

It is raining as the car crosses the Willamette River for a Sunday morning meeting with leaders of Potter's House Ministries Life Center. Through the windshield wipers on a residential street in Southeast Portland, the first impression is that of a strangely beautiful building that looks part house, part church, morphing into something new.

It's difficult to think about a personal evolution without glancing at one's religion or spiritual beliefs. But for sexual minorities, remaining devout can feel like an exercise in futility as far as mainstream churches go.

The recent emergence of those that minister to faith beyond cultural stereotypes has helped remove some of the stigma encountered when entering a traditional place of worship. Although solid gains have been made in acceptance of gay, lesbian and bi people, trans inclusion has lagged. Potter's House is helping change this.

The church's lower level entrance is a wide door opening into a large room used for nonservice gatherings. Adjacent to that is an office of sorts, where Potter's House leaders are waiting to talk.

"We are a Bible church. We teach what is in here," lay pastor Eric Brown says as he gestures with the simple black book in his hands.

A period of silence passes. "We get everything we need right here," Brown adds.

Although it is not connected with the numerous Potter's House Ministries found typically in the Deep South, a Bible church practices a certain literal tradition of interpreting Scripture.

"You just can't expect people to be ready to hear God's word when they walk in here," lay pastor Cynthia Butts says. "There is so much anger in so many people that they need time to come to terms with their lives before they

AN OPENING TO GOD

Potter's House Ministries reconnects worshipers with religion

by Kelly Reilly

can accept God's message."

Potter's House is something of an "unministry," leaving large pockets of room for personal issues and a "custom approach" to opening the hearts of people to the word of God. This seems sensible for an organization that performs outreach to the sexual minorities community.

Potter's House got its start in the 1980s. The church, which had between 40 and 50 members during the early 1990s, since has shrunk to about 12 members, perhaps because of the growing acceptance of gay men and lesbians in some mainstream churches.

"We do a Sunday service and then other programs during the week," Butts says. Those activities include dances, Bible studies and outreach to sexual minorities.



Lay pastors Cynthia Butts (top left), Sharon Messerschmidt (top right) and Eric Brown (center) enjoy Thanksgiving dinner Nov. 10 at Potter's House Ministries Life Center

For example, Potter's House held its annual Thanksgiving dinner Nov. 10 for Northwest Gender Alliance, Portland's largest trans organization. The church brought the bird, and about 30 group members brought everything else.

"It's a great time," alliance president Tracy Whelan says. "We've been doing this for a

long time. It's a great chance for people to get together. You know the holidays are so hard for some."

The church itself is a small but inviting room. It has a spiritual glow about it, with simple stained glass windows, lots of musical instruments and a spate of chairs around a simple black metal rostrum. It is a warm place of worship.

Potter's House takes its name from the book of Jeremiah: "This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 'Go down to the potter's house and there I will give you my message.' So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel.... Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel."

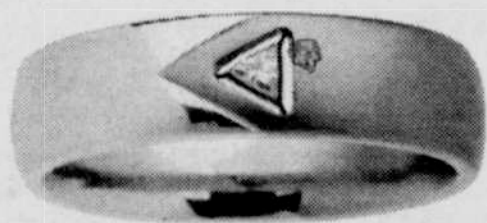
The ministry certainly follows this metaphor in its approach. After listening to the stories of coming out, of burdens lifted, of challenges met, it becomes clear that Potter's House is more about restarting an individual's relationship to God than about God's relationship to the individual. It seems to be more about establishing the link to God and then letting things take their course.

"A person has to become open before they can move forward," Butts says. "A lot of people are so angry when they come in, they are at the end of their rope, and they need time and listening help to work through it." □

POTTER'S HOUSE MINISTRIES LIFE CENTER is located at 3830 S.E. 62nd Ave. For more information call 503-775-5024.

KELLY REILLY is a professional journalist living in Portland. Her e-mail address is kelly_reilly@hotmail.com.

YES!



That is my FINAL ANSWER

Extraordinary Selection

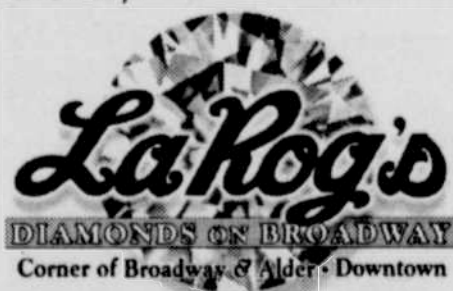
Designer commitment bands and rings from Tacori and Jeff Cooper.

The world's most perfectly cut diamonds from Hearts for Eternity.



James Giardina
Your Downtown Jeweler with Pride

Parking validated for Alder Street Garage or Smart Park



Oregon's Family Business of the Year

(503) 223-5051

539 SW Broadway

www.Larog.com

MARVIN SALLES

Associate Broker

- * Innovative Marketer
- * Experienced Buyer's Agent
- * Attentive Listener

503.320.1271
www.marvinsalles.com

John C. Scott
REAL ESTATE



Cat-N-Doggie Do's



"A Cut Above"

- Boarding Available
- All Breed Professional Grooming
- Pickup/Delivery Available
- No Tranquilizers Used
- Early Drop Offs

Norma Trepanier

Master Groomer

8028 SE Powell Blvd. Ste. 103 • Portland, OR 97206

(503) 771-5331

Mon-Fri: 8am-5pm • Sat: 9am-3pm

CERTIFIED
CAH
COMpanion Animal Hygiene



Discreet—Personal—Innovative
Photography—503.892.2677