



CPT's James Loney in downtown Baghdad prior to his abduction. Photo courtesy of CPT.

WELCOMING ALL TO SERVE Christian Peacemakers "Get In the Way"

Celeste Kennel-Shank

In training and employing peacemakers, CPT has a policy of nondiscrimination, according to Carol Rose, CPT co-director. The main criteria are: "Are you Christian? Are you a peacemaker? Are you capable of teamwork?" Thus, a gay or lesbian individual or couple who met those qualifications would be welcome, while someone who said he or she could never work on a team with a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender person might not fit CPT's needs, Rose said.

CPT was inspired by a speech by Ron Sider, now head of Evangelicals for Social Action, at the 1984 Mennonite World Conference. Sider proposed Christians who care about peace should be willing to wage it with the same valor that soldiers wage war, even if it meant dying. In a March 27 article in *Christianity Today* about CPT's philosophy, Sider said Mennonites then engaged in a two-year deliberation that resulted in the formation of CPT in 1986.

"The question was, does this kind of activist, confrontational engagement fit with our under-

standing of what Jesus taught?" Sider said. "And the answer was yes."

The process included the other Historic Peace Churches: first Brethren delegates, and then Quakers, as well as groups from other denominations and organ-

izations, including Baptist and Presbyterian. CPT was begun with delegations to Iraq, Haiti and Palestine in 1992.

From those first forays, CPT created a peacemaker corps of Christians willing to follow the
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Drawing attention to the exclusion of BMC, conference attendees close booths and gather for communion. Photo courtesy of Dale Seese.

Public Witness at Brethren Conference Draws Hundreds

Annual Conference in Des Moines last month drew nearly 300 people in an action that culminated in the sharing of communion. The witness was held in the Conference Exhibit hall to highlight the absence of a BMC booth, despite more than 20 years of respectful requests by BMC to the Conference.

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Some called them naïve, others called them courageous, but in the reports about Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) during the months in which four members were kidnapped in Iraq, few reporters dug into the group's Anabaptist roots. And few were aware of the group's welcoming stance to people regardless of sexuality, whether partnered or single.

Based in Chicago and Toronto, CPT creates teams from their corps of roughly 35 full-time members and 150 reserve members—who serve two weeks to two months a year. They currently work in Barrancabermeja, Colombia; Baghdad, Iraq; At-Tuwani and Hebron, Palestinian Territories; and Arizona, U.S.

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Thinking Differently

Randall Friesen

What if gay and lesbian people were fully welcomed in the Brethren and Mennonite churches? What if we freely served in our denominations' missions work? What if we unabashedly engaged in discussion with our welcoming and receptive church brothers and sisters?

The truth is that we do. Each day, gay and lesbian people contribute in and *do* the work of the church. Just as we marry and build families regardless of discriminatory laws, so do we serve in our churches and identify as lgbt Mennonites or Brethren despite church-imposed regulations denying our membership and questioning our identities as Christians.

Now is an empowering time to be queer. Despite immoral laws (Martin Luther King in his letter from the Birmingham Jail defines immoral laws as those that are applicable to only one group and not all people) written against lgbt people, we now have more places and opportunities than ever to live and express as full members of society. Some of these places and opportunities we have built through persistent insistence. Others have been created by those who understand and honor the gifts and integrity of all people.

Christian Peacemaker Teams and the Supportive Communities Network, featured in this issue of

Outspoken, are two fine examples of groups that embody this principle of opportunity for all people. Both are places where the spirit of Christ's unconditional love is made manifest. They are places that not only accept gay and lesbians as members, but they also sincerely value and welcome the gifts we bring to their organizations.

Full inclusion is imminent. The dialogue is over; the discussion is happening. People of God are beginning to realize that a church that discriminates against gay and lesbian people and their families cannot fully express or even speak to the unconditional love of the gospel. We're not there yet, but we are getting close. The question is: will we be ready when it happens?

Maybe now is a good time to begin thinking differently about our lives as lgbt people in the Brethren and Mennonite church. One of the founding goals of *Outspoken* was to lay the groundwork for the day when lgbt people are allowed to be full members in our denomination and to present ourselves not as victims of dogma, but as indispensable and vital people engaged in the work of the church. I believe this issue of *Outspoken* fulfills this.

It's not yet time to close our eyes to discriminatory policies. It is time, though, to expect our inclusion and start sharing our gifts.

Letters to the Editor

I just received my issue of *Outspoken* and really loved it. I agree wholeheartedly that its time to stop trying to have one-sided dialogue. We need to get on with our lives, our loves and our faith!

Thanks for your work on this.

David P. Weaver

Online

I received my copy of *Outspoken*. Though I've barely had time to glance quickly through it yet, I like what I see! I'm looking forward to having some quiet time to more thoroughly read it. Your editorial brought tears to my eyes. Struck some chords! I look forward to future issues.

Dottie Wine

Lomita, CA

Mennonite Pride in SF

The First Mennonite Church in San Francisco celebrated Pride with a June Sunday morning worship service that reflected upon the contributions of lgbt people and the congregation's queer-positive witness within the church and community. Member Ed Driskill offered reflections about the early role of those in BMC whom he termed "Freedom Riders," who visited congregations and shared their stories. He also described First Mennonite's journey in becoming a publicly affirming congregation. According to pastor Sheri Hostetler, the service was inspirational, particularly for their newer members and visitors.

Welcome Committee Announces New Booklet

The Welcome Committee was formed in 1998 out of concern for the lack of constructive dialogue and discernment by the Mennonite Church in its relation to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (lgbt) people. One of the projects of the committee has been to create a series of booklets that explore the inclusion of lgbt people in the Mennonite Church. The booklets have examined issues of history, tradition, biblical interpretation, theology, church polity and practice, as well as the personal experience of lgbt Mennonites.

A new booklet, number 8 in the series, is hot off the press. Entitled *Gay and Lesbian Inclusion as a Peace and Justice Issue*, the booklet features an interview with Seattle pastor Weldon Nisly, biblical reflections by John Linscheid, and a piece on hospitality by Ted Grimsrud. The ideas and the writing are excellent.

The Welcome Committee graciously makes their work available on the internet at www.welcome-committee.org. Booklets are also available for \$2 each or \$14 for a complete set. Send your order to Ken Roth, 1538 Hillcrest Dr., Harrisonburg, VA 22802.

Additional books in the series are: *Sharing Personal Convictions*; *Historical Perspectives*; *Discerning Church Membership*; *On Biblical Interpretation*; *Biological and Psychological Views*; and, *These, too, are Voices from God's Table*.

The Communion Table Triumphs Brethren Exclusion

(continued from page 1)

Led by individuals carrying the communion elements and dishes of salt, the witness began with a singing procession around the exhibit hall that ended at the table that BMC had constructed at last year's witness. Gathered around the table, individuals reflected upon the biblical call to be salt and more specifically, what it means to be salt to the body of Christ that is the Church of the Brethren.

Dean Johnson held his newborn son and spoke of his hope that his child would be raised in a community that valued all people. Brett Boyer



John Magley and Josih Hostetler lead the BMC procession to the communion table. Photo courtesy of Dale Seese.

affirming congregations like Dundalk could "be the salt that melts the ice of rejection and fear."

Three congregations: Manchester in North Manchester, Indiana, First Church in Springfield, Illinois, and Open Circle in Burnsville, Minnesota, were singled out for their persistence in the face of district threats. After offering their reflection, individuals sprinkled salt upon the communion bread. Melissa Bennett and Ralph McFadden then invited everyone gathered to come to the communion table and taste the goodness of the bread, cup, and salt.

According to BMC Executive Director, Carol Wise, the purpose of the witness was fourfold:

- ▶ To offer a statement of hope and faithful witness for those in the denomination who are discouraged by our church's persistent fear and hostility towards lgbt people and our families;

- ▶ To honor a Brethren tradition of conscientious dissent to practices and ideologies that are unjust and function to dehumanize whole groups of people;

- ▶ To provide a witness to youth and young people, particularly young lgbt individuals, who are desperately seeking

models of health, dignity, and grace;

- ▶ To offer the possibility of healing to a church that is doing harm to itself and others by its exclusionary, unwelcoming posture.

In addition to the procession and service, five agencies with exhibit space closed their booths for the afternoon as a statement of solidarity. Booths at the Womaen's Caucus, Voices for an Open Spirit, Christian Peacemaker Teams, Juniata College, and the University of La Verne were covered with black cloth and displayed a sign indicating their solidarity with their lgbt sisters and brothers.

"It was so refreshing to see a critical mass of supportive people standing in solidarity with us," said Katie Hochstedler, BMC volunteer staff person. "The visible public support from the programs that closed their booths especially gave me hope that the church is changing for the better."



The Evans family (Riley, Tom, Jonah and Kara) serves communion to conference attendee Megan Fiske. Photo courtesy of Dale Seese.

reminded participants of the importance of witnesses like this for lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (lgbt) youth who are finding their way. Andrew Sampson, pastor of the Dundalk Church of the Brethren, spoke of his desire that publicly



"We long for the day when the Church of the Brethren is as welcoming as the Table of Christ." Photo courtesy of Dale Seese.

Excerpt from BMC's response to the Program and Arrangements Committee of the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference

Dear Committee Members:

While we were disappointed in the decision to ban BMC from the exhibit hall, we did appreciate your invitation to sit down together to hear one another in our mutual concern for the wellbeing of the church. The conversation felt respectful and honest, and we were grateful for the chance to share with you.

At the meeting you offered the suggestion of a luncheon or special dialogue room as a potential substitution for the exhibit booth. While these were helpful, it is clear to us that the exhibit hall represents our community table, for it is here that the breadth of Brethren programs and involvements are displayed and where opportunities for conversation and engagement abound. Our banishment from this table continues to be a major source of disappointment and sorrow to us. This is exacerbated by the obvious realization that BMC is singled out in a fashion that you also acknowledge to be unfair.

FIRST DO NO HARM

Carol Wise

The adamant proclamation, “because it says so in the bible” is often asserted in order to call a halt to an uncomfortable conversation. It is worthwhile to think critically about the Bible and how it functions, because no system of oppression has been maintained in the US and Canada without the overt or covert support of the Christian church, the Christian majority, and our sacred scripture.

For example, for hundreds of years, good Christians read the Bible and found there a justification for the institution of slavery (“servants” in Canada), the practice of segregation, and the dehumanization of racial discrimination.

Today we are horribly embarrassed by our past and carefully point to what we claim is a diversity of views within scripture that supported a change in our national attitudes. What interests me is not how we think about slavery and segregation today. Rather, it’s coming to terms with the fact that for more than two hundred years, most devout white Christians piously read the same scripture that we read today, saw no diversity of views, and either felt fine about the oppressive treatment of people of color or decided that other concerns were more pressing.

Today, many in the church insist that scripture offers a uniformly and consistently negative view of homosexuality. They acknowledge no diversity of views and are quite adamant that scripture justifies the church’s bad behavior towards lgbt people. In addition, they expect the government to support the “biblical perspective” by withholding

civil rights and privileges from lgbt people (including a ban on marriage that smells a lot like earlier bans on interracial marriage). Challenges to these beliefs are either dismissed or result in letters to the editor that are surprisingly reminiscent in tone, content and style to letters from forty years ago addressing the push for integration.

What this reminds me of is that reading scripture is a profoundly ethical exercise that demands responsibility and accountability. The community gathered around the word is certainly important, but history should also teach us that this needs to be more than a matter of majority rule and comfort. Rather, we also need to have an acute awareness of the impact that particular beliefs or interpretations have upon others and the world, particularly those who are most vulnerable and impacted. Beliefs have consequences. It disturbs me when beliefs that do harm to others, particularly

those with less power, are excused because we either are reluctant to offend another’s style of biblical interpretation or we fear challenging the text or the community. An evaluation of how texts are used, for whose gain, and what happens to whom as a result, is vital, and quite in the tradition of Jesus.

A motto taught to physicians is “first do no harm.” The ethicist Marie Fortune follows a similar perspective when she cites Romans 13:10 as a good starting point for ethical discernment: *Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.* This simple statement seems to stand up to challenges of history, compassion, reason, integrity and life. It occurs to me that this might be one way to begin in our evaluation of scriptural beliefs. At the very least, maybe it could spare us another 200 years of embarrassment.

Jumpstart Your Small Group

The CORE committee of BMC is launching a new program to sponsor small retreats and weekend events through local BMC groups around the US and Canada. In response to increasingly lower attendance of recent Men’s and Women’s Retreats, the program hopes to create more opportunities to bring lgbt Brethren and Mennonites together in social and political forums.

“We would like to tap into the resources of our local groups,” says committee member Matt Enders. “If there is an event happening in your area,

for example a Pride parade, concert, amusement park, lgbt conference, etc., we urge the local groups to advertise this event and host people that would be coming to the area for that time. We would ask the local groups to house and either provide food, a potluck, or gather at a restaurant with the guests.”

With this new program, the CORE committee also offers seed money for deposits, down payments, or fees required for a local small group to hold an event or support a project. For example, if a group wanted to host a camping weekend or

sponsor a booth at a Pride festival, BMC would offer some funding to advertise the event or purchase supplies or pay fees that support the event. The BMC office will also assist with planning and publicizing the events. The event would then be advertised to BMC members who may be interested in joining in with the local group.

Another aspect of the program involves BMCers who may be traveling to other areas in which there is a BMC group or presence. When traveling to an area, participants may notify the BMC office of their plans. BMC will then tap into local groups in that area to find other BMCers interested in hosting

the visitors. This dynamic program opens a new realm of possibilities for our lgbt community to network and provide new contacts with each other.

The Welcoming Dialogue Group, Lancaster, PA, meets the third Monday of the month at 7:00 p.m. We are a support group, available to tell stories to other groups, and also local advocates for lgbt persons in Anabaptist churches. For further information, contact Ken Beam at welcomingdialoguegroup@yahoo.com.

If We Could Hope

A new discussion

Bruce Hiebert

Given the stalemate in the discourse on gay/lesbian inclusion in the Brethren and Mennonite churches, it is clearly time to find a new approach. Currently one side of the debate is doing its utmost to keep the door to gay/lesbian inclusion closed because it knows what the church should be, while the other side is doing its utmost to pry/hold the door open because it knows what the church should be. Such a power struggle creates a lose-lose situation for the church. And though not hopeless, I do believe we desperately need to rethink this state of affairs and find a new way forward.

As a first step toward a new approach, can we all agree that the church, the body of Christians in its broadest sense, is not what it could be? Can we all—straight, queer, conservative, liberal, fringe, or in power—agree that the church could be better than it is? If we can all agree on that one point, then I think we genuinely have the foundation for building a better church together.

If we agree the church could be better, logic suggests that there exists a gap between our

current state and a potential future state, a gap that the church could move to close. If we agree to those two statements, then I even think we concur that we need to look to God to help us close that gap, i.e. that our hope rests in God. All three of these agreements flow simply and logically from our perception that the church is not what it could be.

The church always stands short of what God is calling it to be, and lives in and through the hope that it can become closer to what God desires.

Based on that proposition, we clearly must rethink the issue of gay/lesbian inclusion in our congregations. If, indeed, the church is rooted in the hope of being better tomorrow than it is today, then we have made some serious errors in judging this issue. At the same time, if the church is trying to live out of its hope, then we have fresh grounds for discussion, a new sense of the rules that govern discussion, and even a new sense of possible outcomes for that discussion.

It is not hard, from a hope-based point of view, to see how we arrived at our current

impasse. Conservatives, diligently working to be a faithful church, live according to the previously established and collectively agreed upon standards. Thus they create rules they believe are consistent with the pre-established standards of God (faith). Liberals, on the other hand, working to be a loving church, live according to the command of God as innovatively demonstrated by Jesus. They evoke change by declaring new realities where only potentials exist, realities they believe are consistent with

in radically surprising ways. But until God has chosen in God's own time to reveal that to us, we are forced to live between a real and humbling past and a real and grace-filled future, always guessing but never knowing what that future looks like. All we can be sure of is that when it is revealed it will be better than we can imagine.

How, then, would a church rooted in hope more effectively face the future? There are three levels to this response—

*Hope means that we do not know the future.
It may look like the past,
or it may surprise us with the completely new.*

the way God innovates in relation to human beings (love). Put these two across the table on a difficult issue that calls for change and you have a stalemate.

But I plead that we back off of faith and love, and the impasse they have currently brought to our churches, and look at St. Paul's third corner of Christian character, hope. It is in hope that I think the church finds the basis for change. It is in hope that the future for both faith and love are found. That is, neither side can logically do anything—no new rules, no new realities—unless they are prepared to hope for a better future church.

Hope means that we do not know the future. It may look like the past, or it may surprise us with the completely new. So far God has demonstrated both the ability to confirm the past and the ability to turn it on its head

individual, congregational, and conference.

Individually, hope means acting with courage and integrity. We can only be who we are (integrity), but hope means that not only will we have the confidence of our existence, but we will also have the courage to take risks of openness, struggle, and change. Those without hope hide their existence, their beliefs, dreams, and experiences. Those without hope are afraid to open doors and explore new ideas. This, then, is individual hope: that we honestly talk of who we are and embrace the possibilities for our own personal change. Those who hope know they could be wrong and look forward to the possibility of being more right.

At the congregational level, hope means undertaking the dis-

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Bruce Hiebert, M.Div., Ph.D. Cand., is a former Mennonite pastor who currently teaches history, philosophy, and religion and does a little management consulting on the side. He is completing a doctoral dissertation on the connection between gender and militarism in Mennonite experience. He is also the author of Good Work and most recently Your Soul at Work: How to Live Your Values in the Workplace. For more info, visit "Outspoken links" at www.bmclgbt.org.



Unapologetics

Becky Kreps

Editor: Becky is a member of the BMC board and of the Manchester Church of the Brethren in Indiana. She spoke at the BMC luncheon during Annual Conference at St. John's Lutheran Church in Des Moines, a publicly affirming congregation. The following is an excerpt from this keynote speech. It has been edited for Outspoken, but the full transcript can be found on the "Outspoken links" page at www.bmcglt.org.

Though I feel strongly about continuing loving relationships with brothers and sisters with whom I am in disagreement, I am done with living a life of apology. It is time for me to love without quietly absorbing someone else's hate. Yes, we can agree to disagree, but not when some are being oppressed by the actions of others. When I think about how the larger church interacts with lesbian/gay/transgender/bisexual (lgbt) people or outspoken allies, I am aware of a shaming and silencing dynamic. There comes a time when dialogue ceases to be effective—particularly when the dialogue is actually a monologue, or when its purpose is “keeping the peace” while avoiding the fundamental issues.

I believe it is important to talk about the differences that divide us, but I am not willing to quietly and lovingly sit back while someone who knows nothing about my life except the gender of my partner tells me I am a sinner. I am not willing to be quiet and loving when they threaten to sanction my church for welcoming people like me. I am not willing to sit quietly and lovingly when one congregation threatens another congregation for recognizing the equality of all people.

We cannot mistake love for passivity or conflict avoidance. Loving others is about giving them the space to say what they need while having the

courage to say what *you* need. Love is about how you act. It is about acting with integrity. It is about understanding that people can and do have differences. It is about caring for yourself enough to live in a manner that is true to who you really are.

BMC's newsletter used to be called *Dialogue*. I believe that the new name *Outspoken* reflects a significant change in attitude. The time for dialogue is not over, but it is time to stop asking to be included in the church and to start celebrating who we are and what we bring. *Outspoken* signals that it is time to get off the fence of passivity, time to stop focusing on pleasing

Whatever your course may be, it is time to choose it, and it is time to follow it. What is it that you are called to do as a faithful child of God?

other people, time to stop avoiding conflict. It is time to use our voice! This does not mean I spew back the same hateful rhetoric to which I have been subjected. It means holding my partner's hand in my place of worship. It means creating sanctuary for gay and lesbian youth and talking to our children about sexuality and sexual orientation. It means speaking out for what you believe and putting that

speech into action.

Being outspoken may mean finding a new community that celebrates who you are. It may mean sending letters of support to individuals who are struggling because of their orientation or congregations who are struggling because of their support of lgbt issues. It may mean sending letters to church publications sharing your disappointment at the hateful and divisive way they promote their opinions and concerns. It may mean participating in conversations about difficult issues when it would be easier to walk away.

Some of us have already been called to such bold actions, taking risks by speak-

ing the truth boldly, lovingly, and unapologetically. Whatever your course may be, it is time to choose it, and it is time to follow it. We need to identify our individual or collective missions, and we need to lovingly implement them. What is it that you are called to do as a faithful child of God?

Each of us must find our own way to live, being true to what we believe about love,

about justice, and about living the teachings of Christ. Some of us will continue our quiet journeys—teaching by word and example—while others may need to push beyond previous comfort zones. Those who can, need to be the voice of justice, and those who cannot need to ask themselves “why not?” Are we more concerned about being liked than speaking for what we believe? What are we holding on to, what do we fear losing? Are the costs worth it?

Loving others in the midst of conflict is not always easy, and sometimes I think we Brethren and Mennonites may find it easier to avoid conflict in the name of love rather than risk relationships in the midst of conflict. Difference and disagreement are not in and of themselves unloving. It is the action taken in the midst of difference and disagreement where love and grace can be present. We can lovingly carry our communion table into the exhibit hall and join our brothers and sisters in communion. We can lovingly participate in worship services and gather together for support. We can lovingly say to our churches, our districts, our denomination that we will not be intimidated and that we are continuing our call as supportive individuals and groups.

In my journey, it is essential to live unapologetically, consciously choosing to act in ways that feed my soul and that seek to lovingly engage those around me. I believe that we must not forget the cost to our beings, our faith, our families, our congregations and our communities when we quietly accommodate the rigid majority who blame us for their discomfort.

How will you join me in living unapologetically?

Supporting Gay Youth

A recent study involving 30,000 British Columbia students in grades 7-12 reported that lesbian teenagers were more than four times more likely to have attempted suicide in the past year than heterosexual girls (38% vs. 8.2% respectively). Among boys, the results were less striking, although 8.8% of gay teens attempted suicide as compared with 3.3% of heterosexual boys.

While trying to deal with all the challenges of being a teenager, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender (lgbt) teens additionally have to deal with harassment, threats, and violence directed at them on a daily basis. According to the National Mental Health Association, these students hear anti-gay slurs such as "homo," "faggot," and "sissy" about 26 times a day, or once every 14 minutes. Even more troubling, a study found that thirty-one percent of gay youth had been threatened or injured at school in the last year alone!

Because lgbt people are coming out at an increasingly earlier age, Katie Hochstedler plans to use the coming year of her volunteer work with BMC to focus more intentionally upon the special needs of high school lgbt and questioning youth, their parents, and youth group advisors. Special attention will be placed upon youth who are questioning their sexuality and to non-gay youth who are interested in being positive allies. Katie also plans to develop a resource packet for queer and questioning youth, advisors, and parents; talk with youth advisors and ministers; and provide safe zone trainings for congregations, youth groups, advisors, high schools, and/or colleges.

Katie, a graduate of Goshen

College, has been in BMC's Voluntary Service position for the past year, and recently has agreed to serve an additional year. During her tenure, she has made important connections, led safe zone trainings, assisted with office work, and strengthened relationships with lgbt and questioning youth and young adults.

Other facts about lgbt youth:

► Gay teens are often subjected to such intense bullying at school that they're unable to receive an adequate education. They're often embarrassed or ashamed of being targeted and may not report the abuse.

► LGBT students are more apt to skip school due to the fear, threats, and property vandalism directed at them. One survey revealed that 22 percent of gay respondents had skipped school in the past month because they felt unsafe there.

► Twenty-eight percent of gay students will drop out of school. This is more than three times the national average for heterosexual students.

► LGBT youth feel they have nowhere to turn. According to several surveys, four out of five gay and lesbian students say they don't know one supportive adult at school.

Help BMC reach out to vulnerable high school youth by supporting its Voluntary Service position. It costs approximately \$15,000 to fund the position at a minimal level. To support this position, send your tax deductible US contribution to:

BMC, PO Box 6300,
Minneapolis, MN 55406
Canadian tax deductible contributions may be sent to: BMC Canada, Box 57032, Jackson Station, 2 King Street, West Hamilton, ON L8P 4W9.

BMC Happenings



Jim Wilson (left) and former BMC board member **Adam Hostetter** (right) celebrated their fifth anniversary on June 2, 2006. The couple live in Tucson, Arizona, where Adam manages a community college adult education program and Jim is a realtor.



Jude Amani Bennett-Johnson was born to **Melissa Bennett** (left) and former BMC board member **Dean Johnson** (right) on April 21, 2006. Jude means "praise" and Amani is Swahili for "peace."

Celeste Kennel-Shank of Washington, D.C., will relocate to Chicago in September to attend Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism for a one-year Master's degree in reporting and writing.

Josih Hostetler was awarded a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree from the University of Minnesota, with a concentration in public policy. Josih served for two years as the Kaleidoscope Coordinator and volunteer for BMC. His undergraduate degree is also in social work and is from Manchester College.

Lloyd Bowman (left) and **Douglas Brunk** (right) are proud to announce the adoption of their son **Sheldon Marshall Thomas Bowman-Brunk** (center). The legal proceedings were completed on May 26, 2006 in which Lloyd and Douglas simultaneously became his legal parents. Sheldon is seventeen years old and just completed his junior year at Germantown Friends School.



Ron Brunk, from Minneapolis, was part of the Twin Cities Gay Men's Chorus Great Southern Sing-Out Tour this July. The award-winning chorus began the tour in Nashville, Tennessee, where they were the first organization with the word "gay" in their name to perform at the Grand Ole Opry.

On April 8th, **David Taylor** (left) and **Philip Kendall** (right), surrounded by friends and family, celebrated their committed relationship in a ceremony held near their home in Chicago. Philip and David are both graduates ('05 and '02, respectively) of Goshen College and attend Chicago Community Mennonite Church.



Please email your "happenings," such as weddings/commitment ceremonies, graduations, promotions, births, deaths, awards, recognition, etc., to editor@bmcglbt.org. Photos are welcome, too!



Left to right: Matt Enders, Bruce Hayes, Gerald Ediger, and artist Rodney Harder.



Left: Shawndra Miller and Judy Hostetler



Above (l to r): Katie Hochstedler, Carol Wise, Mary Liechty, and Addie Liechty

Indianapolis Benefit Features Artist Rodney Harder

The expansive, inviting backyard of JB Miller and John Daniels was the site of a spring BMC fundraiser that featured the paintings of BMC constituent Rodney Harder from New York City. Approximately fifty people from the local community gathered for hors d'oeuvres, conversation, and an opportunity to talk directly with Rodney about his art. Sponsored by the Indianapolis BMC group, the event was planned by BMC board member Mike Litwiller, and was held in conjunction with the CORE

Committee.

Rodney, whose work has been featured at the Palazzo Montefano, a cultural association in Bologna, Italy, at the Fresno Art Museum in California, and in a recent exhibit at Penn State, is a painter and teacher at the Collegiate School in New York City. For the event in Indianapolis, Rodney created a special series of twenty small canvases that he donated to BMC. He used stains of gouache and acrylic paint to create atmospheric images reminiscent of land-

scape, biomorphic forms, and sky. Included in the collection was a larger piece from his recent "House Paint Series."

Rodney, who attended the event with his partner Tony Gray, combines his talent with a deep commitment to BMC and the lgbt community. Raised Mennonite Brethren in California, Rodney has served on the BMC board and has been a friend to many lgbt people struggling to find their way in a hostile church.

The event raised over \$3,000 for BMC through the

sale of art and donations.

Fresno, California, will be the site of the next BMC gathering and fundraiser on October 7, 2006, at the home of Gail Newel and Kelli Beingessar. The event will again feature the works of artist Rodney Harder, formerly from Fresno. This marks one of the first times that a predominately Mennonite Brethren group from BMC will gather for support, community, and a grand time together. To learn more about the event, contact the BMC office at 612.343.2060.

Connecting with Kaleidoscope

Kaleidoscope is a supportive and resource-sharing network for lgbt, questioning, and allied people on peace church campuses. Providing opportunities to make connections, receive support, and be active in local communities, Kaleidoscope provides support for students on campuses and young adults in the following ways:

Establishing educational programs for residence life staff and interested individuals; Keeping the lines of communication open between faculty, staff, students, and alumni; Connecting students, young people and recent alumni via its email listserv, K-Scope; and Increasing youth and young adult presence at BMC gatherings and retreats by offering scholarships.

For more information, visit www.bmclgbt.org.

Be Outspoken!

Outspoken is currently soliciting submissions from its readers for inclusion in the newsletter. Some of the opportunities for you to speak out include:

- ▶ Letting us know what's new in your life for the "Happenings" column;
- ▶ Reporting on a BMC-related event you have attended;
- ▶ Writing a letter to the editor;
- ▶ Letting us know what issues you'd like to see covered in upcoming issues;
- ▶ Writing an article for publication.

Please inquire at editor@bmclgbt.org.

A Short History of Supportive Communities

Amy Short

The full inclusion and participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (lgbt) people is seldom found in Mennonite and Brethren churches. In my travels, though, I have had the honor of seeing them realized in a few communities. These communities are among the 46 members of the Supporting Communities Network.

Supportive Communities Network (SCN) is a group of congregations and communities from the Brethren and Mennonite faith traditions that publicly welcome lgbt people into their fellowship. SCN exists to provide a network for lgbt and allied Anabaptists seeking a faith community. Unique in its connections to the Mennonite and Brethren denominations, SCN has always been a part of the larger ecumenical welcoming movement throughout the US and Canada.

Originally named Supportive Congregations Network, SCN was formed by Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests (BMC). The first meeting took place at a private home in Chicago, Illinois, in January of 1991 and included members of the BMC board as well as sup-

portive pastors and laity from congregations that were already working on their welcome to lgbt individuals. The formation of a Mennonite and Brethren welcoming network grew out of an existing interest in the denominations and mirrored what was taking place in other denominations. In 2003 the BMC Board changed SCN from the Supportive Congregations Network to the Supportive Communities Network, acknowledging that congregations are not the only place where church happens.

Held in June of 1996, SCN's first international conference, *Dancing at the Table: Re-Imagining the Church*, brought together more than 300 supporters from Mennonite and Brethren backgrounds. According to former BMC Executive Director Jim Sauder, "In the history of SCN, [this] event was a highlight of moving energy and [was] the first time that supporters—that many supporters—had been brought together." One planner of the event, Jane Miller, reflects, "We were just on fire and happy!"

"I don't think you can find more congregations or groups that are more Mennonite or Brethren in their identity."

It really felt like we were embodying this image of 'dancing'...It was transformational." She adds that coming out of the conference there was definitely the sense that "this was the beginning of something."

Some of the early Brethren

churches that joined SCN were large congregations that brought a large number of supporters and a lot of money to the movement. On the Mennonite side, however, the large congregations have been timid in their welcome of lgbt people. The initial Mennonite congregations to join SCN were small, often urban congregations that got pummeled by the broader denomination in the form of conference investigations, removal of voting privileges and funding, and eventual expulsion from area conferences and districts. According to current BMC Executive Director Carol Wise, the backlash against smaller congregations, like Ames Mennonite Church and the Saint Paul Mennonite Fellowship, took its toll in ways that it didn't for large congregations. "Those [smaller churches] were the gutsy ones," states Wise.

The early discipline of these Mennonite congregations, coupled with the General Conference/Mennonite Church merger in the late 1990s, led to an atmosphere of fear and general mistrust of SCN. Today the merger is no longer the focus of Mennonite Church USA, but keeping the two sides together still paralyzes congregations from stepping forward and joining SCN.

The Church of the Brethren has also experienced a shift. Congregations like Manchester CoB in Indiana have started to be the targets of district inquiry. In the first two years of Carol Wise's tenure as BMC Executive Director, SCN added twelve new Publicly Affirming Communities (a 38% increase). In the last year however, only three congregations have joined. Carol remarks, "It is my impression that many congregations are in a sort of holding pattern, waiting to see which way the political climate will shift. Congregations are

scared. Many want desperately to avoid the kind of experiences [of disciplined congregations], so they avoid the issue. But paradoxically, their unwillingness to risk only makes it more risky, and really makes it difficult for change to occur."

Carol refers to the list of SCN communities as the "honor roll" of churches that are needed for the future. "When you look at the 'honor roll' I don't think you can find more congregations or groups that are more Mennonite or Brethren in their identity....They know the history, and there is a deep appreciation for the values of service and the peace position." She adds, "It's ironic that the congregations that are most deeply Mennonite or Brethren get attacked." She believes that the biggest misconception about SCN is that it is an outside movement—that it isn't Anabaptist and that the communities that have joined don't esteem the denomination. In fact, the SCN communities value the denomination so much that they are willing to dissent from it. These congregations

(continued on page 11)

SCN goals are:

- ▶ To offer support, resources and opportunities for dialogue among congregations which welcome gay, lesbian, transgender, and bisexual members;
- ▶ To encourage meaningful dialogue at the denominational level;
- ▶ To offer support and resources for individuals who are working toward welcome.

“I believe CPT is part of the movement of God’s spirit to bring an end to war.”

(“CPT” from page 1)

motto of “getting in the way,” following the way of Christ by putting their bodies on the line in conflict situations, and have carried out 13 projects in North America and around the world. Peacemakers engaged with local communities and populations in areas as divergent as inter-city Washington, D.C. and Grassy Narrows, a part of First Nations land in Canada.

Potential projects are spurred by invitations from local churches and peace groups in an area. In fall 2005, CPT delegates

first participate in a two-week delegation to see CPT in action on one of their projects. The potential peacemaker must then take a monthlong intensive training in nonviolent peacemaking skills.

In addition to conflict transformation tactics, the training involves anti-oppression instruction, focusing especially on battling racism and sexism. “It has been brought up that there are other oppressions here,” Rose said, such as heterosexism and classism, but they struggle to cover a large amount of material

ual ethic. This differs from Mennonite Voluntary Service—a project of Mennonite Mission Network, requiring volunteers to “reserve sexual intimacy for the marriage covenant,” according to their website—and Mennonite Central Committee—which works with members of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in Canada and the United States and takes “marital status” into account in accepting volunteers, their website states.

CPT also has gay and lesbian members in leadership roles, including James Loney, 41, co-coordinator for Canada. In November 2005, The Swords of Righteousness Brigade, an Iraqi radical group, kidnapped Loney, Harmeet Singh Sooden, 32, Tom Fox, 54, and Norman Kember, 74, and held them until March 23. Loney, Sooden and Kember saw the other side of the ordeal, while Fox was killed March 10.

After returning to Toronto, Loney said in a March 27 statement, “It was a terrifying, profound, powerful, transformative, and excruciatingly boring experience.” Yet, he was amazed by the work around the world for their release, he said. “A great hand of solidarity reached out for us, a hand that included the hands of Palestinian children holding pictures of us, and the hands of the British soldier who cut our chains with a bolt cutter. That great hand was able to deliver three of us from the shadow of death.”

Loney then asked for time away from the public eye. “I’m going to disappear into a differ-

ent kind of abyss—an abyss of love. I need some time to get reacquainted with my partner Dan, my family, my community—and freedom itself,” he said.

Looking toward the future, CPT is focusing on trying to increase their ranks of peacemakers, Rose said. They are short on peacemakers for the projects they have and continue to receive invitations by groups in other areas.

“I believe CPT is part of the movement of God’s spirit to bring an end to war,” Rose said. “I hope we can live into that, not only in ways that reduce violence on that scale, but that build the reign of God among us, and build more just and compassionate relationships among us, and especially in relation to groups that are held on the edge.”

“Undoing sexism and undoing heterosexism are intertwined. There’s something causal, sexism is a systemization of heterosexism. Homophobia functions as sitting on that foundation of this unjust power dynamic.”

completed a two-monthlong exploratory trip to East Africa’s great Lakes region—Burundi, Rwanda, and eastern Congo—to look into the possibility of starting a project there. Rose said plans are being worked out for another delegation in the fall. “It will likely be a women’s delegation, and focus on rape as a tool of war, and the role of the West in perpetuating and funding the violence,” she said.

An individual interested in becoming a peacemaker must

in one month. “Every time we turn around there’s something else to add to training.”

However, Rose added, “For me, undoing sexism and undoing heterosexism are intertwined. There’s something causal, sexism is a systemization of heterosexism. Homophobia functions as sitting on that foundation of this unjust power dynamic.”

In going through training, CPT does not require participants to commit to a certain sex-



Celeste Kennel-Shank, a freelance writer in Washington, D.C., was a member of a CPT delegation to Colombia in July 2004, and has been involved with the northern Indiana and Washington, D.C.-area regional groups.

While the world has come to know **Christian Peacemaker Teams** because of the hostage crisis and death of Tom Fox, their violence-detering, human rights promoting work goes on in the Americas and Middle East. Experiencing a shortage of full time workers willing to commit to three years of service, CPT is calling on mature Christians with a sacrificial commitment to peacemaking to consider joining their ranks.

Prospective CPTers participate in a short-term CPT delegation prior to training. For instructions on how to apply, or additional information on CPT, visit “*Outspoken* links” at www.bmclgbt.org.

(“Hope” from page 5)

cipline of study. In collective study we open our eyes to ourselves, those around us, and to the world at large. In study we begin to understand our past, our present, and the possibilities for our future. It is not a matter of welcoming or not welcoming. It is a matter of struggle with each other, agonized, painful (and very often hurtful) wrestling with what is *really* going on. And this struggle never ends because the world has not yet come to God’s end. God is prepared to surprise us even when we think we understand. Though we cannot see the future, we can do better if we study. Undertaking the discipline of study, we can try to be better this week than we were as a church last week.

Study can only work if it is done with courage and integrity. When we study we easily get challenged, forced to defend

ourselves, and attacked in places of great vulnerability. It takes courage to keep going and integrity to know who we are and where we have transgressed our own boundaries. Those with integrity know they regularly must repeat “I’m sorry.” Those

No conference can tell a congregation how God is acting within it, nor what future God has in store for it. Conferences can only pass along the stories.

who study will be wounded and will wound others. That is inherent in courageous study by people of integrity.

At the conference level, hope means assisting study. The vehicle of action for Anabaptist conferences is the congregation, and conferences have the difficult task of aiding congregations to study better. There are two sides to this assistance; passing

stories along and developing study resources. No conference can tell a congregation how God is acting within it, nor what future God has in store for it. Conferences can only pass along the stories its congregations tell and develop resources

the people who drafted them. It is only when we hear the struggles of those who agonized them into being that we can hear how God might be calling us to use them in the future. They are deep and sometimes profound statements, but for all of that they are no less reflective of where the community was and where it guesses it should be. They are not statements of what could be or of what God has decided ultimately will be.

Hope is not faith. Hope is not love. I believe it is the foundation and corrective for both. If we take it seriously, I think we have a way around the current impasse. It won’t be easy. And it does not appear to me that the resulting church will look like our current institutions. But I do think it will be a church that finds it easier to pursue the future God is bringing. That, anyway, is my hope.

(“SCN” from page 9)

want to do the right thing and do so out of deeply held values, through thoughtful theological and biblical reflection.

Initially, supportive communities had three levels of involvement—*Publicly Affirming*, *Accepting*, and *Exploring*. *Publicly Affirming* congregations adopted a written statement that specifically welcomed LGBT members. Because it seemed important to allow hesitant congregations to work toward a place of welcome, the other two levels of SCN involvement allowed a church to join as *Exploring* or *Accepting* without having to publicly welcome LGBT people. While this did result in some congregations ultimately joining the SCN, it also resulted in reinforcing an unhealthy sense of secrecy that was all too familiar for LGBT people. Congregations would spend

time debating which level of membership was enough to appease members who wanted to be public about their welcome while still keeping the congregation “safe” in the larger denomination. Many of these conversations steered completely away from welcome and, according to Carol Wise, reproduced “that whole queer experience of closeted-ness.” Congregations would want to feel good about themselves without actually taking risks, leaving the LGBT people in the church feeling constantly vulnerable. When this began feeling destructive to both the congregations and the very people they were trying to welcome, SCN eliminated the various membership levels. Today, while any congregation or community looking at the inclusion of LGBT people may contact SCN for resources, only those willing

to be counted as Publicly Affirming are counted as member communities.

Today SCN exists as a program of BMC. Its work is overseen by the BMC Executive Director and the BMC Justice and Community Committee. SCN has produced a resource binder for congregations working toward welcome entitled, *Affirming Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People in our Congregations*, and has distributed worship resources for the annual Ecumenical Sunday of

Welcome. SCN also sponsors retreats for pastors of welcoming congregations. The next retreat is slated for winter of 2007.

To see if your church or community is a member of SCN, visit the complete list of supportive communities at “*Outspoken links*” at www.bmcglbt.org. For more information on joining this dynamic collection of communities, contact BMC Executive Director Carol Wise at www.bmcglbt.org.



Amy Short visited several SCN communities between 2000 and 2003 as BMC Executive Director. She previously worked as BMC’s first full-time volunteer. Amy lives in the Loring Park neighborhood of Minneapolis, MN with her partner Rachel and their cat Fruvous.

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

*From: An Open Letter to my Gay, Lesbian,
Bisexual and Transgendered Brothers And
Sisters in Christ*

V. Gene Robinson, Bishop of New Hampshire

We know how all this is going to end. It is not arrogant to say that we believe we know how all this is going to turn out. It will end with the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in the life and ministry and leadership of the Church. It will take a long time. Some or all of us may not live to see it. But happen it will! In a strange way, I think the conservatives know it too. All we're arguing about now is timing. It will be enough for each of us to play her/his own part. Each of us can provide a pair of shoulders for someone else to stand on, just as surely as we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. This is a never-ending march toward justice for *all*, and *no one* is going to be left behind. In the end, the reign of God will come. And oh what a privilege it is for each of us to play a small part.

We are worthy of God's love—not because of anything we have done, but because God has *made* us worthy to stand before God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As I said at Convention, the *gay agenda* is *Jesus!* If we keep that ever before us, in the end all will be well.

For the full transcript, see the "Outspoken links" at www.bmclgbt.org.



Joe and LaVonne Blowers carrying the BMC banner in the Portland Gay Pride Parade. Beautiful people doing God's work!

Upcoming Events

October 7 BMC Benefit
featuring artist Rodney Harder
Fresno, California

Oct 13-15 BMC Board
Meeting
Minneapolis, Minnesota

To list your upcoming events, email editor@bmclgbt.org. Check "Outspoken links" at www.bmclgbt.org for publishing schedule and guidelines.