

# Herland

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## VOICE

July, 2000

### REPORT FROM CLEVELAND

By Jim McKinley-Oakes

The United Methodists, with nine million members worldwide are the second largest Christian denomination. They meet every four years at a delegates' convention to set policy. They have been debating the institutional church's relationship with LGBT people since 1972. Each year they have taken a more reactionary position. This year they were expected to take the backward step of prohibiting any of their churches from being "reconciling"; i.e., accepting of gays and lesbians. While we were not able to change their hearts to welcome open LGBT people into their church as pastors or permit holy unions, we were able to keep them from moving backwards.

On Wednesday May 10, Soulforce, led by Rev. Mel White, held a demonstration and civil disobedience outside the convention center. The convention had refused to allow us onto the floor. Missing the historical irony, they had said we could sit in the balcony. 191 demonstrators, with several hundred supporters looking on, blocked the exit of the convention center and said "We won't let you out until you take the correct action that God loves all of her/his children." The 191 were arrested, held in cells for several hours and paid \$155 in fines for disorderly conduct. The police and guards were uniformly polite, jovial, and supportive. One officer told us she is a lesbian and several others were vocal in their support.

We were with several of our (s)heroes. Yolanda King, Martin Luther King, Jr's daughter met with us Tuesday, spoke to the press on our behalf, and gave a great speech with quotes from her father and from Maya Angelou. The following people came for at least three days or the entire week and were arrested with us: Rev Don Faldo, Rev. Gregory Dell, and Rev Jimmy Creech all Methodist ministers who were tried by the church for performing Holy Unions. Dell is serving a two year suspension and Creech had his orders removed. Dr. Rodney Powell was a leader of SNCC in the 50's and 60's. He is a bisexual man in a longtime marriage to Dr. Gloria Johnson-Powell whom he met in medical school. He said, "We remember when the Bible was misused to exclude racial minorities from the churches. Today that same Bible once misused to support slavery, apartheid, and segregation is being misused to

*(continued page 3)*

### PRIDE 2000



*The Herland float was warmly greeted by the crowd waiting at 39th and Penn.*



### Herland Activities

**Two-Spirits — 7:00 PM, Saturday, July 1.**  
A gathering of Native American lesbians and their friends.

**Supper Club — Saturday, July 8. Meet at Herland at 5:30PM.** Everyone is invited.

**Bike Ride — 8:00 AM, Sunday, June 16.**  
Call 942-1535 for information.

**HSR Board Meeting — 4:30 PM, Sunday June 16.** Open to all.

**Two-Spirits — 7:00 PM, Saturday, August 1.**

# SAINT SYBIL

Sybil Ludington, Matron Saint of the Forgotten Woman, is an occasional contributor to this space.

Dear Sybil,

Well, I had another lovely Oklahoma moment tonight, 'round about midnight. The weather was fabulous, not too hot, not too cold, not too breezy; the moon almost full; the Governor's lawn prettily planted and of course no common working-people houses across the street anymore to distract from the Governor's glory and give offense. A beautiful night to be alive. Not such a good night to die. I got to bed about 1 a.m. and then couldn't sleep, so now I am up writing to you. I keep thinking of the wrongness of capital punishment, as well as the futility of my protests.

Because, I ask you, just what good did this little exercise do? There were *eight* of us out there, eight out of half a million, protesting an execution that took place in our names. I can imagine the gate guard smirking to Keating in the morning - "just eight this time, sir", and the Guv digging into his bacon and pancakes, well satisfied.

The man who was executed didn't know we were there, so we didn't help him any. There were a few folks protesting down at the prison, but likely he didn't know they were there either. Here he was, 29 years old, being killed by society for a terrible crime he committed twelve years before - when he was in massive sexual thrall to the woman whose husband he helped kill. That'll teach him, I guess.

It's not a fun pastime, this midnight gathering. When a person who is clearly guilty of a very bad crime is executed, it is an hour of sorrowful contemplation and protest. When someone who might well be innocent (Robyn Parks always comes to my mind) is executed, it is extremely painful. It is going to be very hard later this year when an obviously unbalanced woman is scheduled to be killed in our name.

So why in god's name do we do it, what use is it, the executions go on and on and no one cares that there are eight or ten of us out here who want it to stop.

Help me please,

Sissie Fess

Dear Sissie,

So you're asking me to tell you that you can sleep in when your government kills in your name? Think how you'd feel if you didn't go there one night, and Tom didn't go either, and neither did Bea or Bill or any of the others - and there was *no one there*. Imagine with what gusto Keating would tackle his breakfast the morning after that no-show!

And imagine the opposite of that scenario - imagine that every person in Oklahoma City who deplores and despises the death penalty showed up one night - they would think it was a riot, they'd have to call out the guard to contain you all, and breakfast would be like ash in the Governor's mouth.

Even if that doesn't happen, you know you are right and you know that your side will win - and every little thing you do will hasten the day. So keep the faith, and keep pushing that boulder up the hill - one day it will stay up there and not roll back down again.

In sisterhood,

Sybil

*Editor's Note: On June 15, Oklahoma executed William Bryson. His execution was the fourth in four weeks with two more scheduled in the near future. A recent study by Columbia University documents the failure of the criminal justice system to implement the death penalty within reasonable standards of fairness. Oklahoma, has had serious errors in at least 75% of the state's death penalty cases, the report shows.*

*The Oklahoma Coalition Against the Death Penalty has called on Governor Keating to implement a moratorium on all executions in the State of Oklahoma until a thorough, full and independent evaluation and investigation into all death row cases in the state can be conducted.*

*Opponents of the death penalty will continue to stand vigil in front of the Governor's for each execution.* □

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support intolerance and discrimination against sexual minorities. We African-Americans had to take our truth to the streets before anyone would listen. It's time homosexual-Americans took their truth to the streets as well. This Soulforce event gives us that chance."

Dr. Arun Ghandi, who lived with his grandfather Mahatma Ghandi was arrested for the first time in his life and shared many stories of his grandfather. Rev. Robert Graetz came with his spouse, and daughter. Rev. Graetz was the first and for a long time the only white pastor to stand with Dr. King during the Montgomery bus boycott. Their home was bombed twice and they received threats against their children. Rev. Phil Lawson was there with his brother Rev. Dr. James Lawson who mentored Dr. King in Gandhian non-violence.

Dr. Lawson, the current Chair of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, said "Gays and lesbians have a more difficult time than we did. We had our families and our churches on our side. All too often, they have neither."

Whew! And these folks were not just making an appearance. They were integral. I feel so humbled and incredibly honored to have met them and worked with them.

The civil disobedience went well. My cell mate was a retired minister who was fired from his first church for going to jail during the civil rights movement. We were all released by dinner. Several bishops and ministers and laity from the convention came out to support us. One woman bishop was arrested with us. The convention did not vote our way, but they did not move farther right, and we sparked a lot of conversation and controversy. We had a lot of press coverage in Cleveland, but none elsewhere except for NPR as far as I can tell. I imagine that having such powerful solidarity between civil rights leaders, LGBT activists, and people of faith is threatening to the New York Times, and the Washington Post.

Another exciting factor was that probably no action for LGBT liberation has ever had such a large percentage of straight allies working with the LGBT folks. We had three transgendered people

arrested. They are my new standards for courage. None of them were abused by the police and jailers who were all cordial, friendly, or openly supportive. That was wonderful. It certainly wasn't the 60's.

I have never been in an action with so many Christians. It was a great education which I needed. They were some of the most passionate, mature, loving seekers of justice I have ever met. And not one even blinked when I said that I am Pagan. One of the straight arrestees was Rev. Nancy Gibson who came with her 11 year old daughter Katie in memory of a seminary classmate who killed herself following her denial of ordination because she came out as a lesbian.

Even more expansive than being confronted by my anti-religious prejudice, was being immersed in a culture of non-violence. I was deeply moved and challenged by the compassion of the people. I feel that they have invited me to stretch in difficult and wonderful ways. I think and hope that I can. During one point Fred Phelps's people were shouting at us the most hateful, and cruel things I have ever encountered. I thought "how can Mel possibly expect me to love THEM?" Then my pal Freeman said that he had been told that the loudest hate monger was Phelps's son. I thought about how at eighteen I had wanted my father's approval and that now I would not like the person I was then. And I thought about how horrible it must be to grow up with Fred Phelps as a father. Although the young man still scared and disgusted me, I began to feel pity and even compassion for him. I felt so blessed and lucky to be where I was and not where he was. Then a young Baptist minister said to me, "You know, Phelps is converting a lot of people to our side. In a way we are lucky he is here."

The intention of the action was clearly expressed by the leader Rev. Mel White, "We are using this civil disobedience and mass arrest to deliver a clear message to leaders of all the Christian churches. This tragic debate about God's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered children must end. The suffering has gone on far too long. We are recruiting and training our allies to help us end that suffering."

At a press conference and debriefing held Thursday, May 11, Greg Marlan and Karen Weldin, Soulforce co-chairs for this event, announced a four-year Soulforce strategy to help end discrimination against sexual minorities by the United Methodist Church. That campaign - RELIGHT THE FLAME - was announced Thursday to show solidarity with United Methodist allies inside the Convention Center who were risking arrest (many of them the second time this week). Thursday afternoon, May 11, when the delegates voted to maintain their LGBT policies twenty-seven United Methodist leaders, including Bishop Joseph Sprague (Northern Illinois) and Bishop Susan Morrison (Central New York), were arrested after staging a Pray-In on the stage of the Convention Center.

To learn more about Soulforce check out [www.soulforce.org](http://www.soulforce.org) (not .com). □

[www.herlandsisters.org](http://www.herlandsisters.org)

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