



the GAY LUTHERAN

September-October, 1974

Published in Minneapolis, Minn.

No. 2

Official publication of LUTHERANS CONCERNED for GAY PEOPLE, Box 15592, Salt Lake City, Utah 84115

Church press ignores new gay group

The official news magazines of all three major Lutheran denominations chose to ignore the news of the formation of the first national gay organization in Lutheran ranks.

The *Minneapolis Star*, whose religion editor is nationally-respected Willmar Thorkelson (who is Lutheran), devoted 12 prominent paragraphs to its report. Nancy Manser of the *Detroit News*, another thoroughly professional journalist, used the occasion to report on all ten gay cacuses in churches, interviewing at length Brian McNaught, who is president of Detroit's chapter of Dignity, the Catholic gay group. The *Salt Lake City Tribune* carried a short notice and WCCO-TV, the largest TV station in Minnesota, telephoned Coordinator Diane Fraser to prepare for a filmed interview with her.

The gay press was similarly professional. The *Advocate* carried a lengthy account under a five-column headline about the birth of LUTHERANS CONCERNED. Shorter articles appeared in the *GPU News of Milwaukee*, the *Detroit Gay Liberator*, the *Minneapolis Together*, and the *Chicago Gay Crusader*. Several Lesbian publications were also sent announcements.

Christian News, a conservative Missouri weekly, reported the news in detail on its front page, bringing LUTHERANS CONCERNED at least one new member. *Interchange*, a monthly newsletter of the Lutheran Council/USA, digested the item, and the *Badger Lutheran of Milwaukee* was among the regional periodicals which reported the event. Theologian Martin Marty discussed gay questions in his influential personal newsletter, *Context*.

At least two parishes serving heavily gay neighborhoods took note as well. The summer newsletter of Grace and St. Paul's Lutheran Church in New York City devoted an entire page to gay rights, including LUTHERANS CONCERNED. The LCA-spawned Christian Covenant Community in San Francisco carried not only the news, but reprinted our membership form.

LUTHERANS CONCERNED mailed over 30 announcements of its birth to church news agencies and publications, as well as daily papers and the gay press. Religious News Service sent out a lengthy version to its own hundreds of subscribers, and Erik Modean of the Lutheran

Council/USA News Bureau followed suit, as did Evangelical News Service, the LCA's news agency, and others.

However, LCA members found nary a word about LUTHERANS CONCERNED in *The Lutheran*, which goes to half a million LCA homes. The Missouri Synod's *Lutheran Witness* also carried no mention of the group. The ALC's *Lutheran Standard* published exactly one sentence.

Gays visit 2 meetings

Coordinators Diane Fraser and Allen Blaich carried the LUTHERANS CONCERNED quest for love and justice to two national Lutheran meetings in August.

Their appearances, at the Lutheran Student Movement annual convention at Collegeville, Minn., and at the Lutheran Campus Pastors Conference in DeKalb, Ill., were the first of a continuing series to educate Lutheran laity and clergy alike. For many, these occasions were the first on which they've spoken face-to-face with a known gay.

Ms. Fraser, of Kasota, Minn, and Blaich, Salt Lake City, were joined by Marie Kent of Minneapolis for part of their visit to LSM; they paid travel and other expenses out of their own pockets. The trip to DeKalb was financed by the generous donations of LUTHERANS CONCERNED members, above and beyond their dues. At each event the gay delegation appeared as part of a panel or workshop on sex roles and sexuality, presented by Keith and Libby Olstad of Luther Hall, the University of Minnesota student center in Minneapolis. Of 215 students at Collegeville and 300 campus pastors at DeKalb, about 30 to 40 persons attended each of the workshops where our leaders spoke, two sessions at each event.

In addition, lunches and coffee hours provided occasions for informal conversations, some extending until well after midnight, Ms. Fraser said.

"The film was the cincher," she added, referring to "A Position of Faith," the 18-minute color documentary about the United Church of Christ decision to ordain the Rev. Bill Johnson in 1972 in San Francisco.

"After we showed it in DeKalb, there wasn't a dry eye in the house," Ms. Fraser said. "It made it poss-

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

COMING OUT: Yes...and No

We are living in a time when people are demanding openness and honesty—in government and in human relationships. Yet for those of us who are gay to be open and honest about our sexual/affectional being can mean the loss of our very survival—economic, physical and psychological. For in spite of new laws and changing moral attitudes, the risk of losing painstakingly-built careers and reputations is still great, simply because people find subtle ways of discriminating, intimidating and discrediting gays.

Yet until we who are gay can step forward and say, "We are not ashamed of who we really are," straight people will continue to believe the myths that gays are weirdos, "out there" somewhere, who do obscene things in dark alleys. And we will continue to believe these myths, and go on feeling shame and guilt, withdrawing into ourselves, thus depriving ourselves of a fulfilling and satisfying part of our being.

In my opinion, gays need to encourage and give as much strength to each other as possible, in order to overcome this fear of being different. For we all know who we are-- not freaks, but for the most part, obedient daughters and sons, some honor students, most charitable and giving members of society, in every corner of this great land and this grand and mysterious world. Not new to the 20th century, but having existed since time immemorial. Some achieving greatness in spite of hidden pain.

We need to stand tall and declare that we are not ashamed of who we are... each and every one... a child of the universe, no less than the trees and stars. We have a right to be here.

For the greatest danger, as I see it, is that this fear of declaring "who we really are" has and can produce the very sickness straight society sees in us. —Marie Kent.

news notes

DETROIT--Executive Council of the Episcopalian Diocese of Michigan voted, 13-7, to ask its parishes to call gay clergymen as pastors, and said all Episcopalians should speak up for gay rights in the legislature.

ST. PAUL--Two ALC clergymen testified on behalf of the gay-rights amendment to this city's Human Rights Ordinance, which was passed July 16. They are the Rev. Tom Duke, instructor at Luther Theological Seminary, and the Rev. Marvin Grunke, a chaplain for Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota.

To be frank, most gay Lutherans just can't afford, or don't feel they can afford, to let the fact of their gayness be known on the job, in church or elsewhere.

It is true that every one of Marie Kent's points is sound. "Coming out" publicly does improve one's personal outlook. It does give the lie to myths that have harmed each of us for years. And LUTHERANS CONCERNED could never have formed with any impact unless Ms. Kent and others had been willing to stand up and be counted, to show the church that there are proud gay Lutherans who will not remain hidden any longer.

But for many gay pastors or other gay officials in church agencies, to come out publicly would mean the end of their career, their life's work in the church. Other gay Lutherans have not yet built up the emotional inner strength to take the plunge.

Yet these fine women and men can still be an active part of LUTHERANS CONCERNED, working shoulder to shoulder behind the scenes, perhaps with our dedicated nongay members in doing the work that needs vitally to be done.

They can be influential on our task forces, committees and chapters. They can contribute funds so that up-front LUTHERANS CONCERNED members can raise a travel budget of several hundred dollars to attend the ALC national convention in Detroit and every other major Lutheran conference where a gay identity is vital to spread the truth about this nation's tens of thousands of gay Lutherans.

Yes, we need openly gay Lutherans in our group. And yes, just as vitally we need the efforts of every other gay Lutheran as well. —Mr. A.

DeKalb CONTINUED from cover

ible for us to speak to a great many ministers very honestly about gay people in the church, and we signed up one nongay pastor as a member on the spot."

The LSM leadership was at first unresponsive to the LUTHERANS CONCERNED request to appear on the program, and the Rev. Reuben Baerwald of Chicago, the LC-MS pastor at Lutheran Council/USA staff who arranged the pastors' event, insisted that his agenda had been determined ten months before and could not be changed.

Indeed, he was angry when he saw Blaich and Ms. Fraser in the cafeteria line at DeKalb, assuming that they intended to crash his event. Informed that they attended as the invited guests of the Olstads, Mr. Baerwald later apologized profusely to both gay people and paid for their room and meals.

A gay pastor tells his story

By PASTOR X

Sexual relationships can be bad—destructive, manipulative, degrading. But, of course, not everybody, and not all gay people, know that they can be good. It took me a long time to find that out.

It all came together in my consciousness when I was "brought out" at the late age of 27 while I was a pastor in my first parish. But to understand that experience you need to know the background.

I knew from the time I was 8 or 9 that I was drawn more to guys than to girls. I was conscious of being different, in that respect. But I was a good boy and kept my thoughts to myself. I was afraid of my own sexual feelings and inherited the usual guilt about them that is part of a pietistic heritage. Not my parents, my friends, or my church told me the truth about sin and sex and the freedom of the gospel. They were just as ignorant as I was.

My social life was working on things—extracurricular activities, choir, Luther League, hobbies, studies, clubs. I was very busy and fairly happy. I didn't think about sex much, although I knew I was missing out on the personal kind of relationships that the other kids had.

At a Lutheran college and the seminary, I finally got a few things straight about our faith. I learned that God loves us just as we are. I learned that all sinners, including myself, stand on the same level before God. All are loved, redeemed, forgiven, reconciled, on the same basis.

I learned that sin is a fouled-up and loveless relationship. Jesus, Paul, and Luther all make it very clear that righteousness is not obedience to a code of rules; it is a gift of God to people who don't deserve it. The acts we call sins are symptoms of that disease—lovelessness fouling up the way we relate to each other, and keeping us from doing and being what we were meant to be.

Contrary to what I had been led to believe, I learned that sex isn't evil. It's a very complex part of being human. It's more than a body function, more than reproduction. It's a very interesting and complicated kind of non-verbal communication.

Somewhere along the line I learned that gay

people are very common, though I didn't know any personally—that I was aware of. I knew from my own experience that being gay was not a choice; it was something I discovered in myself, like the color of my eyes. Someone else will have to figure out the "why."

By the grace of God, through the teaching of good pastors, teachers, and friends, I learned to quit feeling guilty for what I am. God accepts us just as we are; we have to accept ourselves as we are and make the best of whatever gifts we have.

So much for the theory. I was still lonely.

It all came together out in that rural parish when a man of 19, whom I had known and counseled for his emotional problems for a couple of years, asked if he could live with me and finish high school in that town. (He had dropped out for a brief, unsuccessful stint in the military.)

With his parents' permission, he moved in. We talked long and late. He had many problems. After six months, he began to tell me about his homosexual experiences. He was very honest with me; I had to be honest with him.

I told him what I have just told you in the lines above. I told him not to feel guilty because he felt horny sometimes. The thing to be concerned about is how you relate to people, so that you build people up rather than using them or destroying them in any way. (That's good advice for straight and gay people alike.)

A few days later, he seduced me, very tenderly and lovingly. It was a way of saying, "Do you mean it? Do you accept me as I am?" To say no in those circumstances would have been a denial of the gospel, of myself, of the truth. We had come to love each other very much, and because we did, it was natural to express it sexually as well as in other ways.

We still love each other, though now he is married and has two children and lives a thousand miles away. We don't have sex any more; he has made a commitment to his wife that we both respect. She knows. We are like a family.

That happened years ago. I hope that what took me so long to discover will become clear to more people at an earlier age. The gospel really helps people to learn how to love, how to use the gift of sexuality as God intended.

Gay movie asks the right questions

A VERY NATURAL THING

A film by Christopher Larkin.

Premiered in New York City during Gay Pride Week in June, "A Very Natural Thing" is one of the best gay films made to date. It's an attempt to show honestly what some gay men are really like, what moves them, their beauty and their vulnerability. It's a film about relationships; right away that lifts it light-years above skin flicks, on one hand, and slick stereotyped sit-coms like "Boys in the Band" on the other.

The script is embarrassingly bad, the direction only slightly better. One cannot believe that real people would react with such banal lines. Writer-producer-director-filmmaker Larkin needs a good editor. Some visually fascinating footage should have been cut, because it has nothing to do with the story. But Larkin couldn't seem to bring himself to delete a single beautiful, irrelevant frame.

The result is one of the best home movies you've ever seen. The cinema verite scenes of New York gay life are superb and evocative and sympathetic--the bars, the baths, the apartments, the Promenade, the Gay Pride march. Those are worth the price of admission.

The audience at the showing of the film we witnessed empathized completely. They hooted and laughed and clapped as they identified one locale after another. It was enjoyed as camp. And they commented on hearing the dreary lines, or when the hero's self-doubt was drawn out to the ridic-

ulous extreme: "Oh, go ahead and kiss him!" "I thought you'd never ask!"

The best thing about the film is what it tries to do, even though it isn't successful. It raises the right questions. What does it mean to love someone? Is commitment a trap? What does sex have to do with love? What do you do when you don't love someone any more, but that person still loves you?

These are very good questions, and they deserve to be treated with something more than soap-opera sentimentality. Give Larkin credit for trying. One only wishes that he understood theology better. Judging from this film, its maker must have been exposed to Christianity only at its legalistic worst, for the only religion we seen here is a rigid, hypocritical, unreformed Romanism. He did well to rebel against that.

The gospel would go a long way toward liberating the men in this film from their guilt, their doubts, their hangups. It's a shame they haven't heard it yet. Perhaps someday they will. Pray for them. For with all their faults, all their banality, they're like many very real people. - James Allen.

HELP WANTED

This regular feature brings together Lutherans who, on their own, want to form task forces, committees and local chapters. Items should describe the nature of the group (national, local) and purpose, and list an address.

Oct. 31st is the deadline for the next issue. Submit to Newsletter Editor, Box 15592, Salt Lake City, Utah 84115.

ALC CONVENTION: Lay and clergy uniting nationally, especially in Detroit area, to approach ALC convention in Detroit Oct. 9-15, and to raise funds to send LUTHERANS CONCERNED members out there. Write ALC Convention, Box 15592, Salt Lake City, Utah 84115.

CHICAGO AREA CHAPTER: Second meeting for Milwaukee-Chicago area is Sunday, Sept. 15, 7 p.m. at Hyde Park Lutheran Church, 5046 S. Greenwood, Chicago, for consciousness-raising/support groups, worship, outreach to Lutheran congregations, etc. Or phone Kris Warmoth, 973-5868 nights (be persistent.)

MINNESOTA CHAPTER: Third meeting for Minnesota area is Saturday, Oct. 19, 8 p.m., Luther Hall, 1813 University Ave. SE., Minneapolis, for informal discussion and planning.

Subscribe! Join!

To: Lutherans Concerned
Box 15592
Salt Lake City, Utah 84115

Enter my subscription; I enclose \$3.
Count me also as a member.
To further your work, here is my donation of \$10 _____
\$25 _____ More _____

Please check
____ ALC
____ LCA
____ Missouri
____ Clergy
____ Non-Luth.

Make checks payable to
LUTHERANS CONCERNED

Name _____
Address _____
Zip _____

Our mailing list is strictly confidential