

# just news

## Portland church to welcome gays

A local United Methodist church has announced its intention to actively welcome gay men and lesbians into its fellowship and to include their concerns in its life and ministry. The new policy is reflected in the unanimous decision of members of Metanoia Peace Community to become a "reconciling congregation," a congregation which seeks to heal the wounds due to prejudice against homosexuals in the church and in society at large.



THE REV. MATTHEW NELSON

Metanoia Peace community is the 45th United Methodist Congregation in the United States to adopt this stance, and the second in Oregon. Last year the Estacada United Methodist church voted to become a reconciling congregation.

The Metanoia Congregation celebrated its inauguration as a reconciling congregation at a special worship service with music by the choir from the Metropolitan Community Church.

In a "Statement of Reconciliation" members of the Metanoia church acknowledge that "we are just beginning a journey which, if undertaken in full faith and sincerity, will ultimately reach out to include all individuals who have suffered the pain of alienation."

Pastor John T. Schwiebert said that, though there are already gay men and lesbians in virtually every congregation, many feel they must hide their sexual identity because of widespread prejudice against homosexuality. They live in silent fear of being recognized and treated as morally inferior by the heterosexual majority. "We want to be a congregation where all persons, regardless of their sexual affinity, are regarded equally; where God's good gift of sexuality can be openly celebrated in all its variety; and where the same high standard of unconditional love can be encouraged for heterosexual and homosexual persons alike."

The Metanoia congregation also plans to work with other reconciling congregations to encourage a broadening of the United Methodist Church's denominational position regarding homosexuality. The present official stance for the denomination is somewhat ambiguous: according to the denomination's *Book of Discipline*, homosexuals are regarded as "persons of sacred worth," but at the same time, homosexuality is seen as "incompatible with Christian teaching," and "avowed, practicing homosexuals" are barred from ordination as clergy.

one woman has been ordained bishop) while 26 percent disapproved. On the other hand, 64 percent are opposed to the sanctioning of relationships between members of the same sex, while 21 percent are in favor. On the subject of non-sexist language, 49 percent were against additions or changes to the liturgy and the psalms with 27 percent approving such changes.

The poll included a representative sample of Episcopalians from across the country and was commissioned by the presiding bishop of the church, the Most Rev. Edmond L. Browning, in anticipation of the church's triennial general convention slated for 1991. Copies of the survey are available from the Episcopal Parish Service, Dept. 9040, Washington, DC, 20061-9040.

## Gay ordination in Canada

The General Council of the United Church of Canada voted 302 to 74 to reaffirm its 1988 policy statement holding that any of its members should be eligible for consideration for ordination as ministers, regardless of sexual orientation. After the 1988 decision, thousands of members and about 70 clergy left the denomination. Some who opposed ordination of homosexuals stayed within the denomination and formed a group called Community of Concern (COC), establishing chapters across the country and claiming a membership of more than 50,000. COC has spearheaded a two-year battle to persuade the council to rescind the 1988 policy. It succeeded in getting the church to invite congregations to offer their opinion on the policy to the General Council; more than 1,250 congregations replied, with the overwhelming majority voicing opposition to it.

A sessional committee of 26 commissioners gathered for five days prior to the council to discuss the issue, with a majority concluding that any amendment of the statement "would send an unacceptable message to the church of retreat from the justice position established by the church in 1988." After hours of debate the General Council agreed, acknowledging that the church is "not of one mind," on issues of human sexuality and fitness for ordained ministry but assuring church members that their concerns had been listened to and urging them to seek unity amid their theological diversity.

—The Christian Century

## Gay and lesbian Jewish group to gather

Congregation Beth El Binah is sponsoring the first Southwestern Regional Conference of the World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations. The conference will be held in Dallas, Texas, Dec. 14, 15, and 16. The theme of the conference will be: "On Being Gay, Lesbian, and Jewish." There will be a variety of topics discussed, guest speakers, and Havdalah and Shabbat services. The conference's purpose is to educate and present individuals an opportunity to meet other gay and lesbian Jews throughout the country. For more information call (214) 840-3553, or write to: Congregation Beth El Binah, P.O. Box 64460, Dallas, Texas 75206.

The Reverend Matthew Nelson is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ

## Women bishops approved; gay unions rejected

A majority of members of the Episcopal Church believe women should be ordained as bishops, but most are still adverse to same-sex unions, according to a poll on the church's spiritual health. Although the survey concentrated on all aspects of church life, one major section included the three most controversial issues facing the church today: women's ordination; the sanctioning of homosexual relationships; and inclusive (i.e., non-sexist) language in the Bible and the liturgy.

Findings showed that 66 percent of those sampled approved of ordaining women as bishops (women can be ordained as deacons and priests already, and



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