



crossbeams

www.gladalliance.org

A publication of the Gay, Lesbian, and Affirming Disciples Alliance, Inc.
Issue #82 November 2007

A Journey to Radical Welcome at Park Avenue Christian Church

by Rev. Dr. Judith Hoch Wray,
Pastoral Associate, Park Avenue
Christian Church, New York City

[Ed Note: At the General Assembly last July in Ft. Worth, GLAD sold books on welcome and inclusion to many visitors to the GLAD booth. Mark Johnston, GLAD's Communications Team Leader, pressed the book *Radical Welcome* into the hands of Judith Hoch Wray. The following article describes how Judith has taken the book to Park Avenue Christian Church in NYC. *Radical Welcome* is one of two books at the GLAD booth that were sold out before the Assembly ended. The book can be bought at the GLAD on-line bookstore.]

Park Avenue Christian Church, with the leadership of Alvin O'Neal Jackson, has accepted the challenge to reexamine its congregational life and ministry. "Open and Affirming" has defined the congregation for years. And now, with renewed openness to God's Spirit working in our midst, the congregation's leadership has chosen to embrace transformation [read: change] in order to move beyond simple "Open and Affirming" to be radically welcoming of all persons. That change is showing itself in new governance structures, more diverse worship, and a re-visioning of mission in New York City, in the

Northeastern Region, and in the world.

Stephanie Speller's book, *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, The Other, and the Spirit of Transformation* (New York: Church Publishing, 2006) has been chosen as one tool to educate and support the congregation's emerging identity and mission. Park Avenue Christian Church has ordered dozens of copies of the book, enough for each of the staff, the ministry council, the elders and the deacons to receive a copy. Retreats and study sessions are being planned so that these congregational leaders can study the book together.

Speller writes:

Radical welcome is the spiritual practice of embracing and being changed by the gifts, presence, voices, and power of The Other. . . .

Radical welcome is concerned with the transformation and opening of individual hearts, congregations and systems so that The Other might find in your community a warm place and a mutual embrace and so that you are finally free to embrace and be transformed by authentic relationship with the margins.

We are learning to expect God to be doing new things among us. Along the way, we are learning patience with each other, for this journey called transformation is hard. We are learning boldness—and joy. We believe the stories and theological reflection in *Radical Welcome* will help us find the way.

Family Trees: African American Disciples Pastors and Dialog

by Vance Martin, GLAD Council Member

"We all know that, if we shake our family tree...." With a dramatic pause, Dr. Timothy James, Deputy General Minister and President and Administrative Secretary of the National Convocation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), invited a gathering of African American Disciples pastors and laity to become seriously involved in the church-wide dialogue about the presence and meaning of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons within the Body of Christ. The event was a reception on October 13 for Dr. James, sponsored by my congregation, United Christian Church of Los Angeles, on the occasion of its annual Homecoming celebration. Everyone present understood the meaning of the pause: that African American families --- as is true of other racial/ethnic groups -- are not (if you'll pardon the mouthful) monolithically heteronormative. They, too, represent, and struggle to accept and embrace, a spectrum of sexualities and gender identities. The Disciples executive made it clear that black clergy and laity must contribute their voices to the conversation, at all manifestations of the church, and share in an authentic process of discernment.

During the mounting controversy over U.S. involvement in the

Southeast Asian conflict in the 1960s, Martin Luther King, Jr. was publicly criticized by some within the Civil Rights movement for linking this country's history of racial injustice to what he deemed to be its misguided ventures in Viet Nam. As usual, his proclamation was prophetic. Approximately thirty years later, his wife, Coretta, clearly acknowledging the risk she was taking, uttered these words:

I still hear people say that I should not be talking about the rights of lesbian and gay people and I should stick to

the issue of racial justice. But, I hasten to remind them that Martin Luther King, Jr. said, 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.' I appeal to everyone who believes in Martin Luther King, Jr's, dream to make room at the table of brother-and-sisterhood for lesbian and gay people.

The Disciples community of faith is a table of remembrance, set for all in a wonderful grove of family trees. Let us love one another. The time is now!

North Carolina Church, Welcoming All, Gains Talented Pianist

by Ben Gerardy, GLAD Council Member

First Christian Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina, will be hosting a concert on November 10th with Dr. Jessie Sneed. Dr. Sneed is a well known concert pianist with a wide variety of musical talent. Having written over 85 hymns and church anthems as well as contatas, he has a fascinating story to tell.

GLAD Alliance Inc
PO Box 44400
Indianapolis IN 46244-0400

FORWARDING SERVICE REQUESTED



crossbeams@gladalliance.org

After completing his PhD. in Music, Dr. Sneed became a music teacher in the Stokes County School System. He attended and joined a local church and became their choir director and pianist. A few months later the church hired a new minister and after a few weeks called Dr. Sneed in for a meeting. He was told "We don't need or want your kind in our church because we believe you to be gay."

Jessie left and did not attend any church for a few weeks, when someone said, "You ought to go

to First Christian in Walnut Cove, they accept everyone with open arms." Reluctantly Jessie attended and was made to feel very much at home. He later joined and is the pianist at that church and is deeply loved. Many of his friends now go there and the church has warmly accepted them.

Dr. Sneed is a two time cancer survivor and has a deep and abiding faith. His concerts are fun for people of all ages and backgrounds. Though his degree is in classical piano, his concerts are a good mix of church music,

classical, show tunes, jazz and modern music. Children love him and tell all their friends they have the best music teacher anywhere.

When Dr. Sneed called me recently he said, "Ben, it is obvious to everyone I'm gay and proud of it. Is that going to be a problem with anyone in your congregation?" I shared this comment with the leadership and they said, "Why would that be a problem?"

More on the Web

Read Crossbeams on-line at <http://news.gladalliance.org>