

The Rev. Casey Moffett-Chaney is a firm believer that "everything that is God is good." That is one of the messages repeated frequently at the God Connection, a place that defines itself as a center for worship, growth and leadership.

One would look at the organization and assume it is a church: The Bible is used to take a close look at daily life. Stories from the Bible are used to imprint specific messages.

However, members of the God Connection, along with the Revs. Casey and Berdell Moffett-Chaney, do not wish to call it a church. If it looks like a church, sounds like a church and feels like a church, then why not call it a church?

For the Moffett-Chaneys, who are also life partners, the answer is quite simple: Many of the people they reach out to have had bad experiences in church. They say those who attend the God Connection get something different, so they prefer the term "spiritual center." Berdell likes to say she preaches "practical spirituality."

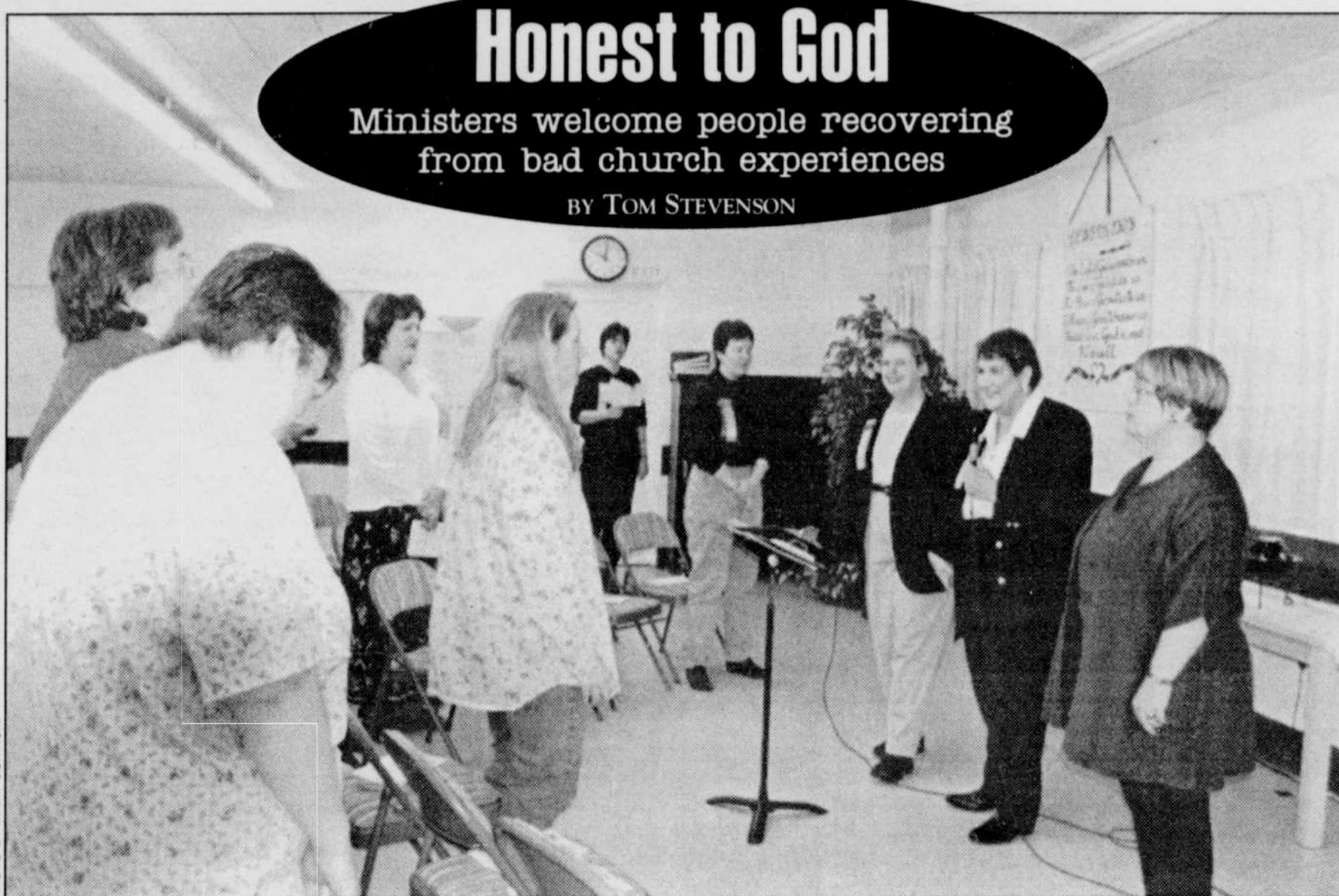
Founded in 1992, the God Connection focuses on seven principles that are referred to as a spiritual curriculum. According to the center's bulletin, "the spiritual curriculum, when practiced and applied to our thoughts, words, decisions and actions, creates the connection that allows God's power to enter, heal and build our lives."

The seven parts of the spiritual curriculum are God Is Truth, God Is Life, God Is Love, God Is Intelligence, God Is Soul, God Is Spirit, and God Is Principle. In many ways, according to Casey, the group follows the same spirituality of 12-step programs from what she calls a "new-thought, all-inclusive" perspective.

For those who assume "new thought" and "new age" are one and the same, Berdell strongly sends a message that they are not. "New thought is very different than new age," she said.

Much of the learning at the God Connection comes from the classes and workshops offered by the Moffett-Chaneys and the Rev. Barbara Wuest, an associate minister. "The people who take classes have the most growth—permanent growth," Casey said.

Wuest added: "That is due to the awareness that is brought into class. It's about character



From right, Barbara Wuest joins Casey and Berdell Moffett-Chaney during a service at the God Connection

building...choices we make."

One of the main focuses of the God Connection is leadership training, but not in the traditional sense. "The focus is on personal relationships," Casey said. "How people get along...that is the gist of leadership."

The three ministers are in the process of teaching an annual series of classes held the seven weeks before Easter. This year's theme is "CHOOSER: Commitment to Honor, Organize, Optimize, Spiritualize, Expose and Resurrect."

"It's a growth thing," Casey noted. "Each week is a progressive process. They start in one place, and we challenge them to pick something to work on. The idea is to bring yourself from one place to another."

Berdell added: "That's why we call it practical spirituality. People can put it into practice."

Although many members of the God Connection are part of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community, others—including Wuest—are not. The idea is that the center is a welcoming place, open to everyone regardless of sexual orientation—or even religious beliefs for that matter.

"We don't look at people as gay or straight," Wuest said. "We look at them as people."

Casey added: "We have people of all different backgrounds. I was raised Jewish."

Honest to God

Ministers welcome people recovering from bad church experiences

BY TOM STEVENSON

Berdell said: "We talk about all religions. We look at the good things of each. We look at similarities, not the differences."

One thing you will not find at the God Connection is politics.

"Our cause is to enhance leadership abilities," Berdell said. "We encourage people to go out and support their causes, but our center does not take on causes. We are here to help people work on their potential."

Another key facet of the God Connection is relationship counseling and coaching. The three teach a number of workshops and offer one-on-one and couple counseling. "It's about teaching people how to communicate," Casey said.

All three of the ministers said the classes have received a tremendous response. Rather than just coming in for about an hour on Sundays, members make the commitment to attend the classes and workshops, which often are held on Mondays and Thursdays. "The classes give people the chance to start looking at their lives," Berdell said. "People are dealing with some hard stuff. We are there for them."

Being there for the members means understanding that people come to the center with different needs. Many, the three ministers find, have been "religiously abused." Others, espe-

cially those who deal with sexual orientation issues, have to relearn how to live openly and honestly rather than in the proverbial closet.

"People don't have to live their lives with the stress and tension of a lie," Casey said. "That is one of the first things we teach."

The center has a number of pamphlets available on personal growth written by Casey, who also has published several books. The Moffett-Chaneys graduated from a three-year program at the Living Enrichment Institute before starting the God Connection.

Wuest is the first person they actually have coached through the process to become a minister. "It is nice to know that if we left, the center would still be a safe place," Berdell said.

The God Connection always is looking for new members. Each Sunday celebration begins with a 9 a.m. preservice followed by a 10 a.m. worship service and a 11 a.m. after-service, which includes a social

time, a sharing circle and "goodies."

The God Connection shares an older church with a stamp collecting group, which owns the building. The Moffett-Chaneys said the relationship has been extremely positive but hope to buy their own building someday.

They also have a goal of 300 full-time members—a huge jump from the 60 members today. But all three of the ministers are excited with what is happening in the God Connection and see that as a realistic goal.

The one thing they do want potential visitors to realize is that they offer a "no pressure" welcome.

"We just want people to feel like they have a home here," Casey said. "We want to be welcoming." ■

The GOD CONNECTION will hold an Entertainment Extravaganza and Silent Auction featuring headliner Theresa Demarest and several other performers from 6 to 10 p.m. April 28 at 4828 N.E. 33rd Ave. For more information call 503-481-7591.

TOM STEVENSON is a Portland-based free-lance writer and a full-time Portland State University student who can be reached at ruraltom@yahoo.com.

Happiness is a new pair of shoes.

**JOHNNY
SOLE™**

815 SW Alder Street | Portland, OR 97205
503.228.5844 | Upstairs
503.225.1241 | Downstairs

Holy Week at St. Stephen's Episcopal Parish
A Welcoming Congregation
Maundy Thursday
7:30 P.M. Holy Eucharist
Good Friday
5:30 P.M. Tenebrae Service
Easter Sunday
7:45 A.M. and 10:00 A.M. Holy Eucharist with Choir
Breakfast after 7:45 A.M. service
(Child care and Sunday School at 10:00 A.M.)

The Rev. Lawrence Falkowski, rector
503-223-6424
S.W. 13th and Clay in downtown Portland
(parking in PSU structure at 13th and Market)

**VISUALIZE YOUR
Inner Beauty**

- Personal Image Design
- Hair & Wig Styling
- Specializing in Trans-Formation
- Professional Makeup
- Exp. with feature film & TV
- Friendly Private Salon

CHRISTINA'S
*Authentic
Creations*

503
286-7000

Raized Printing

We specialize in **business cards** using thermography, die cutting, embossing, and foil stamping.

Call us at: 503.239.6694 or visit our website at: www.raizedprinting.com

Bring in this ad for a 10% discount on your first order