October.
- JULY 11-17, 1983 MCC General Conference in Toronto, Canada

**HELP!
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HELP!**

FREEDOM needs helpers in any and every capacity. If you have any time/skills to offer, please contact Gary at 238-3746 in Harrisburg, or Arthur at 392-2729 or Philip at 299-2704, both in Lancaster.

MCC benefit

Sept. 11

8 o'clock

THERE'S A RABBIT IN YOUR HEART

contributions \$2 advance \$3 at door

Friend's Meeting House 6th & Herr Sts. Hsbg.

THE PARABLE OF THE APPLES by Earl Custer

Once upon a time there was a man who had nothing... and God gave him ten apples. God gave him three apples to eat, three apples to trade for a shelter from the sun and rain, three to trade for clothing to wear and one so that he might have something to give back to God to show his gratitude for the other nine. The man ate three apples. He traded three for a shelter from the sun and rain. He traded three for clothing to wear. Then he looked at the tenth apple. It seemed bigger and juicier than the rest. He knew that God had given him the tenth apple so that he might return it out of gratitude for the other nine. But the tenth apple looked bigger and juicier than the rest. And he reasoned that God had all the other apples in the world. So the man ate the tenth apple and gave back to God the core. God has given you enough apples to supply your needs—plus one with which you may show your gratitude. What will you do with

your apples?
This little story came to me through the United Methodist Church who, in turn, borrowed it from the American Baptist Convention. The story, of course, is promoting the tithe as a model for Christian giving. But regardless of whether or not you feel 1%, 10% or 50% is an appropriate formula for giving, I believe it puts into perspective the reality that everything we have or ever expect to have (or be) comes as a gift from God. Unfortunately the story also points to how selfishly we view these gifts and the sharing of them.
One of the goals that we at MCC-Lancaster have set for ourselves is to achieve a per capita giving of \$5 per week. Others involve weekly worship services with an average attendance of 25.
These are pretty hefty goals considering that we now only meet twice per month, averaging 16.4 people with a per capita giving rate of

between \$1.98 and \$4.80. But the simple truth is that we must exceed our goals if we wish to remain a worshipping body.
When we move to weekly worship, our expenses will jump from roughly \$125/month to at least \$200/month or \$50/week. That means we either average 10 people giving \$5 or 50 people giving \$1 each week. Either method will require additional commitment on the part of all of us.
For some, this may mean skipping a movie or a drink at the bar to meet their personal financial giving goal. For others it may mean working harder and longer to get friends to join us at worship services. Either way, we must always remember that we have only returned a small portion of the time or money that have been given to us by our Creator. I will close as I began by asking: *What will you do with your ten apples?*

FREEDOM Vol. 1, No. 5

FREEDOM is the newsletter of MCC-Harrisburg and the Lancaster Parish. It is published monthly and mailed on the Monday prior to the first Sunday of the month from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (Lord willin' and the crick don't rise...).

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(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.