

## Portland congregation - seeks lesbian pastor

Members of Metanoia Peace Community United Methodist Church have announced their intention to hire a lesbian as their co-pastor, in disregard of the denomination's official policy regarding sexual-minority clergy. The congregation is seeking an ordained clergywoman who, along with her regular pastoral duties, can help guide a new ministry of the congregation called "Partners in Reconciliation."

The new program is designed to address the overt and hidden homophobia that has made a large segment of the population vulnerable to the appeal of discriminatory initiatives such as Ballot Measure 9. The program will also demonstrate ways in which persons can learn to appreciate, not fear, the varieties of human sexual expression that members of the congregation regard as "God's good gifts."

The decision to hire a lesbian came after it was

learned that Bishop William Dew of Portland was not willing to supply an ordained sexual-minority co-pastor to the congregation through the regular appointment process. The bishop cited a provision in the denomination's *Book of Discipline* which says that "avowed practicing homosexuals" shall not be ordained or appointed. Members of Metanoia Peace Community had previously urged the bishop to appoint a sexual-minority person as an act of conscientious civil disobedience that would challenge the church to change a policy which the Metanoia congregation regards as un-Christian and unjust.

The present pastor, John Schwiebert, who will be sharing leadership with the new co-pastor, said he welcomes the decision to hire a sexual-minority person in the newly created position. "Because we have publicly declared our intention to welcome gay men, lesbians and bisexual persons as full participants in the life of our congregation, it is appropriate that the ordained leadership of this congregation also be designated without regard to sexual orientation," he said.

He noted that a committee of church members is in touch with several qualified persons who have expressed an interest in the position. Among those who have inquired is a woman who is presently serving as pastor of another United Methodist congregation and who is no longer

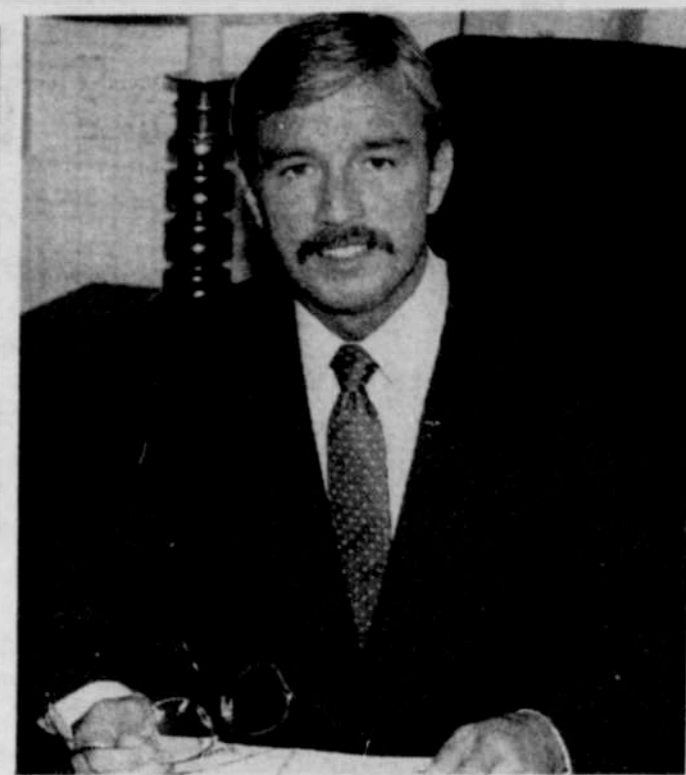
willing to hide the truth about her sexual orientation in order to keep her present position.

The Metanoia congregation hopes to have the new position filled no later than Sept. 1. Members have launched a fund-raising campaign to cover the costs of the expanded program.

Metanoia Peace Community, which is headquartered at the Northeast 18th Avenue Peace House, is a congregation known for its emphasis on community building, hospitality, peace-and-justice advocacy and ministry with bereaved persons. It is one of 62 United Methodist congregations nationwide and five in the state of Oregon that publicly welcome and include gay men, lesbians and bisexual persons in their congregational life and ministry.

## MCC invites nominee

The Metropolitan Community Church of Portland has settled on a nominee after a seven-month search process. The Rev. Dennis Chappell has been invited to MCC as a candidate for the senior pastor position, which has been open since the Rev. Gary Wilson resigned in December. Chappell is currently the director of AIDS ministry at MCC in San Diego. Since graduating from Wartburg Lutheran College he has served in a ministerial capacity for 13 years.



The Rev. Dennis Chappell is MCC's senior pastor candidate.

The Rev. Chappell and his partner, Keith Elder, will be in Portland from July 5 to 12 in order to meet the community. MCC is hosting an Independence Day picnic at Laurelhurst Park on Monday, July 5, at noon to give people an opportunity for socializing with the Rev. Chappell.

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