

atives a "coming out" letter explaining why he was returning ahead of schedule. Some responded by sending him a letter full of Bible quotations, showing just how evil and depraved he had become.

Partial or provisional acceptance of gay men and lesbians, although better than outright rejection, is still not enough. Duffy says we still are dealing with persecution if acceptance depends on having to confess the sinfulness of our feelings.

Rhodes expands on the topic: "We gays and lesbians are not here just to be ministered to. We must be able to be fully one with any religious community that truly accepts us." He means that a truly accepting church would have gay men and lesbians sharing power and leadership and would recognize their right to change the teachings of the church, "just as any other individual and group, through their experiences, changes the teachings of the church they are part of."

Dave Jenkins illustrates the need for total acceptance. He could have continued his ministry at a church that officially accepted gay men and lesbians as long as he did not do the one forbidden thing: utter the words "I am a self-avowed practicing homosexual." But, as unavoidably as in a parable, on Dec. 31, 1999, he found himself proclaiming that sentence from the pulpit and thereby losing both his church and his livelihood.

Jenkins felt a call to ministry in his early teen years. He also began to feel homosexual attractions. Because he was involved in conservative religious denominations he decided he would deal with his feelings by remaining celibate.

But that turned out not to be enough. His repeated attempts to become a pastor were rebuffed because he was not married—a step he was not willing to take.

Eventually, Jenkins received an



An umbrella group of congregations welcomes people of all sexual orientations

appointment as minister within a more liberal congregation in the United Methodist Church. It allows individual congregations to become "reconciling"—that is, openly minister to gay, lesbian, bi and trans people. However, the official position of the denomination is a) homosexuality is incompatible with Scripture, b) gay men and lesbians may not be ordained as clergy and c) ceremonies of union may not be performed in the church.

Ministering to a congregation that was 20 percent to

30 percent gay and lesbian would be perfect, Jenkins thought, but it proved difficult. He felt honor bound not to come out from the pulpit, so he was limited in the kind of support he could comfortably give to nonstraight congregants in their demands for fuller acceptance. Although the rules caused him untold misery, as pastor he was the one who had to ensure his congregation obeyed at least the letter of his denomination's clear teachings about homosexuality.

While attempting to discuss his difficulties with supervisors, Jenkins was reminded not to say specifically, "I am a self-avowed practicing homosexual." If he uttered that sentence, they would be forced to take steps to remove him

from the pulpit. Jenkins had no trouble avoiding the forbidden sentence because he was not "practicing." But that was to change.

At a nonchurch-related convention Jenkins shared a hotel room with an openly gay friend. One night he worked up the courage to ask the acquaintance just to hold him. The friend agreed. Jenkins' eyes tear up as he recalls that night.

"I didn't sleep at all," he says. "I savored every minute of the experience. The euphoria lasted for weeks."

But the euphoria wore off, and Jenkins found himself longing for more, and he decided it was time to end his 45 years of celibacy. He wanted his first experience to be emotionally as well as physically safe, and eventually he found some-

one to share his all-important first encounter. Jenkins expected to feel shame and guilt, but the opposite was the case. He describes it as "the most spiritual experience of my life," its significance heightened by the fact that it was a loving gift from a friend. However, he recognized that it was more about compassion than about passion.

Soon after, Jenkins met someone with whom he had his first passionate sexual relationship. But on the morning after their first night together, he received a reminder that his inner conflict was not over. He had just taught a Bible study class at church when a parish-

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With a flair for drama, Dave Jenkins arranged to preach one last sermon on New Year's Eve 1999. The church was packed. His sermon topic: "I am a self-avowed practicing homosexual." As if saying the forbidden words was not enough, he chose his last act as a minister to be a bit of civil disobedience.

Dave Jenkins took a giant leap of faith

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