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1. Tis the Season!

Tis the season! To all of those who support the work of BMC, we are eternally grateful. Because of you, the number of welcoming congregations has grown 37% in the past two years. Because of you, LGBTQ groups at Mennonite and Brethren colleges have benefited by BMC trainings and support. Because of you, parents and family members have found safe space at Connecting Families retreats. Because of you, the important stories of older BMC community members and early SCN congregations are being taped and preserved. Because of you, LGBTQ people, parents, allies and friends can access quality resources for the work of justice and inclusion. Thank you for your commitment, hard work, encouragement and support.

As the year comes to an end, please consider making a special financial gift to BMC. All contributions are tax deductible, but more importantly, all of the funds are used to further the work of justice within the church and within our communities. [Click here](#) to make your contribution. Thank you!!

2. Common Spirit Grand Rapids Joins the Supportive Communities Network

BMC is very pleased to welcome the Common Spirit Grand Rapids Church of the Brethren congregation to SCN, the Supportive Communities Network. This fairly young and exciting church start has been meeting in the Grand Rapids area of Michigan for the past several years. They recently were awarded fellowship status within their district, despite some challenges to their open and affirming position. BMC is proud to welcome this dynamic, creative and very caring group of people to the Supportive Communities Network. They are the 12th congregation to join SCN this year!

3. Megan Ramer Rocks Lancaster



The Welcoming Dialogue Group (an SCN



community) and BMC recently sponsored a [dinner event](#) in Lancaster, Pennsylvania that featured Megan Ramer, pastor of Chicago Community Mennonite Church, as the main speaker. Megan's presentation was well received by the nearly 200 who were in attendance, with copies of her formative essay, *Fashioned in Love: Biblical and Theological Foundations for Inclusion*, sold out. BMC is appreciative to the Welcoming Dialogue Group for their work in conceiving, setting up, advertising, and hosting the event. Read Megan's presentation [here](#).

4. Manchester Community Responds to University's Neutral Stance on HJR-6

Organizing efforts at Manchester University have recently gained momentum. This article briefly outlines happenings and provides ways you can support the work. Next month, Goshen College will be featured.

Before the Indiana Constitution is House Joint Resolution 6, a proposed amendment which would define marriage as between one man and one woman. If HJR-6 passes both the house and senate in January, it will go to a direct vote in November 2014. In an organizing effort stemming from a Social Movements class, Manchester University students presented letters and a petition urging Manchester's cabinet to take a stance against HJR-6. The cabinet responded with a statement of neutrality based on the University's history of refraining from taking a position on political issues and the belief that taking a stand for civil rights would compromise dialogue. An excerpt from the statement reads, "We believe that a university endorsement on one side of a political issue may marginalize or silence those members of our campus community who do not agree with the endorsement." In the following weeks, the cabinet received hundreds of phone calls and letters from the Manchester community on and off campus.

Where the institutional voice failed to uphold its mission of respecting "the infinite worth of every individual," those a part of the Manchester community continue to offer a voice of influence in a diversity of ways. A week after the neutral statement was released, a [sit-in](#) was held on campus in which students, faculty and staff stood in solidarity and discussed ways to make Manchester's campus more inclusive. The strong response to the statement of neutrality directly impacted the ability to make headway on inclusive efforts which were previously at a standstill. For instance, already the language of Manchester's non-discrimination policy has changed "ethnic origin" to "ancestry," "marital status" to "familial status," and "sex/gender" to "sex, gender identity or expression."

Efforts to generate a voice of legislative influence are in process. A [petition](#) stating opposition to HJR-6 for members of the Manchester community has 484 signatures and is growing. Various groups have released statements in opposition to HJR-6, including the Peace Studies Institute, Gender Studies Council, Sociology and Social Work Program, the Department of History and Political Science, Faculty of the Music, Theatre and Art Departments, and the Department of English. On December 13th, faculty are voting on a statement based on Manchester's mission, vision, and non-discrimination policy which expresses steadfast opposition to the proposed amendment. This is the work of individuals committed to justice.

Here are ways you can support the work:

- If you are a former or current student, faculty or staff person, please sign the petition, [Members of the Manchester University Community Against HJR-6](#), and share it with others affiliated with the University.
- If you are from Indiana, write your legislators individually and don't stop there. Consider forming a [statement from your church](#) or other groups.
- If you are interested in learning more about the conversation that is happening, visit the facebook page, Manchester Alumni in Support of Civil Rights.

5. Save the Date - BMC Ontario Winter Retreat!

All are welcome at the BMC Ontario Annual Winter Retreat; a fun-filled and relaxed weekend

with friends in the cold Canadian snow. The date for this year's retreat is Friday, February 21 – Sunday, February 23, 2014. Save the date on your calendar! Details will be coming soon.

6. Connecting Families West

If you have a family member who is LGBT, or you are LGBT yourself, or you love or care about someone who is LGBT, then West Coast Connecting Families Retreat may be just the place for you. The retreat will be April 25-27, 2014 at the beautiful Alton L. Collins Retreat Center in Eagle Creek, Oregon. It is close to Portland, OR for easy access to the airport and to public transportation. The featured speaker will be Randy Spaulding, a gay, former Mennonite pastor who is currently studying at Yale Divinity School and seeking ordination in the Unitarian denomination. The retreat welcomes LGBT and their families and supporters. It is intended to be a safe, relaxing time to share our stories regarding sexual minority issues as they affect our families, our friends, our churches and ourselves. Please contact LaVonne Blowers (lblowers@ix.netcom.com) or Eileen Wilson (eileenandpatricko@comcast.net) with questions. A fun and supportive time is promised!

7. Weldon Nisly Retires



Congratulations and many good wishes to Weldon Nisly, who has retired after more than forty years of peace and pastoral ministry. For the past 19 years, Weldon has served as the lead pastor at the Seattle Mennonite Church, an SCN congregation. He has brought a passion for justice, strong sense of pastoral care, good humor, thoughtfulness, quiet wisdom and genuine courage to his work. Thank you, Weldon, for your work as a strong ally and special friend to BMC. We look forward to see what the years ahead will bring to you. In the meanwhile, well-wishes can be sent to Weldon at nislyweldon@gmail.com.

8. On-line Training for Welcome

For the past several years BMC has joined with ecumenical partners to offer *Building an Inclusive Church* trainings that offer concrete ways to help congregations initiate a positive welcoming process. Our United Methodist colleagues have recently released a very helpful on-line resource that is useful if you are interested in learning more about initiating a welcoming process in your congregation. [Click here](#) to view the Building an Inclusive Church Toolkit e-learning resource.

9. Progressive Brethren Gathering

The Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren was the gracious host for this year's Progressive Brethren Gathering held in November. Over 150 gathered to worship, reflect, share, converse, watch a documentary, hear lively music, and enjoy good food and company. Dr. Sharon Groves, Director of Faith and Religion at the Human Rights Campaign in Washington, DC, was the keynote presenter. Reflecting upon the life and work of Bayard Rustin, Sharon very skillfully called us to a "new moment in the movement for justice" and reminded us that "our salvation is directly tied to our ability to hear and be led by those whose voices have not been fully heard as part of the 'we.'" A special highlight of the weekend was the worship service on Sunday morning where members of the Beacon Heights congregation very movingly shared about their congregational experience following the 2011 Annual Conference. You can view most of the conference online by [clicking here](#).



10. SCN Pastors and Board Chairs Meet

Over 20 Church of the Brethren SCN congregations were represented at a retreat for SCN pastors and board chairs that met following the Progressive Brethren Gathering. The group shared about their various experiences with being an inclusive community, discussed potential challenges to ordination and credentialing, and engaged in some lively strategy sessions to discern ways to grow the welcoming movement within the Church of the

Brethren. The group selected a committee to plan a similar retreat for next year. BMC thanks Brian Flory (Beacon Heights) and Rob Miller (Northview COB) for their leadership in planning the retreat.

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