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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. 2, No. 10

January, 1984

Your Testimony

by Rev. Art Runyan

One phenomenon one notices when one becomes a pastor of a church is that whenever one meets people who have either not been to church for a long time or have never come at all, these folks seem obsessed with regaling one with the reasons for their absence. While some of these reasons are better than others, I believe that it behooves us to take each one seriously. While not every reason will demand a response in some kind of action, every reason or excuse does have something to teach us.

One Sunday recently we had several first-timers and two of them cornered me with such a discussion. While these two men had not come together, nor had they compared notes, their reasons for staying away heretofore were remarkably similar. While I did not take notes, and therefore cannot quote verbatim, their arguments went something like this: "Oh, I've known about MCC for some time, but I've never wanted to come because of the way the members of this church act when they are out in public. I've seen them down at the bars, pawing and groping one another and sharing filthy stories. What kind of Christians are these?" Especially noteworthy is the fact that while these two people had the same impression of our church, they came from different cities--one residing in Harrisburg and the other in Lancaster.

"What kind of Christians are these?" is a fair question to ask. And the answer is that we are not any one kind of Christian. We all have different backgrounds and we all bring different histories into our church when we come. Generally, we are Christians that believe that homosexual behavior is not generically sinful. Generally we believe that God blesses sexual expression between two people who genuinely care for one another.

And generally we believe that one's sexual expression should reflect a certain degree of responsibility.

And that is where the problem arises. We do not all agree on just what responsible sexual expression is. To some it means a totally exclusive ("monogamous") relationship with one other person. To others it may mean a high degree of promiscuity governed only by a respect for mutuality--that is, making sure that both parties know what they want and get what they want while helping their sexual partner achieve that same goal. Most of us, I imagine, fall somewhere between these two extremes, while a few folk will indeed fall outside of them.

*Deadline for February Freedom
is January 20.*

And while I will certainly defend anyone's right to choose for themselves just where they best fall on that spectrum, I do feel the need to lift up two scriptural injunctions.

(1) "Do not use your freedom to gratify desires of the flesh." and (2) "Do not do anything that would cause your neighbor to stumble." The first is aimed at those who claim to be working out their own sexual mores, but who, in truth, are doing no such thing. We are indeed given the freedom to work out our own morality. But that freedom includes the responsibility to do that work. The freedom to establish our own moral guidelines does not mean the freedom to do what we damn well please. It means that we must intentionally structure a moral code and then live by it.

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YOUR TESTIMONY CONT. from p. 1

But the second stricture is equally important. What sort of image do we present to others? This is a difficult question to answer because no matter what we do, we are going to offend somebody. And there are a lot of rumors going around about us that are patently untrue. I once heard, for example, that an orgy took place after a particular GayRap. All I can say is that if it did happen, it was the smallest orgy on record since all but 2 or 3 of the rap group participants went out with me for ice cream afterward.

Nonetheless, when we are out in public, we represent our church whether or not we want to. And everything that we do reflects on the integrity of our church. And believe it or not, there are people out there in the bars (and elsewhere) who believe that wanton promiscuity is sinful. And to some people more than one sex partner a month is wanton promiscuity. And while we may have worked out a highly developed set of sexual mores, they don't know that. It will be difficult for us to preach the gospel to anyone who is offended by our personal behavior.

What should we do? Should we give in and follow a morality we don't agree with just to satisfy the needs of a bunch of people who seem to live in the dark ages? Or do we just do what we believe to be right and let these nouveau Puritans solve their own problems? Because neither answer is acceptable or totally avoidable, we live in a tension between the two. (All of this is somewhat aggravated by the fact that some of the people who accuse us of irresponsible sexual behavior are merely projecting onto us the guilt they feel for their own activity. They feel mired down in sin and when they look to us they just see more of the same behavior they loathe in themselves.)

There is no easy answer to all of this. For my money the gospel comes first. And I would like to say that anything that interferes with the spreading of the gospel should be seriously questioned.

But there is the spreading of the gospel (which we are about) and there is the message of the gospel (which we also cannot ignore). And

that message says that anytime we make up a list of rules that will get us into heaven, we have missed the boat. The gospel is about freedom, responsible freedom to be sure, but freedom nonetheless. And our detractors must be made to understand this. However, they will not understand unless they listen, and they will not listen if we drive them away.

I guess the bottom line in all this is discretion. This does not mean that we should be secretive about what we do or believe, but it does mean that we should not advertise that which we know may offend some.

After people have heard the gospel that we preach, they are free to accept or reject it. But we rob them of that freedom when we don't give them a chance to hear.

We testify to MCC when we are out in public, but we testify to the gospel of Jesus Christ as well. "What am I saying about Christ by my behavior right now?" is a question that we cannot afford to stop asking ourselves.

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17105

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(Please make checks payable to MCC/Harrisburg). I understand that this gift will be used to defray costs for FREEDOM. Contribution is not necessary to continue receiving this newsletter.



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397-0691

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Thursday, and Sunday
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**GAY
SWITCHBOARD
OF HARRISBURG**

234-0328

Monday thru
Friday
6:00 to 10:00 p.m.

TO TELL THE TRUTH

by Rev. Pat Lichty

"Thou shalt not bear false witness" Some of the women in the church have been reading Adrienne Rich's book on Some Notes on Lying". What Rich writes about are the subtle forms of lying - the ones we use that aren't usually recognized as lying; things like avoiding painful subjects, or when being asked "How do you feel?" responding with "How do you feel" instead of answering, or saying that we are concerned with the other persons feelings instead of with our own.

What Rich is writing is about the place of truth in our relationships with each other - how serious are we about communicating with each other? How seriously do we take our relationships? How much importance do we place on trying to base our relationships on what is really happening between us? How much do we really care about each other?

And this has a lot to do with our church communities. How much effort and honesty are we willing to put into our congregations? How much effort and honesty are we willing to face?

The honesty that is involved is not the simple "tell the truth" rule that most of us were taught because so often we don't know what the truth is. We have ambivalent and ambiguous feelings and we don't always know how to say what we feel. We don't always know what is happening. But to "tell the truth" in this kind of situation is to face ourselves as honestly as possible - and to be willing to face our ambivalence, and to share that with other people.

One of the fallacies of modern society is the idea that we can live for ourselves, by ourselves. There

Cont. on page 4

MEMOIRS OF A BIBLICAL FEMINIST

by Barbara Gifford

Were it not for the Evangelical Woman's Caucus, I don't know how long it would have taken me to dig my way out of the darkest despair I had ever experienced in my Christian journey.

Did God really love me as much as God loved my brothers in Christ? Was I truly second rate, just below men in the hierarchy of the Christian structure --certainly that was true in the secular world and in my own family situation. And why was I treated differently by people on Sundays (within the church walls) than on other days? It was okay to have my own Co. in the business world, but as soon as I walked into a church, I was relegated to my proper place as a woman: sitting under the authority of men. Indeed, I was invited to sit on committees, but not considered an equal member and thus

not granted full status in the decision making process.

To make matters worse, the more I read the scriptures, the more it appeared that God was speaking exclusively to men. Every "he" and every "man" jumped off the pages of my Bible as if to substantiate my innermost fears of being 2nd-rate. The passages in I Cor. 11 & 14, Eph. 5 and I Tim. 2 were of course, the most distracting because they too underlined what I had been taught by male pastors.

And then, like manna from heaven, a friend placed before me a brochure which read:

Evangelical Women's Caucus is an international organization of evangelical Christians who believe that the Bible, when properly understood, supports the fundamental equality of

Cont. on p. 5

I love you for all the failures in my life
 which drove me into your arms,
 for the loss of my mind
 in order to win your wisdom.
 I praise you for all that was incomprehensible
 which caused me fear
 and showed me the vulnerability of my
 life.
 I praise you for all the surprises
 which have shaken me up
 and open a new world for me.
 — Ulrich Schaffer

TO TELL THE TRUTH CONT. FROM p.3

is an assumption that we can do what is best for us regardless of its effects on other people. But to enter into relationship with others is to allow them importance and influence in our lives...it is to take them seriously. How seriously we take them is the measure of how serious we are about our relationship with them.

And because congregations are groups of people who have chosen to share their lives with each other - this is a crucial question for us. How seriously do we take each other?

Why does it matter? Because the extent to which we are willing to take each other seriously is the extent to which we will find life in ourselves, each other and in the congregation.

I've never felt comfortable with cruising bars, baths, bushes, backrooms. I find I cannot use my sexual partners/lovers because they are human beings too, with hearts and minds and souls. If I treat them as trash in a tacky way, then I become trash as well. And I am not trash. No one has to be.

— Tom Migliscio
 Baltimore MCC

JAN. 15 MEETING SLATED

Everyone who has been a part of MCC in Harrisburg is asked to attend the events of January 15. A pot luck dinner at 6 PM will be followed by the 7o'clock service. An important Minister and Finance Evaluation Meeting will be held at the conclusion of the service.

That MCC is needed in the Harrisburg area is understood. Or is it? MCC can be a vital force in the lesbian and gay community, a force of understanding, a force of Christian love. But we have become complacent, thinking that even if we don't act everything will come out just fine. Well, we are in a serious financial crisis and must make some tough decisions for the year ahead.

We need your open participation at this meeting. Everyone needs to make their feelings known, negative as well as positive. We must be honest with ourselves. We need an honest exchange of ideas and commitments to insure that MCC-Harrisburg is more than a dream! Pray about it. Be there.

FREEDOM

Vol. 2, No. 10
 January, 1984

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.

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.

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

Manuscripts submitted for publication should be typed, single-spaced, with a column width of no more than 3 1/4 inches (19 1/2 picas). Manuscripts will not be returned unless a stamped, self-addressed envelope is included. Manuscripts should bear the name of the author.



Your friendly church news columnist would like to request that anyone in Harrisburg and Lancaster who has news (or gossip) for this column to telephone or write such information so this can be a bigger and better column.
 Dave's phone - 737-6644, address - P.O. Box 452, Lemoyne, PA 17043.



P. Smith

the sexes. We find that the Scriptures ask both women and men to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, and enjoin all Christians (female & male) to exercise their gifts in response to God's call upon their lives.

We see much injustice towards women in our society. The church esp. has encouraged men to prideful domination and women to irresponsible passivity. Our purpose, therefore, is to present God's teaching on female-male equality to the whole body of Christ's church, and to call both women and men to mutual submission and active discipleship.

I immediately joined this organization that adhered to the belief that women & men were equal in the eyes of God and was calling men & women to mutual submission. During the following months, I began to learn what it meant to follow Jesus--as a woman, no longer as a 2nd-class citizen. Nancy Hardesty & Letha Scanzoni in their book, All We're Meant to Be best express what freedom in Christ means:

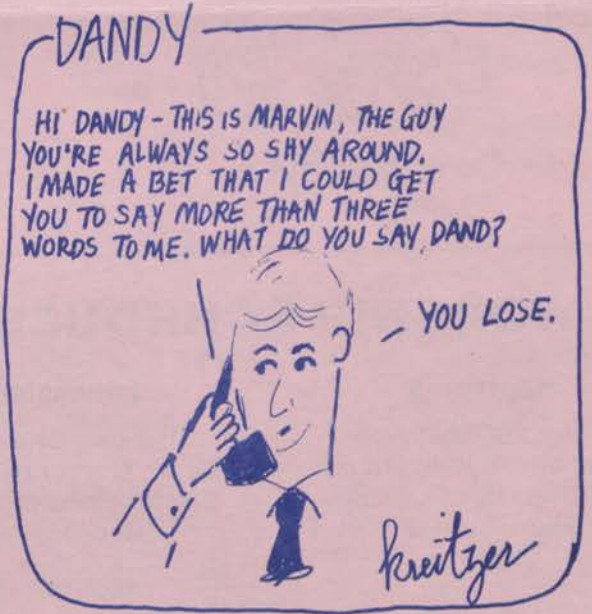
In speaking of the liberation for the Christian woman, we are not thinking of an organization or movement, but rather a state of mind in which woman comes to view herself as Jesus Christ sees her--as a person created in God's image whom He wants to make free to be whole, to grow, to learn, to utilize fully the talents & gifts God has given to her as a unique individual. It is a realization that men & women alike may be freed from sex role stereotypes and traditions which hinder development into the true humanness that God intended. (pp.11-12)

Since my moment of "enlightenment", I have attended 2 EWC international conferences (and will participate in a 4th in June, 1984), many seminars, small group discussions, and mini-conferences on biblical feminism varying from "Why I am a biblical feminist" to "Understanding I Tim. 2". In addition I've been introduced to numerous books ranging from All We're Meant to Be to Virginia Mollenkott's, the Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female.

As I travel along on my spiritual journey, I would be negligent if I did not mention the contribution EWC has made in my life which has deeply impacted my Christian commitment. In uncovering the discrimination toward women, the other injustices of the world have been brought to light. And because I am a woman, one of the oppressed species, I can have compassion toward and can learn to identify with my sisters and brothers who have been oppressed by racism, elitism, militarism, and the complacency of many Christians who have left naked the unclothed, hungry the unfed, destitute the homeless, and lonely the imprisoned.

Because of the many strengths and opportunities EWC can offer both men & women please contact me:

Barbara Gifford
% the Open Door Community
910 Ponce de Leon Av. NE
Atlanta, Ga. 30306
(404) 874-9652.



HI DANDY - THIS IS MARVIN, THE GUY YOU'RE ALWAYS SO SHY AROUND. I MADE A BET THAT I COULD GET YOU TO SAY MORE THAN THREE WORDS TO ME. WHAT DO YOU SAY, DAND?

- YOU LOSE.

Kreitzer

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

HARRISBURG CHURCH

Jan. 15 - Pot Luck Supper, FMH, 6pm. Adam deBaugh, guest speaker, 7pm service. Following service there will be a general meeting dealing with ministerial and financial evaluation.

Jan. 21 - Game Night w/ Dignity at Jack & Jimmy's (234-5730) at 321 Woodbine St. Hsbg. Bring your favorite game along.

WILLIAMSPORT CHURCH

Jan. 15 - Membership class after service. Service 1pm. Class 2:30pm. Call Gary 1-238-3746 for information.

LANCASTER CHURCH

Jan. 1 - Potluck supper. 5 pm. Unitarian Center.

Jan. 15 - Guest preacher Pat Lichty, 5pm service. Unitarian Center.

Jan. 29 - Potluck supper. 5pm. Unitarian Center.

Jan. 5 - GayRap. 7:30pm. Founder's Hall. Unitarian Center.

Jan. 19 - GayRap. 7:30pm. Founder's Hall. Unitarian Center.

NEWS FLASH---

At Lancaster's last congregational meeting, the following people were elected to fill the church positions:

Co-Worship Coordinators:

Bob Life and Earl Custer

Chair of Worship Committee:

Allyson Green

Treasurer:

Bill Dixon

Deacons:

Jay Abel and Don Mowrer



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.

Williamsport:

1st^{and 3rd} Sunday of the Month
YWCA - 815 W. 4th Street
1:00 p.m.
717-238-3746 for info.