

Faith: Bishops call for acceptance

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bian youth in the religious community, Cromwell explained.

"The United Methodist Church does not believe homosexuality is compatible with Christian values," she said. "The Wesley Center believes the national policy is not correct."

"We are a local unit swimming upstream against the current tide of church policy. We openly express our intent of being an open and welcoming community."

The United Methodist Church student group and its board decided to look more closely at the issue after the 1994 Western Student Christian Conference, which held panel discussions on the subject of gays and lesbians in the church.

"We took a year and a half to study biblical issues, human sexuality and sexual orientation," Cromwell said. After studying the issues, the center voted to establish a support group. The students wrote the statement of reconciliation, which described their openness and commitment to speak out for gays and lesbians and to create an open environment for worship and prayer.

"It's to make people aware there is a place in the community for them," Cromwell said. "Our strength, though, relies on the group always having been gay and straight together. We can support and challenge each other more faithfully through a variety of perspectives."

Much of the Christian church's theology is based on the belief that

sex is for procreation. Cromwell said this is a misunderstanding of the world of sexuality. The United States in the 20th century has a broader understanding of sex, intimacy and companionship, she explained.

Many conservative churches believe sexual orientation is a choice that can be changed or altered with the right instruction. Many churches are affiliated with "ex-gay" ministries that conduct reparative therapy that attempts to change homosexuals to heterosexuals.

These homosexuals "perceive themselves to be an abomination and sense a desire to be acceptable in the eyes of their God," Cromwell said.

But in 1990 the American Psychological Association said scientific evidence did not show that conversion therapy works. They actually found it can do more harm than good. In their statement they concluded, "Some question the ethics of trying to alter through therapy a trait that is not a disorder and that is extremely important to an individual's identity."

The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC) is believed to be the world's largest gay and lesbian spirituality organization, with more than 300 churches in its denomination.

Since 1968, more than 20 gay and lesbian churches have been bombed or burned, with countless others being vandalized or desecrated, according to Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance.

According to a letter from Rev. Troy D. Perry, founder of the fellowship, to President Bill Clinton in June 1997, "Proportionally, no other institution in America has been the recipient of as much arson, bombing, vandalism and desecration motivated by hate crimes as have the churches of UFMCC."

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops asserted in a pastoral letter to United States Catholics in September 1997 that parents of gays and lesbians should love them and that priests should accept gays into their congregations. Yet it was unclear if the church believed homosexual relationships were sinful according to biblical scripture.

The Newman Center, the campus Catholic ministry, invites lesbians, gays, bisexuals and their families to worship together on the first and third Thursdays of the month at 7:30 p.m. The center is located on 1850 Emerald St.

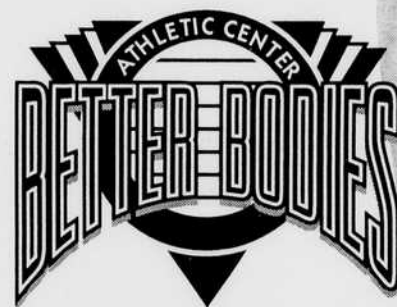
"There is prejudice against them within the Catholic community," said Rev. Chris Renz, who conducts the Catholic gay and lesbian mass at the Newman Center. The center started the mass after members of the Newman community saw a need for it.

"We try to be present to them by listening," he said. "There has been a lot of hurt, and we do not judge them or make assumptions."

"For many, coming to terms with their religion and their sexuality means reinterpreting what the religion said," Vittek said.



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