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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

UNEXPECTED PARTICIPANTS IN DEMOCRACY: REFUGE, COMMUNITY, AND ACTIVISM IN A CONGREGATION OF THE METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Debra D. St. John
Norman, Oklahoma
2001

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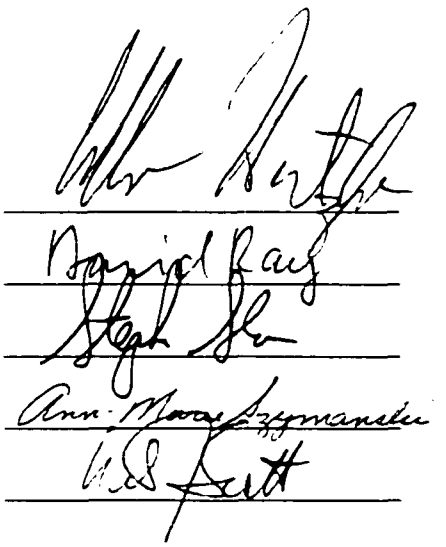
REFUGE, COMMUNITY, AND ACTIVISM IN A CONGREGATION OF THE METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

BY



Acknowledgements

In May of 1996, Justice Anthony Kennedy writing for the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Romer v. Evans* (116 S. Ct. 1650) stated, "In effect, Colorado's Amendment Two classifies homosexuals to make them unequal to everyone else." He asserted, "A State cannot deem a class of persons a *stranger* to its laws." Much of the argument in opposition to gay rights is based on religious convictions. Interestingly, Jesus is quoted in Matthew 25:43 as saying, "I was a *stranger* and you did not invite me in." The continual struggle to obtain equal rights has been assisted and resisted by those espousing differing religious beliefs. Sexual minorities face the many of the same political and religious obstacles to liberation as have Blacks, women, Jews, and other minorities. The necessity of the struggle for each minority group is difficult to fathom in a country that claims "all are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights." If we as a people are equal and possess God given rights which are not to be separated from us, why have each of these minorities been treated as *strangers* to these rights in their own land? Why have so many groups of American citizens had to go through many of the same birthing pains to achieve equality? With these questions in mind, I have for many years taken a great interest in the study of civil rights issues.

Through qualitative course work at the University of Oklahoma, I began a term long study of an unusual phenomena that I had earlier stumbled upon—a congregation of a religious denominations with an outreach to sexual minorities. The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches considers

homosexuality, heterosexuality, and bisexuality a gift from God. This fellowship seeks to advance the gay liberation movement through the inclusive message of salvation for sexual minorities as sexual minorities. I was intrigued by this denomination's message, my research continued to grow in depth and richness, and my dissertation was born.

The acceptance, generosity, and hospitality of the local congregation of Wichita Falls Metropolitan Community Church where I conducted my lengthy observations made the richness of my data possible. The members of the congregation through interviews and casual conversations provided me with a wealth of information and insight into the denomination and what it means to the gay community of Christian. A special thanks is given to Lisa Goldberg and Annette Beavers who provided me with legal briefs, court decisions, and access to National Center for Lesbian Rights Director, Kate Kendall. My sincere gratitude is given to Rev. Margaret Walker who provided me with access to the church's library, the denomination's by-laws, documents, district conference business meeting, the weekly operational duties, and her vision for the church. Through her eagerness to assist me in my research she introduced me to numerous leaders in the Fellowship including Rev. Troy Perry, founder, Rev. Nancy Wilson, elder and pastor of the Los Angeles "mother" church, and Rev. Eleanor Nealy, South Central District Coordinator for the Fellowship. I also wish to thank Rev. Nancy Horvath, minister of the WFMCC congregation following the departure of Rev. Walker. Her courage and perhaps God's divine plan placed her as pastor of the local congregation at a time when

remaining closeted was impossible. The openness of the congregation and its ministers despite the homophobia and hate crimes that plague the denomination and it congregants has earned my deepest respect and appreciation.

This lengthy tome could not have been written without the guidance of my dissertation chair, Dr. Allen Hertzke. His enduring patience, stern criticism, and enthusiastic praise motivated and matured my writing throughout the process. Certainly, my utmost respect is given to Dr. David Ray, who guided me through the doctoral program and unselfishly suggested that Dr. Hertzke would be a most beneficial mentor to me during the writing of my dissertation. Professors Hertzke and Ray's generous and sincere desire for me to achieve the utmost from this experience speaks to their professionalism and commitment to the students they guide. I express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Stephen Sloan, who provided me with friendship, laughter, walks across campus, lunch, and advice throughout my graduate school journey. I will forever value the friendships of these three scholarly men. They have my eternal admiration. I extend my gratitude to my other committee members, Professors Ann-Marie Szymanski and Wilbur Scott who offered words of encouragement and helpful suggestion along the way. In addition to my committee members, I must mention friend and former classmate, Alison Howard whose generosity is beyond measure. For her constructive criticisms and proof reading of every page, I cannot thank her enough.

While I have been working on the dissertation away from the attentive eyes of my committee, there have been others who have encouraged me to keep prodding

along. Friends and colleagues at Collin County Community College including Dr. Belinda Newman, Dr. Tracey Elliot, Professors Gordon O'Neal, and Martha Tolleson's personal support of my efforts to complete this dissertation while teaching a twenty-one hour course load is greatly appreciated.

Certainly, no dissertation could ever be written without the support of a loving family. To my parents who instilled in me from an early age the importance of an education, an interest in politics, and a religious faith, I am most humbly grateful. Your love, encouragement, and support have made all the difference throughout my life and this academic journey. I am most blessed by my children, Kure and Trent Croker, who believed in me, encouraged me, and continually expressed pride in me. Their sustained support and love is more than a mother could ever hope for from her children. I only hope that I can demonstrate the same level of enthusiastic support for their efforts as they reach for their dreams.

Many people have made this degree possible, but there would have been no quest for the doctorate and no dissertation without the encouragement, patience, insight, and love of my partner of thirteen years, Pam Humphrey. I am forever grateful for the enormous sacrifices she has made in getting me to this point. I promise to make the most of what she has helped me achieve and I offer her my enduring admiration and eternal love.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the role that the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches plays in the gay rights movement, by examining how the denomination addresses the social discrimination and religious condemnation directed toward its predominately gay congregations. An extensive ethnographic study of an individual congregation demonstrates how the denomination's three-pronged message of salvation, community development, and Christian social action contributes to local political action. The narrative explores barriers faced by the denomination in coordinating efforts with secular gay and lesbian groups, but the importance of faith communities in the American cultural, social, and political experience is reaffirmed.

The findings indicate that this denomination offers a unique contribution by empowering certain individuals who would otherwise not participate in the gay liberation movement. The ethnographic study suggests that in more conservative areas of the nation, small congregations of gay Christians may provide the only voice on behalf of the sexual minorities in the community. Although the political impacts noted seem minimal when compared to the substantial gains of other social and political activists, when calibrating the difficulty in changing society's views toward homosexuality, a degree of political efficacy is achieved.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

The screen at the front of the church sanctuary is lowered and the lyrics of the first song of the morning worship service are placed on the overhead projector. Recorded music is provided for the call to worship. The organist and the pianist each step off the stage, take hand-held microphones, and begin leading the congregation in the songs as they are placed on the overhead projector. Many of the members rise to their feet as the call to worship through song begins. Several of the congregants begin clapping their hands in time with the music and a woman starts playing a tambourine. "T" and "B" make room for their young children to move from the pew to the aisle. The children seat themselves on the floor in order to see more clearly the lyrics to the songs projected on the screen. I noticed "T" reach over and take the hand of her mother. "T's" daughter moves back on to the row between her mother and grandmother and takes their hands in hers as they sing the choruses. I am witnessing the loving scene of three generations worshiping together. Many in the congregation are holding hands during the song service. Young, old, male, female, Black, White, Hispanic, and Asian -- as they sing, the entire lengths of several pews of individuals are holding hands, forming a chain high in the air that crosses the aisle to the other rows of pews. I stopped singing, listened, and watched carefully from an ethnographer's prospective, as this congregation praisec God in song. As I grew silent and observed, I had an epiphany. I could almost feel the unity and love being demonstrated by this little group of worshipers just as can be observed in many congregations across America. The true spirit of the people seemed to be reflected as they swayed back and forth, united by the harmony of their voices and hands clasping hands that were raised high in the air. As I focused on adding this observation to my field notes, I realized that what I had witnessed could not be observed by conducting a survey or interview. Being there in the midst of a group of believers, immersed in a worship service, brought me, as a researcher, to what appeared to be the very essence

of the spirit of the group.

This appearance of a spirit-filled congregation was made surreal by the reality of who composed the majority of the congregations as well as the denomination. My observation took place in a congregation of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC), which according to Dart, "is an odds-defying denomination—one that worldwide has 300 churches made up largely of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people (GLBT)."[1] The declaration that the church is Christian, with its alternative interpretations of the traditional biblical injunctions against same-gender sexual behavior, is appalling to most religious organizations that view such conduct as an anathema to God. The possibility that UFMCC could be considered a mainline-style church body is a difficult concept to grasp for a lot of mainline religious groups, most members of the GLBT community, and even many gays who consider them self to be Christians. Nonetheless, the UFMCC does exist, is steadily growing in membership, employs seminary degreed ministers, has representatives on several committees of the National Council of Churches, and has official observer status at World Council of Churches' meetings.[2]

The three-pronged gospel mission of salvation, community, and Christian social action taught by Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches is supported by its claim that an alternative interpretation of the scriptures offers salvation to gays without having to deny their sexual orientation. Combining the inclusive practices of language, women pastors, church works, and social activities,

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[1] J. Dart, "The Success of the MCC: Gay and Mainline." *Christian Century*, (2001, March 21-28), p. 6. Although the membership of the congregations of UFMCC have a larger percentage of gay men and lesbians than any other sexual minority, bisexuals and transgendered people are included among the members and serve on church boards and as pastors within the denomination.

the denomination attempts to build community for many gays[3] who have been abandoned by broader society and their immediate families. Because MCC[4] primarily serves a minority group, the denomination has an activist side. From its founding, Rev. Troy Perry has exhorted MCC to actively participate in the struggle for broader civil and religious rights for nonheterosexuals.[5]

Given the above discussion regarding UFMCC, the following questions arise. First, can lesbians and gay men who have suffered at the hands of the teachings of the traditional Church find a church to be an instrument of liberation and not the closet of shame and self-loathing? Second, can the very Bible that has been used to justify casting sexual minorities out of the protective environment of the Church, be understood as a source of refuge from condemnation? Third, can the UFMCC help build community for an exiled subculture of gay Christians? Finally, can a religious organization that primarily serves the GLBT community contribute to gay rights efforts in a manner comparable to black churches during the civil rights movement? In part, my intent is to try to determine if GLBT people who seek to maintain or establish an identity based on both their sexuality and their redeemed nature in Christ can find sanctuary in a church that claims to be a Bible-based, interdenominational, Christian religion.[6] I contend the UFMCC plays a significant role in the

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[2] ____, ibid.

[3] The congregations' membership includes gay men, lesbians, bisexual and transgendered people. I will refer to the various permutations of sexual minorities as gay, GLTB, gay men and lesbians, and gay community interchangeably unless I am specifically discussing only one segment of this group.

[4] The denomination utilizes MCC or the "Fellowship" interchangeably when referring to the UFMCC denomination. Likewise, local congregations make reference to their congregation and others with the title MCC. In order to provide an ethnographic approach to my observations, I will use the terms interchangeably where appropriate.

[5] Dart, p. 6.

[6] Most mainline denominations would disagree with UFMCC's claims of being Bible based and cite numerous scripture as proof that the denomination teachings are contrary to the majority of theologians' interpretation of the Word of God. UFMCC offers a hermeneutical argument for re-

transformation of gay Christians who have viewed their condition as an abomination to God. I also hope to illustrate that if the Church provides a sanctuary to some gay men and lesbians, such a refuge can be a source of cognitive liberation for its members. My findings indicate that when community is established and trust is restored, UFMCC offers opportunities through the activities of the church to develop and enhance skills that are transferable to civic engagement. In addition, I will attempt to demonstrate the activists' role the denomination is pursuing in the gay rights movement. At least indirectly, the UFMCC's gospel mission has political implications for gay liberation. Thus, this research posits that the religious resources provided through UFMCC offers a unique benefit to some participants, especially those who would not otherwise engage in social activism on behalf of gay rights. Furthermore, this field study will attempt to demonstrate the importance of local congregations of UFMCC to the gay rights movement in areas where secular gay organization are few or nonexistent.

THE THEORETICAL CONTEXT

The theoretical context of this study emerges from several areas of scholarly

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examining the Biblical message. In a simple declaration of what UTMCC believes the church by-laws state: Christianity is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and is the religion set forth in the scriptures. Jesus Christ is foretold in the Old Testament, presented in the New Testament, and proclaimed by the Christian Church in every age and in every land. According to the denomination, its faith is based upon the principles outlined in the historic creeds: Apostles and Nicene. UFMCC's states: We Believe (1) In one triune God, omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient, of one substance and of three persons: God-our Parent-Creator; Jesus Christ the only begotten son of God, God in flesh, human; and the Holy Spirit—God as our Sustainer. (2) The Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God, showing forth God to every person through the law and the prophets, and finally, completely and ultimately on earth in the being of Jesus Christ. (3) That Jesus...the Christ...historically recorded as living some 2,000 years before this writing, is God incarnate, of human birth, fully God and fully human, and that by being one with God, Jesus has demonstrated once and forever that all people are likewise Children of God, being spiritually made in God's image. (4) That the Holy Spirit is God making known God's love and interest to all people. The Holy Spirit is God, available to and working through all who are willing to place their welfare in God's keeping, and (5) Every person is justified by grace to God through faith in Jesus Christ. Retrieved on August 5, 2001 from http://www.ufmcc.com/state.htm.

investigation including religion and politics, civic society, gay politics, and social movements. This study will begin to develop a theoretical perspective on the possible significance that a congregation of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches through its message of salvation/refuge, community, and Christian social action contributes to religion, civic culture, gay politics, and social movements. The contributions to the literature from the national perspective of the three-pronged mission of UFMCC will be examined. Of particular significance will be the case study conducted at the grassroots level. The findings will demonstrate how the three-pronged gospel corresponds with the social science literature as each prong is carried out through a local congregation's efforts.

Religion and Politics

Clearly, religion and politics have been long intertwined and the relationship between the two institutions is certain to continue to exist. The religious right has begun to be perceived as a major factor in politics and because of its influence in the selection of candidates, the outcome of elections, interest group formation and lobbying, policy development, and legislative achievements at the local, state, and federal levels.[*] By examining the third prong of UFMCC gospel mission: Christian

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[*] T. Baker, R. Steed, and L. Moreland, (Eds.), discuss the role of the religious right is playing in politics in *Religion and Politics in the South: Mass and Elite Perspectives*. (New York: Praeger, 1983). For additional discussions regarding the religious rights as a factor in politics see M. Moen, *The Christian Right and Congress*. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989); J. Green, J. Guth, L. Kellstedt, and C. Smidt, "The Characteristics of Christian Political Activists: An Interest Group Analysis." In W. Stevenson, (Ed.), *Christian Political Activism and the Crossroads*. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), pp. 133-172; J. Wallis *The Soul of Politics: Beyond "Religious Right" and "Secular Left."* (San Diego: Harvest Book, 1995); R. Wuthnow, "The Political Rebirth of American Evangelicals." In R. Liebman and R. Wuthnow, (Eds.). *The New Christian Right*. (New York: Aldine, 1983), 186-187. The religious right is a factor in the selection of candidates according to J.Haskell, K. Sutten, and P. Squire, "Old Style Politics and Invisible Challengers: Iowa's 1st and 4th Districts." In T. Kazee, (Ed.), *Who Runs For Congress?: Ambition, Context, and Candidate Emergence*. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1994), 101-135. Also see A. Hertzke, "Vanishing Candidates in the 2nd District of Colorado." In T. Kazee, (Ed.),

social activism, this dissertation will contribute to the underdeveloped literature concerning the impact of one denomination of the religious left on politics.[8]

Why should we be interested in the UFMCC's role in politics and society? Religion and politics is a growing concern in American political science.[9] According

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(1994), pp. 82-100; and K. Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States.* (3rd edition), (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 1997). For a discussion on the Religious Right's impact on elections see C. Bull and J. Gallaghar, *Perfect Enemies: The Religious Right, the Gay Movement, and the Politics of the 1990s.* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1996). See A. Hertzke, *Representing God in Washington: The Role of Religious Lobbies in the American Polity.* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1988) for research on the formation of religious interest group and lobbying. Also see M. Moen, (1989) and K. Wald, (1997), Religious groups are engaged in influencing policy development according to M. Cruinkshank, *The Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement.* (Great Britain: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1992). The Religious Right has begun to influence legislation according to R. Mohr, *Gay/Justice: A Study of Ethics, Society, and Law.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) and M. Nava and R. Dawidoff, *Created Equal: Why Gay Rights Matter to America.* (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1994). For a debate on the Religious Right's impact on legislation at the local level see E. Jenkinson, *Censors in the Classroom.* (New York: Avon, 1979) and A. Crawford, *Thunder on the Right.* (New York: Pantheon, 1980). See J. Persinos, "Has the Christian Right taken Over the Republican Party?" *Campaigns and Elections* 15 (1994): pp. 20-24, for research regarding the Religious Right's influence on legislation at the state level and J. Boles, *The Politics of the Equal Rights Amendment.* (New York: Longman, 1979) and at the federal level in S. Blumenthal, "The Righteous Empire." *New Republic.* (1984, October 22), pp. 18-24.

[8] The religious left is viewed as an alternative to the religious right and has formed their own national coalitions, such as Interfaith Alliance and Culture Renewal as alternatives to the Christian Coalition. They embrace social causes they feel are ignored by the Christian Coalition. According to J. Wallis, founding editor of *Sojourners* magazine, the two main principles behind the organized effort are: (1) To show there is an alternative to the Religious Right that offers a broader view of both the church and politics. Politics as defined by the ancient Greeks—"Concern for the public good." and (2) To help forge a new kind of politics that emphasizes not just personal responsibility, but social justice, not just personal values, but good neighborhoods; not just rebuilding families, but rebuilding communities destroyed by global economic and politics (G. Heinlein, "Religious Left: Liberal clergy holds the power, observers say," *The Detroit News.* Retrieved June 20, 2001 from http://www.detnews.com/1996/menu/stories/63464.htm. See R. Fowler and A. Hertzke, *Religion and Politics in America: Faith, Culture, and Strategic Choices.* (Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, Inc., 1995) and C. Earp, "The Potential of the Christian Left in the 1990's." *Z Magazine* 7 no.1, (1994, January), pp. 21-22. For a different perspective see R. Nash's *Why the Left is Not Right—The Religious Left: Who They are and What They Believe* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), who claims that the religious left consist of three major groups in the United States. One is a movement with numerous subdivisions, includes many of the clergy, denominational leaders, and academicians in America's largely theologically liberal mainline denominations. A second branch of the Religious Lefts is composed of the politically liberal Roman Catholics in America. The third branch is a group who profess to be theologically conservative Protestant—evangelicals. Despite some theological differences with representatives of the Catholic and mainline Protestant Left, they are in agreement in the areas of political, economic, and social matters. Also see J. Wallis, *The Soul of Politics: Beyond "Religious Right" and "Secular Left."* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1995).

[9] D. Leege and L. Kellstedt, *Rediscovering the Religious Factor in American Politics.* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1993); C. Gilbert, *The Impact of Churches on Political Behavior: An Empirical Study.* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1993); J. Green and J. Guth, "Religion, Representatives, and Roll Calls." *Legislative Studies Quarterly 16* (1991), pp. 571-578; K. Wald, (1997); Fowler and Hertzke,

to the literature, churches help to foster skills needed for political involvement.[10] In addition, religion has been found to be important in voting behavior.[11] Furthermore, religious organizations have shown to be actively involved in lobbying.[12]

In this study, religion will be shown to play a role in mobilizing gay Christians for the gay rights movement. UFMCC may be providing an added dimension in the gay rights movement as illustrated by its participation in the gay rights Marches on Washington in 1979, 1987, and 1993, as well as their co-sponsorship of the Millennium March on Washington in 2000. The co-sponsorship of UFMCC of the 2000 march was a major point of contention for many in the GLBT community who find organized religion to be a major barrier to securing equal rights for gays. Despite the rejection of gays as Christians by traditional conservative religions, UFMCC believes it provides a much-needed spiritual wing to the gay rights movement. Salvation, the first prong of the denomination's gospel message, claims

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(1995); and M. Noll, (Ed.). *Religion and American Politics.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[10] S. Verba, K. Schlozman and H. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Volunteerism in American Politics.* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995) and Fowler and Hertzke, (1995).

[11] J. Hougland and J. Christenson, "Religion and Politics: The Relationship of Religious Participation to Political Efficacy and Involvement." *Sociology and Social Research,* 67, (1983): pp. 405-420; D. Hughes and C. Peek, "Ladies Against Women: Explaining the Political Participation of Traditional and Modern-Role Females." *Political Behavior,* 8 (1986): pp. 158-174; R. Macaluso and J. Wanat, "Voting Turnout and Religiosity." *Polity, 12* (1979): pp. 158-169; O. Martinson and E. Wilkening, "Religious Participation and Involvement in Local Politics Throughout the Life Cycle." *Sociological Focus, 20* (1987), pp.309-318; S. Rosenstonde and J. Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America.* (New York: Macmillan, 1993); Fowler and Hertzke, (1995); Green et al. (1994); A. Hertzke, *Echoes of Discontent: Jesse Jackson, Pat Robertson, and the Resurgence of Populism.* (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 1993); A. Menendez, *Religion at the Polls.* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977); and A. Reichley, *Religion in American Public Life.* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1985).

[12] J. Adams, *The Growing Church Lobby in Washington.* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdman's, 1970); R. Zwier, "The World and Worldview of Religious Lobbyists." Paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, Ill., (1988); P. Weber and W. Jones, *U.S. Religious Interest Groups: Institutional Profiles.* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1994); L. Dexter, "Administration of the Social Gospel." *Public Opinion Quarterly 2,* (1938): pp. 294-299; L. Ebersole, *Church Lobbying in the Nation's Capital.* (New York: Macmillan, 1951); Hertzke, (1988); Wald, (1997); and D. Hofrenning, *In Washington but Not of It: The Prophetic Politics of Religious Lobbyists.* (Philadelphia; Temple University Press, 1995).

to provide the opportunity to gain cognitive liberation that offers legitimacy and empowerment to its congregants. Such empowerment can be a force for mobilization and political activism.[13] As a point of comparison, in the past when Biblical interpretation was customarily being used to justify slavery, many African American Christians chose instead to reject the "monologic" solution used by masters to support the "slave ideology." By reinterpreting the difficult text, "the black churches never hesitated to disavow any interpretation of Scripture that would attempt to legitimate racism, slavery, or any other form of human bondage."[14] Once, a pro-slavery Biblical interpretation served as an agent of oppression. However, many Black theologians who see African American religion as a force of political liberation and activism have interpreted the Biblical message differently.[15] A groundbreaking study of southern Blacks during the early 1960s recognized the importance of religion to political mobilization among Blacks.[16] Why do I discuss the significance of the black

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[13] Psychologically oriented resources such as personal efficacy and self-esteem can directly promote political action. See S.Verba and N. Nie, *Participation in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972) and L. Mibrath and M. Goel, *Political Participation.* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1977).

[14] Given the racist ideology that legitimated the "slaveocracy" of the antebellum South, it is amazing that more African Americans have not rejected the Bible. M. Cartwright, "Ideology and the Interpretation of the Bible in African American Christian Tradition." *Modern Theology* 9, (1993): p. 142.

[15] H. Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited.* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, [1949] 1981); J. Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* New York: Seabury Press, 1969), *A Black Theology of Liberation.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, [1970] 1986), and *Spirituals and Blues: An Interpretation.* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972); V. Harding, *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America.* New York: Vintage Books, 1983); P. Paris, *The Teachings of the Black Churches.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985; and C. West's *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity.* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982) and *Prophetic Fragments.* Grand Rapids, MI: African World Press, 1988).

[16] D. Matthews and J. Prothro, *Negroes and the New Southern Politics.* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966). Also see S. Peterson, "Church Participation and Political Participation." *American Politics Quarterly* 20 (1992): pp. 123-39; R. Smith, "Black Power and the Transformation from Protest to Politics." *Political Science Quarterly* 96 (1981): pp. 431-43; R. Browning, D. Marshall, and D. Tabb, *Protest Is Not Enough.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); F. Frazier, *The Black Church in America.* (New York: Knopf, [1963], 1974); and C. Lincoln, *The Black Church Since Frazier.* (New York: Schocken, 1974). Some relatively recent studies argues that the belief that Black churches encourage political participation among Blacks is a myth; instead the church encourages "political quietism," suppressing mass activism among African Americans. See A. Reed, *The Jesse*

churches in a discourse concerning sexual minorities? The understanding of the Bible as viewed through the African American lens has implications for a gay and lesbian hermeneutics.[17] The church as an indigenous organization could, according to McAdam and Morris, provide the leadership base, social interaction, and communication networks required for collective action.[18] The possibility that MCC's theologians may regard their inclusive religion as a force for cognitive and political liberation and as a source of activism is worth exploring.

When asked about challenges within the denomination, Reverend Perry talks about reaching out to self-loathing gay men and lesbians, who ask, "How can God possibly love me?"[19] Perry states that he copes with what he calls the narcissism and sexual obsessions of the gay community that he says leads to alcohol and drug use. This internalized homophobia causes the members to believe God hates them. The first prong of the gospel message of UFMCC seeks to provide an alternative refuge to the often self-loathing behaviors associated with those who believe they are facing discrimination and prejudice. The denomination message of salvation is given through a reinterpretation of the Bible that is inclusive of sexual minorities.

Because of certain religious beliefs, institutions have condemned gay and lesbian sexual orientation and have made enormous efforts to cure, repress, and criminalize the gay and lesbian "lifestyle." In fact, many in the community reject any association with religious groups because of the excommunicative role that many mainstream denominations have represented. Therefore, the interesting phenomenon

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Jackson Phenomenon: The Crisis of Purpose in Afro-American Politics. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

[17] N.Wilson, *Our Tribe: Queer Folks, God, Jesus, and the Bible* San Francisco: Harper, 1995).

[18] McAdam, (1982); Morris (1984).

of a church with a special outreach to gay men and lesbians, which accepts the individuals as gay people and Christians, rather than as candidates for reparative therapy, suggests that the Metropolitan Community Churches could play a unique role in gay liberation and political activism.

Civic Culture

The civic culture literature considers the significance of citizen participation in the political process.[20] Douglass and McMahon maintain a successful democracy requires that citizens be involved and active in politics, informed about politics, and influential; in other words, to posses the skills to be rational-activists.[21] In truth, citizens in democracy are not well informed, not deeply involved, not particularly active, and not rational in calculating the casting of their votes.[22] Civic culture also helps to explain change that results in higher levels of freedom and equality.[23] Elkins argues that a cognitively sophisticated public plays an important role in democratic life. Such sophistication in the citizenry helps bring policymaking institutions closer to the people, which is important because democratic institutions cannot be easily built from the top down. According to the literature on civic engagement, democratic institutions, including governments, must be built up in the everyday traditions of

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[19] J. Glionna, "A Path Less Traveled." *Los Angeles Times*. (1998, March 16), pp. 1-7

[20] Verba, Schlozman and Brady, (1995).

[21] P. Douglass and A. McMahon, *How to be an Active Citizen*. (Gainsville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1960).

[22] B. Berelson P. Lazersfeld, and W. McPhee, *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), p. xiv; A. Campbell, P. Converse, W. Miller, and D. Stokes, *The American Voter*. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1960); and J. Woodward and E. Roper, "Political Activity of American Citizens." *American Political Science Review: XLIV*. (1950): pp. 872-885

[23] R. Wilson, *Compliance Ideologies: Rethinking Political Culture*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

trust and civic virtue among its citizens.[24] The second prong of UFMCC's gospel message calls for building community for the socially and spiritually exiled sexual minorities in society. The denomination believes that a sense of community can be developed when an environment of trust is established. In order to maintain a community, the development of communal skills is necessary. Once trust is established, a sense of fellowship can evolve and the skills that are learned through membership in the community can be used to benefit the group.

The levels of economic development and social mobilization and the relative concentration of resources or income have explained democracy's success or failure, patterns of political culture or beliefs, and leadership skills and strategies.[25] One can point to the fact that the civic culture of the Southern Black churches provides an example of how these churches helped develop skills that led to a high level of participation by its members in the civil rights movement.[26] From an organizational perspective, Peterson explains how being engaged in "church activities can serve as a resource for participation, promoting both voting and more demanding forms of political activity."[27] Peterson contends that "participation in decision making within a church (can) spill over and enhance the odds of an individual becoming involved in

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[24] R. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. (Princeton: Princeton Press, 1992).
[25] R. Dix, "History and Democracy Revisited." *Comparative Politics*. 27 no.1. (1994): pp. 91-105.
[26] S. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972); A. Greeley, *The Denominational Society*. (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman,1972); W. Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*. (New York: Doubleday, 1955); S. Mead, *The Nation with the Soul of a Church*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1975); A. Reichley, *Religion in American Life*. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1985); A. deTocqueville, trans., *Democracy in America*. Translated by G. Lawrence, J. Mayer, and A. Kerr, (Eds.). (Garden City, New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1969); Fowler, (1985); Wald, (1997).
[27] F. Harris, "Something Within: Religion as a *Mobilizer* of African American Political Activism." *The Journal of Politics* vol. 56, no. 1 (1994, February): pp. 46-47.

political activities."[28] I propose to demonstrate through the use of grounded theory that the community provided through the second prong of the denomination's gospel mission and the culture that exist within a "gay church" can assist in the development of the communal skills that led to participation in the gay liberation movement.

Gay Politics

The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches grew out of a Pentecostal minister and gay activist's desire to provide a place for gays to worship. In 1969, Perry stated, "We organized with the hopes of reaching those people who cannot or will not attend church because of the attitudes of other religions concerning homosexuals."[29] An activist before he was the founder of UFMCC, Perry had already begun to be embraced as the local gay community's new spokesperson for gay liberation. The new Gay Liberation Movement exploded on the modern day political scene with the Stonewall riots in New York's Greenwich Village. The media coverage promoted the growth of the movement in the seventies. In turn, the increased activism by the GLBT community brought about a strong reaction from the New Right in the eighties.[30] A second major impediment in the struggle to liberate gays occurred with the appearance of AIDS.[31] Despite the initial setbacks caused by the impact of AIDS, the disease has served as a rallying point for gay activism.

Gay politics is growing in visibility and importance.[32] The debate addressing

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[28] S. Peterson, Church Participation and Political Participation. *American Politics Quarterly* 20. (1992): p. 124.
[29] M. Thompson, (Ed.). *Long Road to Freedom: The Advocate History of the Gay and Lesbian Movement.* (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1994).
[30] Mohr, (1988).
[31] B. Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement.* (Boston, MA: G. K. Hall, 1987, 1995).
[32] D. Haider-Markel and K. Meier, "The Politics of Gay and Lesbian Rights: Expanding the Scope of the Conflict." *The Journal of Politics* 58 no. 2, (1996): pp. 332-349; A. Wilson, (1995); M. Edelman,

gays in the military became a political hot button issue during the 1992 election.[33] As Congress turned to the allocation of monies for medical research and social programs, AIDS funding has been a part of the budgetary discourse for over a decade.[34] Hate crimes against gay men and lesbians were included in the discussion at the 1997 Conference on Hate Crimes in Washington D.C.[35] A hate crimes bill passed in the Senate in 2000, only to be stopped in the House.[36] Nonetheless, a heated debate over the necessity of hate crimes legislation continues in our nation's capitol, State Houses, and municipalities across the country. Anti-discrimination policies dealing with housing, the workplace, child custody, adoption rights, sexual privacy, same-sex marriage, and partnership rights are producing increased sensitivity and heightened

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The Gay Vote, 1990: Preliminary Findings. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., (1991); Phelan, (1994); Mohr, (1988); K. Wald, J. Button and B. Rienzo, "The Politics of Gay Rights in American Communities." *American Journal of Political Science*, 40, (1996); and M. Blasius, *Gay and Lesbian Politics*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

[33] R. Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1993); M. Weinberg and C. Williams, *Homosexuals in the Military: A Study of the Less Than Honorable Discharge*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1971); J. S. Davis, "Military Policy Toward Homosexuals: Scientific, Historical, and Legal Perspectives." *Military Law Review*, 131,(1991): pp. 55-108; M. Benecke and K. Dodge, "Military Women in Nontraditional Job Fields: Causalities of the Armed Forces' War on Homosexuals." *Harvard Women's Law Journal* 13 (1990): p. 215; and W. Scott and S. Stanley, *Gays and Lesbians in the Military: Issues, Concerns, and Contrasts*. (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1994).

[34] Shilts, (1988).

[35] Hate crime is generally defined as unlawful conduct motivated by animus against the victim's perceived race, religion, ethnicity, or sexual orientation according to P. Green, D Strolovitch, J. Wong, and R. Bailey, "Measuring Gay Populations and Antigay Hate Crime." In *Social Science Quarterly*,82, no.2, (2001 June): pp. 283-284. See L. Wang, *Hate Crime Laws*. (New York: Clark, Boardman, Calligan, 1994).

[36] B. Miller and L. Humphreys, "Lifestyles and Violence: Homosexual Victims of Assault and Murder." *Qualitative Studies*, 3, (1980): pp. 169-185; K. Berrill, Anti-Gay Violence and Victimization in the United States: An Overview. In G. Herek and K. Berrill, (Eds.) *Hate Crimes: Confronting Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men*. Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1992), pp. 19-24; G. Comstock, *Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 14-22, 31-46; B. Dineen, "Houston Police Claim Progress in Fighting Hate-crimes." *This Week in Texas*. (1991, September), p. 22; and D. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988).

hostilities.[37] Although not yet ready to accept the idea of same-sex marriage, Vermont has given legal recognition to same-sex couples through civil unions. UFMCC's third prong of Christian social action espoused by Rev. Perry will be investigated to determine the amount of involvement the denomination has in social and political activism. By specifically examining from both the national and local perspectives the significance of the denomination's third prong exhortation for social activism, this research can help identify the role UFMCC plays in the broader struggle for gay rights.

Social Movements

Research provides evidence that religious groups have spearheaded numerous social movements.[38] Social movements are important to politics and the policy making process. Social movements are characterized by activity directed toward

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[37] See Mohr, (1988); L. Button, B. Rienzo and K.Wald, *Private Lives, Public Conflict: Battles Over Gay Rights in American Communities.* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1997) for a discussion on housing anti-discrimination statutes. In E. Boggan, M Haft, C. Lister, and J. Rupp, *The Rights of Gay People: An American Civil Liberties Union Handbook* (rev. ed.), (New York: Banton Books, 1983), pp. vii-x, 32-49; and W. Rubenstein's (Ed.), *Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Law.* (New York: The New Press, 1993) the authors address anti-discrimination laws in the workplace. See S. Pershing, "Entreat Me Not to Leave Thee: *Bottoms v. Bottoms*, and the Custody Rights of Gay and Lesbian Parents." *William and Mary Bill of Rights Journal 3,*(1994), p. 289; R. Rivera, "Legal Issues in Gay and Lesbian Parenting." In F. Bozett, (Ed.), *Gay and Lesbian Parents.* (New York: Praeger, 1987), pp. 199, 266, footnote 79, and W. Blumenfeld and D. Raymond, *Looking at Gay and Lesbian Life.* (Boston: Indian University of Pennsylvania, 1993) for more on anti-discrimination laws concerning child custody and adoption rights respectively. Also see R. Robson's *Lesbian (Out)law: Survival Under the Rule of Law.* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1992), pp. 47-59, examination of sexual privacy, W. Eskridge, Jr., *The Case for SAME-SEX MARRIAGE: From Sexual Liberty to Civilized Commitment.* (New York: The Free Press, 1996); Wolfson (1994-1995); and B. Cox, "Same-Sex Marriage and Choice-of-Law: If We Marry in Hawaii, Are We Still Married When We Return Home?" *Wisconsin Law Review,* (1994), p. 1033, on same-sex marriage, and Rubenstein, (1993), for a discussion of partnership rights.

[38] See W. Bainbridge, *The Sociology of Religious Movements.* (New York: Routledge, 1997), for an extensive bibliography of religious movements; also see D. Brady and K. Tedin, "Ladies in Pink: Religious and Political Ideology in the Anti-ERA Movement." *Social Science Quarterly* 56, (1976): pp. 564-575; Fowler and Hertzke, (1995); McAdam (1982); J.D. McCarthy, "Pro-Life and Pro-choice Mobilization: Infrastructure Deficits and New Technologies." In M N. Zald and J.D. McCarthy, (Eds.), *Social Movements in and Organizational Society.* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1986), pp. 49-66; and Wald (1997).

changing institutions and behaviors of importance to a society.[39] Often a movement's mode of political expression consists of both conventional strategies and unconventional tactics and behaviors for organizational action including organizing demonstrations, legitimacy bargaining, and media usage.[40] UFMCC claims to be a social movement of gay Christians that are participating in the gay rights movement. UFMCC has utilized many modes of political expression, both conventional and unconventional that will be discussed in later chapters. The amount of social movement literature has expanded in the last several decades. According to McCarthy and Zald, people often will act upon their interests or deprivations.[41] The crucial resources needed by a movement may be obtained from sources external to the group undergoing strains and external support may be based upon altruistic motives.[42] Many analyses of social movements do not distinguish between the movement and the movement's organizations.[43] Whether revolutionary or reform oriented, movements often are composed of competing-cooperating organizations.[44] It is necessary for each organization participating in the movement to combine

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[39] McFarland, (1983).

[40] Freeman addresses both the conventional and unconventional tactics of organizational action. See J. Freeman, "Resource Mobilization and Strategy: A Model for Analyzing Social Movement Organization Actions." In M. Zald and J. McCarthy, (Eds.), (1975). Also see M. Lipsky, "Protest as a Political Resource." *American Political Science Review*, 62, (1968): pp. 144-158, for a discussion of organizing demonstrations, H. Hubbard, "Five Long Hot Summers and How They Grew." *Public Interest* 12, (1969): pp. 3-24, for legitimacy bargain, and for use of the media for political expression see H. Molotch, "Media and Movement." In M. Zald and J. McCarthy (Eds.), *The Dynamics of Social Movements: Resource Mobilization, Social Control and Tactics*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Winthrop Publishers, Inc., 1979), pp. 71-93; Oberschall (1977), J. Martin, "Confessions of a non bra-burner." *Chicago Journalism Review* 4, (1971): p. 11, and Freeman (1975).

[41] McCarthy and Zald (1979).

[42] G. Marx and M. Useem's "Majority Involvement in Minority Movements: Civil Rights, Abolition, Untouchability." *Journal of Social Issues* 27 (1971, January) identifies external movement resources. The motives for external support to movement efforts is discussed in N. Leites and C. Wolf, Jr., *Rebellion and Authority*, (Chicago: Markham, 1970).

[43] McCarthy and Zald, (1979); Oberschall (1973).

resources in order to produce the agenda and the modus operandi that mobilizes the most support. According to the literature, all kinds of things can become resources for movements including material resources such as: jobs, income, savings, and the right to material goods and services. Authority, moral commitment, trust, friendship, skills, and habits of industry are regarded as non-material resources.[45] In addition, legitimacy, money, facilities, and labor can be considered resources.[46] An analytical examination of the resources provided by the UFMCC will be undertaken including: the level of commitment and trust, the development of skills, use of facilities, contribution of labor and money, and the degree of legitimacy the denomination brings to the movement. UFMCC's claim of being a social movement organization is worthy of scholarly investigation. An examination of the resulting benefits and barriers that the denomination's social activism offers the gay rights movement is explored. This exploration will help clarify the competitive-cooperative relationship the religious institution of UFMCC has with secular gay rights organizations.

The Research Problem

The UFMCC with its three-pronged message of salvation, community, and Christian social action is of interest to the discipline for the advancement of several of the literatures addressing politics including: religion and politics, social movements, civic culture, and the newly emerging area of gay politics. First, by examining a parish of MCC, a contribution can be made to broaden studies regarding the

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[44] McAdam, (1982); M. Zald and R. Ash, "Social Movement Organizations: Growth, Decay, and Change." *Social Forces*, 44, (1966): pp. 327-341; L. Killian, "The Significance of Extremism in the Black Revolution." *Social Problems*, 20, (1972), pp. 41-48.
[45] Oberschall (1973), p. 28
[46] McCarthy and Zald ,(1977), p. 122.

importance of churches and faith in American politics.[47] Second, current social movement literature suggest that social movements are important to politics and the policy making process.[48] According to McAdam, for a movement to develop, three factors are required: a high level of organization within the aggrieved population; the collective assessment of the prospects for successful insurgency within the same population; and an encouraging political alignment of groups within the larger political environment.[49]

The UFMCC denomination was established as a result of the disenfranchisement of many lesbians and gay men from their family churches to serve as a refuge for the exiled and a messenger of salvation.[50] Since its founding, UFMCC has included social justice in its mission statement and has been involved with the actions taken by the broader gay liberation movement.[51] The denomination's members are undoubtedly aware of how they, as gay Christians, are defined by their religious counterparts who seek to oppress them. Therefore, it seems logical to suggest that a study of a congregation of MCC will be useful in advancing the discipline's understanding of social movements.

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[47] See D. Hoge and E. Zulueta, "Salience As a Condition for Various Social Consequences of Religious Commitment." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 24.(1984): pp. 21-38; G. Willis, *Under God: Religion and American Politics*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990); S. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion*. (New York: Basic Books, 1993); F. Harris, "Religious Institutions and African American Political Mobilization." In P. Peterson, (Ed.), *Classifying by Race*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 278-310; Fowler and Hertzke, (1995); Wallis, (1995); Wald, (1997).

[48] See M. Olson, Jr., *The Logic of Collective Action*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965); M. Lipsky, "Protest as a Political Resource." In *American Political Science Review* 62 (1968): pp. 1144-58; S. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); J. Jenkins, "Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 9, (1983): pp. 527-53; W. Gamson, "Commitment and Agency in Social Movements." *Sociology Forum*, 6, (1991): pp. 27-50; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, (1996).

[49] McAdam, (1982).

[50] This is the first prong of UFMCC's gospel mission.

Third, the civic culture literature discusses how institutions such as churches help to foster skills needed for political activism.[52] In the context of political opportunity, a need for recognized leadership exists for the purpose of centralized direction and coordination.[53] A study of the UFMCC will offer insight into the talents developed and utilized in church related activities that serve to enrich the community for the exiled, its leadership and augment other civic skills.[54] UFMCC's founder, Troy Perry, has been recognized among the "Who's Who" of the leadership of the gay liberation movement. In addition, the mobilization and sustaining of mobilization recognizes the need for a set of leaders. UFMCC conducts leadership seminars throughout the denomination. Traditionally, churches and other religious groups have prepared charismatic individuals to lead others in the pursuit of social justice. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahandas Gandhi stand as prime examples of religiously devoted men whom carried their beliefs forward in the struggle for justice.

Finally, the literature of gay politics is insufficient. There has been some effort given to the discussion of issues concerning gays, lesbians, and their interest groups. Blasius and Phelan offer an extensive historical sourcebook of the issues and ideas surrounding gay and lesbian politics.[55] However, the role of lesbian and gay Christians in society and culture has not been addressed in any depth. The concept of a gay Christian is an oxymoron to those who condemn same-gender sexual behavior.

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[51] This is the third prong of UFMCC's gospel mission.

[52] Leege and Kellstedt, (1993); Verba et al., (1995).

[53] McAdam, (1982).

[54] This is the second prong of UFMCC's gospel mission.

[55] See A. Cohen, "Obstacles to Equality: Government Responses to the Gay Rights Movement in the United States." *Political Studies*, 30, (1982): pp. 59-76; J. D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); J. Gonsiorek and J. Weinrich, (Eds.), *Homosexuality: Research Implications for Public Policy*. (Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1991);

and a paradox to be addressed by gay men, lesbians and other proponents of gay rights.

I offer a study of an organization that has not previously been investigated by political scientists. Although, we do know something about gay voting, lobbying, interest groups, and the gay rights movement, gay politics continues to remain understudied.[56] It would be an understatement to acknowledge that we know even less about the potential political significance of gay religious organizations and the possible role that is played by gay Christians in the struggle for gay liberation.

In truth, there is a void in the literature. Despite the fact that the gay rights movement predates the Stonewall riots of 1969; mainstream political science scholarship has generally ignored gay and lesbian politics. Haider-Markel and Meier argue that salient political issues such as military service, AIDS funding, hate crimes, or anti-discrimination polices have received only journalistic analysis.[57] The authors argue that gay and lesbian politics at least superficially fits the pattern established for other morality politics issues. Moral disputes over values have a long political history in the United States. Gay politics promises to provide politically salient issues that the discipline should begin to address.

Politically pertinent issues involving two competing coalitions have often

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Blasius (1994); Wald, Button and Rienzo (1996). M. Blasius and S. Phelan, (Eds.), *We Are Everywhere: A Historical Sourcebook of Gay and Lesbian Politics.* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

[56]For more on gay voting see Edleman (1991); C. Gingrich and C. Bull, *The Accidental Activist: A Personal and Political Memoir.* (New York: Scribner, 1996) and J. Schmalz, "Gay Politics Goes Mainstream." *New York Times Magazine,* 29, (1992): p. 42, "Gay Lobbying and Interest Groups" in E. Marcus, *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990: An Oral History.* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), pp. 170-172; Blasius, (1994); Cohen, (1982); D'Emilio, (1983); and Gonsiorek and Weinrich, (1991). For additional information on the gay rights movement refer to J. Lauritsen and D. Thorstad,. *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement, 1864-1935.* New York: Time Change Press, 1974), and B. Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement.* (Boston: MA: G.K. Hall, 1987, 1995).

[57] Haider-Markel and Meier, (1996).

formed around religious beliefs and/or partisanship.[58] In the case of MCC, we have a gay religious organization confronting both the religious and partisan rhetoric of the religious right.[59] Furthermore, gay Christians face resistance from the disenfranchised secular gay movement. A large segment of the GLBT community sees organized religion as fervently pursuing an all out holy war against granting gays the rights they claim they are currently denied. UFMCC claims that it is challenging its congregations to develop the tools needed to stand against what they see as intolerance. Tolerance is perhaps the next step in the goal of acceptance sought by the GLBT community.[60] This research will provide evidence to support the theory that the UFMCC offers a unique contribution to the gay rights movement. The denomination's three-pronged mission empowers some members of the GLBT community to participate and provides certain resources that would otherwise not be available to the movement. Just as the churches of the past justified slavery, they also offered a message of freedom to the enslaved. Likewise, religion is viewed as the perfect enemy of gay rights. Thus, the theory that a religious organization can be utilized to fight the "fire and brimstone"[61] of condemnation with the good news of

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[58] ____, ibid., p. 332.

[59] See Hertzke, (1993); M. White, *Stranger at the Gate: To be Gay and Christian in America*. (New York: Plume, 1994); Fowler and Hertzke, (1995); Bull and Gallagher, (1996); Wald, (1997); B. Bawer, *Stealing Jesus: How Fundamentalism Betrays Christianity*. (New York: Free Press, 1997).

[60] According to Thomas Paine, "Tolerance is not the opposite of intolerance, but it is the counterfeit of it. Both are despotism, one assumes itself the right of withholding liberty of conscience, the other of granting it." T. Paine, *The Rights of Man*. (reprint edition),(New York: Penguin, 1987), p. 58.

[61] The phrase "fire and brimstone" is commonly used to describe condemnation to hell. The scriptures declare, "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murders, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" which is the second death (Revelations 21:8). The abominable is a reference to those who are polluted with unnatural lust according to A. Clarke's, *Clarke's Commentary*. (Nashville: Abingdon), pp. 1058-1059. Unnatural lust is a reference to sexual desire for members of the same sex. See (Romans 1:26-27).

salvation coming down as "tongues of fire"[62] espousing acceptance is worth studying. Such a study can provide new insights for the discipline of political science regarding the role of religion in civic culture, social movements, and gay politics.

WHAT LIES AHEAD

In Chapter Two, a description of the methodology and how it was implemented will be discussed in detail. I will explain the reasoning behind the method chosen as well as the various research tools utilized in gathering the data. Next, I will elaborate on the process of managing and analyzing the enormous amount of data that was collected during my fieldwork. Chapter Three of this dissertation begins with an historical overview of the events and individuals that envisioned, established, and advanced the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC) as a Christian denomination. The focus of the study will proceed from a generalized account of the denomination's mission and experiences to a comprehensive and unique synopsis of the Wichita Falls Metropolitan Community Church (WFMCC). Through this study of a small congregation affiliated with the international denomination of the UFMCC, I will illustrate how the church carries out each of the three-prongs of the denomination's gospel message of salvation/refuge, community, and Christian social action. In Chapter Four, an analysis of the church's efforts to provide a refuge for exiled gay and lesbian Christians and its inclusive

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[62] The expression "tongues of fire" comes from the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. "When the day of Pentecost came, they (the apostles) were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be *tongues of fire* that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues (languages) as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1-5). This implies that at the founding of the Christian Church, the gospel was preached in all tongues, symbolizing the fact that it was for *all* nations (B. Johnson. *People's New Testament: The Common and Revised Versions, with References and Colored Maps with*

message of salvation is explored. An extensive discussion of the impact that self-loathing, biblical interpretation, and cognitive liberation can have on gay Christians is addressed. Chapter Five offers evidence of the practices utilized by the congregation in building community for the GLBT subculture that often atomizes itself from the hostilities of the broader society. An investigation of how the congregants are provided the opportunity to develop the civic skills of leadership, fund raising, and information sharing by means of their involvement in social events and organizational duties associated with operating a church is considered. The local congregation's efforts to advance the denomination's commission to Christian social action (social justice) are investigated in Chapter Six. The barriers and benefits faced by the local congregation's role in two separate First Amendment battles are explored. Finally, Chapter Seven attempts to summarize the progression of WFMCC's grassroots journey through the three-pronged gospel mission of the UFMCC from the perspective of a small non-cosmopolitan community. The intended contribution of this exploration to the literature and future research possibilities are presented.

Explanatory Notes, Vol. I. (Nashville, Tenn: Gospel Advocate Company, 1978), p. 420. The concept presented in this research is one of "fighting fire with fire."

Chapter 2: Methodology

My research agenda is motivated by the concern of how marginalized people can gain political leverage. The less metropolitan areas of the country offer fewer resources for social activism, especially among sexual minorities where the subculture's small numbers increase the likelihood of remaining closeted. When the sources of mobilization within the community of sexual minorities are all but non-existent, it could be important to examine any role that gay Christians play in the gay rights struggle. Identifying and examining any civic skills gained through involvement in the church might be important because the social capital available within the congregation can be utilized to advance gay rights. Christian social action is significant because it could help explain the opportunity for political mobilization among the subset of gay Christians in the larger gay culture. This research is significant because it will increase our understanding of the alternative resources for political and social activism provided through an unconventional religious entity in a conservative environment.

The methodology was chosen because of its appropriateness to the subject matter and as well as complimenting personal strengths. Social justice issues and religious views are highly emotional topics that can be difficult to quantify. The literature on qualitative research emphasizes this point.

> The nature of the research problem addressed naturally lends itself more to qualitative types of research, for instance, research that attempts to uncover the nature of persons' experiences with a phenomenon, like illness, religious conversion, or addiction. Qualitative methods can be used to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known. It can be used to gain novel and fresh slants on things about which quite a bit

is already know. Also, qualitative methods can give the intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods.[1]

The works of Fenno and others, which have dared to step out of the ivory towers of academia and into the real world of participant observation, encouraged me. Fenno agrees that the interviews and reading records yields imprecisionistic verbiage that for the most part is unquantifiable.[2] However, Fenno argues that data such as interviews, observations, and the reading of documents, provides most of the evidence with which to support generalizations about expectations, perceptions and attitudes, norms, roles, and role behaviors, plus the mechanisms operating to maintain harmony among the elements of a political system.[3] Theory grounded in qualitative methodology, including participant observation studies of social and political phenomena, has "soul" and deserves a respected place in scholarly research. According to Fenno, observation is at the heart of political analysis. He argues that participant observation as a mode of research can inform, enrich, and guide theories of politics.[4] In an effort to prod his fellow political scientists to be advised that better data might be collected if political scientists collected it themselves, Fenno asked political scientists two questions. First, why should they leave the journalists in charge of the questions directed to the individual personality? Second, why should we leave them in charge of anecdotes? In response to these questions, Fenno quotes

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[1] A. Strauss and J. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 1990), p. 19.

[2] Fenno's methodology has many critics. See J. Robinson, [Review of *The Power of the Purse: Appropriations Politics in Congress* by Richard Fenno, Jr.]. *American Political Science Review*, 61 (3), (1967, September): pp. 764-767.

[3] R. Fenno, Jr., *The Power of the Purse: Appropriations Politics in Congress*. (Boston: Little Brown, 1966), pp. xxvi-xxviii.

[4] R. Fenno, Jr., "Observation, Context, and Sequence in the Study of Politics." *American Political Science Review*, (1986), p. 4.

Raymond Wolfinger's observation. "The plural of anecdote is data."[5] According to the literature, Kant warns that all knowledge; even knowledge under the categories of space and time depends on the presence of the human observer. Hummel argues, "that until the definition of what is going on is undertaken all further analysis or statistical operation is meaningless."[6] Likewise, Heidegger suggests that scientific laws may be universal, but whether they apply to specific situations depends on the presence of the acting and perceiving subject and the approach he or she takes toward the object.[7] Finally, I draw on the argument of Weber, who states,

> Wherever there exists the possibility of interpretations in principle, there it should be completed; that is, the mere relating of human 'action' to a rule of experience that is simply empirically observed, be it ever so strict, does not suffice us in the interpretation of human 'action.' [8]

GROUNDED THEORY

Empirical research design establishes a hypothesis and then utilizes research as a means of testing and verifying the theory. The emphasis on verifications was brought about by the belief that enough theories had been discovered and must now be tested. Certainly, theorists such as Weber, Durkheim, Marx, Colley, and Mead have generated a large number of theories that can be tested, duplicated, verified, and generalized. The deductive theory methodology includes logical consistency, clarity, parsimony, density, scope, and integration. However, not every subject of research fits nicely into the empirical methodology. Not every phenomenon can be quantified

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[5] D. Hale, (Ed.), *Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. Symposium on the U.S. Congress at Boston College, 1981*, [proceedings]. (Chestnut Hill, Mass: Boston College, 1982), p. 107.
[6] R. Hummel, "Stories Mangers Tell: Why They Are as Valid as Science." *Public Administration Review*, (1998), p. 35.
[7] ____, ibid.
[8] M. Weber, Roscher und Knies und die Logischen Probleme der Historischen Nationaloekonomie. In J. Winckelmann, (Ed.), *Gesammelte Aufsaetze zur Wissenschaftslehre*. (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1922), p. 145.

or measured. Fenno argues, "Surely we cannot construct theories of politics on the basis of observation. But we might ask ourselves whether it is possible to construct theories of politics without observational perspectives."[9] Rather than pursuing testing and verification of a theory, I chose to conduct observational research that is an essential component for building theory. To accomplish this task, I utilized the methodology of grounded theory. Grounded theory requires the discovery of theory from data.[10] The discovery of theory from the data is an important step in research taken prior to verification of a hypothesis. The gathering of data is intimately linked to the theory being built. Immersion in uncovering data requires an extensive amount of time. In order to delve into the intricate details of the research topic, the investigator must first collect adequate amounts of data to develop some level of understanding of the phenomena being studied. As greater understanding of the subject being observed is obtained, a theory regarding the subject under study emerges. As the scientist scrapes off the layers of cultural, political, social beliefs and behaviors, often unanticipated twists and turns lead to continual modifications of what is significant about the discoveries being made. According to the literature, "Generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research."[11] In other words, the revelations that are gained through

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[9] R. Fenno, Jr., (1986), p. 14.

[10] For an in-depth understanding of the purpose and strategies of grounded theory see B. Glaser and A. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research.* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967); Also see M. Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation Methods.* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980), pp. 306-325; A. Kaplan, *The Conduct of Inquiry: Methodology for Behavioral Science.* (Scranton, PA: Chandler, 1964); and H. Becker, "Problems of Inference and Proof in Participant Observation." *American Sociological Review.* 23. (1958): pp. 652-660.

[11] B. Glaser and A. Straus, *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research.* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967), p. 6.

research, generate the hypothesis—theory is a process. Development of the hypothesis is not of the "X causes Y" type. In its final stages the hypothesis is an all-inclusive set of propositions developed to explain the entirety of the phenomenon.[12] Lindesmith describes the analytic induction method:

> The principle, which governs the selection of cases to test a theory, is that the chances of discovering a decisive negative case should be maximized. The investigator who has a working hypothesis concerning his data becomes aware of certain areas of critical importance. If his theory is false or inadequate, he knows that its weaknesses will be more clearly and quickly exposed if he proceeds to the investigation of those critical areas. This involves going out of one's way to look for negative evidence.[13]

Following this method I first I developed a conceptual framework. Concepts are regarded as basic units of analysis in the grounded theory method. Strauss and Corbin explain,

> Conceptualizing data becomes the first step in analysis. By breaking down and conceptualizing we mean taking apart an observation, a sentence, a paragraph, and giving each discrete incident, idea, or event, a name, something that stands for or represents a phenomenon.[14]

According to qualitative research, in a conceptual framework, "descriptive categories are placed within a broad structure of both explicit and assumed propositions."[15] The framework can serve to inform both the methodological and the substantive aspects of the qualitative study. My original conceptual net is provided to illustrate the impetus of my generalizations to help form initial questions and working hypotheses during the beginning stages of data collection, (Appendix A).

Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive,

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[12] D. Nachmias and C. Nachmias, *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*, (2nd edition), (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1981), p. 172.
[13] A. Lindesmith, "Two Comments on W.S. Robinson's 'The Logical Structure of Analytic Induction'," *American Sociological Review*, 17 (1952): p. 492
[14] Strauss and Corbin, (1990), p. 63.
[15] N. Denzin, *The Research Act*, (rev. edition), (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988), p. 49.

naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials--case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, and interactional tests that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives.[16]

Political scientists observe, among other things, the behavior of occupants of political roles. In essence, all social research begins and ends with observation.[17] The literature on observational research states,

> An indispensable part of the study of any social institution, wherever this can be obtained, is deliberate and sustained personal observation...from which the investigator may learn a lot. He clarifies his ideas, which gain in precision and discrimination. He revises his provisional classifications, and tests his tentative hypotheses. What is even more important, the student silently watching a town council or a trade union committee at work, or looking at the conference of politicians and educators, picks up hints that help him to new hypotheses, to be, in their turn, tried on other manifestations of his subject matter.[18]

The three major considerations in observational studies concern what should be observed, timing and recording of observations, and the degree of inference.[19] The extent to which these three major considerations are systematically and rigorously implemented is a criterion by which we can distinguish between controlled and non-controlled observation. The choice between controlled and non-controlled observation depends to a large degree on the research design; that is, controlled observation is most frequently used with experimental research designs and seldom

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[16] N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, (Eds.), *Handbook Qualitative Research*. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1994), p. 2.
[17] Nachmias and Nachmias, p. 155.
[18] S. Webb and B. Webb, *Methods of Social Study*. (London: Longman, 1932), p. 158.

with pre-experimental designs or exploratory studies. The non-controlled system posits fewer commitments on the part of the researcher and allows greater flexibility. The least controlled method of observation is participant observation.[20] According to Lofland and Lofland,

> Participant observation is the process in which an investigator establishes and sustains a many-sided and relatively long-term relationship with a human association in its natural setting for the purpose of developing a scientific understanding about the association.[21]

This approach pertains to those "forms of research in which the investigator devotes herself to attaining some kind of membership in, or close attachment to, an alien or exotic group that she wishes to study."[22] The observer in a complete participant role is wholly concealed; her research objectives are not revealed. Such complete participation makes possible the study of ordinarily inaccessible groups or accessible groups that do not reveal to outsiders certain aspects of their culture.[23]

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

This ethnographic study began as exploratory research. The realization that a denomination existed that had an outreach to the lesbian and gay community was surprising, shocking, and intriguing. As a political scientist, I was curious to see if the church had any impact on the gay rights movement that was comparable to the contribution made by Black denominations during the civil rights movement. Attempting to conceptualize a topic for more specific research, I began to peruse the

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[19] Nachmias and Nachmias, p. 174.
[20] According to Nachmias and Nachmias, norms of objectivity, validity, reliability, and the designs for causal inferences are embodied in participant observation. These norms are consciously made unstructured and flexible so as to maximize the understanding of empirical phenomena (1981), p. 171).
[21] J. Lofland and L. Lofland, *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. (3rd edition), (Davis, California: University of California, Davis, 1995), p. 18.
[22] R. Wax, "Participant Observation," *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan 1968), p. 238.

existing literature. I discovered that a wide range of literature was relevant to my topic. As mentioned in Chapter One, the literature addressing social movements, religion and politics, gay politics, and civic engagement would require my attention in order to assist in my understanding of similar or related phenomena. Because my research is inductive, the concepts, definitions, and theories found in the literature would not be used to define or limit my data collection. However, ignoring the literature would cause me to risk duplicating previous research and perhaps rendering my efforts insignificant. In addition to conceptualizing a topic, defining a research question, and reviewing the literature, the selection of strategies for data collection is essential when choosing a research design. According to the literature, the techniques utilized to conduct research are dependent on several criteria. In an effort to decide the strategies for data collection, I considered the following: (1) how well formulated the theory is before beginning observation; (2) the level of social interaction needed or desired for the observation; (3) the type of information wanted; and (4) the resources that are available for research.[24] After reflecting on my perceived strengths and the information and availability of resources, participant observation was deemed the appropriate data collection method.

The research design of participant observation studies requires non-specified interest and flexibility in determining the goals of the research. Bogdan and Taylor warn the participant observer,

> To enter a setting with a set of specific hypotheses is to impose preconceptions and perhaps misconception on the setting. The ideas and areas of interest one has may not fit the setting and the questions may not be

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[23] Nachmias and Nachmias, pp. 172-173.

[24] J. Williamson, D. Karp, J. Dalphin, and P. Gray, *The Research Craft: An Introduction to Social Research Methods*. (2nd edition). (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982), pp. 45-46.

> relevant to the concerns and behavior of the subject. The participant observer may begin to formulate a new research design or leave the setting.[25]

As I spent time in the field I modified my original ideas and concepts. Tenacity kept me in the setting. For an extended period of time, I did not note any overt presence of phenomenon that was clearly connected the church with social or political activism. Fortunately, perseverance paid off and the phenomena I was hoping to observe transpired. By remaining vigilant, not only did I collect the data related overtly to activism; but the early observational notes also began to have relevance to the overall experience of discovery in the field.

FIELDWORK

Fieldwork is the hallmark of cultural anthropology and the heart of the ethnographic research design. Van Maanen distinguishes between fieldwork and ethnography by stating,

> Fieldwork is the stiff, precise, probably too visual, but nonetheless double-edged notion of participant-observation. Fieldwork asks the researcher, as far as possible, to share firsthand the environment, problems, background, language, rituals, and social relations of a more-or-less bounded and specified group of people... Ethnography is written representation of a culture or selected aspects of a culture. Ethnographies are the results of fieldwork.[26]

The essential core of describing a culture is to aim to understand another way of life from the native point of view. The goal of ethnography is "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world."[27] The ethnographer is both storyteller and scientist; the closer the reader of ethnography comes to understanding the native's point of view, the better the story and the better the

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[25] Bogdan and Taylor, pp. 26-27.
[26] J. Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 1-4.

science.[28] Ethnographical research is referred to as an anthropological method because historically it has been associated with that discipline. Ethnographic techniques are part of a research tradition that has been developed by anthropologists and community-study sociologists according to Wilson.[29] In the field, basic anthropological concepts, data collection methods and techniques, and analysis are the fundamental elements of "doing ethnography."[30] My research is anthropological, but rather than asking anthropological questions, I addressed questions that were relevant to political science.

Ethnographers must keep an open mind about the group or culture they are studying. As a researcher goes into the field, it is impossible not to take some biases and preconceived notions about how people behave and what they think. Biases can serve both positive and negative functions. When controlled, biases can focus and limit the research effort. If the biases are uncontrolled, they can undermine the quality of ethnographic research. Fetterman argues in order to mitigate the negative effects of bias the ethnographer must make specific biases explicit. Incorporation of the ethnographic techniques mentioned above provided quality controls against the effects of biases.[31] The use of triangulation, contextualization, and a nonjudgmental orientation place a check on the negative influence of bias.[32] To combat my own

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[27] B. Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesia, New Guinea.* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul LTD., 1922), p. 25.

[28] D.M. Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step by Step.* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1989).

[29] S. Wilson, "The Use of Ethnographic Techniques in Educational Research." *Review of Educational Research,* 47 (1), (1977, Winter): pp. 245-265.

[30] Fetterman, (1989), p. 12.

[31] ____, ibid.

[32] Glesne and Peshkin describe triangulation as the use of multiple-data-collection methods (C. Glesne and A. Peshkin, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: an Introduction.* (White Plains, New York: Longman, 1992), p. 24). For a discussion on triangulation see Denzin (1970); D. Campbell and D. Fiske, "Convergent and Discriminant Validation by the Multitrait-Multimethod Matrix."

preconceived notions and biases,[33] I utilized theoretical notes[34] not only as a means to gather a deeper insight into the phenomena being observed but also to check my own interpretations of the observation. The longer I was in the field the more I was able to assume the emic perspective of reality. Listening to the congregants' statements of faith, reading the literature provided by the church, and asking the pastor for explanations of various aspects of the services helped me to understand from an insider's perspective. According to Fetterman,

> This emic perspective of reality is instrumental to understanding and accurately describing situations and behaviors. Native perceptions may not conform to an "objective" reality, but they help the fieldworker understand why members of the social group do what they do...Documenting multiple perspectives of reality in a given study is crucial to an understanding of why people think and act the different ways they do. Differing perceptions of reality can be useful clues to individuals' religious, economic, or political status and can help a researcher understand maladaptive behavior patterns.[35]

However, in an effort to combat the danger of "going completely native," I realized an etic perspective was equally important in assuring the validity of my research.[36] Whereas, some ethnographers prefer etically derived data, others are only interested in describing the emic view. I chose to view emic and etic perspectives as "markers

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Psychological Bulletin, 56 (1959): pp. 81-105; L. M. Smith, "An Evolving Logic of Participant Observation, Educational Ethnography and Other Case Studies," *Review of research in education*, 6, (1979): pp. 316-377. According to Fetterman (1989), contexualizing data encompasses placing observations into a larger perspective (p. 29) and a nonjudgmental orientation requires the ethnographer to suspend personal valuation of any given cultural practice (p. 33).

[33] The Christian faith in which I was raised does not condone dancing, drinking, same-gender sexual behavior, or liturgical style of worship services. I witnessed dancing as part of the worship service and banquet festivities, members discussing going to gay clubs for a few drinks, and couples openly displaying affection toward each other during the regular church services. In order to conduct my research, I had to come to understand liturgical aspects of a worship service, suspend my religious training regarding dancing, drinking, and same-gender sexual behavior. I had to assume a phenomenologically oriented research approach.

[34] Theoretical notes have been defined as "Theoretically sensitizing and summarizing memos. These contain the products of inductive or deductive thinking about relevant and potentially relevant categories, their properties, dimensions, relationships, variations, processes, and conditional matrix" See A. Strauss and J. Cobin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), p. 197.

[35] Fetterman, (1989), pp. 30-31.

[36] ____, ibid, p. 32. Etic perspective, the external perspective, or a social scientific perspective of reality.

along a continuum of the different levels of analysis."[37] Thorough fieldwork requires both insightful interpretations and rigorous data collection techniques. Likewise, it has been argued, ethnography requires both emic and etic perspectives. The time-consuming data collection from an emic perspective to ensure validity and usefulness was followed by periods of making sense of the data from an etic perspective. As a further guard against any biases my observations might reveal, I sought assistance from two independent readers whom advised me regarding my lack of clarity and any apparent biases in my interpretations.[38]

RESOURCE ACCESS AND CONNECTIONS

Establishing a dialogue and gaining access to the group under study is perhaps one of the most important aspects of this type of ethnographic research. As a result of the relationship that was developed with the pastor, I eliminated many of the problems associated with this type of research.[39] Having previously made acquaintance with the pastor through an undisclosed source, I called to request assistance in locating information about the UFMCC denomination. I had discovered a book about UFMCC written by Robert Enroth. When I asked Rev. Walker if she was familiar with Enroth's book, *The Gay Church*, she replied,

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[37] ____, ibid.

[38] Dr. Paul Kleine, professor of Educational Research and author of books utilizing qualitative research methods at the University of Oklahoma and Alison Howard, a masters degree graduate in political science and a member of the Jewish faith helped check my cultural and faith based prejudices.

[39] A variety of relationships between the researcher and the subjects of the research have been formulated. Bunker's typology of fieldwork roles includes the complete observer, the participant observer, the complete participant, and the observer participant (B. Junker, *Field Work: An Introduction to the Social Sciences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960). A more detached role of observer, observer-interactant, observer-interactant-participant, observer-interactant-participant-investigateor with the more involved role of peripheral member, active member, complete member, and good-faith member are formulated relationships utilized by Adler and Adler (see P. Adler and P. Adler, *Membership Roles in Field Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987). In addition, Schatzman and Strauss distinguish among watching from the outside, passive presence, limited interaction, active control, the observer as participant, and participation with hidden identity (see L. Schatzman and A.

> No, I'm not. Have you heard of *Don't Be Afraid Anymore* by UFMCC's founder, Troy Perry? It really is the book that gives the history of the denomination. I have a copy you can borrow. You also should contact Nancy Wilson, pastor of the "mother church" of MCC in Los Angeles. I have her book, *Our Tribe*. It is really good. I can loan it to you also. I'll bring them to church Sunday. Right now I am doing a book review as part of my ordination as an official pastor in the UFMCC. The book is by Boswell.[40]

In my preliminary research, I had read Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. Rev. Walker offered to provide me with a copy of her review. The pastor was extremely helpful. Perhaps taking an interest in what they as gay Christians are all about was appreciated. I was not there to judge, or condemn, only to learn from what I observed. This was possibly a change from what the gay church and more specifically gay men and lesbians expected in their daily lives from "straight" society. To reassure the pastor of my intentions, I asked, as an observer, what questions should I ask and what questions did she ask when she came to MCC from the Christian Church. She replied,

> To me it was a matter of the spirituality. As the pastor I often think because a lot of the members come to MCC as dysfunctional people, that we allow them to remain that way. You know, make excuses for their behavior and lack of spiritual growth. This dysfunctional aura bleeds into the congregation. The behavior is played out. We allow excuses for behavior. I'm not sure that is healthy emotionally or spiritually[41]

The pastor's honesty and willingness to share her concerns, books, and book review with me demonstrated the level of access she was willing to provide into the congregation. I realized the importance of avoiding any problems that would hamper my continued access.

UNITS OF ANALYSIS

Strauss, *Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

[40] Personal communications, (1996, February 5).

When formulating a research problem serious considerations must be given to the units of analysis. These entities will influence the research design, data collection, and data analysis decisions. A congregation of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches provided the primary unit of analysis for my ethnographic study.[42] In an effort to examine the role of MCC on a local and individual level, I selected a congregation in Wichita Falls, Texas, to serve as the focus of my case study. The subjects of this study were the individual and collective members of a congregation of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches and the worship services, social activities, ceremonies, congregational business meetings, and a district conference.

Field notes are considered the primary recording tool of qualitative researchers. I described the setting utilizing all of my senses. The sounds and colors as well as the participants within the setting were noted. The participants' genders, ages, social classes, ethnicity, mode of dress, who interacted with whom, their gestures, and their conversations were noted, as was the physical environment.

During the time period that I conducted my observations, the membership of the Texas congregation was fifty-eight with an attendance averaging sixty-three. This is the opposite of what one witnesses in most congregations. Normally, the membership roll is greater than the number of individuals actually attending the church services. I discovered there was a core group of "the faithful" among the membership and regularly a number of visitors. Some came out of curiosity, while others divided their attendance between WFMCC and traditional denominations. In

[41] Personal communications, ibid.
[42] This is a true ethnographic study.

addition, individuals from the neighborhood occasionally visited the congregation, as did sexual minorities who preferred the status of "friends of the church." Each time the congregation gathered, included in the announcements and welcome, was the acknowledgement of any first time visitors and references to friends of the church.

The gender ratio of the congregation was approximately two-thirds female to one-third male. The age of the congregation ranged from less than one year to 70 years old. The racial mix of the congregation was predominately Caucasian; however, there were four African Americans, two Asian Americans, and five Hispanics.

Description of the Setting

The church appeared to be located in a lower socioeconomic neighborhood. The neighbor's yards were cluttered with trash, toys, boxes, and cans. Dead weeds protruded through the chain link fence that completely surrounded one of the houses. Houses were in need of painting. There were numerous miscellaneous items in the yards. The neighborhood automobiles were older models, some rusty, and none appear to have been washed or waxed recently. The church parking lot entry was divided. In the center of the entry stood a large, concrete cross that was surrounded by a small flowerbed. The lot was clean and the area provided for parking was partially graveled and the rest of the lot was covered with grass. A handicapped parking spot was provided. The gravel lot was full and at least five cars were parked on the grass. The building's exterior was white and looks as though the structure had been added on to over the years. There was a sign in front of the church. The name of the church, the pastor's name, and the meeting times were printed on one side of

the hand-painted sign. On the other side were three white crosses with the cross in the center being the largest. The background for the crosses was a rainbow flag.[43]

Several individuals were gathered near one of the cars talking in a jovial manner. Near the building several more people were talking and smoking cigarettes. A woman joined the group and received a hug. Upon being noticed, the group spoke. I introduced myself and walked over to a couple of ladies. Having informed them that I was conducting research on the church, one of the women inquired. "Do you have a questionnaire for me to fill out?" I reply no, but that I would like, anonymously of course, to interview her and others. Both women replied, "sure, just let us know when." At this point, a man handed me the program for the church service and I entered the building.

The church building was a small four-room structure. Inside the entry was a folder with the current day's date. The booklet was divided into two columns with one titled "Praises" and the other "Prayers." Below each column heading was a list of things related to the topic. I noted, in the "Praises" column of the booklet the following statements: for my beautiful spouse; for two wonderful years with "T"; for a safe trip; my new car; the sunshine; and Christian friends. In the "Prayer" column

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[43] The rainbow flag, created in 1978 for San Francisco's Gay Freedom Celebration by Gilbert Baker, depicts not the shape of the rainbow, but its colors in horizontal stripes. Originally, there were eight stripes: pink, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. Those colors represented, respectively: sexuality, life, healing, sun, nature, art, harmony, and spirit. Baker hand-dyed and sewed the material for the first flag himself. Approaching San Francisco's Paramount Flag Company about mass production and sales of his "gay flag," Baker was informed that "hot pink" was not commercially available. The flag was reduced to seven stripes. Following the assassination of openly gay supervisor, Harvey Milk, the 1979 Pride Parade Committee decided to use Baker's flag. The committee eliminated the indigo stripe so they could divide the colors evenly along the parade route. The six colors were incorporated into the six-striped version and are recognized by the International Congress of Flag Makers. It represents the diversity yet unity of gay men and lesbians universally. "Origins of Gay and Lesbian Symbols." Retrieved October 10, 2000 from http://www.swade.net/swadepages/symbols.htm; http://www.cs.cmu.edu/afs/cs.cmu.edu/user/scotts/bulgarians/rainbow-flag.html.

of the booklet the following request appeared: for "L" in the loss of her brother; for "M's grandmother's surgery; rain; "G"; peace within self; state boards; health of mom.

Inside the church there were three sections of wooden pews with two sections in the rear and one centered toward the front of the auditorium. On the sides by the front pews were rows of folding chairs grouped in twos. The sanctuary had a seating capacity of approximately 100. A wooden cross was mounted on one wall above the folding chairs. On the opposite wall were small stained glass windows. Some of the windows looked new and each of the "new windows" had a different design. The other stained glass windows were alike and discolored. The pulpit was located to the right of the congregation and two prayer benches were located to the left of the pulpit. On the stage behind the pulpit was a piano. On the opposite side of the stage was a large electronic organ. Centered on the back wall of the stage was a lovely stained glass picture of Christ knocking at the door. On the wall near the electronic organ was a large white banner with black lettering and a scene of a waterfall and a cross. The banner read W.F.M.C.C. and had the following scripture citation at the bottom: John 7:37-38.[44]

PARTICIPANT–AS –OBSERVER

There has been a great deal of criticism of the participant observation methodology. Erikson rejects all field observations that do not make the role of the researcher and the intent of the study known beforehand because they constitute and

[44]The reference reads, "On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice. 'If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him'" (John 7:37-38).

invasion of privacy and may harm the observed.[45] If the professional observer is discovered, this uncovering discredits not only the research but also the researcher.[46] Lofland and Lofland hold that there are very serious, perhaps damning, ethical problems in all covert research if the presumed immorality of deception is the overriding concern.[47] Some social scientists are adamant that entering a setting for the purpose of secret research should not be allowed.[48]

I chose the public participant-as-observer role because of methodological limitations and ethical considerations associated with secret participant observer. Counterbalancing the responsibilities to my profession, the pursuit of knowledge, society, my subjects, and myself, covert observation was out of the question. In a culture that has faced hate crimes because of their orientation or perceived orientation, I could not justify deep-cover research. The participant-as-observer role allowed me to make my presence as a scientist known to the group being studied. This minimized problems of role pretending and allowed for on the spot recording of my observations.

In the literature, three major problems that confront the participant-as-observer are identified: (1) establishing relationships with members of the group, (2) finding resourceful and reliable informants, and (3) maintaining the observer-

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[45] K. Erikson, (1967). "A Comment on Disguised Observation in Sociology." *Social Problems, 14* (4) L, pp. 366-373.

[46] M. Fine, *Intervention with Hyperactive Children: A Case Study Approach*. (New York: Spectrum Publishing, 1980).

[47] J. Lofland and L. Lofland, *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis* (3rd edition), (Belmont, CA.: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1995).

[48] See Erikson, (1967); D. Gibbon and J. Jones, *The Study of Deviance: Perspectives and Problems*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975), Chapter 9; and D. P. Warwick, "Tearoom trade: Means and ends in Social research." In M. Bulmer, (Ed.), *Social Research Ethics*. (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 35-58.

observed relationship.[49] I addressed all three of these concerns in my research. I established a relationship with the pastor and the members of the congregation by attending services and social events. I participated in the singing and communion, furnished food for such events as the annual church chili cook-off, and supplied my time and labor to help paint the exterior of the church building. Having established relationships with members, I was accepted as a *categorical member* of the group. With rapport established, I was granted almost unlimited access for observation and information gathering.

The hospitable nature of the congregation and their willingness to be interviewed provided multiple informants. The chance of collecting erroneous or misleading information was lessened by the number of interviews, observations, and time spent in the field. Lofland and Lofland warn, "It is unlikely that many richly empirical and deeply understanding studies could have been achieved by outside researchers without the assistance of articulate, wise, knowledgeable, and helpful informants."[50] With this warning in mind, I sought to gain the assistance of the most resourceful and reliable informants that I could secure for my research. I developed a very cordial relationship with Rev. Walker, her spouse, and long-time members of the congregation. The local leadership of the church including board members, the music director, new members, and friends of the congregation talked about the different aspects of the church at length through informal conversations as well as formal interviews. By building a relationship with the local congregation and its leadership based on openness and trust, I was given access to the national level

[49] Nachmias and Nachmias, (1981).
[50] Lofland and Lofland, (1995), p. 61.

leadership of UFMCC. The WFMCC pastor invited me to the congregational banquets and district conference. She took me as her guest and observer to the local congregational and district level business meetings. I had the opportunity to acquaint myself with the national figures of the denomination including: UFMCC founder Rev. Troy Perry; Minister of Justice, Mel White; Pastor of the MCC in Los Angeles (MCC-LA), Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson; South Central District Coordinator of UFMCC, Eleanor Nealy; and pastor of Cathedral of Hope-Dallas (COH), Michael Piazza. I hoped by meeting the leaders in the UFMCC; I would have a clearer understanding of the national, district, and local levels of spiritual and political priorities and visions for the denomination.

Whyte cautions that intimate relationships with informants may bias the informant's reports.[51] I kept a close check on such relationships, and on several occasions reminded the informants that I was involved ONLY in a research capacity. The minister assisted in reminding the congregation of my role by stating from the pulpit that I was the congregation's own research scientist. This occurred when Rev. Walker began to tell a story of a college professor who went into the slums of Baltimore to do field research. She alluded to the fact that there is one (a researcher) in the congregation doing field research currently. This obvious reference to me made the connection between my research and the congregation. The church seemed to have claimed me as "their" researcher. They appeared to be excited that someone was interested in examining and understanding who they were and what they believed. Perhaps they hope my research could serve to reduce the homophobia in

[51] W. Whyte, *Street Corner Society*. (2nd edition). (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), pp. 283-302.

society. On another occasion, I noticed "ID," who normally stood outside the church distributing the service programs had been "replaced" by a young college student who had recently started attending the church. I commented on the fact that "ID" was not assuming his regular role. He laughed and stated, "you need to note that in your notebook."[52] Very early in my fieldwork, a member approached me and gave me a note. She informed, "The girl's name on this note is doing research on parents of gay men and lesbians. I thought [that] since you are both doing research, you might want to give her a call. Keep the note, her phone number is on it."[53] Again, a member was trying to connect with the fact I was a researcher. I became their resident social scientist.

While acknowledging the benefits of nurturing a comfortable relationship with the congregation, the problem of maintaining a professional distinction between participant and observer was not always easy. On one occasion, Rev. Walker approached me as I was leaving the church and declared, "I saw you taking notes. I would like to see them sometime." I informed her it would be inappropriate to share my notes with the participants in my research. I explained it could be a problem if those being observed found or said something negative about what I was observing. Rev. Walker replied, "If something is wrong, I'd like to know."[54] An interest in my observations and findings was important to the pastor. The pastor's interest in my observations indicated I could possibly serve as a source of information for her work with the congregation. The interest in knowing what I was discovering through my fieldwork was not limited to the pastor. A woman seated next to me during a Sunday

[52] Personal communications, (22, March 1996).
[53] Personal communications, (18, February 1996).

service, informed, "Your hand writing is as bad as mine. I can't read any of your notes. As a psychologist, I was advised in college to write where no one could read it. That way you will never get sued."[55] I acknowledged my poor penmanship and that it was a positive in preserving the confidentiality of my observations. The extended period of time I spent in the field served my research well. The congregation became more receptive of my presence and with my observations, note taking, and tape recording. One man, "JD", commented, "We sure have seen you here a lot lately." Having explained that I was doing research on the church, "JD" responded, "Well, it is good to have you here."[56]

Protecting the objectivity of observations is essential if the data is to remain reliable and valid. The length of time I was able to spend with the congregation created a sense of "being one of them" rather than being an "observer who participates with them." For example, one Saturday morning I was asked to join a couple from the church for breakfast at a local restaurant. I was asked if I planned to attend the church's business meeting. The couple informed me they intended to drop a bombshell at the business meeting and preceded to hand me a folder containing various proposals to be delivered to the church board at the meeting. They asked me what I thought about the proposal. I returned the folder and told them that I felt it would be unethical for me to address the proposal. This gentle rebuff did not stop the couple from trying to pull me into the internal politics of the church. One of the women continued,

When I took the proposal and gave it to Rev. Walker, she never mentioned it

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[54] Personal communications, ibid.
[55] Personal communications, (25, February 1996).
[56] ____, ibid.

> to me or talked to me about it. When it came up in the board meeting she didn't address me. I think she thinks I am trying to get rid of her. I just want her to get off her butt and get busy. The congregation limits itself.[57]

I gained almost unlimited access to the local congregation. The overall goal of collecting the richest possible data, demands direct face-to-face contact with and prolonged immersion in the data setting. In order to obtain an "intimate familiarity" with the congregation, it was important that I establish trust by presenting myself as non-threatening to the group. Establishing myself as a "marginal native"[58] included respecting the church's religious beliefs and activities, being nonjudgmental with regards to appearances and behaviors, and protecting the privacy of individuals. Trust was developed early in the process of conducting observational research. My role as researcher was defined clearly. Whether sitting in the back of the church, visiting in front of the building, or attending the district conference, I communicated to the participants that I was a researcher. My constant companions of a notepad and tape recorder reminded the subjects of my role as a researcher. In addition, gentle verbal reminders from members, the pastor, and myself, that I was present for the purpose of conducting observational research served to clarify my intentions. My promise to use actual participants' names only when approval was given offered assurance of confidentiality and served to negate the congregations' fears. Other members and friends of WFMCC identities were protected.

My observations allowed access to a variety of resources of the church. I was present at the church's weekly services on thirteen consecutive Sundays and on five other special service occasions. I attended and participated in ten church sponsored

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[57] Personal communications, (23, March 1996).
[58] M. Freilich, *Marginal Natives*. (New York: Wiley, 1970).

social events.[59] I interviewed thirty-seven percent (twenty members) of the congregation. I spent three days in Austin attending the South Central District Conference with members of the congregation in 1996. The district conference provided me the opportunity to attend a yearly business meeting. I observed the nomination and election process for the selection of a new district coordinator, as well as the discussion and vote on various bylaws and fellowship related concerns.

I attended various workshops conducted or sponsored by MCC that addressed topics such as conflict resolution, legal protection of same-sex relationships, and church growth. I viewed numerous videos from the church library of activities, holy unions, and worship services in an effort to gain a better understanding of the spiritual, social, and political culture of the congregation. I gained access to a large number of church documents that included: holy union announcements and certificates, holy union dissolution forms, the bylaws for MCC, weekly bulletins, monthly newsletters, informational tracts, and the organizational chart of the congregation.[60] In the process of my intensive participatory observation, I tape-recorded approximately 75% of the time, which accounts for sixty-one hours of audio documentation. Having gained permission from the pastor and board of directors of the congregation, I tape-recorded the worship services including the announcements, songs, prayers, communion, and sermons. This allowed me to concentrate on individual behavior of the congregants and their reactions to the services. All formal interviews were tape-recorded. The tape-recorder is a tool used by ethnographers in

[59] The social events I attended included a cook-out and Easter egg hunt, banquet and dance, chili-cook-off, several congregational lunches at restaurants following church services, gospel concert, after church services refreshments and fellowship, and church luncheons.

an attempt to immerse themselves in the field. The ethnographer is free to engage in lengthy informal and formal interviews, and capture long verbatim quotations. Being able to accurately capture the quotations is "essential to good fieldwork, while maintaining a natural flow in the conversation."[61] I also took extensive notes during my observations and added additional data including theoretical notes following each observation and interview.[62]

DATA COLLECTION

The mechanics of data collection can be complex and time-consuming. I collected data through observations, interviews, and documents. The means by which I collected sources required observational note taking, interviewing, viewing videotapes, and reading documents. I purchased several stenographer notebooks for note gathering. On the left-hand side of the page I recorded my observations.[63] The right-hand side of the page was reserved for theoretical notes and comments related to other concerns that I witnessed while in the field. I established my own "short-hand" to differentiate between observations, questions to follow up on, and theoretical notes. I keyed my observational notes as follows: 1. Follow up on the Topic Note (F.T.N.), 2. Future Questions to Raise (F.Q.R.), 3. Theoretical Note (T.N.), and 4. Observational Note (O.N). I also maintained a data log that provided a chronological

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[60] Organizational charts clarify the structure and function of any institutional form of human organization. See Fetterman, (1989), p. 96.

[61] ____, ibid., p. 81.

[62] Theoretical or reflective and analytic noting is a type of data analysis contributing to problem identification, question development, and understanding the patterns and themes in the fieldwork. See Glesne and Peshkin, (1992), p. 49.

[63] See Bogdan and Tyler for a discussion of the importance of the observer recording his or her feelings, interpretations, preconceptions, and future research plans, (1975), pp. 66-71. Also see Herbert Blumer, "Society as Symbolic Interaction." In Jerome G. Manis and Bernard Melter, (Eds.), *Symbolic Interaction: A Reader in Social Psychology* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1967), pp. 146-147; George Herbert Mead, *Self and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), and *The Philosophy of the Act* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938).

record of the dates, places, events, and length of each field observation and interview, (Appendices B and C).

I recorded all of the church services and workshops I attended, as well as the interviews I conducted, on a cassette tape-recorder. I listened to the tape recordings while making the two-hour drive back to my home from the research site. This allowed an immediate review of what I had observed and served to keep fresh the details of the observation. By listening to the tape so soon after recording, I was able to mentally reconstruct most of the behaviors I visually witnessed. Upon returning home, I began the process of transcribing (verbatim) the audiotapes to my computer files. Included in the actual transcription of the tapes were my theoretical notes and other comments and concerns for immediate and future reference. I stopped, rewound, and replayed each section carefully to identify any nuances, and to enhance my recall of any visual observations I had made while recording. In addition, when my theoretical notes warranted, I referred to the literature already available on the subject and typed the citations directly into my transcribed field notes. Videos were observed and the audio portion of the videos were tape-recorded using the same techniques as actual observations, that is, I took both observational and theoretical notes while the replaying the audio portion of the videos. The review of my notes and audio recordings followed the same method utilized with my observation in the field.

Observations

The literature on social science research claims, observation is considered to be the archetypical method of scientific research. Nachmias and Nachmias advise,

> If one wishes to understand, explain, and predict what exists, one can simply go and observe it. But if one's findings are to be systematic, the observations must be carried out with reference to three crucial issues: (1) what to observe, (2) where and when to observe, and (3) how much to infer when recording observations.[64]

On the other hand, participant observation allows for explication *ad hoc* and in-the-field observations that are recorded with a great amount of inference. Observing in the field requires the researcher to attempt to observe everything that is happening. Observation therefore, possesses the virtue of directness. The researcher can study behavior as it occurs in its natural setting. As participant-as-observer it was also important to become an active participant in their environment. It was necessary for me to immerse myself in the lives of the people and the situation if I desired to understand the significance of the phenomena. I worshiped with them, by joining in the singing, communion, and tithing. I attended their social gatherings where I talked, joked, dined, worked, danced, empathized, and shared their concerns and experiences. It was not appropriate to have tape-recorded or taken notes in every situation. On occasions that did not lend themselves to concurrent recording, I made mental notes that I dictated as soon as possible after the social gathering.

Observations should include taking notes of events. It is important to be able to differentiate between special and routine events and the acts that transpire within these events.[65] I attended traditional, liturgical,[66] and holiday church services to

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[64] Nachmias and Nachmias, p. 177.

[65] Glesne and Peshkin, p. 44.

[66] I asked Rev. Walker to explain the difference in the different types of worship and the determining factors for the type of worship practices at each congregation. Rev. Walker explained, "The church in Oklahoma City is a little different than ours. It is what I would call "high church," that is liturgical. More ritualistic or ceremonial like the Catholic Church. The pastor [of each congregation of MCC] pretty much sets the tone for the congregation. For example, they sprinkle at the Lighthouse M.C.C. in Oklahoma City. I prefer immersion, due to my first Christian upbringing. I will sprinkle if someone prefers it." Personal communications, (1996, January 22).

observe and record sermons, procedures, the organizational politics, and the social interaction among the members. I witnessed consecrated rituals of the church, such as baptisms, holy unions, and commitment ceremonies. I was present for the dedication of the church building, an annual congregational meeting, a district conference, various workshops, and the church's anniversary banquet. I observed social activities, concerts, workdays, and other events sponsored by the church. As a participant observer, I heeded the advice of Glesne and Peshkin to "consciously observe the research setting; its participants; and the events, act, and gestures that occurred within them."[67] Additionally, I observed the homecoming activities of Cathedral of Hope in Dallas, which is the largest congregation in the denomination and the regular Sunday morning services of an additional small congregation as a comparative analysis. The hope was that by attending numerous congregations' services, I could determine if the particular congregation under intense study was an anomaly, or typical of the denomination in its services, rituals, message, and role in the community.

Note taking in the field has limits. It is impossible to note everything that is happening and being said. As explained above, I supplemented my field notes by tape-recording all worship services, workshop presentations, special events, and interviews. On several occasions, I tape-recorded my theoretical comments, detailed descriptions of observations, and speculations of possible analytical directions to pursue following each period in the field or interview session.

Formal and Informal Interviews

Verbal interaction is crucial to field research. Fetterman reminds the

[67] Glesne and Peshkin, p. 45.

researcher "words and expressions have different values in various cultures."[68] Lofland and Lofland emphasize the "*mutuality* of participant observation and intensive interviewing as the central techniques of naturalistic investigation."[69] Both formal interviews and informal conversations are important techniques for data gathering. By first observing in the natural setting the congregation and its members, I was able to later engage in informal conversations. The informal conversation resulted in what could be characterized as casual interviews; that is, questions emerged in the course of the ethnographic research. Sometimes things happen while you are in the field, you wonder about it and without formally arranging a time to ask the questions, you inquire right then and there.[70] I engaged in informal conversations throughout the entire time in the field. Informal conversations with members and friends of the congregations were conducted on more than forty separate occasions.

Data analysis depends on theorizing. The conceptual technique of theorizing is the fundamental tool of any researcher. According to LeCompte and Preissle,

> Theorizing is the cognitive process of discovering or manipulating abstract categories and the relationships among those categories...Formally, the tasks of theorizing are perceiving, comparing, contrasting, aggregating, ordering establishing linkages and relationships, and speculating. Each of the tasks involved in theorizing is subsumed in the next. Although they may vary in importance, they are used in some degree at each step of the research process.[71]

As I began to focus on data analysis and ask questions about the phenomena, the continued analysis led to further induction and the examination of the data from different perspectives. Conceptual labels began to be associated with instances of

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[68] Fetterman, p. 47.
[69] Lofland and Lofland, p.19.
[70] ____, ibid.

phenomena. As I continued to collect data, my reflections on the conceptual framework continually evolved to form categories for analysis. Categories, according to the literature, are defined as the classification of concept, which are discovered when the concepts are compared one against another. A category is formed when the concepts are grouped together under a higher order, more abstract concept. As I continued in the field, five categories emerged (personal politics, spiritual and political refuge, politics and religion, politics and gay rights, and politics and social activism). The names given to the categories were logically related to the data collected, that is, grounded in my observations. Certain phenomena were frequently observed. Descriptive dialogue regarding certain concepts was repeatedly mentioned. I began to note the repeated use of certain terms including refuge, trust, community, and social justice. Furthermore, my disciplinary and other professional readings suggested possible concepts such as, social capital, cognitive liberation, and collective action. Based on the concepts, categories and names given to the phenomena a set of questions emerged. A total of twenty-eight questions and additional follow-up questions where appropriate, evolved overtime in the field. (Appendix D).

When a comfortable level of trust was established and adequate observational data had been collected, a set of relevant questions for a more structured or formal interview was used. The open-ended questionnaire provided the opportunity to compare the responses of the groups' members and place them in the context of common group beliefs and major themes. When writing the questionnaire, I tried to

[7] M. LeCompte and J. Preissle, *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research*, (2nd edition). (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1993), pp. 239-240.

remain sensitive the concerns of the group, especially the issue of privacy. One's religious faith can be an intensely emotional area with many people. It goes without saying that an individual's sexual orientation is a very personal subject that can have a plethora of emotions and possible ramifications attached. Because I had been a participant observer for sometime prior to requesting individual interviews, the purpose and nature of my study were well known. A free and open atmosphere was well established prior to the first one-on-one interview.

I asked several if they would feel comfortable being interviewed? One older woman stated, "Sure, do you have a questionnaire?" An elderly member of the congregation indicated that she did not mind helping if I needed an "old" person, but indicated that she preferred to remain anonymous.[72] The nature of ethnography is usually detailed and revealing. I protected the privacy of my subjects from potential harm by using pseudonyms for those who wished to disguise their identity. However, some of my participants have requested that I use their names.[73] Interviews with the past and current ministers of the congregation under study, its board members, congregants, friends of the church, and specialists in church growth were conducted. Twenty formal interviews were conducted. Six interviews were conducted by telephone and two members were interviewed by e-mailed questionnaires. The majority of the interviews were scheduled by telephone and conducted, in the home, and at the convenience of, the person to be interviewed. Two of the in-person interviews were conducted with two or more members simultaneously. The benefit

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[72] Personal communications, (1996, February 11).

[73] See E.O. Booth, "Research as Participant: Collaborative Evaluation in a Primary School." In D M Fetterman, (Ed.), Perennial Issues in Qualitative Research [Special Issue]. *Education and Urban Society*, 20 (1), (1987): pp. 55-85.

of multisubject interviews "allows the researcher to view the relationships between and among people and the difference in their perspectives."[74]

Formulating the questions and deciding how to format the questionnaire required me to place the questions within categories and to classify them as factual or opinion and attitude. A researcher can distinguish among four types of question structures: (1) open-ended questions, (2) closed-ended questions, (3) contingency questions, and (4) matrix questions. For my research purposes, the open-ended question was the most appropriate form. Open-ended questions are not followed by specific answer choices, thus allowing for a free flow of facts, opinions, and comments that indicate attitudes. The open-ended questions allowed the opportunity for the interviewee to ask for clarification of the questions, to tell something about herself (background and training), and to freely interrupt, or go back to a previous topic discussed in an early inquisitorial exchange. Although I had a written set of questions, I allowed the conversational style of the interview to direct the order in which each area of inquiry would be covered. My interviews were, in fact, guided conversations rather than structured in nature. When any of the interviewees wished to expound on a particular topic, I maintained the conversational flow by offering a sympathetic gesture of encouragement. I took very few notes during the interviews. The attentiveness and probing required my remaining alert to what the interviewee was saying, therefore, I tape-recorded all interviews. This was helpful in organizing the data afterward, especially while using a format that provided so much flexibility as to the order in which various questions and topics were addressed. In addition, recording the interviews allowed me the opportunity to locate any comments made

[74] Bogdan and Taylor, p. 118.

during the interview that needed further clarification by the interviewee.

Examination of the Documents

Written records are a valuable source of data. Gaining access to a large array of archival documents enabled me to add a contextual and historical dimension to my observations and interviews. According to Glesne and Peshkin, "documents enrich what you see and hear by supporting, expanding, and challenging your portrayals and perceptions."[75] I examined sermon texts, the church's institutional records (budget, the deacons', pastor's, and music ministry's reports), the church's bulletins and program guides, the denomination's informational tracts, as well as, books, letters, and e-mails by the founder and other members of the leadership of the denomination. I requested and received the monthly newsletter from the WFMCC congregation, the South Central District e-mail newsletter, as well as the newsletters from both the "mother" church, Metropolitan Community Church, Los Angeles (MCC-LA), and the largest congregation in the fellowship, Cathedral of Hope (COH) in Dallas. The documents provided valuable information regarding the historical, demographic, by-laws, rituals, the financial expenditures, and the organizational hierarchy of the congregation and the denomination. One member provided me copies of personal legal documents of court decisions and a divorce decree. A copy of the sermon text delivered by a member of the board of directors and the statement of a member made in front of a city governing body were also made available to me. It is worth noting that church bulletins and programs included only the first name and last initial of those mentioned. The fear of being "outed" to the broader community is real. On more than one occasion, members could not supply me with the last name of other

members with whom they were only casually acquainted.

I was given access to other forms of documentation as well. Members made available the church's scrapbook that allowed me to see a brief history of the congregation through photographs of the first pastor, individual and groups of members, fund-raisers such as talent shows and car washes, and a float entered in a gay pride parade. I viewed the church library's video collection that offered recordings of holy unions, bachelor parties, revival meetings, anniversary banquets, concerts, fundraisers, and holiday parties.

Additional archival documents were gathered from sources outside the church. I collected *amici* briefs and court transcripts, local and national newspaper editorials, letters to the editor, news articles and periodicals, gay rights publications, and Internet materials related to the court cases connected to the congregation's social justice efforts. The importance of gaining access to official records should not be ignored. To the researcher "who is interested in understanding the subjective reality, nothing is too subjective."[76]

DATA ANALYSIS

Making sense of and learning from the sizable amount of data collected through observational notes, interviews, and document gathering is an enormous process. Data analysis can be defined as "a process, which entails an effort of formally identify themes and to construct hypotheses as they are suggested by data and an attempt to demonstrate support for those themes and hypotheses."[77] Unlike other researchers of other methodologies to test or prove their hypotheses; the

[75] Glesne and Peshkin, p. 54.
[76] Bogdan and Taylor, p. 136.

participant observer seeks to demonstrate the plausibility of their hypotheses. Data analysis is an on going process for the participant observer.[78] As important themes are noted, pursued, and refined, hypotheses are formulated, abandoned or expanded. This analytical process goes on throughout the course of the study. Nonetheless, it is during the post-fieldwork stage of research that analysis and interpretation of the data is the most concentrated. The literature on ethnography and qualitative design states, "Wax and Wolcott claim that effective analysis requires at least double the time expended on collection of data."[79]

Although I had been reading my field notes following their transcription, it was important to read the notes chronologically and in totality to reconstruct the unfolding themes that developed while in the field. Certain themes and hypotheses that emerged in the field needed further analysis for the purpose of refining my interpretations of the data. According to Lofland and Lofland,

> In qualitative fieldstudies, analysis is conceived as an emergent product of a process of gradual induction. Guided by the data being gathered and the topics, questions, and evaluative criteria that provide focus, analysis is the fieldworker's derivative ordering of the data.[80]

Minor details can provide clues to a broader understanding of major themes. Reading through my field notes, I gained a sense of which topics were important. Having all of my notes saved to my computer, I began to identify reoccurring key

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[77] ____, ibid., p. 79.

[78] For additional discussions addressing analysis of the participant observer's field data see H. S. Becker and B. Geer, "Participant Observation: The Analysis of Qualitative Field Data." In R. Burgess, (Ed.), *Field Research: A Sourcebook and Field Manual.* (Boston: G. Allen and Unwin, 1982), pp. 239-250; A. Coffey and P. Atkinson. *Making Sense of Qualitative Data: Complementary Research Strategies.* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996); R. Bogdan and S. Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods.* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1982); Y. Lincoln and S. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry.* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1985).

[79] LeCompte and Preissle, p. 239.

[80] Lofland and Lofland, p. 181.

terms by highlighting them in bold print. The progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting the scraps of collected data such as observational notes, interviews, transcripts, documents, and notes from relevant literature that are applicable for research purposes is known as coding.[81] As the amount of data related to a particular term increased, I began utilized my word processing computer program to cut and paste the data into major topical sections with headings such as (1) Religion, (2) Politics, (3) Community, and (4) Refuge. This method of coding reoccurring topics in observations, conversations, and interviews allowed me to check paragraphs for relevant content connections. As I returned to the literature on each of the major topics, I begin to code subtopics that fit within predominately emerging themes. For example, under the major heading of Community, the literature guided me to locate instances where a sense of building community was addressed, or note where the opportunities to develop civic skills were demonstrated. I began to draw diagrams and flow charts to see how the major themes and subtopics connected within themselves and to each other.[82] It was through this process of coding that I discovered the enormous amount of data that I thought was irrelevant was actually quite relevant to my hypotheses. Specifically, all the data collected in the early stages of my fieldwork was tied to the messages of salvation and refuge, as well as the roles that the children, parents, and social activities played in the church. I was beginning to accept the likelihood that nothing of political significance was occurring in this congregation. When the church became embroiled in First Amendment issues, I

[81] Glesne and Peshkin, p. 133.

[82] In the social science context, diagrams have been defined as "visual representations of relationships between concepts." See A. Strauss and J. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990), p. 197.

thought, "finally, something I can utilize." What I did not realize at the time was the fact that the earlier, rather routine activities I had observed were also relevant to social activism within the congregation. With further analysis, more in-depth study of the literature, and re-reading my collected data, the connections became apparent.

My earliest finding identified the three-pronged mission of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Churches: salvation, community, and Christian social action. I came to the realization that the hours spent observing the unconventional congregation worshiping in a very conventional manner, was part of the message of the UFMCC. The message was one of providing a place of refuge and a message of salvation where cognitive liberation could be experienced. Analysis of the data indicated participation by the congregants through embracing the messages presented in the sermons; taking and serving the communion; creating and distributing the bulletins; offering prayers; participating in the singing and reading of the scriptures all contributed to the development of civic skills and the building of a sense of community within the congregation. With further scrutiny, it became obvious that the political positions taken by the church were not independent of other aspects of the church, but rather were the culmination of seeking a refuge, finding salvation, building community, and acquiring and enhancing civic skills. Being cognitively liberated enough to speak out in the political arena, of a largely conservative and homophobic city, resulted in the fulfillment of the entire mission of the church. The data gathered supported the hypothesis that the three-pronged mission of the UFMCC was being carried out at the local congregation. It is true, that there are many secular gay organizations that can provide a place of refuge, recruit members, and help to

develop civic skills that increases the social capital available for advancing gay rights. In metropolitan areas numerous organizations exist that offer opportunities for the gay community to engage in social activism, however, access to such organizations is limited or non-existent in more remote areas of the country. A second hypothesis is supported by my data. In areas where gay organizations are few if present at all, other institutions' involvement may be necessary in order to advance gay rights. WFMCC proved to be such an institution. For example, the local MCC provided facilities for PFLAG meetings, worked with the AIDS pantry ministry, and spoke out for the community in a public forum, thus supporting the role the church plays in social justice. Finally, a third hypothesis suggests a congregation of the UFMCC can provide a means to civic engagement for those participating that would never have considered involvement in gay rights issues through secular gay organizations. The data gathered through interviews and media coverage supports this hypothesis. The data I collected grounded the theories regarding WFMCC's role in the gay rights' movement.

Time Frame

Breadth is traded for depth in participant-as-observer research methodology. An in-depth understanding requires extended periods with few respondents and observation sites. The intensive ethnographic phase of my study was conducted from January of 1996 through June of 1996. Going into this project, I could not know with certainty how long my research would take. It is suggested that a minimum of several months be spent studying a setting regardless of the frequency. I was able to spend a highly concentrated six months in the field, which enabled me to "view the

dynamics of change in the setting and lessen the likelihood of the time observing being conducted at an unrepresentative time."[83] Gaining access is usually a point, in the research process, that demands a great deal of time because of scheduling an introductory meeting. However, having made a previous connection to the pastor and the fact that church services are open to the public helped to expedite this particular step in beginning fieldwork. The time needed to collect data was underestimated. One of the problems with ethnographic research is determining when enough data has been collected to provide the researcher the opportunity to conduct a thorough analysis and reach a better understanding of the phenomena observed. In addition, when utilizing grounded theory, the inductive-observation method of theory building has a tendency to perpetuate a cycle. There is always something new to be observed, analyzed, or someone to interview from a different perspective as the participant-as-observer becomes more immersed in the research environment.

Occasional trips to attend the services of the church, additional interviews with members, and the collecting of documents from the local and national levels of the denomination, followed the completion of the initial period of fieldwork and continued through the fall of 1999. Through the fall of 2000, I utilized the local media services to continue to gather information regarding the most current issues facing the congregation. In addition to data from the news media regarding events related to the congregation and its members, I continued to maintain contact with the congregation and members through e-mails, telephone calls, personal conversations and observations at the church and in the homes of members through the fall of 2000. I transcribed more than 600 pages of observational research notes including

[83] Bogdan and Taylor, p. 76.

approximately 100 pages from interviews, sixty-five pages of video recordings of holy unions, fund raising events, and past holiday services, and forty-five pages from televised coverage by the news media. The secret is to realize that transcription of all recorded data may not be reasonable and decisions have to be made regarding how much of the collected data to transcribe. A large amount of material was recorded and has yet to be transcribed. To manage the copious data collected, part of the process becomes to determine what material helps to ground the theory. This illustrates the extensive depth of ethnographic research that has been a part of this dissertation. The richness of the data collected promises to offer the opportunity for additional research. The conjectures raised through intensive recording of qualitative data regarding phenomena, of which one is ignorant, can provide a foundation for quantitative research.

The difficulty with any research project is finding a point where one lays down pencil and notepad and turns off the tape recorder. Having spent a year as participant-as-observer and additional time gathering data from such sources as the news media, legal documents, and the Internet, I realize the necessity in arbitrarily selecting a stopping point. Considering the breadth and depth of the data I have been fortunate enough to collect and acknowledging the magnitude of attempting to manage both physically and intellectually the project, an arbitrary end to my research was mandated. However, I occasionally, while organizing, analyzing, theorizing, and creating this thesis, returned to the congregation for observational visits in an effort to reinforce and stimulate the research's passions for purposes of writing the dissertation. Tenacity and copious quantities of black coffee assisted in the endeavor.

Chapter 3
A History of Lines in the Sand: The Religious Right and A Religion on the Left

There is no denying that religion and politics are intertwined. Presently, the religious right, of which evangelicals constitute the largest segment, has exploded onto the stage as a significant political actor and has been dubbed the most fervent opponents of gay rights.[1] Drawing from what they perceive as biblical condemnation of same-gender sexual behavior, Christian conservatives see gay rights as the embodiment of everything they deplore about modern life. In the ongoing debate about gay rights, "values" are the property of which the religious right lays claim. According to Gallagher and Bull, the "way religious conservatives view the phrase *family values* in the political arena, virtue has become a partisan commodity."[2]

Same-gender sexual behavior is strongly condemned in the Evangelical branch of Christianity.[3] According to prior research, a majority of conservative Christians believe there is no such thing as a gay Christian, nor a biblical justification for such a lifestyle.[4] Hunter reports, "nearly 89 percent of Evangelicals think homosexuality is an 'immoral behavior.'"[5] Ninety-eight percent of Southern Baptists surveyed by Ammerman in 1985 indicated homosexuality was not consistent with a

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[1] C. Bull and J. Gallagher, *Perfect Enemies: The Religious Right, The Gay Movement and The Politics of The 1990s*. (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1996), p. xii.

[2] ____, ibid., p. xiii.

[3] S. Thumma. "Negotiating a Religious Identity: The Case of the Gay Evangelical." *Sociological Analysis*. 52:4 (1991): p. 338.

[4] There are a few Evangelical groups that do not hold this perspective, see R. Blair, (1977), *An Evangelical Look at Homosexuality*. (New York: Homosexual Community Counseling Center, 1977). Also see a special issue of *The Other Side* committed to exploring the question of homosexuality and the Church. T. Olson, (1984, April). "Where to turn: a guide for gay and lesbian Christians." *The Other Side*, pp. 16-31.

[5] J. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernism*. (New Brunswick, NH: Rutgers University Press, 1982), p. 85. The term homosexual will be used when it a direct quote, used in the context of religious or psychological discussion where the terms is the groups word of choice.

viable Christian lifestyle.[6] Roof and McKinney contend conservative Protestants were the least likely religious group in America either to affirm the civil rights of gays or to view same-gender sexual behavior as morally acceptable.[7] Based on such findings, it is not surprising that the institution of religion has rigorously condemned same-gender sexual behavior and persistently fought to deny the endorsement of civil rights for gays.

In light of the previous evidence, one would assume if a denomination exists that has a special outreach to gay men and lesbians, its purpose must surely be to rescue the homosexual from a lifestyle that is incompatible with being a Christian. Indeed, there are numerous denominations and organizations that work to accomplish this very task. Several "ex-gay" ministries have recently been formed, each claiming the ability to produce a "cure " for homosexuality through religious conversion.[8] A senior writer for *Christianity Today* states that numerous Christian groups make claims about a change in sexual orientation and that many "ex-gay" groups seem to be growing.[9] "Ex-gay" ministries generally consist of groups of people interested in applying principles of scripture to the lives of homosexuals in the interest of changing their sexual orientation. Most "ex-gay" ministries adhere to the theories of Dr. Elizabeth Moberly.[10] She contends that the homosexual condition is created by a

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[6] N. Ammerman, Data from an unpublished study done by the Center for Religious Research. Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, (1985).

[7] W. Roof and W. McKinney, *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future.* (New Brunswick, New Jersey.: Rutgers University Press, 1987), pp. 192, 212.

[8] For information on "ex-gay" ministries, see the documentary film *One Nation Under God* (1993) produced by Teodoro Manizci and Francine M. Rzeznick, (3Z/hourglass productions); and see Darice Clark, "Lecturer Discusses 'Causes and Cures of Homosexuality," *The Washington Blade*, (1993, October 1), p. 15.

[9] T. Stafford, "Coming Out." In J. I. Yamoamoto, (Ed.). *The Crisis of Homosexuality*. (Wheaton, Il: Christianity Today, 1990), pp. 61-75.

[10] E.R. Moblerly, *Psychogenesis.* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

deficit in the relationship with the same-sex parent that occurs very early in life, resulting in a defensive detachment from this parent.[11]

Exodus International is an example of one of the first and largest "ex-gay" ministries.[12] A variety of strategies are used to de-program or convert homosexuals to heterosexuality. Hill and Cheadle report that the "ex-gay" ministry, "Love In Action," went so far as to videotape a dying AIDS patient as he confessed his sin and admitted guilt for his fate.[13] In a pamphlet entitled *Gay Lib*, Pat Robertson declared, "A great lie has sprung up about the gay life...the lie says: 'gays cannot help the way they are. They're born that way. Homosexuals can't change.' This is simply not true."[14] This brochure was the result of a call to the Christian Broadcasting Network's "prayer line" number "to cure a homosexual friend."[15] In *A Nation Without a Conscience*, Religious Right leaders Tim and Beverly LaHaye wrote "Christians feel compassion for homosexuals and sincerely desire that they receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and experience liberation from their lifestyle."[16]

The "ex-gay ministries" tend to contradict themselves when it comes to the

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[11] ____. ibid. See also Joseph Nicolosi's *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality*. (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1990). His argument also centers on a defensive detachment from the same-sex parent, while as an adult, the individual develops an attraction to other men in an attempt to complete the gender identification.

[12] Exodus International was abandoned after ten years by founders Michael Bussee and Gary Cooper after they were unable to alter their own sexual orientation. See J. Hill and R. Cheadle, *The Bible Tells Me So: Uses and Abuses of Holy Scripture*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1996). Bussee claims that those seeking to change (their orientation) "become even more self-loathing when they looked on it as sin." See C. McGraw, "Christian and Gay." *The Orange County Register*, Accent, (1997, April 29), p. 6.

[13] Hill et al., (1996), pp. 62-63. Early reaction to AIDS from the religious community appeared to be more concerned with placing blame and saving souls rather than saving lives, many churches now realize their responsibility for nonjudgmental caring and outreach.

[14] Christian Broadcasting. (Florida: Virginia Beach, 1990), p. 1.

[15] Hill, et al., (1996).

[16] T. LaHaye and B. LaHaye, *Nation without a Conscience*. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House. Publishers, Inc., 1994). In C. Bull and J. Gallagher, (1996), p. 274.

extent of change that is possible. A Focus on the Family[17] publication reports, success rates have never been outstanding or suggestive of an easy path to change for the homosexual person. Those "success" rates have ranged between 33 percent and 50-60 percent.[18]

A prominent "ex-gay" proponent, stated in a KKLA radio interview,

> I don't think that most of them mean "ex-homosexual." I think they prefer "ex-gay" as a term meaning they no longer embrace the gay identity. However, I think it's arguable whether or not the term is appropriate. I think it's more a matter of convenience than saying 'Christians who have homosexual tendencies who would rather not have those tendencies.'[19]

In a personal letter an individual clarifies, "My experience has also shown me that most people who have been exclusively homosexual will retain, to some degree homosexual arousal"[20]

Changing sexual orientation is the subject of a heated and controversial debate among theologians and psychologists. Whether there is any basis in fact for the theories supporting de-programming gay men and lesbians psychologically and whether such programs can actually change sexual orientation is questionable. A review of the psychological literature reveals that most researchers define orientation as consisting of more than behavior. Hart claims that three dimensions require consideration in the definition: physical sexual activity, interpersonal affection, and

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[17] Focus on the Family is based in Colorado Springs, Colorado and was founded by Rev. James Dobson. This Christian Right organization provides a Christian perspective on questions of child-raising and family matters. The organization has become active in the anti-gay rights movement (K. Wald.*Religion and Politics in the United States.* (3rd edition.). (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 1997), p. 235.

[18] L. Burtoft, *Setting The Record Straight: What research really says about the social consequences of homosexuality*. (USA: Focus on the Family, 1995), p. 44.

[19] C. Wulfensmith, "Ex-Gay" Rhetoric. *The Justice Report: A Journal of C.G.L.J., Inc.*. (Special Edition Issue 22), (1996), pp. 1, 19, 21-23.

[20] ____, ibid., p. 23. See J. Nicolosi, *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality*. (Northvale, NH: Jason Aronson., 1991). Nicolosi asserts that "usually some homosexual desires will persist or recur during certain time in the life cycle," (p. 165).

erotic fantasies.[21] Many in the American Psychological Association (APA) who are aware of the issues presented by "reparative" therapy, are considering a proposed resolution that would state: "APA adopts the position that sexual orientation conversion therapies are a controversial and ineffective treatment with no scientifically demonstrated support for efficacy."[22]

Despite the recent evidence that gay and lesbian sexual orientation is possibly genetically based, "ex-gay" ministries have launched a national advertising campaign. The full-page ads have been place in major U.S. papers by a coalition of some 15 religious right organizations.[23] The campaign declares that they hate the sin and not the sinner, and the Religious Right promises help to those seeking to change their sexual orientation through sound Christian psychological teachings. Deciding to conduct a study after talking with protesters objecting to the association's policy discouraging reparative therapies. Columbia University psychiatrist. Dr. Robert Spitzer, reported at the 2001 American Psychiatric Association's annual meeting that highly motivated gays can become heterosexual. Spitzer, who led the task force in 1973 that removed homosexuality from the official list of mental disorders,[24] contends that the mental health professions have bought the idea that once a person is

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[21] J. Hart, "Therapeutic implications of viewing sexual identity in terms of essentialist and constructionist theories." In J.P. DeCecco, (Ed.), *Gay Personality and Sexual Labeling*. (New York: Harrington Park, 1985), pp. 39-51.

[22] C. Chan and T. Gock, "August APA council meeting report." *Division 44 Newsletter, 11*. No. 3, (1995): p. 13.

[23] J. Birkitt, Jr., "Newsletter," *Leadership News from UFMCC*. (Santa Monica, CA: UFMCC Publishers, 1998, June 10), pp. 1-2.

[24] China's psychiatric association has removed homosexuality from its list of mental illness. The psychiatric guide, "Chinese Classification and Diagnostic Criteria of Mental Disorders," published in May 2001, replaced a 1989 edition that defined homosexuality as a "psychiatric disorder of sexuality." China and the United States have not been the only countries calling homosexuality a mental disorder. Japan's psychiatric body called it a mental illness until 1995, and the World Health Organization until 1993. *Associated Press*. "Homosexuality Not an Illness, China Say." *New York Times*, (2001, March 8).

gay they cannot be changed. Most of the subjects of Spitzer's research study were recruited through groups such as Exodus that condemn homosexuality. Of those participating in the study 78 percent had spoken publicly in favor of efforts to convert homosexuals to heterosexuality; 93 percent claimed religion was "extremely" or "very" important in their lives. Approximately 40 percent stated that before they decided to change their orientation they have been exclusively attracted to partners of the same sex.[25] Dr. Spitzer's study came under strong criticism by gay rights groups for the lack of scientific rigor. His research was based on 45-minute telephone interviews with 143 men and 57 women who had sought help to change their orientation. According to Goode,

> Scientists do not know what determines whether someone becomes heterosexual or homosexual. But most believe that biology plays a strong role in sexual orientation. And most mental-health organizations have passed resolutions discouraging the use of so-called reparative therapies intended to change homosexuals into heterosexuals, saying no scientific evidence exists to show they are effective.[26]

Another study presented at the APA annual conference by two New York psychiatrists found of 202 homosexual subjects who had received therapy to change their sexual orientation, 178 reported that their efforts had failed, many were harmed by the attempt to change and only 6 achieved what the researchers called "a heterosexual shift."[27]

Hating the sin and not the sinner suggests that Christianity and homosexual

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[25]E. Goode, "Scientists Says Study Shows Gay Change Is Possible." *The New York Times* (2001, May 9).

[26] ____, ibid.

[27] ____, ibid. Dr. Ariel Shidlo and Dr. Michael Schroeder of Manhattan, reported that the majority of the subjects in their study, who were recruited through the Internet and direct mailings to groups advocating reparative therapy, reported failure in their efforts to change through reparative therapies. According to Dr. Schroeder, many of the subjects had invested 5 to 15 years in the therapies, and when they were not successful experienced "an inordinate sense of loss."

orientation are incompatible. Gay men and lesbians must turn away from homosexual practice if they desire to be a Christian. Claiming to be both gay and a Christian is viewed by many religious organizations as impossible. Therefore, the very concept of a gay or lesbian Christian would appear to be not simply an oxymoron to many, but a blatant disrespect for the principles of traditional conservative Christianity, bordering on blasphemy.

The religious right is comprised of more than Protestant evangelicals, but it is they who have been the most incessant in opposition to gay rights and condemnation of homosexuality. For example, Jay Grimstead, director of the Coalition on Revival, states "homosexuality makes God vomit."[28] In March 1984, television evangelist Jerry Falwell declared homosexuals "...brute beast...part of a vile and satanic system [that] will be utterly annihilated, and there will be a celebration in heaven."[29] A pamphlet, *The "Christian" Agenda Revealed*,[30] proclaims, "The Bible advocates discrimination against, intolerance of, and the death penalty for homosexuals."[31]

The more liberal denominations are not immune from the debates regarding the degree of diversity that is tolerable. The struggle with issues of diversity, in particularly, sexual orientation, has contributed to the growth of the theological debate surrounding inclusion and exclusion of the gay male and lesbian Christian. For example, in 1996, the "Human Sexuality and Ordination Committee" of the Presbyterian Church (USA) voted to continue the ban on the ordination of gay men

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[28] C. Bull, "Why Bush Hates You." *The Advocate*, (1992, October 20),p. 43.
[29] H. Covington, *The March Upcountry* as quoted in the booklet *Quarantines and Death: The Far Right's Homophobic Agenda* (Center for Demo-cratic Renewal, Atlanta, GA: 1991). Falwell's quote "brute beasts" is from his "Old Time Gospel Hour" television show, March 1984, p. 18
[30] The pamphlet was produced by Gran Fury in 1993.
[31] Hill et al., (1996), p. 72.

and lesbians.[32] With increasing pressure in the heated debate, the chief policy-making body of the denomination voted to recommend barring its ministers from officiating at blessings for gay couples.[33] Despite having recently voted against the formation of "Reconciling Congregations," United Methodists have been struggling with the issue of sexual orientation.[34] The Evangelical Lutheran Church allows gay and lesbian ordination, but restricts such action to gays who are committed to a life of celibacy.[35]

The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Church: A History

It is startling, to the majority of Christians and non-Christians alike, that there actually exists a denomination chartered by a gay evangelical pastor, who sought to provide a special religious outreach to gay men, lesbians, bisexual and transgendered people. Troy Perry, founder of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC), preaches that both homosexuality and heterosexuality are "gifts from God." The fact that there actually is a denomination with an affirming outreach to gay men and lesbians has significance given the hostile environment encouraged by the religious right. In order to grasp a better understanding of this unique religious

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[32] However, the Presbyterian General Assembly urged Hawaiians to legalize civil same-sex marriages. "Religious Groups' Attitude Towards Homosexuals and Homosexuality." Link: Presbyterian Church (USA). Retrieved on May 12, 1996 from http://web.canlink.com/ocrt/hom_pru.htm.

[33] Gays Lose Key Presbyterian Church Vote. Retrieved on August 2, 2000 from http://www.iwon.com/home/news/news_article/o,11746,211336|national|07-02-2...:15cbs,00.htm.

[34] Reconciling Congregations could lead to total acceptance of persons of all sexual orientations as members. "Religious Groups' Attitude Towards Homosexuals and Homosexuality." Retrieved on May 12, 1996 from http://web.canlink.com/ocrt/hom_umc.html.

[35] "Religious Groups' Attitude Towards Homosexuals and Homosexuality." Link: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Retrieved on May 12, 1996 from http://web.canlink.com/ocrt/hom_elca.htm. It should be noted that there are denominations other than UFMCC that permit membership and ordination of sexual minorities. The Unitarian-Universalists not only welcomes gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals as full members, but also supports their right to become clergy. According to a knowledgeable member of the Unity Church, sexual orientation should not be an issue in Church membership or employment in general. "Religious Groups' Attitude

organization, a brief history of the events leading to the creation and growth of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC) as a Christian denomination is provided.

The Exodus and the Genesis of a Moses

Religion was an intrinsic part of the life of the founder of UFMCC. Perry's experiences while attending church services at a Pentecostal holiness church in Florida during childhood provided the emotional, spiritual, and psychological impetus for the life he would seek as an adult.[36] The following vignettes offer a glimpse into some of the life altering events that helped form Perry's perceptions concerning religion, the role it would play in his life and could play in the lives of the emotionally, physically, and spiritually wounded. Perry's childhood provided the first traumatic events that would impact the direction of his life's journey. An unsettling home life, which included the loss of his father from a high-speed chase[37] and the remarriage of his mother to an abusive man, had a deep impact on Perry's psyche and shaped his ambitions. Beginning with his stepfather's insistence that Perry not attend church and culminating with the alcohol induced rage that resulted in being frequently beaten, Perry suffered emotional harm.[38] Then, the humiliating agony that Perry experienced when raped by a friend of his stepfather jolted Perry's world and prompted him to run away from home. Perry went to his paternal uncle's

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Towards Homosexuals and Homosexuality." Link: Unitarian-Universalists. Retrieved on May 12, 1996 from http://web.canlink.com/ocrt/hom_unit.html.

[36] T. Perry and T. Swicegood, *Don't Be Afraid Anymore: The Story of Reverend Troy Perry and the Metropolitan Community Churches*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

[37] Troy Perry, Sr. was a bootlegger, a fact Troy would not learn until after his father's death.

[38] T. Perry, *The Lord is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay*. (4th edition). (Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 1994).

home in Georgia to seek relief from the physical and emotional abuse.[39] The necessity to run from the emotional pain inflicted on Perry, would become a repetitive pattern in his struggle to find himself and a place to fill his spiritual needs.

Perry continued to hold a great fascination for church, despite of, or perhaps because of having faced the loss of his father, the abuse of a stepfather, and the emotional and physical violation by a stranger. Free from his abusive home-life, Perry was able to seek refuge in his religious convictions. Believing God could heal his emotional wounds; Perry immersed himself in the religious practices and teachings of the Pentecostal faith. The teachings of the Pentecostal faith would continued to direct the course of Perry's life. Pentecostals claim they have the gifts of the Holy Spirit described in the New Testament.[40] Perry found in his faith a place of refuge. The need and benefit of a shelter from life's abuses would remain an important part of his vision when deciding to found UFMCC.

The anxiety that Perry was experiencing led him toward exposure to additional religious training and opportunities to preach. The distress that frequently accompanies abuse pushed Perry further away from his mother and brothers. Perry traveled to his relative's home in Texas where he began speaking at the Assemblies of God church. Eventually, he grew homesick and returned to Florida where his family had moved upon his mother's divorce.[41] Perry's uncle was a Baptist minister and Perry was given the opportunity to preach the evening services at his uncle's church while living in Florida.

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[39] ____, ibid., pp. 6-7.

[40] The gifts of the Holy Spirit include prophecy, faith healing and glossolalia ("speaking in tongues"). See Acts 2; Acts 4. Pentecostalism was identified by its distinguishing gifts, which were called

The frequent movement of Perry's family did not end in Florida, nor did his desire to preach. Due to financial necessity, Perry and his family moved to Alabama and at sixteen, Perry became a paid evangelist, traveling throughout the state preaching. Perry's religious education increased rapidly as he moved from city to city and from the Pentecostal to the Baptist denomination. The frequent movement would become routine in Perry's life and the exposure to the Baptist pulpit would enrich Perry's spiritual ideology and inclusive view of religious beliefs. Although, Perry was comfortable in both Baptist and Pentecostal churches, he decided to attend the Pentecostal church.[42] Perry was under the impression from his church that he had to marry to be ordained. Certainly, Southern society had taught him that the only lifestyle for a minister is a married family man. Therefore, determined to pastor a congregation of his own, Perry married the pastor's daughter. Seemingly, Perry's life had taken a path that would lead him away from his tumultuous childhood experiences.

A second series of events further molded Perry. At the same time of Perry's exposure to both Pentecostal and Baptist doctrine, his sexual development was occurring in a way that troubled him. According to Reverend Perry, acceptance of two denominations created no conflict, but an attraction toward two sexes did trouble him.[43] He has stated that perhaps his attraction to charismatic fundamentalist churches was an effort to restrain his inevitable sexuality. Perry's reasoning is supported by the fact that fundamentalist denominations are "religious groups who

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charismatic. Charismatic comes from the Greek word for gifts, *Charismata* (B. Bower, *Stealing Jesus: How Fundamentalism Betrays Christianity*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1997), p. 137.

[41] ____, ibid., pp. 11-12.

[42] ____, ibid., p. 14.

believe the Bible is the literal word of God."[44] Fundamentalism and Pentecostalism's core theology is the doctrine that holds "every word of the bible to be the word of God and literally, historically true."[45] Likewise, on issues of social morality, charismatic fundamentalists are more conservative than are non-fundamentalist evangelicals. Perry believed that by aligning himself with fundamentalism, same-gender sexual behavior could be conquered.[46] His reasoning remains common among gays who continue to struggle with the conflict between their sexual orientation and religious beliefs. The logic applied by Perry in an attempt to conquer the perceived incompatibility between his sexuality and Christianity supports the religious right's current belief that Christian reparative therapies can free the gay male from his life of sin.

Despite Perry's efforts to embrace the tenets of fundamentalism, the ability to suppress his sexual orientation faltered. When a young man in the Chicago congregation where Perry preached informed the church leadership that he and Perry had engaged in a sexual relationship, Perry was excommunicated and advised to leave

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[43] ____, ibid.

[44] K. Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, (3rd edition). (Washington D. C.: CQ Press, 1997), p. 161.

[45] F. Fitzgerald, *Cities on a Hill*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986). p. 126.

[46] J. Green and J. Guth, "The Christian Right in the Republican Party: The Case of Pat Robertson's Supporters." *Journal of Politics* 50 (1988): pp. 150-168; C. Wilcox, (1986). "Fundamentalists and Politics: An Analysis of the Effects of Differing Operational Definitions." *Journal of Politics*, 48: pp. 1041-1051; C. Smidt, (1989). "'Praise the Lord' Politics: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Characteristics and Political Views of American Evangelical and Charismatic Christians." *Sociological Analysis*, 50: pp. 53-72. James Robison, a fundamentalist television evangelist, argues that same-gender sexual behavior is "perversion of the highest order. It is against God, against God's word, against society, against nature" (M. Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993, p. 84). This view remains current among fundamentalists who are antigay advocates (see F. Rich, Bashing Victory. *New York Times* (1996, February 14), (national edition), p. A15; A. Jacobs, "The Rhetorical Construction of Rights: The Case of the Gay Rights Movement, 1969-1991." *Nebraska Law Review 72 (1993)*: pp. 723-59; J. Dobson and G. Bauer, *Children at Risk: The Battle for the Hearts and Minds of our Kids*. (Dallas: Word, 1990). One popular belief of Christian fundamentalists is that homosexuals can be "healed" (Wulfensmith, Special Edition, 1).

town.[47] Although unaware of it at the time, this rejection by his church would, in the future, influence his decisions to create a spiritual refuge for gay men and lesbians who were also rejected by their churches.

The pattern of moving from community to community would continue for the Perry household and increase the tensions that were building in the marriage. Unable to find a congregation to pastor after returning to Florida, Perry and his family bounced from city to city and church to church.[48] Finally, he was able to secure the position of pastor at a small church in Santa Ana, California. Anticipating and hoping to head off a similar fate as faced in Chicago, Perry decided to inform the district overseer and bishop of his homosexuality. Once again, Perry was asked to go before the congregation, confess, and leave.[49] The move to California would eventually play a role in his decision to found UFMCC.

Perry's life would make another turn when he was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1965. Drawing on past experiences, Perry, as he had with his ministry, decided to make known his sexual orientation. Surprisingly, the military ignored Perry's assertions of being homosexual. Transferred to Kaiserslautern, Germany, Perry gained a high security clearance and coded and decoded top secret messages.[50]

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[47] Perry and Swicegood, (1990), pp. 17-18.

[48] _____, ibid., pp. 22. Still rejected by the Church of God, Perry found a ministry position in the Church of God of Prophecy. The organizations of the Church of God and the Church of God of Prophecy had split from a single source in 1923. They continued to have very similar doctrine, but almost entirely avoided speaking to each other on religious subjects.

[49] _____, ibid., p. 25.

[50] The irony of declaring his sexual orientation and being placed in a high security position in the military would not be wasted on Perry when he met with Jimmy Carter in 1975 in Los Angeles. At a luncheon, Perry ask then Governor Carter, "If you become president of the United States, are you willing to sign an executive order to ban discrimination against homosexuals in the areas of military, housing, employment and immigration?" Carter said, "the place I would have difficulty with, is the area of employment where security clearances are involved, where there are employees who are not open about a being gay." Perry notes that Carter was light-years ahead of what other national politicians were saying in their campaigns (Perry and Swicegood, 1990), p. 20.

Fellow soldier, Ted Cobb, befriended him and would have a long-term impact on Perry's religious fervor. Cobb, an Episcopalian, inquired why Perry, a gay man, continued to attend the Church of God when the church really did not want him there. The seeds of UFMCC were planted when Cobb suggested that Perry should consider starting his own church upon returning home.[51] The concept of establishing a church would take root and become part of Perry's future as the need to find a religious home would continue to grow.

The constant moving and humiliating dismissals from pastoral positions finally took a toll on Perry's marriage. Moreover, the tour in the military had not resolved the issue of Perry's sexuality. Divorced and again a civilian, Perry began pursuing a life as a gay man. Once again, the trauma associated with the emotional loss of a person close to Perry would shape his psyche. When his first live-in lover left him after several months, Perry tried to commit suicide. This is not surprising behavior, considering approximately 40 percent of gay men and lesbians have seriously contemplated or attempted suicide.[52] Perry's sexuality had cost him jobs, his marriage, and a place to worship openly as a gay man. The loss of his lover only added to the tremendous sacrifice that had been made because of his sexuality. As Perry struggled with his sexuality and spirituality, the nurse at the hospital admonished him to get in touch with God. Likewise, Willie Smith, Perry's roommate, continued to remind Perry that he was gay, would always be gay, God knew he was gay, and God loved him.[53]

The next series of events in Perry's life lead to the development of the concept

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[51] ____, ibid., p. 28.

[52] E. Rofes, *Lesbian, Gay Men and Suicide*, (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1983), p. 20.

of Christian social action that would become an integral part of his gospel message. Following his suicide attempt, Perry began the process of healing physically, emotionally, and spiritually. He began to venture out into the gay bar scene.[54] It is on one such occasion that Perry would take his first step toward social justice activism. While dancing at a local gay bar, plainclothes policeman came into the bar and arrested Perry's dance partner and another gay man for "lewd conduct." The frustration generated by the arrests motivated a group response, which would foster the rise of Perry's passion for social justice. Several patrons from the bar, including Perry, decided to go to the jail, post bail for their friends, and protest the police harassment. In the early hours before dawn, the group began to sing "We Shall Overcome," the anthem of the civil rights movement. Upon release, Perry's dance partner, who had never been arrested, began to make self-derogatory remarks about being gay. The man claimed, "nobody cares about dirty queers" to which Perry replied, "God cares."[55] Lying in bed exhausted from the previous nights events Perry had an epiphany. He prayed,

> Lord, you called me to preach. Now I think I've seen my niche in the ministry. We need a church, not a homosexual church, but a special church that will reach out to the lesbian and gay community. A church for people in trouble, and for people who just want to be near you. So, if you want such a church started, and you seem to keep telling me that you do, well then, just let me know when.[56]

Perry professes that a voice in his mind replied "Now."[57] This was a major turning

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[53] Perry and Swicegood, (1990), p.30.

[54] Due to societal homophobia and oppression, bars have constituted one of the only known places for gay men and lesbians to gather in safety, be affirmed, and socialize (C. O'Neill, *Coming Out Within: Stages of Spiritual Awakening for Lesbians and Gay Men—The Journey from Loss to Transformation*. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 102.

[55] Perry et al., (1990), pp. 32-34.

[56] ____, ibid., p. 35.

[57] ____, ibid.

point in his life. Perry made his exodus from the Pentecostal church of his childhood and began a journey that would make him a Moses for gay men and lesbians who felt the same desire to reconcile their need to practice Christianity.

A Promised Land: Establishment, Mission and Growth

All of the traumas of childhood, the moving from state to state, the excommunication from multiple churches, his divorce, and his spiritual battle with his sexuality served as a reminder of the sacrifices he had made to be a gay Christian man. His suicide attempt reflected the struggle of other gay men and lesbians. He knew he could not be the only person who was gay and with a desire to serve God, but was denied a place at the table because of his/her sexuality. As the pull of the ministry grew too strong to ignore, Perry began to discuss the idea of a church for gay men and lesbians. Those in opposition to the concept reasoned that the peace that most gays had made with themselves did not include religion. Despite the words of discouragement, Perry could not let the challenge his army buddy had suggested of starting his own church remained unanswered. Perry claims that he knew too well that gay men and lesbians have lived through centuries under the conviction that if they were gay they could not be children of God.[58]

Perry believes he received a call from God to establish a church whose doors would be open to all of God's children without exception. The mission of such a church would be to offer the promise of God's salvation, sanctuary, and family for those who had been exiled. Retaining a sense of naivete that caused him to be excommunicated and fired from pulpits in the past, Perry ran an advertisement in *The Advocate*, a national gay and lesbian publication inviting the magazine's readers to

his duplex apartment in Huntington Park, California, for Sunday services. When hearing Perry speak at the local MCC, he noted the innocence in his running the advertisement,

> When my roommate saw I had taken out that ad, he just freaked right out. He said, "My God, you put an ad in a gay newspaper and gave them our home address? You are crazy." I look back and say, I was stupid not crazy and there is a difference. I am a southern boy. And I was taught in my Pentecostal/southern Baptist background, if you were going to start a church, the first thing you have to do is tell people exactly what you believe. And, secondly, tell them where to find you. So, this wasn't being brave, I was stupid. I never thought about there being any difference in advertising. There were regular folks out there. My roommate said, "This little tiny town is not use to me and now you will be bring all these homosexuals from southern California, the police will be down at the end of the street, scooping them up in nets."[59]

His naïve nature paid off this time. On the first Sunday, October 6, 1968, twelve people came to meet with Perry. Perry informed those gathered in his apartment that the church was organized to serve the religious, spiritual, and social needs of the gay community of the greater Los Angeles area. Because the church was to be an outreach to the gay community, the word "community" needed to be in the title. According to Rev. Perry,

> Community meant a feeling of comradeship, a small area, a place where you knew everybody. So, it would be a community Church. We would also serve a large community, we would serve the whole Los Angeles area....so the word "metropolitan" finally came to mind, and it stuck.[60]

In addition, he emphasized that the church was not a *gay* church, but a Christian Protestant church that would be all-inclusive.[61] This inclusivity is a reflection of the exclusivity he had personally experienced as a gay Christian. Because of the major traumas, rejections, and frustrations Perry was driven to found what would become

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[58] Perry, (1994), p. 132.
[59] Troy Perry, (1995 March 22). Personal communications.
[60] Perry, (1994), p. 128.
[61] ___, ibid, p. 133. Those attending the first service included: 10 gay men, one of which was African

the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC). The denomination, from its inception, was founded on the concepts of the promise of salvation in God, refuge for those cast out of their churches, community for those rejected by their families, and social action in the fight for secular and religious equality.

It is difficult to comprehend that such a radical idea as a church ministering to sexual minorities could actually be created. By means of the advertisements in *The Advocate*, Reverend Richard Ploen[62] contacted Reverend Perry and offered to assist in setting up an educational program for UFMCC. Ploen helped with the formalization of the services by borrowing from other denominations' ceremonies. Because of the large number of Catholic, Episcopal, and Lutheran people in the early congregation, Perry acknowledges that the church relied heavily on the rituals practiced in those particular denominations. The books of worship from the Episcopal, Presbyterian, and the Lutheran churches were utilized as well as others that the members of the congregation wanted considered. Perry states the denomination "experimented and accommodated" the rituals of worship and allowed for "improvisation or change should any occasion within the church warrant it."[63] A patchwork of spirituality can be displayed in the denomination.

Perry's exposure to both Baptist and Pentecostal religious practices as a young person is evident in UFMCC interdenominational approach to worship. Perry had no difficulty in claiming the pulpit in both the Baptist and Pentecostal

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American, a heterosexual man and his girlfriend.

[62] ____, ibid. Rev. Ploen was a teacher at a Christian college and a missionary to Omdurman, Sudan, Africa.

[63] ____, ibid., pp. 144-145.

congregations. UFMCC has continued to incorporate the religious ceremonies of numerous Christian religions into the worship service and remains today an interdenominational hodgepodge that allows for improvising or change should the occasion warrant it. According to Rev. Horvath,[64] UFMCC stands as the only Christian denomination that does not require its members to relinquish their membership in other denominations. UFMCC's theology is described as "Basic Christian Doctrine." A great deal of latitude is allowed while embracing the tenets of Christianity. The denomination claims that it does not get tangled up in terms that are not integral to the salvation story of Christ's sacrifice or the rapport of Yahweh with the "Children of Israel."[65] For example, the congregations in California range from a "charismatic-Pentecostal church in Long Beach to a San Jose church whose approach is oriented toward metaphysics and New Thought to a San Francisco congregation that is near Unitarian"[66] in it theological tenor.

Reverend Perry continues to preach a three-pronged Gospel of salvation, community, and Christian social action. According to Perry, salvation refers to "God so loved the world that God sent Jesus to tell us that whoever believes shall not perish but have everlasting life"[67] and "whosoever" included Perry as a gay male. Perry posits that salvation is unconditional, because salvation is free and no church can take it away. While many orthodox Protestant denominations believe salvation is unconditional and free, there are some religious organizations that believe salvation,

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[64] Rev. Horvath is the pastor of Wichita Falls Metropolitan Community Church (WFMCC). Interview (May 26, 1998).
[65] "The Five Most Frequently Asked Questions About The UFMCC." *Wichita Falls Metropolitan Community Church: Discovery Class*. Unpublished.
[66] Dart, (March 21-28, 2001).
[67] John 3:16

although given by God, is conditional.[68] Second, community is for those without families to care about them, or who find themselves alone or friendless. The church, Perry promises, will be family. Third, Christian social action implies that gay men and lesbians would stand up for all of their rights, secular and religious. Perry proclaimed "we will start fighting the many forms of tyranny that oppress us."[69] Growth in the public square has come with the growth of empowerment within the gay and lesbian community. The issues espoused by the Church are grounded in the doctrine that advocates that God loves all people, whoever they are, just as they are.

With UFMCC offering a message of salvation, the question of morality is raised. According to the church's theology, MCC addresses the issue of sexuality and the need for the development of sexual responsibility in the community. MCC's theology declares,

> We hold that in scripture homosexuality, in itself, is not condemned, but rather lust and sexual irresponsibility of both heterosexual and homosexual nature are. There is a definite need for MCC to address a moral ethic as scripture leads us. It recognizes that there is a real need to educate people that in the concept of personal liberation and the recognition of the naturalness of our lifestyle, that accountability and responsibility are also a part.[70]

Openly dealing with human sexuality is an emphasis of MCC. Many denominations have very little to say from the pulpit or the Bible study class on the subject of human sexuality. Sexual morality is more likely to be addressed through the positive

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[68] Arguing that the teaching of Wesley's Calvinistic theory is inaccurate, C.R. Nichols claims to show that a child of God can depart from the faith and fall away from grace. In C.R. Nichols, *Nichol's Pocket Bible Encyclopedia* (Abilene, Texas: Abilene Christian College, 1949). Having received my religious training in the Church of Christ and by attending Abilene Christian College (currently Abilene Christian University), many of the concepts, beliefs, doctrines, liturgical aspects of Protestant denominations were new and difficult to understand spiritually. The doctrinal differences in my faith and the majority of Christian faiths required additional research in order for me to address the similarities and differences among mainline churches and the UFMCC.

[69] Perry and Swicegood, (1990), p. 38.

[70] ____, ibid.

message regarding purity, fidelity, and a private matter between husband and wife. A negative view is taken on promiscuity and sexual unfaithfulness. Most espouse chastity until marriage and that homosexuality is an abomination to God.[71] According to the teachings of UFMCC, the church believes that God intended for human beings to be sexual and that sexuality should be an integral part of the wholeness of a person. Sexuality is, however, not to be the focal point of one's life. Everything in one's life, including sexuality, must be centered on a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. God's relevance, according to UFMCC's theology, comes through "Jesus who related to Samaritans (foreigners), women (who were considered property), lepers (social outcasts), sinners (supposed to be rejected by God) and other elements of society."[72] UFMCC's three-pronged gospel of salvation, community, and Christian social action is a matter of faith being expressed through the denomination's basic belief system. Through salvation, UFMCC claims to offer the sinner a message of acceptance rather than rejection and a place of refuge from those that condemn homosexuality as a sin against God and nature. By building a physical, social, and spiritual community, the denomination hopes to provide fellowship for those who are regarded as social outcasts. The church through its Christian social action asserts an unwillingness to be considered foreigners in their own land.

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[71] Drawing on the frequently cited scriptures of I Corinthians, it is taught that remaining pure is praised, but if passions are impossible to control, it is better to marry than to lust. (I Corinthians 7: 9) Also, if a man marries a virgin it is good (I Corinthians 7: 38). Sex outside of marriage is immoral (I Corinthians 6: 12-20) and homosexuals will not inherit the kingdom of God (I Corinthians 6:9-11). For additional Biblical instructions on marriage see Ephesians 5:22-33.

[72] The Faith, Fellowship and Order Commission of UFMCC document (1973). "A Theology From the People."

Perry's traumatic early life experiences are again apparent in how adjustments were made in the beginning of UFMCC. The transient nature of Perry's home life helped prepare him for the repeated relocating that his congregation would face. When the church was approximately ten weeks old it became necessary to move from Perry's apartment in order to accommodate the crowds.[73] In less than three months, the church was averaging 36 in attendance weekly. The church relocated to the Huntington Park Women's Club where space was rented on Sundays.[74] During the first two years, the fast growing congregation continuously outgrew its meeting places and relocated to larger facilities.

Growth in numbers was not the only reason for the frequent relocation of the congregation. Moving to larger facilities became standard for what can be considered the first Christian bulwark against a homophobic society. Homophobia contributed to the address changes. On several occasions the moves occurred when the landlords of various civic organizations discovered they were renting to "queers who meet on the premises every Sunday."[75] Although the membership of Metropolitan Community Church is primarily gay and lesbian, from its earliest days between 5 and 15 percent of the membership was heterosexual. Presently, the fastest growing population in the denomination is among heterosexuals according to Rev. Michael Piazza of Cathedral of Hope MCC of Dallas.[76] Currently, 20% of UFMCC's membership is heterosexual. In addition, the Metropolitan Community Church in

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[73] The fledgling church grew from 16 to 22 first few weeks following the initial service.

[74] The majority of MCC congregations continue to rent spaces for worship services. Most congregations are small and lack the financial means to purchase their own facilities.

[75] Perry et al., (1990), p. 42.

[76] Piazza is senior pastor of the Cathedral of Hope (COH) which is the largest congregation of Metropolitan Community Churches with a membership of over 2000). Piazza informed me the reasons

Nigeria is primarily comprised of heterosexuals.[77] The "untouchables" of Nigeria are the outcast of society and have found refuge in MCC Okigwe.[78] According to Rev. Judy Dahl of UFMCC Global Outreach, no one from the United States MCC has been to Nigeria in fifteen years because they have not been able to obtain visas to travel in the country. Knowledge of the congregation is based solely on reports coming from Rev. Sylvanus Maduka of the Nigerian congregation.[79] All other Global Outreach areas are working with congregations that are predominantly composed of sexual minorities.[80] The majority of those aware of UFMCC's existence continue to categorize the denomination as a "gay church."

Early Growth of UFMCC

By the end of the first year of the church, Perry was filling services at the 385-seat Encore Theater in Los Angeles.[81] Because the owner-manager of the Encore did not charge the church rent, this allowed the congregation to add to their building fund. In 1970, MCC Los Angeles became the first lesbian and gay organization to own property.[82] On March 7, 1971, MCC-LA held the first service in its own building at the corner of Twenty-second and Union. In the first year and a half of MCC's

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the number of heterosexuals attending MCC congregations is growing is parents of gays and those in the community that find most congregations too conservative for their beliefs.

[77] N. Wilson, *Our Tribe: Queer Folks, God, Jesus, and the Bible.* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995), p. 11.

[78] Nigeria maintains a caste system. The lower caste is referred to as 'Osu' or 'Ume.' Osu or Ume is a legacy of the forefathers of Nigeria and is an ascribed status. It is Nigeria's version of Apartheid. Viewed as the pariah, the Osu or Ume are regarded as the lowest species of mankind, and are treated with contempt. In a society such as Nigeria where laws are disregarded, they are often exposed to public ridicule. See V. Dike, (1999, June 13). "The 'Caste System' in Nigeria, Democratization and Culture: Socio-political and Civil Rights Implications." *African Economic Analysis.* Retrieved on August 1, 2001 from http://www.afbis.com/analysis/cast.htm.

[79] The UFMCC membership statistics for 2000, indicate Nigeria's Okigwe MCC has 1,500 members according to *Journey to the Promise,* UFMCC World Jubilee and 20th General Conference, Toronto, Canada, 2001, Packet. Retrieved on August 1, 2001 from www.ufmcc.com/GC2001, (p. 16).

[80] Personal e-mail correspondence with Rev. Judy Dahl, Global Outreach Ministry. Retrieved from AOL email on May 15, 2001 from revjdahl@ufmcchq.com.

existence, the attendance rose to 1,000.

The growth of the membership inspired other gay men and lesbians in California and across the nation to duplicate the Los Angles endeavor. Because of the coverage in major magazines, newspapers and on television, Perry attracted other gay clergy, and word spread about his church. He traveled constantly to speak to potential converts and to open new branches of his church. In February 1970, MCC San Francisco formed, then in May of the same year congregations of MCC formed in Chicago, San Diego, Miami, and Dallas. Indeed, Perry's California endeavor spawned churches in Georgia, Illinois, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Wisconsin, Louisiana, New York, Oklahoma, Utah, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Oregon, Arkansas, Texas, and Washington, D.C.

In the summer of 1970, UFMCC held its first General Conference with eight cities represented. The local churches are joined together in the fellowship by the by-laws and articles of incorporation as accepted by the general conference. At that time the congregations were divided into seven districts. The tiered governmental structure[83] of UFMCC includes a general conference, district Conference and the local congregation (Appendix E). The organizational structure of UFMCC illustrates

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[81] The theater was a movie house where Perry's roommate Willie Smith worked.

[82] The MCC-LA has moved nineteen times in its thirty years.

[83] The primary issue for UFMCC's 2001 General Conference was the restructuring of the church's governing body. The proposed bylaw amendments to implement restructuring suggest replacing the districts with regions for the purpose of strengthening the personnel and resources of the whole fellowship. Rev. Horvath explains the reason for the restructuring is in part due to the wealth of certain districts and the shortages of personnel and resources of other districts. The South Central District, of which WFMCC belongs has the largest membership (4,706 members in 2000), and the greatest percentage of growth in membership (an 8.91% increase in 2000 over 1999). The global outreach ministry would be absorbed by the various regions with intentional efforts to have cross-cultural and international challenges. District coordinators would be replaced with elders assigned to serve the region. *Journey to the Promise*, UFMCC World Jubilee and 20th General Conference. Toronto, Canada, 2001, Packet. Retrieved on August 1, 2001 from www.ufmcc.com/GC2001 (pp. 24, 221-223).

the similarity to many mainline religious organizations' governing framework.[84]

The Samaritan Bible Seminary was established to train ministers for the denomination. Renamed, "The Samaritan Institute for Religious Studies," UFMCC's educational institution for professional ministry, administered coursework from its national office in Dallas, Texas through distance education programs. The education program offered a two-week residency curriculum and correspondences courses for students and clergy candidates in the United States and Canada.[85] However, UFMCC voted to close Samaritan because of ongoing funding and accreditation problems. Chicago Theological Seminary and the Pacific School of Religion, both of which are associated with the United Church of Christ have signed a covenant with MCC for the preparation of the denomination's clergy.[86]

Rev. Perry credits the growth of the church to a clear mission. Echoing the three-pronged gospel message, UFMCC's original mission statement read:

> The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches is a Christian church with a special outreach to the world's gay and lesbian community...Calling people to new life through the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ...Creating a community of healing and reconciliation through faith, hope, and love...Confronting the injustice of poverty, sexism, racism, and homophobia through Christian social action.[87]

Early in the churches' history, the church's business and social action programs were conducted from Perry's home. He was flooded with telephone calls

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[84] Preparing for the challenges of the 21st century, UFMCC restructuring proposal called for a new governing body composed of Elders elected by regions, a Moderator and Vice-Moderator elected by the General Conference. Each will receive full time compensation. Each region would have a mandate to establish new churches in the countries or areas that make up their region. Global Outreach would be abolished. The 15% paid by local churches to support UFMCC's district and international ministries will be reduced over several years to 10% total. T. Perry, "A Message from the Rev. Troy D. Perry: On the Restructuring of our UFMCC Movement." South Central District UFMCC e-mail Mailing List. Retrieved on May 1, 2001 from UFMCCHq, http://www.ufmcc.com.

[85] *Keeping in Touch*, (Santa Monica, CA: UFMCC Publishers, 1998, March-April), p. 3.

[86] Dart, (2001, March 21-28), p. 6.

from gays wanting information, counseling, and some were in desperate need of help. Several callers were severely depressed and contemplating suicide. The church formed a Crisis Intervention Committee that sought training from professionals in suicide prevention and in counseling for acceptance. UFMCC coordinated find-raising effort, provided counseling services, and through its social action programs supplied food, housing, and clothing to those in need. Many gay men and lesbians had difficulty finding and keeping housing and jobs if their sexual orientation was discovered. Once contacts with local agencies were established, many attorneys came forward, often anonymously to be available for consultation at a minimum of legal fees. The congregation began working closely with the Probation Department, Human Resources, all areas of the United States Health, Education, and Welfare Department (HEW), and with all local and state arms of the HEW. By holding festivals the church raised monies for food, clothing, and housing. At the same time that MCC began its outreach through social action programs, ministers and deacons from other churches began to transfer their license or degrees, credits, and ordination certificates to Perry's church.[88]

The social action programs of UFMCC have contributed to the rapid growth of the denomination. In the beginning, the most important aspect of the social action program involved helping sexual minorities obtain jobs and housing. The difficulties confronted by being gay, including acceptance and suicide prevention, were addressed with the development of a 24-hour telephone hotline with professionally

[87] UFMCC World Center, Homepage. Retrieved on June 5, 1999 from http://www.ufmcc.com.
[88] Perry, (1994), pp. 161-162.

trained counselors.[89] Acknowledgment or acceptance of the sexual element of being different frequently accompanies feelings of denial, shame, anxiety, and ambivalence. Often this is a time of intense dissonance and inner turmoil.[90] Suicide is the extreme manifestation of such dissonance. The majority of gay men and lesbian suicides occur between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one according to Pollak.[91] A 1989 study on youth suicide reports thirty percent of youth suicide is attributed to young people believing they have nowhere to turn to address question about their sexual identities.[92] According to a sermon presented by a Wichita Falls MCC pastor (WFMCC),

> Among the young, homosexual youth are two to six times more likely to commit suicide. One-third of suicides among gay males is related to their conflict over their sexual orientation. Many feel a sense of hopelessness, uselessness... Killing them selves because life seems hopeless. Likewise, many among our community are killing themselves by their unhealthy behavior, risk taking behavior, and oppressive stress.[93]

The gay male and lesbian Christian community does not escape oppression. My findings note that during a worship service of the local congregations, prayers were offered for an individual who was hospitalized after attempting suicide. Furthermore, several members confided that they had contemplated or attempted suicide in the

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[89] Personal communications, (1998). Both the former pastor and Rev. Horvath acknowledge that they spend a large amount of their time counseling members who are experiencing personal or public difficulties with their sexuality.

[90] L. Lewis, "The Coming-Out Process for Lesbians: Integrating a Stable Identity." *Journal of the National Association of Social Workers*, 29:5, (1984): p. 465.

[91] M. Pollack, "Male Homosexuality." In P. Aries and A. Bejin, (Eds.), *Western Sexuality*: (New York: Blackwell, 1985).

[92] U. Vaid, *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1995), p. 16. The Reagan-Bush administration January 1989 study was suppressed by the White House and the Department of Health and Human Services until August of 1989. The study was entitled, *Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide*. (also see C. Bull et al., 1996), pp. 220, 222, 237, 256, 272). Likewise, D. Lafontaine confirms in *New York Native* (1991), states that thirty percent of the million teen suicide attempts each year are by gay and lesbian teens.

past.[94] Because of the homophobic oppression experienced by many, a ministry that is directed to gay men and lesbians who attempt suicide is an important part of the church's mission.

Equity Growth

One might think that an oppressed segment of society that is fighting what it perceives as the tyranny of oppression would be free from internal discrimination and strife. This has not been the case for UFMCC. As the denomination continued to grow, it began to articulate the issues of sexuality, gender, ethnicity, and inclusivity that would come to define the denomination. However, the delivery was more of a halting stutter than a smooth enunciation in the denomination's early evolution. The equality of women became an issue early in the church's development. A need to engage in social justice within the denomination became a reality. Originally, all of MCC's clergy were males as were most members of the congregations. In the late 1960s when the first bylaws were written, the word "he" was used throughout to refer to ministers, deacons, and other offices. To the men, the masculine pronoun was to be interpreted to be non-exclusionary. Perry had grown up in a family that contained several women pastors and had no objection to female ministers. The reality was that few women clergy existed in the general population. There is gender discrimination within the gay community just as there is sexism in the non-gay population. In the early days of the denomination, women comprised approximately ten percent of the churches' membership. Thus, UFMCC was not as emancipated as members would

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[93] Rev. Walker. Personal communication (1996, February 11). Walker affirms fifty-eight percent of males and thirty-nine percent of females claimed that their first attempt to commit suicide was related to the fact that they were lesbians.

[94] Personal communications, (1996, March 17).

like to remember. Women who wanted to get involved in the church were placed in the choir. This changed, however, because of the efforts of Freda Smith.[95] Smith had attended the Eastern District Conference early in 1973, and brought to the attention of the male pastors, deacons, and exhorters that she was the only woman present. Determined to end the traditional subordination of women, Smith spoke at the Fourth General Conference in Atlanta in 1973. With the Fellowship busy writing a statement of faith, Smith believed it was an appropriate time to change the wording of the bylaws to "he and she." Some males argued that the term "he" was universally understood to include women. Smith fought for a line by line change of the bylaws wording and succeeded in getting the changes. Smith gained such admiration for her efforts that she was nominated and approved for the position on the Board of Elders. She was the first woman to serve on the board and the first to be nominated from the floor rather than by the nominating committee.[96] UFMCC came to practice what it preached regarding equality. The role of women has increased over the years. Some members have voiced concern that the church's clergy is overwhelmingly female. Rev. Perry disagrees and states, "It is true that slightly more than 50% of the faith's clergy are female. I believe this is due in part to the loss of male members because of the complications of AIDS."[97]

Resistance: Suffering for "Doing Good"

UFMCC's rapid growth has been an important indicator of the magnitude of the need of many gay men and lesbians for a place of spiritual renewal and

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[95] In 1972, Smith was officially licensed as a minister and was acting pastor of MCC in Sacramento. In 1990, Smith began serving as a vice moderator of UFMCC (the second highest elected position) and is pastor of Sacramento's Metropolitan Community Church (Perry and Swicegood, 1990), p. 103.
[96] Perry and Swicegood, (1990), p. 118.

acceptance: a refuge. Unfortunately, for the denomination, it has and continues to feel the discomfort that its existence has produced for many in the broader religious community. For example, the *Washington Post* carried a front-page story on Perry's message that God loves gay people. He was scheduled to preach and perform a holy union or "gay marriage" ceremony in the nation's capitol at an Episcopal Church rented for the occasion. Having read the article in the *Post*, the bishop responsible for Episcopal churches in the District of Columbia ordered that Perry and the seventeen others who joined him for the service, were to be locked out of the building with out notice. Being asked to leave a place of worship was not a new experience for Perry or his parishioners. The past resistance to renting facilities to a "gay" church prepared Perry for this day. Despite the snowy 23-degree weather, Perry conducted the service outside the locked church while reporters, press photographers, and television crews surrounded him. When asked what he planned to do following the sermon, Rev. Perry told the reporter, "We are going to the National Cathedral to pray for the soul of the bishop who denied shelter to this small band of Christians."[98] The desire to be tolerant of the opposition was exhibited in the prayers offered in this incident and continues to be part of the non-violent Christian social action chosen by the denomination to address opposition today. The resolve to not be stopped in spreading the gospel to gays was and remains an important focus of UFMCC.

With the continuing growth and visibility of MCC churches, resistance beyond verbal condemnation and exclusion spread. Violent opposition to the denomination's existence increased. Since 1968, more than twenty UFMCC churches

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[97] Personal observation, (1996, March 22). Also see Dart (2001, March 21-28).
[98] Perry and Swicegood, (1990), p. 44.

have been bombed or burned, while many others have been vandalized, desecrated or threatened.[99] For example, in January 1973, MCC-LA was destroyed by fire. Three months later, the Nashville MCC burned. The Nashville MCC blaze was called a fire "of suspicious origin" by authorities.[100] The third fire of 1973 was the worst. A bar in New Orleans, although no longer used on Sunday's by Metropolitan Community Church, was destroyed by arson on the last Sunday in June of 1973. Thirty-two lives were lost including twelve members of MCC. Rev. William Larson of MCC burned to death in the inferno as the crowd on the street helplessly watched. On the first of July 1973, all congregations of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community churches held special memorial services as part of a national day of mourning for those who were lost in the New Orleans fire. The community created by gay Christians was reinforced by the action. In 1974, the Metropolitan Community Church in San Francisco was torched. On the announcement board in front of the burned building was the message "AND YOU SHALL DIE, BASTARD" with an arrow pointing toward the name of the pastor, Reverend James Sandmire.[101] The drawing of parallels to the numerous burning of Black churches cannot be denied. The destruction of Black churches, the violence toward African Americans, and the actions taken against congregations of MCC and its members serve to illustrate the degree of intolerance many minorities encounter in the United States.

Violent opposition has gone beyond destroying property. Members of the clergy have been attacked. Threats on Rev. Perry's life have resulted in him often

[99] According to a report entitled, "Attacks on Gay and Lesbian Churches," proportionally, no other institution in America has been recipient of as much arson, bombing, vandalism, and desecration motivated by hate crimes as have the churches of UFMCC. Seven percent of UFMCC's congregations have been targets of bombing or arson (Birkitt, Jr., 1998, June 10).

being accompanied by bodyguards while preaching nationwide.[102] In 1970, a woman in front of the Federal Building in Los Angeles struck Perry in the face. In 1971, during a demonstration march from San Francisco to Sacramento, an attempt was made to stab Perry with a broken beer bottle during. According to Perry, full-time bodyguards are always present at the fellowships General Conferences because, until the 1985 General Conference in Sacramento, they had never been able to complete the meeting without at least one bomb threat.[103] Likewise, Rev. Mel White, gay activist and national Minister of Justice and Reconciliation for the UFMCC frequently wears a bulletproof vest under his black clerical shirt when speaking in churches and Bible colleges across America. Referring to some of the churches and universities, Rev. White states, "some are bleak outposts of intolerance."[104]

An event in Texas in 1978 stands as another example of resistance to the concept of a gay Christian. The metropolitan area including Houston, Texas certainly can not be considered a remote settlement. Nonetheless, MCC was, at the time, the primary gay deterrent to antigay forces in Houston. Organizing, leading, and speaking at the first parade for gay and lesbian human rights in the city, Rev. Harvey[105] was called upon to face the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). The day following the parade a cross of iron pipes and rusty rebar wrapped in heavy burlap and chicken wire was burned on the lawn of her MCC church. Twenty-two and thirty-eight caliber bullets were inside the cross, which had been doused with kerosene. The heat from the fire caused many of the bullets to discharge. Flying in all directions, several

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[100] Perry and Swicegood, (1990), p. 76.
[101] ____, ibid., p. 183.
[102] J. Glionna, "A Path Less Traveled." *Los Angeles Times*, (1998, March 16), pp. 1-7.
[103] Perry and Swicegood, (1990).

bullets were found embedded in the walls of the church building. In an apparent attempt to encourage additional violence, the KKK's phone number was broadcast over the local television and radio stations every half-hour following the rebroadcast of Rev. Harvey's parade speech. Harvey called and recorded the KKK phone message which stated:

> Pasadena, Texas. We, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, are not embarrassed to admit that we endorse and seek the execution of all homosexuals...we are seeing the establishment of homosexual churches like the Metropolitan Church at 1214 Joannie Street in Houston in our once unblemished land...The law of God states the death penalty for homosexual, and when God's laws are again enforced the death penalty is what it will be.[106]

Despite the harassment that followed, including threats of bombs, rape, and murder, Houston's MCC congregation grew in the two-year period of 1978 to1980, from eighteen members to 360.[107] This growth demonstrates the determination of the ministry of UFMCC not to be deterred.

Resistance to UFMCC not only exists in the Christian and general heterosexual realm of society, but also within the nonreligious gay and lesbian communities. According to Hasbany, gay and lesbian believers often find themselves isolated in both of their identity communities. Within their faith communities, religious conservatives and fundamentalists castigate them. Outside the religious communities, many in lesbian and gay community who are bitter toward religion, see the activism of gay Christians as dupes and masochists engaged in a neurotic and meaningless struggle.[108] This attitude was observed when members of

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[104] McGraw, (1997, April, 29).
[105] Rev. Jeri Harvey was the first woman to become the pastor of MCC-LA.
[106] Perry and Swicegood, (1992), p. 132.
[107] ____, ibid.
[108] R. Hasbany, (Ed.), *Homosexuality and Religion.* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1989).

the MCC-LA congregation took to the streets to distribute flyers that advertised a series of sermons on "Outing the Bible." Some of the gay men and lesbians who knew that the group came from MCC reacted with hostility. According to Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson, chief ecumenical officer[109] and pastor of MCC-LA, gay men and lesbians on the streets cursed members who were distributing the flyers. Gays hostile to the church members ripped up the flyers and shouted, "F__ the Bible." Wilson believes that anyone who would react with such hostility is "hurt and enraged, or a survivor of some authoritarian, homophobic religious abuse."[110]

A member of WFMCC informed me of the difficulties involved in getting many gay men and lesbians to attend church. She regretfully states,

> Let me tell you about the gay and lesbians in the workplace who do not attend church. I have invited them to attend things at the church. I have been surprised how much resistance that has been ingrained in them through the years that church is just a rejecting place. They are having a hard time even giving it (church) a chance.[111]

Many open-minded religious organization have found MCC to be too liberal with God's grace and adamantly resisted the denomination's desire to be recognized. Seeking a role in the broader religious community, MCC began plans to apply for membership in the National Council of Churches (NCC)[112] and the World Council of Churches (WCC) in the mid-1970's and early 1980's. This action, according to a

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[109] It has been Reverend Elder Wilson's job to coordinate the strategies and policies of UFMCC Ecumenical Witness and Ministry Department. She works with and trains MCC clergy and laity to interact with ecumenical (inter-religious) organizations (N. Wilson, 1995), p. 1.

[110] N. Wilson, (1995), pp. 114-115.

[111] Personal communications, (1998, December).

[112] The National Council of Churches was founded in 1950 as the successor of the defunct Federal Council of Churches. In the 1960's NCC had a reputation as being social activists, progressive's vanguard of mainline churches in America helped fund such social movement activities as Martin Luther King, Jr.' March on Washington in 1963 (N. Wilson, 1995 endnote 4), p. 287. In the 1990's, NCC remains the key coalition of theologically liberal denominations. See Fowler and Hertzke, *Religion and Politics in America: Faith, Culture, and Strategic Choices*. (Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, Inc., 1995), p. 65.

prominent sociologist, put the issue of religious rights for homosexuals squarely on the agenda of the National Council of Churches.[113] Tensions within the NCC had been mounting over the issue of UFMCC's application for membership. The Eastern Orthodox churches had issued a statement to the press indicating that if UFMCC ever became eligible for membership by the governing board, they would leave the council.[114] This application for membership by UFMCC occurred shortly after President Reagan's election. His administration had no use for the liberal reputation of NCC. Both *Readers' Digest* and *60 Minutes* did damaging exposés on the political activities of the NCC and the World Council of Churches. This exposure, according to Rev. Wilson, was a major source of financial and political anxiety for the council. The leadership of NCC found itself dealing with an application for membership from a controversial denomination. MCC served a less-than-acceptable minority: gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people. Acceptance of MCC by the NCC would not advance the council's broader image. The meetings, examinations, and discussions of MCC's application developed into a long dysfunctional relationship pattern of "Come here/go away" version of "ecu-teasing"[115] according to Rev. Wilson. Over the next ten years UFMCC leaders met with a NCC committee four times. Finally, in the Fall of 1992 the National Council of Churches' General Board voted to take no action on UFMCC's request for observer status. Wilson argues that

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[113] J. Dart, (1991, June 7). "Church for Gays Alters Mainline Religions' Views." *Los Angeles Times*.

[114] The membership committee of the council, which included the Eastern Orthodox member, had unanimously voted in March 1982 that MCC met the criteria for membership. A vote by the council to ratify that judgement had been postponed for a year and a half at the time the Eastern Orthodox issued its objections to MCC" eligibility (N. Wilson, 1995), p. 8.

[115] By creating the term "ecu-teasing," Wilson is making a reference tongue-in-cheek to the lack of decisiveness exhibited by NCC. The inability of the council to make a final commitment to either include or exclude MCC from its membership was becoming frustrating and annoying to Wilson and others who were involved in the process.

the "no action" *is* an action.[116] This offers an example of the relationship that MCC has experienced with the NCC. According to Rev. Perry, recognition was not the point; participation was. "Validation comes from the Holy Spirit and what MCC wanted was fellowship with other Christians. In 1996, UFMCC sought to start along with members of NCC a study on a theology of *human* (Perry's emphasis) sexuality, not homosexuality or heterosexuality."[117]

Efforts to Build and Expand Community

Serious about including sexuality in the theological discussion, a new mission statement was adopted at the General Conference XVIII in Sydney, Australia. The current statement reads:

> The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community churches is a Christian church founded in and reaching beyond the gay and lesbian communities. We embody and proclaim Christian salvation and liberation, Christian inclusivity and community, and Christian social action and justice. We serve among those seeking and celebrating the integration of their spirituality and sexuality."[118]

In 1997, Gwynne Guibord, UFMCC representative, met in Washington D.C. to hold formal discussions with the NCC.[119] Guibord restated UFMCC goals to always be a witness for God in the community and to be members of NCC. Joan Campbell, General Secretary of NCC indicated that UFMCC would be invited to address the next general board meeting in 1998.[120] UFMCC was pleased that the dialogue with

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[116] N. Wilson, (1995), pp. 8, 19, 25.
[117] Personal communications, (1996, March 22).
[118] J. Birkitt, Jr., (Ed.), *Keeping in Touch*, (Santa Monica, CA: UFMCC Publishers, 1997, May), p. 2.
[119] N. Wilson, "UFMCC/NCC Hold First Formal Discussion in Five Years." *Keeping in Touch*. (Santa Monica, CA: UFMCC Publishers, December 1997-January 1998), p. 3. Discussion between UFMCC and NCC were re-opened after a five year period of silence.
[120] ____, ibid., p. 2.

NCC has once again been started.[121] The hope that the dialogue with NCC would re-start indicates UFMCC desire to be part of the broader religious community. Acknowledgment by the NCC would also reinforce the message of salvation for gay Christians as acceptable to a segment of heterosexuals.[122]

Although excluded from membership in the National Council of Churches, MCC has been able to obtain official observer status in the World Council of Churches. In part, by leapfrogging the National Council of Churches and gaining observer status in the World Council of Churches, MCC has broadened its vision and was represented by Rev. Wilson at the WCC Assembly in Canberra, Australia in 1991. This was the first chance for this world ecumenical assembly to offer a communion liturgy composed and celebrated by such a diverse international Christian body.[123] Not all members of the WCC approved. Once again, the Eastern Orthodox objected to MCC's participation. They chose to remain outside the service protesting the celebration with maligning signs. Politics proved to make for strange bedfellows when, according to Rev. Wilson, several fundamentalists critical of MCC joined in the protest with the Eastern Orthodox protestors.[124]

National Growth

Despite ongoing resistance from conservative and liberal denominations and

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[121] Six MCC representative sit on NCC committees, including the Faith and Order Commission and a task force on justice for working women according to Guibord (Dart, 2001, March 21-28), p. 6.
[122] ____, ibid. Guibord was elected president in January 2001 of the California Council of Churches. The council represents 19 denominations at the state capital, primarily on social issues. The MCC also belong to statewide church councils in Colorado, Hawaii, North Carolina and Oregon.
[123] N. Wilson, (1995), endnote 14, (p. 288).
[124] ____, ibid., p. 21.

acts of violence, today the growth of the UFMCC extends nationwide.[125] According to the membership reports there has never been a year when the membership was not higher than the previous year despite the heavy toll taken by AIDS among the male members a decade ago and attacks on the church and its members.[126] There are congregations in forty-three states and the District of Columbia (Appendix F).

Although UFMCC has expanded its outreach across the United States rapidly relative to the age of the denomination, it is also clear that MCC's total numbers are very small when compared to other denominations. The number of individuals attending congregations of MCC is generally larger than totals on the membership roles. This is normally the reverse of what occurs in churches. This reversal of numbers between attendance and membership occurs in most MCC congregations because those attending often do not become part of the church's membership. Rev. White explains, "Very few people stay to become members. They stumble into an MCC church and weep for the first six months—like I did. Once they get their bearings, many return to a church tradition they are comfortable with."[127]

International Growth

The Universal Fellowship has not only expanded nationwide, but also worldwide. MCC is now located in such diverse places as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Germany, England, Japan, India, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Israel, France, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, and Latin America.[128] Today, thirty years after its beginning, UFMCC consists of 52,000 members in 314 churches in 15

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[125] Lyle Schaller, a parish consultant of 38 years claims, "I have written between 45 and 50 books on congregational life. I would say it is safe to say that MCC is one of the 10 fastest growing denominations." Personal communications (1998, March 25).
[126] Dart, (2001, March 21-28), p. 8.
[127] ____, ibid., p. 8. White and his partner, besides membership in MCC, also belong to the All Saints Episcopal parish in Pasadena, California.
[128] Perry, (1972).

countries (Appendix G). Although the numerical size of the membership is relatively small, the geographic reach is noteworthy. Much of UFMCC's recent growth is attributable to their international churches, especially those in South Africa. For example, from 1999 to 2000, the South African congregation Good Hope MCC located in Cape Town grew in attendance by 20%. In that same period of time the number of churches increased in the Australia District 12.5%, European District 13.3%, and the Global Outreach 105.8%.[129] Since 1993, 22 MCC congregations have doubled in membership and another 30 have grown by 40%.[130]

UFMCC's expanding outreach is part of the denomination's desire to establish evangelical centers around the world. The need to develop a world extension for UFMCC's message can be demonstrated by the actions of MCC's Brixton-London pastor, Jean White, who has established correspondence with people in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia where death is the penalty for same-gender sexual behavior. Aware of the risk of being identified as a sexual minority, White cautiously writes to a man in the Middle East using code to protect the man's privacy. If the code were to be deciphered, it would cost the man his life.[131] In other countries MCC has had to proceed according to the native laws and cultures. According to White, UFMCC's literature has been translated into Polish, Chinese, Danish, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, and Russian. White states, "I have had to teach people in other countries that MCC is not an American church. It started in America--but MCC is now a Christian church on an international level."[132]

UFMCC's geographic growth is impressive. Perry's determination to make a

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[129] *Journey to the Promise*, UFMCC World Jubilee and 20th General Conference, Toronto, Canada, 2001, Packet. Retrieved on August 1, 2001 from www.ufmcc.com/GC2001, (p. 16).

[130] Membership reported to the administrative offices for districts outside the United States is Eastern Canadian district, 561; European District, 550; Australian District, 191, and Global Outreach, 2,590 [Argentina, 30; Mexico, 150; New Zealand, 75; Nigeria, 1,500; Philippines, 50; Puerto Rico, 35 and South Africa, 750]. See *Keeping in Touch*, (Santa Monica, CA: UFMCC Publishers, 1997, June), p. 1.

[131] Perry et al., (1990), p. 223.

place for people who were Christian and gay has succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. Reverend Perry states, "You could not have told me that twenty-seven years ago we would be part of the largest organization for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and the transgendered (GLBT)...Our churches are growing."[133] Undoubtedly, UFMCC has become a denomination—a formal association of churches with common beliefs and customs.[134]

UFMCC has also continued to show signs of becoming an established institution. Churches in the United States are not simply buildings providing a space for worship. Congregations have become multipurpose organizations that offer a variety of services including social welfare, pastoral counseling, publishing, charitable fund-raising, and formal education.[135]

It appears that after three decades of steady growth, Perry's movement has become a growing financial force. There is evidence of the denomination's increasing status among gay organizations. For example, in 1997, U.S. parishioners alone donated more than $15 million to the church and with the help of a $1-million down payment raised through church collections, Perry's movement paid $3.8 million for a complex in West Hollywood. The complex is the worldwide headquarters for MCC. The multi-storied building is to be transformed into a church space, a chapel

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[132] ____, ibid., p. 227.

[133] Personal communications, (1996, March 22). This is a personal observation noted while hearing Rev. Perry speak at WFMCC during his UFMCC Capital Campaign tour.

[134] Wald, (1997), p. 171; L. Kellstedt and J. Green, "Knowing God's Many People: Denominational Preferences and Political Behavior." In D. Leege and L. Kellstedt, (Eds.), *Rediscovering the Religious Factor in American Politics*. (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe,1993), pp. 53-71; Roof and McKinney (1987); Wald and Smidt, (1993); R. Salisbury, "American Politics: Religion and the Welfare State." In R. Tomasson, (Ed.), *Comparative Social Research*. (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI, 1983); M. Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land*. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984), pp. 56-65; A. Greeley, *The Denominational Society*. (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1972).

[135] Wald, (1997), p. 29.

and visitors center, gay and lesbian museum, office space, board and general council meeting rooms, and a technology center. The chapel, located on the first floor, is dedicated to parents with the purpose of spreading the message that it is okay to love their gay and lesbian children. The visitors center has videotapes that tell the story of the Metropolitan Community Church, because, according to Perry, "to know us, is to love us." For those who visit the center, a packet of literature is provided identifying the MCC congregation closest to the visitor's community. The nearest MCC pastor is notified so that a follow up contact can be made with the individual when they return to their home. The second floor is used as office space for the headquarters' staff. The third floor includes board and general council meeting rooms and a technology center.

Doing Justice: Promoting Christian Social Action

Another example of how MCC was taking on the characteristics of an institution is its increasing role in Christian social action. Both directly and indirectly, UFMCC has become a force politically. Perry acknowledges that UFMCC must move into the twenty-first century by learning to use the technologies already utilized by the Religious Right and other political and social activists. The goal of the denomination's worldwide headquarters' technology center is to connect all of the fellowship's congregations by Internet, so that they can notify each other of problems and the progress experienced by the local churches.[136] In addition, Perry envisions the use of the Internet to generate "millions of letters to send to Washington D.C., just

[136] 84% of UFMCC congregations have either e-mail or fax access (86% in the US; 74% outside the US). 78% of all UFMCC churches have e-mail access (82% in the US; 70% outside the US). 16% of UFMCC churches have no e-mail or fax access (14% in the US; 26% outside the US). A recent pilot

as the religious right does."[137] References to the political and social activism of the religious right and the vision of being able to counter such actions, underlines the belief that this faith is, as it claims, a movement. The action plan that Perry lays out in describing the technological benefits that are available in the new facility indicates an increased spiritual and political activism and national outreach in the spiritual efforts of the church's work.[138]

The benefit of the technology in enhancing UFMCC's work to spread the message of salvation and build community was demonstrated during the General Conference XVIII held in Sydney, Australia in July 1997. The conference was the largest gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered spirituality gathering ever held in the Pacific Rim and key events were broadcast over the Internet. More than 1,600 attended the opening rally. Delegates and attendees from 15 countries gathered for a week of worship, workshops, and business.[139]

Perry views the complex as a legacy to an emerging generation of those excluded from traditional churches. His childhood and early ministerial experiences of abuse and rejection continues to shape the purpose of his mission. Used by Perry in his tour to raise money for the UFMCC headquarters complex, a Capital Campaign video called *Dare to Dream* and a brochure titled, *For the Next Generation*, asked,

In the declining current of social tolerance, who will remain as the advocate

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projects grant has provided $16,000 to establish e-mail or fax capability in international global Outreach areas. "UFMCC LeaderLink." Retrieved on July 8, 1998 from http://www.ufmcc.com.

[137] Personal communications, (1996, March 22).

[138] Every Friday night (8-10 PM EST; 5-7 PM PST) people of diverse backgrounds, opinions, and experiences from around the world gather in the UFMCC Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgendered Christian chat room in the PlanetOut area of American Online. During the two hours of net time, there is a sharing of concerns, joys, as well as discussion of religious questions. See Hahn, *Keeping in Touch*, (Santa Monica CA: UFMCC Publications, 1996, November), p. 6.

[139] J. Birkitt, Jr., (Ed.), *Keeping in Touch*. (Santa Monica, CA: UFMCC Publications, 1997 September), p. 1.

> for our people? In the current political climate fueled by the homophobic rhetoric of the radical religious right, do MCC churches have the tools needed to stand against intolerance? Are we equipped to draw a line in the sand for our people?[140]

Today, UFMCC is the largest international organization in the world with an outreach to gay men and lesbians. According to Wald, "organizations associated with religion may provide a link to politics through the tie of interest."[141] The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF),[142] founded in 1973, maintains a staff of twenty and has a budget of $2.8 million. The Human Rights Campaign (HRC),[143] founded in 1980, has a staff of sixty and a budget of $13 million.[144] NGLTF under the leadership of Kerry Lobel and HRC guided by executive director Elizabeth Birch, are the community's two largest political organizations. In 1997, HRC and NGLTF's combined memberships gave over seven million dollars to their organization's efforts to shape the debate on equal rights. However, they are not as large as the gay-affirming ministry focused UFMCC with a staff of 350 and a $15 million budget, which gave over eleven million dollars in tithes in 1995. Devoted to advancing the debate on equal rights for GLBT people, UFMCC disseminates information, participates in marches, conducts peaceful demonstrations, and provides organizational assistance for the political and social goals of the gay rights movement.

Furthermore, UFMCC congregations around the globe have begun to be recognized in the struggle for justice and committed to overcoming the forces of

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[140] Personal communications, (1996, March 22). Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, Videotape, *Dare to Dream*, viewed at WFMCC.
[141] Wald, (1997), p. 28.
[142] NGLTF is a grassroots organization for lesbian and gay rights.
[143] HRC focus is lobbying for lesbian and gay rights.
[144] C. Bull, "The Power Brokers." *The Advocate*, (1998, June 23), p. 68.

racism, sexism, and homophobia. Evidence of this commitment is noted by the fact that Rev. Perry has toured Europe and Africa as part of his worldwide evangelism and political activism efforts. In London he rented a Baptist church, placed ads in a local gay-oriented newspaper, and began holding services. In 1997, Perry visited South Africa to encourage the spread of new churches and met with Archbishop Desmond Tutu to discuss the treatment of gays in that country.[145] According to UFMCC, Christian social action is about "doing justice" locally, nationally, and internationally.

The growth, resources, and social activism of UFMCC in metropolitan areas do not provide a complete portrayal of the denomination's direct and indirect contribution to the gay rights movement. The majority of MCC congregations have fewer than 50 members. In an effort to determine if the smaller congregations have an impact on the advancement of gay rights, a case study of such a congregation is needed.

So far, we have looked at Metropolitan Community Churches from a national perspective. It is true large pockets of gay men and lesbians populate major metropolitan areas. Such enclaves receive a large amount of resources and the heaviest amount of press coverage. Separatism has been an urban privilege. Furthermore, major cities offer the gay and lesbian community the opportunity to participate in a variety of community sponsored activities secular and religious. By migrating to urban areas, the gay and lesbian subculture found places of refuge in what D'Emilio calls "doses of concentrated queerness."[146] Such metropolitan areas have a greater supply of resources necessary for a social movement's success.

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[145] Glionna, (1998).

[146] J. D'Emilio, "Out of the Ghetto." *The Advocate*, (1997, November 11), p. 9.

However, the national perspective does not reveal the grassroots efforts of the average size congregation of the denomination. In smaller communities that are without the resources available in major metropolitan areas, organizations such as HRC, GLAAD, and NGLTF are invisible or non-existent. Likewise, gay men and lesbians are more likely to be casual and open in building such friendships that lead to activism in big cities and are more cautious when making acquaintances with other gay men and lesbians in small towns and rural areas.[147]

In an effort to evaluate the three-pronged gospel message of UFMCC at the grassroots level, I decided to examine the role that MCC plays in a town in which the resources available for utilization by the gay community are limited. I acknowledge that one small congregation[148] in North Central Texas cannot provide a study that can offer the definitive word regarding the multitude of congregations across the country. However, I believe that it is in the smaller communities of gay men and lesbians that the quiet lives of sexual minorities may most often seek refuge in a less conspicuous environment and may find that they are the first or only voice to speak out against homophobia. In order to provide points of reference for the congregation of my study, I will begin with a brief history of the establishment of the local MCC.

WFMCC: A Unique Christian Community

The congregation of UFMCC that served as my unit of analysis is in Wichita Falls, Texas, a city of just under 100,000. Such a city is expected to have some level of sophistication. However, this particular town is the largest city within a two-

[147] M. Cruiksnank, *The Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement.* (Great Britain: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1992), p. 47.

hundred mile radius. It is located less than 20 miles from the Oklahoma border. There is a small state university with an enrollment of approximately 3,000 students, most of whom commute. It has a one gate municipal airport scheduling flights on "puddle jumping" commuter planes. It is not unusual to see jack rabbits playing on the tarmac. The town has 162 Christian churches. Most of the denominations are fundamentalist and conservative in theology. The denominations with the largest number of churches are Baptist (66); Church of God (12); Church of Christ (11); Methodist (11) and Assembly of God (10). Most of the other denominations have three or fewer congregations. There is one Jewish Reform Temple. The city has been described as a conservative Texas community that is culturally more of a large town than a small city.

In this conservative town, there is one gay bar, a fledgling Parents, Friends of Lesbians And Gays (PFLAG) organization, and a small MCC congregation. It is in this environment that I conducted my field research. I began my study by interviewing a founding member of the congregation about the historical beginnings of the church in the community. According to the church organist of WFMCC, the first hint of any interest on the part of the local gay and lesbian community in forming a church began in 1979.[149] A poster placed on the bulletin board at "D.J's Pub," the only bar with a gay male and lesbian clientele, stated "all those interested in starting a Metropolitan Community Church in Wichita Falls please contact this Lawton, Oklahoma number [phone]." A resident of Oklahoma recalls that there was some

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[148] According to *Metropolitan Community Church of Wichita Falls By-laws Article VII*, "All powers not delegated by the UFMCC by-laws, General Conference, and the District Authority are reserved to this local church (1996), p. 2.

[149] The organist is one of the two original members still associated with the congregation.

dialogue with Wichita Falls at the time she was the pastor of the Lawton MCC. "Several from Wichita Falls did come to Lawton and discuss the possibility of starting a church. Preliminary work was planned but nothing became of the idea at the time." The Lawton MCC pastor also stated that she was approached and told that an MCC would not work in Wichita Falls. "It was if 'Hell would freeze over' before there would be a MCC in Wichita Falls. The community was just too conservative."[150] Several years past before anyone again considered the concept of a church for the gay community. In 1985, a group of approximately twelve people began meeting in one of the city's major parks. The group would sing and take turns providing the devotional. Each devotional closed with a member of the group leading a prayer as everyone that was present joined hands forming a circle. The congregation continues today to close its services by joining hands with the persons seated beside them and across the aisle. The expressive characteristics associated with Pentecostal worship remains a prevalent influence on the style of MCC's services.

In October of 1986, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance of the community formed a temporary committee to "explore" the possibility of establishing an MCC "work" in Wichita Falls. A "work" or "new work" according to former WFMCC pastor is distinguished by the limited number of programs through UFMCC that are made available. Every group that begins to meet that wants affiliation with MCC is considered a "new work" until they can support a pastor. A "new work" does not have much input in church politics. It does not handle it own monetary affairs. Offerings are sent to the district and the district pays all the bills. The district writes

[150] Personal communications. (1998, August).

all checks until someone from the "new work" can be brought in for training. Usually the "new work" church does not have enough money to sustain itself and the district subsidizes the congregation.[151]

A meeting of interested persons was coordinated on January 16, 1987, by Reverend Ricki Richards of Lubbock, Texas. District headquarters informed the locals that they would be very limited in their program and that the district would provide assistance with parliamentary procedures. The congregation was advised of the importance of conducting business meetings in conjunction with the Fellowship, if they desired to be part of UFMCC.[152] According to an original member of the congregation, "They didn't want us to claim the Fellowship's name until we were operating within the Fellowship's guidelines."[153] The following Sunday, January 19, 1987, the first worship service was held in the lounge room[154] of D.J's Pub. The group began with ten to fifteen people. A member of the congregation stated that several dropped out because they did not feel it was right to conduct church services inside of a bar.

Despite resistance to the idea of gay Christians, the group continued to meet. Within a few months the small congregation was able to secure David Presley from Ft. Worth as their part-time pastor. Rev. Presley commuted from Ft. Worth several

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[151] ____, ibid.

[152] According to *Metropolitan Community Church of Wichita Falls By-laws Article II*, "The purpose of this church shall be to spread the truth of God's redeeming love for all people and to serve out the UFMCC purpose (as stated in its' by-laws) in the greater metropolitan area of Wichita Falls, Texas" (1996), p. 1.

[153] Personal communications, (1998, June 28). The guidelines of UFMCC require all affiliated MCC congregations to abide by the denomination's by-laws. According to *Metropolitan Community Church of Wichita Falls By-laws Article III*, "We subscribe to the UFMCC Doctrine, Sacraments, and Rites as stated in its' by-laws," (1996), p. 1.

[154] Personal communications, (1998, June 28). The bar was divided by a wall which separated the actual bar and dance floor from a lounging area referred to as the "quiet side."

times a month. On the Sundays that he was unable to make the commute, others in the congregation conducted the service. To expand the church's outreach and to accommodate those who were offended by the services being held in a bar, the congregation gathered in the park on some Sundays. The park was frequented by gays who were "cruising."[155] People in the park would join in the worship. The group reached numbers between 20 and 30 in attendance. The goal of creating community was encouraged as a game of touch football often followed the services. The congregation was officially affiliated with the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches in February of 1987. In August of that same year Rev. Presley and his spouse Larry made the move to Wichita Falls with the understanding that his job was part-time. Rev. Presley did counseling from his home and conducted all of the church's services. On February 10, 1988, the District Committee of the South Central District of UFMCC upgraded the church's status from that of a "new work" to a fully commissioned church. A "commissioned church" can sustain a part-time pastor, part-time program, and is continually working toward the goal of a full-time pastor and program.

The growth of the congregation required that the church move to a more permanent facility. A committee was formed to locate a building in which to regularly meet. Hoping to provide a setting that would make everyone feel comfortable, the committee sought a large house to rent near the park. After looking at approximately 40 different locations, the congregation rented an empty church

[155] "Cruising" is a term used by the gay community to describe the act of looking for a prospective partner or seeking anonymous sex. See A. Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two*, (New York: The Free Press, 1990), p. 101.

building in an area of the community that locals refer to as "Little Tijuana."[156] On September 11, 1988, the church occupied its first building located on Wichita Street. Several primarily Hispanic congregations and small bars are located in the area. The area was and continues to be worked regularly by prostitutes. This is not an unusual site for a gay organization to be located. Gay businesses, organizations, and churches are often situated in areas labeled as "gay ghettos"[157] rather than in prominent middle class neighborhoods. Rev. Presley was pastor of the congregation for three years. During his ministry, the church membership fluctuated between seven and twenty members. A lot of church related activities were held at Rev. Presley's home as well as in the old tin storage building behind the church that served as a fellowship hall.

A member of the church acknowledges that a lot of the gay men and lesbians still dealt with the problem that they could not be gay and come to church.[158] Many in the gay and lesbian community would join in the social fellowship, but refused to attend church. Although unwilling to attend church services at WFMCC, the owner of the gay and lesbian bar purchased hymnals for the congregation.

A positive self-concept was difficult for many in the community to negotiate. This was especially so during the mid-eighties when the AIDS epidemic was ravaging the cities where high concentrations of gay men lived. The small communities felt the viruses' wrath as well. WFMCC was not exempt from the loss of leadership or

[156] The area referred to as "Little Tijuana" has a population primarily composed of Hispanics.
[157] Society tends to prefer the ghettoization of gays as it does ethnic and racial minorities (Blumenfeld et al., 1988), p. 260.
[158] Personal communications, (1998, June 28).

membership because of AIDS.[159] The congregation continued to grow in number until Rev. Presley, having been diagnosed HIV positive, became ill. During 1990, members of the congregation provided the sermons as their pastor's health deteriorated. As attendance began to fall, the South Central District helped the congregation compose a letter and make contact with a minister in Lawton. The minister, Rev. Margaret Walker, who had a full-time job in the public school system, began to commute to Wichita Falls to preach for $50.00 a Sunday during Rev. Presley's hospital confinement. At that time attendance was running around 20 people. Upon Rev. Presley resignation, the Oklahoma minister became the interim pastor with a salary of $500.00 per month. Apparently, this was a substantial amount of money for such a small congregation to pay because the district offered to subsidize the pastor's pay by $100. However, the congregation refused the aid. Rev. Walker would later be hired as the official pastor of the congregation. During her early work with the WFMCC attendance varied greatly as the congregation grieved over the loss of its first pastor. It is shortly after Rev. Walker began her work with this congregation that my ethnographic study begins.

My desire in this chapter has been to provide background data for my study by recording a broad and general summative history of the founding, organizational accomplishments, and goals of UFMCC. I have tried to point out the condemnation by fundamentalists, promises of healing through reparative therapy by conservatives, and rejection as an equal by liberal religious organizations to illustrate the degree of resistance to accepting gay Christians. Through this discussion I have tried to provide

[159] There have been numerous deaths due to AIDS complication within the congregation and several members are HIV positive or living with AIDS.

the reader with religious, social, and political points of reference to begin examining the concept of gay Christians and social justice.

In addition, I have offered background information on the psychological, religious, social, and political influences on Rev. Perry, who would envision and start the denomination of the Universal Fellowship of Community Churches in an effort to understand the founder and his mission. A history of the founding, theology, mission, and growth of UFMCC was provided to explain the denomination's struggles, achievements, and goals for the fellowship, the individual congregations, and it members. Examples of the development and early attempts to carry out the mission of UFMCC's three-pronged gospel of salvation, community, and Christian social action were included. The purpose was to emphasize the importance of the tenets for social justice and capital, political, civil, and gay rights, and civic skills as they are examined through the local congregation in the following chapters.

In the latter part of this chapter, I offered a brief history of WFMCC, the specific congregation of my study. As with the Fellowship, the circumstances leading to the establishment of a local congregation have relevance to my analysis and the reader's understanding of the denomination's significance in obtaining social justice and political rights for gay men and lesbians.

In the following chapters, I will continue to move the focus from the broad to the specific in an effort to depict some of the successes and difficulties faced by a congregation adopting the major mission and visions of UFMCC. In the next chapter, I will investigate the church's role as a refuge and messenger of salvation for sexual minorities desiring to be Christians. In so doing, I will identify some of the

contributions that WFMCC as a messenger of salvation and a refuge for the exiled, is attempting to make for the gay rights movement.

Chapter 4: The Church as a Refuge

"He Is My Refuge And My Fortress: My God; In Whom I Trust."[1]

At the back of the auditorium of the church is a homemade banner depicting a rainbow and an ark. Below the picture are the words "Our Refuge."[2]

The pains of economic, political, social exploitation, and human suffering are often soothed through the efforts and message of religious institutions,[3] as demonstrated in Black churches. Churches frequently provide a place of refuge and renewal for the downtrodden, a place for the sinner to find redemption. A refuge can be defined as "something to which one may turn for help, relief, or escape."[4] Indeed, the interpretation of the Bible by religious denominations and individuals allows for a reading of the scripture that offers strength, wisdom, inspiration, and hope in the face of hopelessness.

It is important to note that religion does not always provide refuge or is it necessarily used for lifting oppression. The opposite may often be the case. Biblical scriptures have also been used as a two-edged sword[5] cutting both ways in the cultural wars surrounding diversity of religion, culture, race, gender, and sexuality. It is clear that we cannot ignore the contradictions that exist in a society whose claims of love and justice have frequently fallen into moral relativism. Slavery in the United States exposed the truth of a society that went to great lengths to protect the social and economic interest of the dominate culture under the banner of state's rights.[6]

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[1] Psalms 91:2.
[2] Personal communications, Wichita Falls Metropolitan Community Church, Wichita Falls, Texas.
[3] Psalm 140:12; Proverbs 14:31; I Timothy 6:17-19; Jeremiah 22:3; Ephesians 6:2; Galatians 3:28
[4] The American Heritage Dictionary, (2nd edition), (1976), p. 1040.
[5] Hebrews 4:12 describes the word of God as "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints, and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."
[6] In rendering the decision in *Dred Scott v. Sanford* (1857), Justice Taney reasoned that when the Constitution was drafted, the Negro race "had for more than a century before been regarded as being of

Historically, the Bible has been used to maintain political power, control populations, and regulate behavior, thus providing reason for persecuting minorities and identifying enemies. The justification for race superiority, slavery, subjugation of women, warfare and punishment for certain behaviors has been advocated through interpretations of the scripture and demonstrated through the actions of various denominations.[7]

How groups define themselves and others is often based on how each group's interpretation of the Bible protects or challenges the powerful. Guided by the interpretation, change in the perception of justice has and can be hindered or assisted in the name of righteousness. The biblical interpretation espoused by the dominant culture of organized religion regarding sexual orientation has been used to both defy and corroborate the law and the political system. According to Romero, "Serious ideological and theological tensions exist among diverse communities that test the fabric of a nation and its ability to absorb change."[8]

Biblical interpretation determines whether the scriptures offer a message of refuge or condemnation for different segments of society. Using one edge of the sword, the Bible is selectively used as a tool to justify and promote policies that affect the lives of others based on the phrase, "It's in the Bible." Such literalism is meant

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an inferior order; and altogether unfit to associate with the White race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the White man was bound to respect; and that the Negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit" (*Dred Scott v. Sanford*, 19 How. 398, 407 (1857). The issue of state versus national power led the country into civil war.

[7] Philippians 3:18; Romans 12:10-21; Exodus 21:2-6; Leviticus 25:44-46; I Peter 2:18-21; Colossian 4:1; Ephesians 6:5; Genesis 3:16; I Timothy 2:12-15; I Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:22-24; I Corinthians 14:34-35; I Thessalonians 2:14-15; John 8:44; Acts 7:51-52; I Kings 14:24; Jude 7; Genesis 38:7-10; Romans 6:12-13; Leviticus 15:16-17; I Kings 14:24; Jude 7; Genesis 38:7-10; Romans 6:12-13; Leviticus 15:16-17.

[8] Daniel Romero. "The Church's Struggle with Diversity." *International Review of Mission*, v85, no 337, (1996): p. 189.

to be a source of authority in guarding the text and the reader from error. What is important to the literalists is what the reader discovers the author has brought to the text. We recognize this principle in the intellectual doctrine of original intent, as it applies to the Constitution. Framed by constitutional discourse, it is neither what we think the Constitution means nor what Supreme Court justices say, but the founding fathers original intent. This unquestionable allegiance to a people or an institution's interpretation of the Constitution, as well as the Bible, has lead to both the persecution and the redemption of oppressed groups in society. Where the responsibility for the uses and abuses of the Bible lay is part of the debate surrounding a definitive statement regarding an "absolute" understanding of the scriptures. Similarities between the discussions pertaining to a literal and historical versus figurative[9] and non-historical reading of the Bible and the arguments concerning the decision-making powers of the Supreme Court based on the legal model versus the attitudinal model[10] concerning the Constitution abound.

We struggle with interpretation of the federal Constitution, which was written in English just over two hundred years ago out of our own cultural history. It is, therefore, apparent that the struggle with an accurate interpretation of the scriptures written centuries ago in foreign tongues and ancient cultures would make grasping the original intent extremely arduous. The danger of such an interpretation is in the

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[9] Literal interpretation refers to the Bible being wholly divine and absolute and the historic contents tends to relativize certain elements (Gomes 1996, p. 29). Parables are an example of figurative passages.

[10] Plain meaning, intent of the framers (or legislatures), precedent, and balancing are the four variants employed by the legal model of Supreme Court decision making, (J. Segal and H. Spaeth, *The Supreme Court and the Attitudinal Model*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993). According to Segal and Spaeth, this model "holds that the Supreme Court decides disputes in light of the facts of the case vis-à-vis the ideological attitudes and values of the justices." (p. 65).

power of the private judgement of the literalists' own exegesis[11] and eisegesis[12] of the text.

Condemnation And Exile: A Traditional Interpretation Of The Scriptures

Past and present interpretations of the scriptures have major ramifications for the degree of rights and liberties granted various groups in society and the treatment received by the dominant society. The legitimization of violence against sexual minorities, women, Jews, and Blacks comes from the view that the Bible stigmatizes these groups. Following this logic, the responsibility for the death of Jesus rest upon the Jews. Despite the memorials to the Jewish dead of the German imposed holocaust, the visibility of the new Jewish state and the vigilance of the Anti-Defamation League, anti-Semitism remains an ugly fact of life to some extent in the United States. Likewise, through the interpretation of the scriptures, "racism was the mother of slavery and segregation the child of slavery."[13] Once slavery ended Blacks were kept segregated by what was regarded as ample support by the Bible. Furthermore, women have been placed in a subservient role to men based on scriptural interpretations.[14] Questioning the pattern of male dominance reflected in the Bible, as an expression of God's will, has led to a battle by women over biblical interpretation of the most significance since the debates over slavery. Many have interpreted Genesis to blame women for the fall of mankind. Accordingly, women rival the Devil as the greatest source of temptation and influence over men. Thus, by scriptural authority they are "cursed" to bear children and live in submission to men.

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[11] Defined as "the act of explaining a text" in *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Tradition.*
[12] Defined as "reading a meaning into the text" in *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Tradition.*
[13] Peter Gomes. *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart.* (New York: Morrow, 1996), p. 97; Titus 2:9-10; Ephesians 6:5.

Individuals' sexual orientations and religious convictions led to the clashing of views regarding morality verses justice. For those taking the Bible seriously, the topic of same-gender sexual orientation is perhaps the most vexing. Believing that the scripture teaches that homosexuality is wrong and gay men and lesbians represent Satan, justifies gay bashing and expulsion from the church. Gomes declares,

> Blacks were always in the church, though in separate institutions, and women were always in the church although diminished in expectation and responsibilities, but homosexuals, as such, have not been seen to be either a part of the church or an object of its ministry.[15]

The interpretation of homosexuality as an abomination to God stimulates a pattern of condemnation of what is regarded as unrighteous. Presently, institutions of religion are in the forefront of the fight to deny cultural rights to gays. It is suggested that today no segment of society suffer more from the stigmas legitimized by centuries of interpretation of the scriptures than the gay community.[16] Many religiously conservative churches rely on traditional religious morality to condemn and excommunicate members who are part of the gay and lesbian community. Churches offer no apparent place of refuge for those seen to be contributing to America's moral decay. The conservative churches believe the increasing visibility and demands of sexual minorities are contributing to the unraveling of the moral culture of the United States.

Understandably, organized religion becomes for many in the gay and lesbian community the perfect enemy of gay liberation and an institution to reject and possibly abhor. Given organized religion has been the institution that has most

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[14] I Corinthians 14:34-35; I Timothy 2:11-12; Titus 2:1,3,5.
[15] Gomes, (1996), p. 225.
[16] ____, ibid.

intensely condemned same-gender sexual behavior. most gay and lesbians believe that the Bible is not their friend, but instead the enemy that condemns them to hell. Many in the gay community do not want to read the Bible or align themselves with religious organizations. According to Kaufman and Raphael, "From the perspective of theology, the homosexual has been invariably judged as a contaminant to be condemned, permanently distanced, and inexorably punished."[17]

The religious and spiritual rejection is a continual reminder of sexual minorities' second-class citizenry. The messages of condemnation burned into the subconscious mind through repetitive admonishments by major institutions of society including government, family, and religion are frequently present in the gay psyche.[18] Rejection often spurs gay people to disengage and seek refuge elsewhere. Rev. Nancy Wilson, minister and elder at MCC-Los Angeles, acknowledged that when she attended the National Council of Churches' meetings, it was exhausting. She states,

> Just showing up, I triggered people's questions, fears, anxieties, and fantasies about homosexuality. And yet, it feels like it is part of my job to invite questions, speculations, [and] even their projections. But I find myself wanting to retreat to the safety of the gay/lesbian "ghetto"[19]

Wilson's comments illustrate her understanding of the concerns the straight world projects on the gay community, but also how gay men and lesbians frequently incorporate these same fears and anxieties into their own psyches. Hatred and loathing of gays is internalized in the form of self-hatred and self-loathing. Many gay men and lesbians do not have the resources internally to cope with these experiences

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[17] ____, ibid., p. 9.

[18] During my research, members of the clergy and congregation repeatedly reminded me of the damaging "emotional tapes of rejection and self-doubt" that played on their psyches.

[19] N. Wilson, (1995), p. 33. According to Blumenfeld and Raymond, " homosexuals often choose to reside in designated areas within larger cities to escape the battle-zone of homophobia on the outside"

and feelings. Some do not understand that this is a result of homophobia. Many in the gay and lesbian community believe they must deserve the negative labels placed on them by society. This internalized struggle causes many gay men and lesbians to repress their sexual feelings. According to MCC's Reverend Michael Piazza, "There are many ways in which internalized homophobia manifests itself and works its evil, none is more damaging than the one we call the closet."[20] The closet, thus becomes the psychological refuge for some gay men and lesbians.[21] Goss explains,

> The term "closeted" refers to the "hiddenness" of being gay/lesbian because of the dreadful repercussions inflicted by homophobic oppression. The metaphor denotes something hidden from public view or display, something kept secret and privatized. Living in the closet carries the constellation of feelings of fear, dread, shame, guilt, and self-hatred. It is internalized homophobia.[22]

Self-loathing and self-rejection often result in isolation. Complete denial of one's sexual orientation to oneself or to one's social network often is the case. Many live a double life that can be destructive. Some gay men and lesbians enter into marriages in an attempt to change their orientation. Studies show that over "one-fifth of gay men, one-third of White lesbian women, and over one-half of Black lesbians were once married."[23] Frequently, the desire to conceal one's real sexual orientation or to test one's responsiveness to heterosexuality is given as the reason for marrying.

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(269). (e.g. the Castro Street District in San Francisco, parts of Boston's South End).

[20] M. Piazza, (1995), p. 85.

[21] Having counseled hundreds of people who had given up on the hope of living healthy and holy lives, Piazza wrote *Holy Homosexuals: The Truth About Being Gay or Lesbian and Christian* as a resource for those struggling to reconcile their faith and sexual orientation.

[22] J. Hencken, "Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis." In Paul and Weinrich, (Eds.), in *Homosexuality*, p. 124.

[23] R. Goss, *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto*. (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 29 (footnote 7). M. Weinberg and C. Williams, *Male Homosexuals: Their Problems and Adaptations* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974); A. Bell and M. Weinberg, *Homosexuality: A Study of Diversity Among Men and Women* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), pp. 162, 166.

Self-hatred is regarded as a common affliction to all oppressed groups.[24] Cannibalistic[25] internalized homophobia can be directed at those that are out of the closet as well as those who are stilled closeted. Rev. Perry believes that "some people from UFMCC suffer from 'oppression sickness.'"[26] This "oppression sickness" from which many gays and lesbian suffer, is the result of having been relentlessly brainwashed for years to believe that same-gender sexual orientation is bad. Torie Osborn, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) reports, "Next to the right wing and their ideological determination to obliterate us, I think our own oppression sickness is the most dangerous force around."[27] According to Perry, this negative view of same-gender sexual orientation becomes ingrained and is often difficult or impossible to disregard.[28]

The significance of this phenomenon of self-inflicted oppression is found in the psychological dynamics of an individual. Moral and legal judgments are used in the struggle for power. According to Humphreys, oppressors cannot regard an oppressed people as innocent. "To perpetuate the subjugation, oppressed people must be condemned as . . .'heretics' . . .'moral degenerates.'"[29] Neither heterosexuals nor sexual minorities are protected from internalizing the negative attitudes in a world that teaches that same-sex activity is morally repulsive and psychologically

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[24] Humphreys, (1972), pp. 36.

[25] Goss, (1993). The term cannibalistic is used to describe the tendency of gay and lesbians to "trash" members of their own community. It is a horizontal hostility directed by the gay community against itself.

[26]Perry made this statement March 22, 1996 while preaching at WFMCC. Frye states in Brittan and Maynard, (1984), "The root of the word "oppression' is the element 'press.' . . . Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict or prevent the thing's motion or mobility. . . Immobilize . . . Reduce" (A. Wilson, 1995), p. 1.

[27] See Robin Stevens, "Eating Our Own," *The Advocate*, (1992, August 13), pp. 33-42.

[28] Perry, (1985), p. 272.

damaging. Internalized homophobia can manifest itself in a variety of ways among people with same-sex attractions.[30] Hodges and Hutter[31] posit, "We have been taught to hate ourselves and how thoroughly we have learned the lesson."[32]

The self-loathing associated with oppressed segments of society can be linked to the dynamics involved in socialization. Self-concept, "what one thinks one is like"[33] and identity, "the content of self-concept in relation to a social situation" arise from the interaction of self and society.[34] Through such interaction meaning systems are created and sustained.

Hart and Richardson[35] have found that gay and lesbians often organize their self-identity around their sexual identity. A discussion of identity can become more complex when considering human sexuality. Romero asserts, "A search for identity can lead one in a variety of directions, but all such searches are attempt to cope with differences in the midst of pressures to conform."[36] Unlike the ethnic and racial minorities, which struggle with their identity formation in the open, the gay or lesbian's struggle for identity is internalized pain. The internal struggle to sort out major issues that are related to sexuality, while facing the societal condemnation can be overwhelming. The ideologies and practices of many religious groups encourage a

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[29] Humphreys, (1972), p. 16.
[30] Blumenfeld et al., (1988), p. 264.
[31] A. Hodges and D. Hutter, *With Downcast Gays: Aspect of Homosexual Self-Oppression*. (Toronto: Pink Triangles Press, 1977).
[32] Blumenfeld et al., (1988), p. 264.
[33] Troiden, (1984).
[34] Grecas, (1982).
[35] J. Hart and D. Richardson, *The Theory and Practice of Homosexuality*. (London: Routledge & Keglan Paul,1981).
[36] D. Romero, "The Church's Stuggle with Diversity." *International Review of Mission*, v85, no 337, (1996, April), p. 195.

self-concept organized around one's religious identity.[37] The tension of being a Christian and having same-gender sexual desires can best be understood in terms of cognitive dissonance theory.[38] This theory states,

> An amount of internal dissonance may be produced by holding two inconsistent cognitive elements. The motivational force of cognitive dissonance arise when the person perceives the inconsistency intolerable and seeks dissonance reduction in some form.[39]

When both identities are crucial to the individual's self-concept, they are construed as mutually exclusive. Thumma suggests that the gay Christian may consider both identities too important to relinquish. If the dissonance between one's gay and Evangelical identities are distressing, the discord must be resolved. Unfortunately, few have any idea of how to reduce this dissonance and still remain authentic to their sexuality and religious identity.[40]

Straus[41] suggests that any identity change can be better understood as a product of negotiation between the individual and the social context. Thumma posits, "Identity negotiation is a facet of adult socialization. Socialization is the process by which the self internalizes social meanings, reinterprets them, and responds back upon society."[42] Thus, socialization can be perceived as the continuous development

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[37] N. Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World.* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987); A. Peshkin, *God's Choice: The Total World of Fundamentalist Christian School.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

[38] L. Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance.* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957); R. Prus, "Religious Recruitment and the Management of Dissonance: a sociological Perspective." *Sociology Inquiry*, 46, (1984): pp. 127-134.

[39] S. Thumma, "Negotiating a Religious Identity: The Case of the Gay Evangelical." *Sociological Analysis*, 52, (1991): p. 335.

[40] ____, ibid., pp. 335-336, 345.

[41] R. Straus, "Changing Oneself: Seekers and the Creative Transformation of Life Experience." In J Lofland (Ed.), *Doing Social Life.* (New York: Wiley, 1996), pp. 252-273.

[42] Thumma, (1991), p. 334.

of self-concept over time.[43]

To reconcile one's spiritual identity with one's sexual identity requires a socialization process by which the self-internalized social meanings are reinterpreted. From this prospective, identity negotiation, whether religious or sexual, is a part of the natural process in which people engage to create a more stable and coherent self-concept.[44] Conversion, from this point of view is identity negotiation that involves a complete change in the "core identity construct."[45]

The struggle to reconcile same-gender sexual orientation and Christianity has been a difficult journey for many gay men and lesbians. When ex-gay ministries, psychotherapy, family and/or intervention efforts fail, many in the gay community accept their condemnation as the burden of their sexuality. One young man discussed his battle with his faith and sexual orientation and the peace he was able to find through MCC. He tearfully offered a testimony during a local worship service by proclaiming,

> I met the Lord, 20 years ago. I was in one program to de-program me from being a homosexual. Then I was in another program and then another program. All of which tried to convince me that I was not a homosexual. I am very grateful that I came out of those programs and am part of MCC now. I first started coming to WFMCC when my first lover died. I am very thankful for the church and the salvation, safety, and community it has provided in my life.[46]

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[43] V. Gecas, "The Motivational Significance of Self-concept for Socialization Theory." In E. Lawler (Ed.), *Advances in Group Process*, 3. (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1986), pp. 131-156.

[44] H. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. (New York: Free Press, 1963); R. Straus, "Changing Oneself: Seekers and the Creative Transformation of Life Experience." In J. Lofland (Ed.), *Doing Social Life*. New York: Wiley, 1976), pp. 252-273.; V. Gecas, "The Self-concept." In R. Turner and J. Short, (Eds.), *Annual Review of Sociology*, (Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews, 1982), pp. 1-33.

[45] C. Staples and C. Mauss, "Conversion or commitment? A reassessment of the Snow and Machelek approach to the study of conversion." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 26 (1987): pp. 133-147.

[46] Personal communications, (1996, March 22).

The idea of seeking solace *from* religious teachings *in* religious teachings seems to be either an oxymoron or at best an enigmatic concept for many in the gay community. As a result, many in the gay and lesbian community reject religious affiliation. It is, therefore, ironic that a Christian denomination would be among the national organizations helping to guide the debate toward granting equal rights to sexual minorities. Many concerns are raised upon discovering that there is a Christian denomination that claims to rely on the Bible to minister to homosexuals. Some religious denominations conclude that UFMCC congregations are shameful and only "playing at religion." Conversely, the UFMCC believes the fact that it provides a refuge to many gay and lesbian Christians is the result of a re-examination of the teachings of the Church. The UFMCC attests there is no need to repent because of gay male and lesbian sexual orientation. It is not a sin, but rather another form of sexuality created and blessed by God. UFMCC's theological interpretation of the Bible claims to offer gay men and lesbians a place of refuge, salvation, and full fellowship, rather than an institution that practices exile and condemnation of same-gender sexual behavior.

In 1997, at the General Conference XVIII in Sydney, Australia, the UFMCC adopted a new mission and vision statement, both of which proclaim the celebration of the positive "integration of spirituality and sexuality."[47] Rev. Perry claims that "with the adoption of this new mission statement, UFMCC became the first Christian denomination in history to proclaim the 'integration of spirituality and sexuality' as

[47] See Chapter Three of this dissertation for the full text of the mission and vision statements adopted by the General Conference in July 1997.

part of its intrinsic mission."[48] This prompted me to contact both former pastor Rev. Walker and current pastor, Rev. Horvath of WFMCC to raise some concerns that were generated by the mission and vision statements and UFMCC's theological interpretation on such issues. I asked the following: First, what is the 'official' position of the church on promiscuity? Second, realizing much of the heterosexual worlds, views all sex outside of marriage as immoral and since the GLBT community does not have the legal option of marriage, what does the church teach on this morality issue? Third, what is the church's stance on bisexuality and trangendered people? Finally, is a holy union required for the sake of morality and to avoid living in sin? Upon asking the pastors these questions, Rev. Walker replied,

> I don't know if there is an 'official' position except that what [sexual behavior] is acceptable to consenting adults is acceptable to the church. Just like in the straight world there are differing opinions. Promiscuity would be dangerous in this day and age, therefore, not an appropriate use of the body as the temple of God, in my view. Regarding a holy union as a moral action, I think the church would again see that as a personal issue. I would be inclined to suggest to folks that there be some kind of commitment, but that is not always true in the straight world, so GLBT are not going to agree. For some it [a holy union] may be viewed as a moral issue, but for most it is a public declaration of commitment before God and a request for God's blessing on the relationship.[49]

Both pastors emphasized the fact that the UFMCC believes gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people are "acceptable" in the eyes of God. In June of 2001, the COH-MCC of Dallas, celebrated "Life to a T," and evening worship event honoring the most invisible elements of the church's community—the transgendered. There are several trangendered members and leaders in UFMCC ministries. The purpose of the service was to honor the "difficult journeys, affirm their baptisms with their new

[48]"UFMCC Adopts New Mission, Vision Statements." Retrieved on October 21, 1997 from http://www.ufmcc.com/vision/htm.

identity, and receive the anointing oil from their hands." The guest speaker for the event was Rev. Erin Swenson, an ordained Presbyterian pastor who serves as a therapist at a counseling center in Atlanta, Georgia. This ceremony honoring the trangendered members within the denomination indicates full acceptance of this segment of the GLBT community.[50]

Rev. Horvath also provided interesting responses to the questions concerning promiscuity and marriage. She explains,

> We in UFMCC struggle with the fact that others accuse us of promiscuity, and yet deny us the right to marry. We do not have an official position on the morality issue at this time. We have worked to define it more than ever, particularly with arriving at a clergy code of ethics in the last 10 years. A holy union is not 'required' at all. We offer it because it's the closest we can come to a marriage ceremony. Interestingly enough, more and more heterosexual couples are coming to UFMCC clergy to request a holy union. They want to be 'joined in the eyes of God' but not legally (because they can lose benefits, etc.). For us the Holy Union is being joined in the eyes of God. One of the issues in UFMCC is in regard to more than two people being joined together in holy union. It is left up to the individual clergy as to whether they will perform such a joining. There are also some individuals who have more than one spouse at a time, having been joined together at different times. Again, this is up to the individual clergy as to whether they will perform a holy union for a couple where one has (and still is) had one [a holy union] already and there will be multiple spouses. We have a long way to go on our theology of sexuality (in my personal frame of reference).[51]

The question of promiscuity appears to be left to the individual to define. The local clergy's interpretation comes into play in the performance of holy unions and what message concerning morality is provided. Pastor of Cathedral of Hope MCC, Michael Piazza reasons that because the majority of gay men and lesbians never have

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[49] Personal communications, (2001, June 8).

[50] Swenson was the first mainline pastor to be ordained as a man and successfully defend those credentials as a woman. Cathedral of Hope—News Update for 6/15/2001. (email@cathedralofhope.com).

[51] Personal communications, (2001, June 9). The request for holy union ceremonies by heterosexual couples comes as a real surprise. Such requests possibly indicate the move away from civil

a chance to date until they are adults, the practice time afforded heterosexual teenagers is often missed by the gay community. He explains,

> Often, perhaps too often, adult dating includes sex. Hence, society has labeled us promiscuous...This lack of opportunity to practice relationships as a teenager puts a great deal of pressure on adult gay and lesbians to find spouses and settle down. What results is often a series of short-term relationships, generally lasting two to four years. That produces two negative results. We internalize the end of the relations as a failure because it did not endure, and we grow cynical about our ability to sustain healthy relationships. The other unfortunate result is that we establish a pattern of serial monogamy. Heterosexuals are prone to this as well, but since we date almost exclusively as adults, it is of even more concern for us. We [the gay community] tend to go from one relationship to another.[52]

In truth, a significant number of heterosexual teenagers who date, engage in sexual relations outside of marriage. This behavior is also condemned as morally wrong. Chastity is frequently one of the major message coming from the pulpits of mainline denominations. Rev. Piazza's explanation has merit, but for conservative denominations the argument of not having the opportunity to "practice" relationships through dating does not justify sexual relationships outside of marriage for most denominations. This very issue of the right to marry has become a matter of great importance to the gay rights movement. Since the GLBT community does not have the legal right to marry, some Christians suggest they must remain celibate.[53] Minister of Justice for UFMCC, Rev. Mel White writes,

> Studies show that most who try celibacy will eventually fail at it. In fact, a lifetime of celibacy is not possible for most people. Why can't we see that encouraging gay men and lesbians to enter into long-term, loving relationships is the answer to loneliness and promiscuity exactly as it is for our heterosexual

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government's intervention in a couple's private life and a desire to value the institution of marriage primarily from a spiritual perspective.

[52] Piazza, (1994), pp. 159-160.

[53] For a discussion on being celibate as a gay Christian and the restrictions on ordination of gay clergy see R. Nugent and J. Gramick, "Homosexuality: Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish Issues: A Fishbone Tale." In R. Hasbany, (Ed.), *Homosexuality and Religion*. (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1989), pp. 7-46.

friends and neighbors?[54]

I was shocked to learn that it could be possible to have a holy union involving more than two people or that dissolution,[55] which Rev. Walker requires before she will perform a holy union, is left to the discretion of the local pastor. UFMCC preaches a message of inclusiveness and does not require an individual to denounce the religious doctrines of other denominations to which they currently or previously have belonged. I observed a Mormon couple attended WFMCC. One member of the lesbian couple was legally married to a gay man in the military. The marriage was a front to hide their sexual orientations from the military. The lesbian couple was planning a holy union. The fact that members of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (LDS) do attend congregations of MCC might give the local pastor the discretion to allow multiple unions to its congregants.[56] Since marriage is not legal for same-sex couples, the statutory penalties would not be applicable to multiple holy unions.[57]

In 1996, Rev. Perry stated that the "issue of legal marriage for gay men and

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[54] White, (1994), p. 163.

[55] A dissolution of a holy union is a non-legal ending of a relationship recognized through a holy union. A more detailed explanation is given in Chapter Six of the dissertation.

[56] The Church of the Latter-day Saints professes to be a Christian denomination. Polygamy was a practice condoned and ensconced in the earlier doctrines of the Mormon religion. Polygamy is still practiced in some isolated segments of the Latter-day Saints community and it is estimated that there are 30,000 polygamists throughout the West. Although the Utah State Constitution bans polygamy as a third-degree felony, enforcement of the statues has not been a top priority on any police or legal agenda since the 1950s. *News Wire*: "Polygamy Debate Prompts RLPA/RFRA" and C. Goeringer. *American Atheists* ' and *AANews*. "'Religious Freedom' Debate in Utah." Retrieved on July 3, 2001 from http://www.infidels.org/activist/current/wire/archives/stories/ut_polygamy.html.

[57] Although rare, the case of a Utahan charged with polygamy did go to trial in Provo, Utah in May 2001. Thomas Green, the father of 30 children with 10 women, defended plural marriages as a fulfillment of his Mormon religion. Green was convicted with four counts of bigamy and related crimes and faced 25 years in prison and $25,000 in fines. This was the first major polygamy case in the country in nearly fifty years. See M. Janofsky, *The New York Times On-line*, "Trial Opens in Rare Case of a Utahan Charged With Polygamy" (2001, May 15); "A Utah Man With 5 Wives Is Convicted of Bigamy" (2001, May 20), and "Conviction of a Polygamist Raises Fears Among Others" (24 May 2001), National Desk.

lesbians was too volatile and politically loaded to put atop the MCC agenda."[58] However, when questioned in 2001, Perry declared same-gender matrimony had become the church's foremost goal. The denomination changed their bylaws in 2000, thus blurring the line between "holy unions" and "holy matrimony." Rev. Horvath informed me that during the South Central District Conference in 2000, a forum was conducted on multiple partners in relationships. The leaders of the forum asked those in attendance to keep an open mind. Horvath states she attended the forum out of curiosity to see what the "temperature" was on this issue within the district. More spoke out in opposition than in favor on the issue. She went on to discuss the forum and her views on the issue by writing,

> Many came in with their own minds made up and their own agendas to 'rid the fellowship of this heathenism' as I hear it explained. My personal concern to perform a Holy Union of more than 2 or a Holy Union for those expressing 'open' relationships is that we are striving to have our relationships recognized as legal marriages. I think that we 'shoot ourselves in the foot' if we don't begin to address the need for monogamous marriages. I hear folks say that we don't have to model heterosexuals...BUT (her emphasis) if we want to legalize our "joinings," we DO!![59]

The mantra in opposition to same-sex marriage normally focuses on the uniqueness of the gay experience in an effort to avoid assuming traditional heterosexual role playing within the relationship.[60] My findings indicate the tension within the GLBT community does not exist only between the secular and Christian activists. Within

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[58] Dart, (2001, March 21-28), p. 7.

[59] Personal communications, (2001, June 6).

[60] An in-depth discussion about same-gender sexual orientation, marriage, and the family brings together "queer" theory and Christian theology in Kathy Rudy's *Sex and The Church: Gender, Homosexuality, and the Transformation of Christian Ethics.* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1997). Rudy posits that rather than debating whether gay and lesbian couples should marry, whether homosexuality is a matter of nurture of nature, and whether lesbians and gay men should be ordained avoids the more important issues. She goes on to suggest that both liberals and conservatives should be learning from the lives of gay men and lesbians and asking new questions: (1) Is gender a way that

the UFMCC, as well as other liberal denominations, the debate over the morality of same-sex unions is increasing. The added dimension of multiple marriages is being discussed not only in context of the Mormon's Religious Liberty Protection Act proponents, but also among the fellowship of MCC regarding multiple partner holy unions. The threat of a backlash to the gay rights movements' efforts to obtain the legal rights of matrimony could be very strong if multiple holy unions become common in the GLBT community. The "I told you so" argument regarding promiscuity could be the anthem of conservative religious groups.

Redemption And Liberation: Through A New Interpretation Of The Scripture

The UFMCC teaches that biblical condemnation of same-gender sexual orientation that is espoused by certain denominations and church leadership is the product of the fallible people who guide these churches. It is not difficult to locate the debated biblical texts. Numerous articles and books repeatedly cite the same list of scriptures used to denounce homosexual practices. Six passages in the scriptures have been identified and quoted by fundamentalists to condemn homosexuality. These verses have come to be known to sexual minorities as the "texts of terror."[61] The sets of texts from the Old and New Testament to which people refer for teaching concerning homosexuality are addressed within these five topics: (1) the creation story[62]; (2) Sodom and Gomorrah,[63] with parallel the passages of Judges 19 and

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we should define ourselves and judge others?, (2) What makes sex ethical or unethical?, and (3) What kind of intimate relationships best contribute to the formation of Christian community?

[61] According to N. Wilson, the use of this term to describe the six condemning passages was first used by Robert Goss, (1993) in *Jesus Acted Up*. Goss took the phrase from Phyllis Trible's book *Texts of Terror* (1993). Tribe used this phrase to denote verses that described or justified violence against women. See N. Wilson, (1995 n2, 65). The "text of terror" for gay and lesbian Christians are Genesis 19:1-25; Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13; Romans 1: 24-27; I Corinthians 6:9 and I Timothy 1:10

[62] Genesis 1-2.

[63] Genesis 19:1-25.

Ezekiel 16:46-56; (3) the Holiness Code[64]; (4) Saint Paul's views[65]; and (5) the Pauline lists of vices.[66]

It is interesting to note that a growing number of biblical experts are convinced the frequently cited passages condemn only certain sexual acts that are idolatrous or abusive. The clergy of UFMCC argues that the passages in the Bible that have been said to condemn same-gender sexual acts are currently under debate among both Catholics and Protestants.[67] According to UFMCC's Rev. Eastman, since the founding of UFMCC in 1968, the emergence of a strong lesbian and gay community and conclusions of new scientific studies on homosexuality, the Christian Church has been forced to reexamine the religious teachings and psychoanalytic thought that homosexuality is a sickness and a sin. Eastman argues lesbian and gay men face discrimination because of societal attitudes, which are often taught by the church.[68] The teachings of the church often demand repentance of the sin of

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[64] Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.

[65] Romans 1:24-27. Many biblical scholars regard this as the most significant scriptures concerning homosexuality.

[66] I Corinthians 6:9 and I Timothy 1-10.

[67] For additional sources on both sides of the debate, see John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Glenn Olsen's "The Gay Middle Ages: A Response to Boswell" in *Communio* (1981, Summer); J. Robert Wright's "Boswell on Homosexuality: A Case Undemonstrated" in *Anglican Theological Review* (ATR/LXV: 1); Victor Paul Furnish's *The Moral Teachings of Paul: Selected Issues* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1985); H. Darrel Lance's "The Bible and Homosexuality" (*American Baptist Quarterly* 8, 1989); Jeffery S. Siker's "How to Decide? Homosexual Christians, the Bible, and Gentile Inclusion," (*Theology Today*, 1994, July). See also his "Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate," (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster, John Knox, 1994). Also see, Marion Soards' *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today*, (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster, 1995); John H. McNeil's *The Church and the Homosexual*, (Boston: Beacon, 1975); Daniel Helminiak's *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality*, (San Francisco: Alamo Square Press, 1994); Stanton L. Jones' "The Loving Opposition" in *Christianity Today*, (1993, July 19); David F. Wright's "Homosexuality: The Relevance of the Bible" in *Evangelical Quarterly* 61 (1980); Richard B. Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1" in *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14 (1986); Reay Tannahill's *Sex in History* (New York: Stein and Day, 1982); and Charles Hefling, editor of *Our Selves, Our Souls and Bodies: Sexuality and the Household of God* (Boston: Cowley, 1996) and his essay included in *Our Souls*, "By Their Fruits: A Traditionalist Argument."

[68] D. Eastman, "Not a Sin...Not a Sickness: What the Bible Does and Does Not Say." (Los Angeles:

homosexuality. When gay men and lesbians refuse are or unable to turn away from their sexual orientation, denominations often cast the "sinner" out of the fellowship. Such exile is considered an act of tough love. The idea is to "love the sinner but hate the sin." Strong disciplinary action by the church is centered on shocking the dis-fellowshipped member to turn away from the sin of homosexuality. This approach at saving the sinner from the sin can be supported by an illustrative story of "NG," a member of WFMCC. This member worked for Abilene Christian University (ACU)[69] as a Christian book liaison for the North Texas area. I was informed that her childhood was shaped by the beliefs of the Church of Christ. Her father was associated with Oklahoma Christian College (OCC) as teaching faculty and a part-time preacher. When her lesbian partner confided in a Baptist preacher, the pastor immediately contacted the minister of the Church of Christ where "NG" attended and co-taught a Wednesday night Bible class. The Church of Christ minister along with the elders[70] of the congregation, under the pretense of needing assistance in teaching a Wednesday evening class, had the class's co-teacher call and request "NG" come to the church. Upon arrival at the church building the minister and elders of the congregation confronted her with the information provided by the Baptist preacher. When question about the relationship, she told the truth. The church leaders warned her that if she did not change her life, she would be dis-fellowshipped from the church. In addition, she was advised to inform ACU of her lifestyle or the elders

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Universal Fellowship Press, 1990).

[69] Abilene Christian University, located in Abilene, Texas, is a private religious institution associated with the Church of Christ denomination.

[70] In the Church of Christ, "elder" is a term used to identify the congregation's leaders.

would be obligated to do so if she refused. Discussing this traumatic event "NG" recounts,

> It was horrible. I felt that they [the elders] had set a trap. I felt betrayed by the co-teacher. They didn't have the courage to just honestly tell me that they wanted to discuss the Baptist minister's revelations. I began to cry, ran up the aisle, and out of the church. No, one followed me. No one from the church called to see if I was okay. They never sought to bring me back to the church. I had in effect, been dis-fellowshipped. I called ACU and resigned. I knew if I didn't handle it, the elders would. I was without a job for six months. They don't know if I attempted suicide, found work...nothing about what happened to me after that day.[71]

The rejection by the church of her childhood, education, and occupation illustrates the intense conviction of conservative religious organizations regarding the biblical condemnation of homosexual behaviors and Christianity. Several denominations sincerely believe that such actions are warranted in order to get the member to face the sin in their life and repent. Sanctuary in the fellowship is offered to the repentant homosexual who vows to "sin no more" the sin of abomination: same-gender sexual intercourse.[72]

In an effort to provide refuge and the promise of salvation, the UFMCC encourages its members and others to read the Bible "with new eyes."[73] The reader must consider the context in order to understand any writing. Understanding who is speaking, to whom it is addressed, why it was written, and what the culture was like at the time of the writing, impacts the message. In addition, UFMCC posits that the Bible began as an oral tradition and then was written in ancient languages over many centuries. Understanding that translating requires interpretation and personal

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[71] Personal communications, (1998, April).

[72] The practice of dis-fellowshipping a member is justified through their interpretation of the scriptures according to certain denominations. See I Corinthians 4: 9-13.

judgement, which implies that despite the best intentions, translators and copyists are capable of human error. Today's understanding of the scripture may be different from the original language and context in which it was written, thus possibly altering its meaning.

Theologians are conscious that the understandings of biblical and ancient writers and their own can widely differ. The science and methodology of hermeneutics[74] guide the explanation of the text. The daunting task of hermeneutics involves the analysis of the text in its context and presuppositions of the interpreter who lives in a different context from the original authors. Interpreters try to guard against reading meaning into the text, rather than reading the meaning from the text. The problem remains that everyone who reads the Bible, whether acknowledging it or not, reads the Bible within a hermeneutical theory. Interpretation is what we do when we read according to Gomes. We apply explicitly or implicitly a theory of interpretation to which we submit the meaning of the text.[75] In addition, the belief that "biblical interpretation must be the same as what the biblical writers intended is itself an imposition of hermeneutical principle upon the text without which it is impossible to understand the texts in the 'correct' way."[76] Religions do not come to interpretation of the text empty-handed. Traditions, the assumptions of the community interpretation, are presupposed. Perhaps the battle for the Bible is

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[73] "Our Story Too...Lesbians and Gay Men in the Bible: Reading the Bible with 'New Eyes'". Retrieved on October 22, 1997 from www.ufmcc.com/1rsty2.html.
[74] The technical term for the interpretation of the scripture is "hermeneutics," from the Greek *hermeneuo*, "to interpret," Gomes, (1996), footnote 3, p. 357.
[75] Gomes, (1996), p. 357.
[76] ____, ibid., p. 358.

actually a battle of the hermeneutics over the conflicting interpretive principles between the larger culture and the particular community of interpretation.[77]

Liberation theology and feminist biblical critique indicate that the Bible, in order to empower all people, must be read with new eyes from the vantage point of oppressed peoples. Mollenkott believes that there is hope of building bridges across interpretive communities. She further states,

> In each community [of biblical interpretation], there is an (often unwritten and unspoken) agreement about what constitutes evidence and what is irrelevant or beside the point...It is futile for us to fling accusations at each other about creating "a canon within the canon" (that is, emphasizing some Scriptures and jumping over others), because every interpretative community tends to do the same.[78]

An interpretation of the scriptures that is absolute is theologically tenuous at best. Notwithstanding the difficulty, a correct evaluation of religious institution's truthfulness in interpretation can be determined by the liberation theology of religion according to Knitter.[79] Truthfulness, which is the Divine, can be judged in light of how a religion promotes the process of liberation. Such a process is referred to as "the kingdom." Knitter contends that justice, peace, and goodness characterizes "the kingdom." Despite the theses of MacIntyre and Hauerwas, who argue that all ethics are tradition specific, narrative forms of reflection and practice;[80] Knitter argues that

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[77] ____, ibid.

[78] ____, ibid., p. 169.

[79] P. Knitter, "Dialogue and Liberation," (Drew Gateway, LVIII, 1987): pp. 1-53.

[80] According to A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice: Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988), and S. Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Towards a Constructive Christian Social Ethic.* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), there is no such concept and practice as "justice" without the narrative tradition that defines it and specifies the conditions for pursuing it. The practice of "justice" is likewise impacted by the types of agents that may or may not engage in the pursuit of justice and the way in which it may relate to other concepts and practices within that narrative undermines a definitive understanding of what constitutes "justice."

when a religion promotes justice, peace, and goodness, the Divine (read: truth) is found in them.[81]

A theologically based re-examination of the scriptures, which are frequently sighted to justify condemnation of homosexuality, is an arduous task at best and an anathema to many members of conservative denominations. It is likely that such a paradigm shift in interpretation will be criticized and dismissed by many religious institutions and leaders. In an effort to help develop gay and lesbian biblical interpretative methods, Mollenkott says,

> Every human being belongs to an interpretative community. Inevitably, we must communicate from within specific situations. And to be in a specific situation is to be possessed by a "structure of assumptions, of practices understood to be relevant in relation to purpose and goals that are already in place"...In his groundbreaking 1980 study called, "Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretative Communities," Stanley Fish explains that "the self does not exist apart from the communal or conventional categories of thought that enable its operations (of thinking, seeing, reading)." Because all "conceptions that fill consciousness...are culturally derived," there is no such thing as a wholly free consciousness. Nobody's interpretive acts are exclusively her own: our interpretations fall to us by virtue of our position "in some socially organized environment."[82]

Notwithstanding the certain negative reaction to bringing a new reading to the scriptures, Eastman, in his article "Homosexuality: Not a Sin, Not a Sickness: What the Bible Does and Does Not Say,"[83] examines the "text of terror" with the "new eyes" of an interpretive community of gay and lesbian Christians. He argues that the factors that influence new ways of understanding the Bible include new scientific information, social changes, and personal experience. The author then proceeds to

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[81] G. D'Costa, "The Impossibility of Pluralist View of Religions," *Religious Studies*, v 32, n2, (1996 June), p. 227.
[82] V. Mollenkott, *Sensuous Spirituality*, (New York: Crossroads, 1992), p. 167.
[83] Eastman's article has been printed in pamphlet form, as "Appendix A" in Troy Perry's *Don't Be Afraid Anymore*, (pp. 338-346); reprinted in *Gay Theological Journal: Homosexual Hermeneutics on*

question some theologians' interpretation of each of the "condemning" passages by carefully studying the verses offered as cross-references. Eastman also looks to the original meaning of the words in Hebrew and the context of the time, place, and the audience for whom the scriptures were written. Finally, the article relies on the principles of the Gospel regarding the commands to love and not to judge others and quotes, "the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, and 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"[84]

Speaking at WFMCC, I observed Rev. Perry's response to the issue of scriptural interpretation of the "text of terror." He stated, "What does Jesus say about homosexuality? Nothing!"[85] Advising the congregation to realize their salvation is not tied to fundamentalists' interpretations, Perry went on to proclaim,

> Let me tell you something. God knew who you were from your mother's womb. Amen. God created you and your homosexuality, just as he created your heterosexual brothers and sisters. It is a gift of God. You do not owe an apology to any one for your sexuality. Amen. I've said at district conference, if I believe in Christ and that God raised him from the dead, then I WILL BE SAVED! I don't give permission to Jerry Falwell or any of that crowd to come between me and God. Because of the grace of God, I know beyond a shadow of a doubt what God has given me. Amen.[86]

Fundamentalists, including Rev. Falwell, have lead efforts to block gay civil rights, for which Rev. Perry has long been an activist. The granting of such rights are viewed as a conspiracy against children and an attack on America. In a direct-mail letter distributed during the 1984 campaign, Falwell called on readers to "stop the

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Religion & The Scriptures, (pp. 12-15) and is available as a link on UFMCC Internet homepage at www.ufmcc.com.

[84] Galatians 5:14.

[85] Personal communications, (1996, March 22).

[86] Personal communications, (1996, March 22).

Gays dead in their perverted tracks."[87] The letter describes San Francisco during the Democratic convention. Falwell reported,

> Men kiss openly in public...City parks have become cesspools of perverted behavior...And you see what they have planned for your children is what makes them most dangerous...The only way for them to expand their ranks is to recruit your children...It is time to take a stand...With your help I will launch a "truth campaign" to counter the homosexual attack on America.[88]

Same-sex relationships are seen as antithetical to Christianity. According to fundamentalists, homosexuality is not inborn but socially made. Therefore, it can be repented, if it is a sin. Fundamentalists believe "Christ offers the healing, heterosexual alternative that God wishes for all humanity."[89] Christian groups desire to contain what they consider to be social deviance and to prevent its spread and contagion. Leithart maintains,

> Homosexuality is the cultural culmination of rebellion against God...The homosexual strikes at the very cornerstone of human society...A homosexual culture is opposed at every point to Christianity. It must therefore be fought with every available weapon.[90]

Rev. Perry responds to such depiction of homosexuals with his tongue-in-cheek description of fundamentalists:

> They are extreme. God bless their hearts. I have a definition of a fundamentalist. There is nothing fun, nothing mental, and a lot of "isms" along the way. Don't let them define you. Their definition of a Christian can change in an hour on television. They say you can't be happy, of course I am, amen. I tell them, I won't let you define me, I know who I am, I am a good person."[91]

UFMCC's members are undoubtedly aware of how they, as gay Christians, are defined by their religious counterparts who seek to oppress them. A letter written to

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[87] D. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 475, 467.
[88] *Village Voice*. (1985, September 25), p. 33.
[89] Goss, (1993), p. 11.

UFMCC headquarters in 1993, not by fundamentalists, but by a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, vilified UFMCC's challenging of the traditional reading of the Bible:

> I was aghast and appalled at the thinly veiled attempt to twist the Bible and Christian message in what seems to me to be a dishonest, heretical, and even blasphemous manner. I wonder why those of you who believe in homosexuality are straining to give it some semblance of respectability by deliberately misinterpreting the Christian message. I do not have the time to take you up one by one on the heresies and blasphemies contained in the documents you sent...I, as well as all those who read their Bibles without jaundiced eyes, am firmly convinced that HOMOSEXUALITY is both a SIN and an ABNORMALITY."[92]

Such harsh criticism from the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches has surfaced because of UFMCC's efforts to look at the Bible through "new eyes." It appears that religious institutions that reject the "new eyes" approach to biblical interpretation believe that the "laser surgery" utilized to clear the interpreters vision has instead blurred one's vision due to scaring.

At the international level, UFMCC has published a leaflet entitled, "Homosexuality: What the Bible Does and Does Not Say." The brochure addresses gay people's concern that the attitudes of certain ministers and the scriptures seem to present stumbling blocks for persons who perceive themselves to be both a sexual minority and Christian. The reader is taken through the passages most frequently used to show displeasure with same-gender sexual orientation. In the process, the context, purpose, speaker, language, and translations are discussed. The message of

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[90] P. J. Leithart, "Sodomy and the Future of America." *The Biblical World*, (1988, February), pp. 7-8.
[91] Personal communications. (1996, March 22).
[92] N. Wilson. (1995), pp. 67-68.

UFMCC is "gay men and lesbians can come to the saving grace of Jesus Christ and yet still retain their identity and the rightful expression of their sexuality."[93]

One aspect of refuge associated with UFMCC congregations is that gay men and lesbians do not have to give up their sexual integrity to maintain their faith. As a part of the healing process, clergy have been taught how to put books about sexual orientation at eye level in their offices so that parishioners could feel comfortable enough to talk about their sexuality.[94] The clergy of UFMCC believe that sexual healing is necessary for survival in a homophobic culture. Sexual healing among those ministering to gays as Christians differs greatly from the programs that claim to "heal" a person of their sexual orientation. Instead, UFMCC ministers, offer a healing to sexual minorities through accepting their sexual orientation within the context of their Christian faith. Reconciliation with God can lead to reconciliation with self, family, friends, and the church according to Glaser.[95] I witnessed a multiplicity of occasions where a sense of condemnation impacted the gay person's Christian perspective. For example, I attended a concert at the local MCC, which was presented by the UFMCC's music ministry. The vocalist combined contemporary Christian music with her conversations with the audience.[96] Realizing the difficulty of being a Christian and a lesbian she testified,

> I grew up going to a Pentecostal church. I went until I was sixteen. They scared the hell out of me. I gave my heart to the Lord. I know that gays struggle with gay issues and religious groups tell us we are going to hell...the

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[93] The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. *Homosexuality: What The Bible Does and Does Not Say*. (Los Angeles, California: Universal Fellowship Press, 1984), p. 8.
[94] N. Wilson, (1995), p. 37.
[95] C. Glaser, *Coming Home! Reclaiming Spirituality and Community as Gay Men and Lesbians*. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990).
[96] Dena Kaye composes her music and lyrics. Her recordings are produced by Dena Kaye and Mike McClain Studio, Garland, Texas.

people that condemn us.... I hated those people.[97]

Many gay men and lesbians see religious institutions as a major contributing factor in their oppression, and not a place of refuge. According to Glaser,

> The family of faith has usually been less than welcoming of Jesus' lesbian and gay relatives. The church has offered little sanctuary for homosexual orientation and expressions. To "succeed" spiritually required denial of our sexuality. It often also demanded suffering in silence, because the subject itself has been considered taboo...Often we reflected back toward the church the rejection, the anger and the hatred it had demonstrated toward us.[98]

The term homosexuality immediately brings to mind sexual acts for most heterosexuals. The local MCC Sunday school teacher observed,

> My mother keeps referring to my lifestyle. I tell her that I don't have a lifestyle. I go to work, go to ballgames, cook, clean, grocery shop, attend my book club meetings, visit friends, and go to church. What about *that* (her emphasis) is a lifestyle? My mother's reply is, "but you sleep with a woman." Her remarks anger me. That one aspect does not define my entire life. There is more to my life than with whom I sleep. I have a life. Only the rich and famous can afford to have lifestyles.[99]

Her frustration over having her existence defined by her sleeping arrangements is repeated by others in the congregation. A member states, "You know, you say you go to a MCC [read: gay church] and everyone thinks we're having sex at church...some sort of ritual thing. You say homosexual and all people think about is sex. Church is about being a Christian."[100] The disappointment in continually having to explain MCC is a Christian denomination was echoed by another member who informed me following services one Sunday, "When you say gay church people get these ideas that we are up here having sex parties. Partying all the time. They just don't know."[101]

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[97] Personal communications, (1996, March 9).
[98] C. Glaser, (1990), p. xiii.
[99] Personal communications, (2000, July 2).
[100] Personal communications, (1996, February 25).
[101] Personal communications, (1996, February 25).

The use of the word "gay" church by a member highlights the acceptance by many gays of the label "gay church" that has been attached to the denomination. Rev. Walker is aware that many heterosexuals and homosexuals believe that the only thing that holds MCC congregations together is the primarily homosexual orientation of its members. In defense of the local congregation, Rev. Walker asserts, "I don't think that is what you will find to be true here. We have a relationship with God and our church attendance is about spirituality. We don't run a dating service. We are Christians who are here to worship and serve God."[102]

At the local level, pastors of WFMCC utilize the pulpit to preach a gospel of acceptance rather than condemnation through a revised interpretation of the scriptures. Former local minister, Rev Walker asserts,

> What MCC does for me and what I try to incorporate in my preaching is to uphold gay and lesbian people before God...a positive assurance for us that God loves us and cares about us...that our sexuality is not a matter that we have to worry about.[103]

Likewise, current WFCC pastor, Rev. Horvath has developed a sermon series "What the Bible says (and doesn't say) about homosexuality."[104] The series has been produced in video and cassette formats. She also offers the message of her research and study on the issue through a series of sermons. In the eight session series, Rev. Horvath discusses the history of societal views on homosexuality, traditional interpretations of the scriptural condemnation of homosexuality, and a re-interpretation of the "condemning" scriptures based on a study of the culture and

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[102] Personal communications, (1996, February 11).
[103] Personal communications, (1998, August)
[104] Rev. N. Horvath, *What the Bible says (and doesn't say) about homosexuality*. Baton Rouge, LA: Joie D Vivre MCC, 1994).

original language of the passages. Each lesson is accompanied by what is considered thought-provoking questions for discussion.

The leadership of UFMCC believes that the texts in the Bible that have terrorized gay men and lesbians are used to justify the homophobia of the church and culture. In an effort to expose the "untruths" in the scriptural interpretation that denies hospitality of the church to openly gay parishioners, UFMCC characterizes the tenets of its faith as those which offer social justice, peace from oppression, and celebration of the goodness found in the faith of the gay Christians. The argument follows that the house of God should be a safe and secure place for all God's children where people are free to be who they are without pretense. According to Romero, "At a very basic level, the local church as an agent of mission should extend hospitality to all who seek a place where God's love is present and unconditionally available."[105] Utilizing liberation theology and relying on sources that UFMCC considers to be some of the best materials available on how to reinterpret the texts of terror.[106] Reverend Wilson endeavors to "get at the heart of the politics of biblical interpretation as it affects gay men and lesbians." Rev. Wilson attempts this by critiquing the handling of the "condemning" texts.[107] Employing what she refers to as a "lesbian hermeneutic of suspicion"[108] Wilson suggests,

> If we use the logic of Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza's "feminist hermeneutic of suspicion," then what is *omitted* from a text or commentary may be as important, if not more important, as what is included. The presence and absence of points of view, voices of characters, and commentary on both are

[105] Romero, (1996), p. 189.
[106] See Perry, "Appendix A: Helpful Reading," in *Don't Be Afraid Anymore*, pp. 244-245.
[107] N. Wilson, (1995), pp. 94-95.
[108] Wilson is applying of lesbian theory of interpretation draws on the logic of Elisabeth Schusseler-Florenza's "feminist hermeneutic of suspicion." See Elisabeth Schussler-Florenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. (New York: Crossroads, 1983).

> important. Scholars, owners, and publishers who produce Bible translation realize that a single word omitted, changed, or added to a text, or annotation to a text, is very important.[109]

Rev. Wilson claims some previously marginalized groups (women/people of color) have found their way to some degree into the power structures that produce new Bibles. She declares a need for more gay and lesbian scholars of the scriptures. She explains her approach as a method of biblical interpretation that will point out the connections among misogynist, homophobic, and racist's methods of biblical interpretation. The methodology involves: (1) questioning traditional homophobically interpreted passages (the "texts of terror"); (2) asking why certain passages have or have not been studied; (3) examining of biblical annotations and questioning of the use of certain words and phrases; (4) using of biblical dictionaries and commentaries for the purpose of identifying trends in interpretation, cover-ups, omissions, and silences and (5) attempting to *un-silence* silent biblical characters, and freely engaging in wild, bold, shameless speculation about gay men and lesbians in the Bible.[110]

Caution is warranted when any interpretation of the scripture is undertaken. A clear relationship between human interpretation and Divine meaning is subject to the logic of inclusivism, exclusivism, and pluralism versions of religion.[111] D'Costa

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[109] N. Wilson, (1995), p. 96.

[110] ____, ibid., p. 79.

[111] A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism.* (London: SCM, 1983) coined the threefold typology of Christian attitudes. For a discussion of the merits and fault of Race's typology. Also see Ian Markham's "Creating Options: Shattering the Exclusivist, Inclusivist, and Pluralist Paradigm." New Blackfriars, LXXIV, 867, (1993), pp. 33-41; J. DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992); S. Ogden, *Is There Only One True Religion or Are there Many?* (Texas: SMU, 1992); Ken Sunn, "A Politics of Speech", in G. D'Costa, (Ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered* (New York: Orbis, 1990), pp. 192-212.

contends that one religion's justice may be another's malpractice.[112] Acknowledging that caution is required, Rev. Wilson insists, "a lesbian hermeneutic of suspicion cannot be myopic, or afford to be done in isolation." She believes understanding the biblical interpretive methods of the Religious Right and how they have been used against sexual minorities is necessary. Likewise, Wilson thinks that an "understanding of how Catholicism, liberation theology, and African American biblical scholarship have used the Bible can help homosexuals to rescue the Bible" from the oppressors.[113]

The understanding of the Bible through the lens has implications for a gay and lesbian hermeneutic.[114] For example, according to past social science research, the role of religion in the political life of Blacks was portrayed as an agent of Black oppression prior to the civil rights movement.[115] Nonetheless, Rev. Wilson recognizes that there is a real difference between African American slavery and homosexuals being in the closet. Therefore, Wilson points out that comparing slavery to the closet trivializes the "horror of being owned by another human being, held

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[112] D'Costa, (1996), p. 227.

[113] N. Wilson, (1995), p. 79. To get Wilson's commentary on the fundamentalist, Catholic, and the African American lenses on Biblical interpretation see "Chapter 3: Texts of Terror" in *Our Tribe: Queer Folks, God, Jesus and the Bible*, (pp. 80-110). Also see Williams, (1992), *Just As I Am: A Practical Guide to Being Out, Proud and Christian;* Helminiak, (1994), *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality;* Bawer, (1997), *Stealing Jesus: How Fundamentalism Betrays Christianity;* Gomes, (1996) "Chapter 8: "The Bible and Homosexuality: The Last Prejudice" in *The Good Book. Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart*, pp. 144-172; Boswell, (1980) *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality;* Glaser, (1990) *Come Home! Reclaiming Spirituality and Community as Gay Men and Lesbians* and O'Neill, (1992) *Coming Out Within: Stages of Spiritual Awakening for Lesbians and Gay Men.*

[114] N. Wilson, (1995).

[115] C. Johnson, *Growing Up in the Black Belt.* (New York: Schocken Books, [1941], 1967); H. Powdermaker, *After Freedom: A Cultural History of the Deep South.* (New York: Viking 1939); R. Bunche, *The Political Status of the Negro in the Age of FDR.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1940] 1973); G. Myrdal, *An American Dilemma.* (New York: Harper, 1944); J. Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town, 1949.* (New York: Doubleday, 1949); E. Frazier, *The Black Church in America.* (New York: Knopf, [1963], 1974); G. Marx, *Protest and Prejudice.* (New York: Harper &

captive against your will, beaten at whim, wrenched from your family, lynched, murdered, with no recourse for justice."[116] Slavery is neither just another form of oppression nor is the closet just another *secret*. According to Wilson, the experience of "gay and lesbian people, living in the closet, lying and covering up their sexuality has been soul killing and often results in suicide, isolation, loneliness, and despair."[117] Both slavery and the closet have served as sources of emotional, psychological, and spiritual pain. Physical pain and discrimination have likewise resulted from these two different forms of oppression. It is clear that slavery is not a perfect analogy for understanding the situation of the same-gender sexual orientation in relationship to the biblical texts. Nonetheless, both slavery and the closet require a "de-toxing"[118] of the biblical text that has been used to justify oppression. In fact, an official from the National Council of Churches stated in 1992, that the issue of homosexuality and the church is the "most divisive issue in the church since slavery."[119]

Reinterpreting the Bible requires caution, scholarship, and the understanding that what is occurring is simply another interpretation. The explanation of the scriptures that gay and lesbian theologians attempt should be seen in the same perspective as all other interpretation. Reading *in to* or *out of* the text what is discordant with one's situation demands caution. Theological reinterpretation must be done with a reverent heart and the desire of seeking the truth as the Holy Spirit reveals it to the interpreter. Wilson acknowledges, "There is no neutral place from

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Row, 1967); A. Reed, Jr., *The Jesse Jackson Phenomenon: The Crisis of Purpose in Afro-American Politics*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

[116] N. Wilson, (1995), p. 91.

[117] ____, ibid.

[118] The term is used by Wilson to refer to demythologizing the "texts of terror (1995), p. 94.

[119] N. Wilson, (1995), p. 91.

which to read and interpret the Bible."[120] It is a combination of the human and the Divine. The Bible is not inclusive simply in the abstract and in principle, but also in particular. According to the literature, every one's story, sins and fears are addressed, hopes confirmed, experiences validated, and name known to God. One of the paradoxes of race in America is the fact that:

> The religion of the oppressor, Christianity, became the religion of the oppressed and the means of their liberation. Christianity is not regarded as a hand-me-down religion of the White master to the slave. They [slaves] understood themselves to be Christians in their own right because the Gospel not only included them, it was meant for them.[121]

Likewise, Rev. Wilson on behalf of gay men and lesbians, argues.

> The Bible belongs to anyone who will love it, play with it, push it to its limits, touch it, and be touched by it—and the same is true for God. The Bible *must* be a holy text for gay men and lesbians, because we are truly human, created by the God who created the heaven and earth. We are at a critical moment on this question. Either we will believe what others have told us about the Bible, feel awful about it and ourselves (and possibly reject the Bible or devalue ourselves); or, we will dare to learn and study and struggle with our own canon. The choice is ours.[122]

Therefore, following the example of Black Christians in regards to interpretation of the Bible, gay Christians are claiming the Gospel for themselves and finding in it not a text meant to stigmatize, but the inclusive Word of God. Agreeing on an irrefutable single interpretation is not likely to occur because of the human element, the changing culture, and the politics of religious institutions. However, theologians re-examining the scriptures hope to open up the dialogue among those attempting to clarify the Bible's message.

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[120] ____, ibid., p. 68.
[121] Gomes, (1996), pp. 23-24.
[122] N. Wilson, (1995), p. 75.

Harvard University minister Peter Gomes contends that the Bible's message is inclusive rather than exclusive if you follow the biblical commandment to read it with mind and heart. Gomes seeks to encourage students of the Bible to reclaim the responsibility for biblical interpretation that he believes has been used for division and exclusion in an effort to alienate women, Blacks, homosexuals, Jews, and others from the Bible. Minds and hearts are difficult to change when sustained by convictions and sanctioned by the scriptures. Nonetheless, Gomes notes that the source of change in hearts and minds during the civil rights movement was a changed reading and hearing of the scriptures. Moving from a Biblical belief that the Black race was inferior to an understanding that the only race is the human race. Gomes cites an elderly White southerner Baptist, who states,

> Throughout the first sixty years of my life I never questioned Peter's confession that "God is no respecter of person" referred exclusively to the difference among White Christian persons. Neither, did I question that segregation was Christian, and that it referred to the separation of White and Negro people. Three years ago these views were completely transformed. I became convinced that God makes no distinction among people whatever their race and that segregation is exclusively by God in the final judgement. I exchanged the former views, which I had absorbed from my environment, for the latter views, which I learned from the New Testament. I came to understand the meaning of Paul's plea, "be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God"[123]

Gomes contends the gaining of a deeper insight that the Gospel is inclusive rather than exclusive brought this former White supremacist to a new understanding of the scriptures. No new translations have emerged to clarify this passage. What has changed, it is argued, has been the heart and minds of the readers. Those previously exiled to a lower status in life became equals with all others through re-interpretation.

The concept that God is not a respecter of persons, offers a refuge to all seeking and accepting Him. Such an interpretation discredits the belief in biblically sanctioned racism, sexism, and heterosexism. The climate of interpretation has changed creating new or different lenses with which we read the texts. A re-examination of one's eyesight by an optometrist includes changing lenses, likewise, a clearer, more focused reading of the Bible is being undertaken in an effort to enhance one's understanding according to some. On the other hand, many theologians and denominations warn against "false teachers" and argue that reinterpretation is actually a misinterpretation of the scriptures and a deliberate attempt to justify behaviors clearly condemned by the inspired Word of God.[124]

The Local Gay Bar As A Buffer

The need to release what has been controlled is a common phenomenon. People use alcohol to release suppressed affects. A member of the WFMCC, who had been raised in a conservative religion where her father was a church leader, struggled for several years with her sexual orientation. Married with two children, she began to seek psychiatric help as her depression deepened. She stopped attending church and began to drink heavily. No longer believing she was fit to parent, the self-loathing woman began to allow her daughter more social freedom than the young teen could handle. Her son became more withdrawn and angry. The woman questioned her ability to discipline her children. She believed it would be hypocritical because she was an unfit parent. She was being tempted by the Devil. At one point the

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[123] Romans 12:2; Gomes, (1996), pp. 98-99. Floyd Bryant wrote the article "On Integration in the Churches" for *The Southern Baptist Review and Expositor* in 1956.

[124] Some theologians cite II Peter 2:1 for a scriptural warning against misinterpretation and false teachings regarding God's message.

woman's mother, having observed the change in her behavior stated, "You are only about 20% mother." This further confirmed in the woman's mind that she was spiritually separated from God and worthless. Her drinking continued to escalate until she acknowledged her homosexual panics to her psychiatrist.[125] Although she drank at home, many sexual minorities who are struggling with their orientation frequent bars.

Dropping by a bar to "unwind" after work provides a release that could not occur without a drink. An opportunity to laugh or cry freely, having had a few drinks becomes a method for relaxing and releasing well-guarded emotions. Unfortunately for those adverse to the barroom, the bar provides in some communities the only place for sexual minorities to gather openly. The self-hatred, confusion, and desperation leads to seeking refuge in the gay bar scene where societies' judgement is granted a respite. Abandonment of gay men and lesbians *of* or *by* religious institutions causes many homosexuals to substitute other commitments to replace spiritual ones. The shame associated with same-gender sexual orientation is often addressed through addictive behaviors. Frequently, the bar scene provides the emotionally numbing medications of alcohol, drugs, and anonymous sex. Reliance on alcohol, drugs, and anonymous sex can offer a distorted concept of refuge. Gay men and lesbians use these sedatives to reduce the negative overwhelming affect of their sexuality.

Many sexual minorities have been taught to believe that their sexual

[125] Personal communications, (1997, July 2).

orientation is a perverse addiction. According to Kaufman and Raphael,[126] alcohol, food, cigarettes, drugs, and sex are *sedative scripts.*[127] The principal aim with an addiction is sedation of the disturbing affect. Anything can become scripted for use as a sedative. The affect dynamics are the same regardless of the addiction. Anonymous sex, alcohol, and drugs, for example, can generate further shame. The addictive scripts can be transformed into an end in itself. The activities available in the environment of the bar offer the sedative acts which initially provide comfort from negative affect scenes--rejection by family, friends, and church being closeted at work, and disappointing relationships. Such addictive behavior tends to cloud emotional awareness and block the shame and pain associated with same-gender sexual orientation. Sex, like alcohol, can function as a *de-inhibitor* of suppressed affect. Kaufman and Raphael[128] argue intense and intimate sex can provide an opportunity "for the expression of affects that are otherwise over controlled."[129] A bar patron confesses,

> I'd rather have sex than deal with my feelings. If I get angry or feel bummed out, well, I just look for some guy to get off with. I've just got to do it then. There's no other way for me to blank everything out. The craving's so strong that almost anybody will do. I can't afford to be choosy.[130]

Destructive patterns of homophobic self-loathing, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual addiction, codependence, battery, and abusive relationships are produced by low self-esteem. A testimony, offered by a member of the WFMCC congregation

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[126] G. Kaufman and L. Raphael, *Coming Out of Shame: Transforming Gay and Lesbian Lives.* (New York: Doubleday, 1996).

[127] S.S. Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*, vol. 1-4, 1962, 1963, 1991, and 1992. (New York: Springer,1991), 254-258. Also see S. S. Tompkins, "Script Theory." In J. Aronoff, A. I. Rabin, and R. A. Zucker, (Eds.), *The Emergence of Personality*. (New York: Springer, (1987), 185-96.

[128] Kaufman et al., (1996), p. 218.

[129] S. Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness: The Negative Affects*, vol. 2 (New York: Springer, 1963), p. 269.

during a fund-raising service supports this theory. The belief that he was condemned due to his sexual orientation impacted his life choices. He claims, "All my life, I don't know for what reason, I have always gone to church. I have gone to many denominations. And after a certain [gay] relationship of four years, I got involved with a different type of people [bar patrons]. I fell into a bottomless pit."[131] Likewise, a member of the board of directors of the WFMCC congregation informed me that when she first accepted her sexual orientation she felt there was no point in attending church. Having always been taught in her faith of childhood that if you were gay you were going to hell. She states,

> So, what's the point? From that point it was kind of like a downward spiral. If you are going to hell anyway, then your entire foundation is gone...what is the point of living a good life. If you are going to hell, you might as well live like you are going to hell.[132]

She reinforced these feeling of self-loathing, self-rejection, and abandonment based on her religious upbringing. She continues,

> It is difficult, especially for those who have been raised in the church. It is like I always knew that God's presence was there, but I removed myself from Him. That is what everyone had told me. I was to live outside religion. There is so much power, and I don't think people realize how much power there is in words and names. And I was raised with images of homosexuals as perverted people. They went out and had sex with multiple partners, and they didn't care. It is just the stereotypes that the name [homosexual] conjures and I believed it. It is like the self-fulfilling prophecy, that is, someone assumes and claims who they are as being a homosexual or a lesbian. Unfortunately, lot of times they are claiming that stereotype as well.[133]

This same woman discussed the fact that with acceptance of her sexuality a sense of expectation of being acceptable to God was lost. Believing there was no reason to try

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[130] Kaufman et al., (1996), p. 217.
[131] Personal communications, (1996, March 22).
[132] Personal communications, (1998, May 26).
[133] Personal communications, ibid.

to live as a Christian, she went on to say,

> When I first came out as being gay and I knew there was no hope, I went through a very bad time because there was no hope. And it seemed like I moved from relationship to relationship to relationship and each one was a little worse than the one before. And I found myself in situations that I never thought I would be in: with the use of alcohol and drugs. If you have an entire society telling you how bad you are and telling you how hopeless you are, but in your heart you know that who you are [a lesbian], then where is the hope? Where is the reason for trying to do better?[134]

Clearly, the bar offers a place for self-loathing behavior to be encouraged in forms of drunkenness and promiscuity for many in the gay community.

The use of alcohol to dull the pain experienced by many homosexuals is a problem addressed by UFMCC congregations. For example, WFMCC's newsletter includes a schedule of the special groups, their purpose, and meeting time. Two of the groups are AA/Rainbow Group (a gay and lesbian friendly AA group) and Al-Anon. The fact that there are two alcoholic help groups seems notable. Statistics have shown that there is a higher level of alcohol abuse among gay people that is correlated to self-hate, low-self esteem, family rejection, and inability to accept one's identity.[135]

MCC As A Refuge

Those of the Christian Right believe the bar with its alcohol induced stupor offers no one a place of refuge for heterosexuals or homosexuals. Likewise, the Christian Right argues that a traditional interpretation of the Bible clearly states what is necessary to make gay men and lesbians "whole." Rather than altering religious

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[134] Personal communications, ibid.

[135] Alcoholism is a critical problem in the gay community. Studies show that at least two million gay men and lesbians abuse alcoholism. Thirty percent of gay men and lesbians will need treatment at some point. This is three times the alcoholism rate facing the general population. See D. Hain, "Stopping Stereotypes: Gays, Lesbians and Alcoholism." Retrieved on August 16, 2001 from http://www.doitnow.org/pages/110.htm.

teaching to accommodate the "lifestyle" of homosexuality, a campaign for "traditional" family values has been waged as the means of preserving the nation. Dobson writes,

> The family is the fundamental building block and basic unit of our society and is continued health is a prerequisite for a healthy and prosperous nation. The struggle over homosexuality and the church is not about acceptance of the predatory encroachment of the homosexual contamination of society, but a conflict rooted in Christian identity and the nature of God.[136]

According to Smith, "Gay rights is not just another political issue. Nor is it just another moral issue. Gay rights presents us with the ultimate issue of our time: whether or not God will ever again be honored in our nation."[137] Traditional religious institutions profess that denominations have no need to struggle with Biblical interpretation in an effort to accommodate the life choices of gay men and lesbians. The refuge that the gay community seeks can be found in the traditional interpretation that requires turning away from the sinful life of homosexuality and returning to the heterosexual creature each was intended to be by God's design.

It appears to be a logical progression for a person who is suffering from condemnation to seek first a refuge or a place to find protection from the emotional, spiritual, and social storms that batter them. Traditional conservative denominations have been unable or unwilling to offer a refuge free of condemnation and demands for repentance to homosexuals. For those facing a society that condemns same-sex relationships, the internal struggle can be overwhelming. Romero contends that the "formation of faith communities composed primarily of gay men and lesbians stands

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[136] K. Rudy, *Sex and the Church: Gender, Homosexuality, and the Transformation of Christian Ethics* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1997), p. 67.
[137] R. LaGard Smith, *Sodom's Second Coming: What You Need to Know about the Deadly Assault* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1993), p. 245.

as an indictment of our places of worship and betrayal of Jesus' gospel of love and justice."[138] He argues that we will not be a "whole" people until the struggle of gay and lesbian persons becomes "our" struggle.[139]

The struggle to negotiate one's self-concept and identity is a common stage in the evolution of the Gay Christian. My findings indicate that for many, a "closeted" life persists. For others, the community bar becomes a place for gathering with kindred souls. But for some, for which the bar scene is objectionable it is the church that offers solace. The gay bar is, however, often the only public location available in many communities for sexual minorities to openly gather.

The bar with the sedative scripts of alcohol, drugs, and sex does not provide emotional release for all gay people. When one's self-concept cannot merge with the social relationship of the bar, a healthier refuge may be sought elsewhere. The inability to accept the bar as one's social world can result in a search for a refuge or place beyond the bar to be oneself. Some gay men and lesbians find refuge by deciding to remain closeted and isolated from the gay community. Others desire to connect with gays in the community, but abhor the bar scene with the images and addictive behaviors it nurtures. A more holistic, natural, and spiritual healing is offered by MCC according to one of the congregation's board members. I observed the small MCC congregation providing information and healing messages to its members through sermons, announcements, bulletins, newsletters, e-mails, workshops, and social events. While conducting an interview, one person acknowledged,

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[138] Romero, (1996), p. 196.
[139] ____, ibid.

> Everywhere we face the same issues. People feel that the only life is the bar scene, and lying about who they are. It is a half-life, which is maintained too often through drugs, alcohol, sex which are all forms of addiction. But finding validation through the church tells us that feeling certain pains in life can be handled differently.[140]

The church provides a place of refuge from discrimination and an alternative to the worldly environment of the bar. A board member, acknowledging the addictive behavior of many gay people states, "It [the church] is an alternative to the bar. It offers an outreach through our potluck dinners and other activities to socialize where there isn't alcohol."[141]

For the church treasurer the bar has not been viewed as a viable option for providing a refuge or developing a community. Not comfortable with the bar scene she explains,

> I didn't attend any church for a lot of years. Being the person that I am and the profession that I am in, my value system, I would not reach out to a group of people at a bar...that wouldn't be me, and yet, where else do you go to find other women who are lesbian, who fell in love with another woman, who left their husbands and had to go through custody battles and divorce issues and on and on. Where else would you find a group like that. I didn't even know that the MCC existed. That was a revelation for me. As a resource and as a refuge that is exactly what it meant to me.[142]

An ironic twist has taken place in many of the gay communities including the one observed in this study. Because the gay bar has often been the only place for gays to meet, the bar in some communities has served the dual roles of the social watering hole and a house of worship. UFMCC tries to secure meeting facilities independent of the bar when possible. The WFMCC originally conducted worship services at the community bar. A gay or lesbian bar would appear to be the antithesis

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[140] Personal communications. (1998, May 27).

[141] Personal communications. (1998, December 30).

of a place where Christian religious activities would be conducted. A bar certainly seems an unlikely location for regular worship services. To my astonishment, I discovered a history of the gay bar serving the dual and seemingly contradictory roles of escape from religion and a refuge for the religious. A group of homosexuals participating in an organized church service, at first consideration, seems surreal to those with more traditional views of worship. Surprisingly, to many including some gay men and lesbians, the bar became the place of refuge for the gay community for seemingly contradictory purposes.

Initially, many congregations of UFMCC utilized the bar as a meeting place and refuge. Providing the only gay friendly location in most communities, congregations frequently trace their beginnings to the local bar. Individuals seeking a refuge will find refuge wherever it is available. Having been exiled from their churches, the bar clearly was not ruled out as a place for gay Christians to gather.

Historically, gay and lesbian bars are often the primary if not the only meeting places where gay men and lesbians can gather openly.[143] According to Gray and Thumma, the safety of the gay bar serves as the "cultural womb" of the gay community.[144] Although many sexual minorities separate themselves from the straight world by going to gay and lesbian bars, the gay man or lesbian coming from a religious background often has difficulty reconciling their religious beliefs with the bar environment. Interestingly, according to a congregant, to others who were mainly bar people and did not feel they were able or welcome to go to a "regular" church, the

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[142] Personal communications, (1998, May 26).

[143]Records exist that traces homosexuals meeting by regularly gathering in taverns according to Edward Ward's 1709 account in The *Secret History of London Clubs* (Jeffrey Weeks, "Where Engels Feared to Tread," *Gay Left* 1 (1975): p. 3.

church meeting in the bar served as a bridge and made it easier for the bar patrons to take that first step.[145]

The original members of the congregation under study were at least in part able to negotiate their dual identities and pursue religious activities by meeting in the bar. Despite the pros and cons of meeting in the pub, several in the local gay community went to the bar to attend the first worship service of this congregation. In the following weeks, those in attendance took turns providing a lesson. Each week communion was offered. Singing gospel songs in a gay bar challenges most norms and experiences of both urban gay culture and evangelical Christianity.[146] Every element of a *regular* (member's emphasis) or *traditional* (my emphasis) service was provided in the unusual setting of a bar. In an unusual setting, a group of people considered unnatural and "degrading to human dignity"[147] by many religions, were practicing conventional or traditional religious ceremonies. Prayers, songs, testimonies, communion, and a sermon were offered each Sunday. Voices lifted in hymns permeated the entire building. Prayers of comfort and request were offered throughout the services. Because of the small size of the facility, whether those in the bar were participating in the religious service or not, it was obvious to all patrons that church services were being conducted.

I was informed that the religious services did cause discomfort for many of the bar patrons. There were those who chose to stay on the bar service side of the pub. They continued to drink, but listened to the service emanating from the lounge

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[144] Becker et al., (1997), p. 89-90.

[145] Personal communications, (1998, June 28). Also see Gray and Thumman, "The Gospel Hour: Liminality, Identity, and Religion in a Gay Bar," in Becker and Eiesland, (Eds.), *Contemporary American Religion: an Ethnographic Reader*. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1997), p. 90.

area. Many cried and appeared torn between the desire to join in the worship service and the needs to hold on to the lifestyle that they were accustom to living. A congregant noted that the members of the church group would go over to the bar area and talk with the patrons who chose not to participate in the worship services. According to one member, most of the bar patrons were either drunk or in tears by the end of the service. My findings help confirm other's research. According a study of worship services conducted in a bar, tears are no strangers to the services. Gray and Thumma report, "we have seen men cry openly during the Gospel Hour, caught up in the music and the emotion of the evening."[148] The tears flowing during the service from both participants and observers support the self-depreciating atmosphere that envelops many in the gay and lesbian community. Influenced by individual and shared experiences the Gospel Hour utilizes Christian symbols and songs in a manner that permits gay men to reconcile their modern urban gay identity with their childhood evangelical Christian formation.[149]

Many members of WFMCC acknowledge they learned of its existence through posters placed in the local gay bar. The partner of a member of WFMCC and an occasional visitor to the congregation provides an example of the bar as an outreach to the gay community seeking a church home. I asked the woman how she first heard about WFMCC and decided to attend. She recalled,

> My lover was hanging out at the bar (laughter). Actually, we were both at the bar. We picked up a pamphlet on the church. She called and found out where the church was located and she went. That was about six years ago. My lover

[146] Becker et al., (1997).
[147] Blumenfeld et al., (1988), p. 204.
[148] Becker et al., (1997), p. 85. The Gospel Hour is a gay gospel cabaret held in a midtown Atlanta gay bar. The cabaret combines "southern evangelical Christian sensibilities and cultural norms with those of urban gays." (p. 80).
[149] Becker et al., (1997), p. 80.

> found out about the church and she went maybe a couple of Sundays before I attended with her. I have gone to church off and on with her, for I guess about the last six years.[150]

Some in the community continue to frequent both the bar and the church. Others choose one refuge to the exclusion of the other. I discovered that there are some concerns regarding members of the congregation who frequent the local gay bar. Although, MCC considers the bar an opportunity for an outreach to the gay community, when members of the church become intoxicated, the message of the church is often lost. Some members realize that going to the bar can create a problem for them. They tend to make a conscientious decision to stay away from the facility. With an excessively high frequency of alcoholism among members of the gay community, many MCC members simply are uncomfortable going to the bar. The church not only provides an alternative to the bar for many sexual minorities, but also some members admit discovering there was a refuge outside of the bar offered both a spiritual and physical harbor, safe from the self-destructive behavior associated with self-loathing. A member professes,

> In a very real since MCC was the catalyst to my lifeline. I want to be very clear in what I am saying. MCC was not what saved me, but had it not been for MCC, I don't think I would have found the place where I could have begun to be a whole person again. I think I would have been just another statistic. MCC is such a powerful dynamic place and institution.[151]

Realizing that MCC provides a refuge and a message of salvation is overwhelming to some gay men and lesbians. I had numerous opportunities to witness individuals coming to the church and choosing to sit near the back of the auditorium. Some appeared to be struggling with their emotions and left the church

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[150] Personal communications, (1996, March 24).
[151] Personal communications, (1998, May 26).

before the services ended. Often they wept throughout the entire service. Boxes of tissues are provided on every pew in the auditorium. On one Sunday, I noticed a young man began quietly weeping during the sermon. As the sermon ended and communion preparation began, he fell to his knees between the pews and began praying. His sobbing increased as he leaned against the back of the pew in front of him. Members noted his condition but allowed his pain and grief to be expressed. Toward the end of the service a male member of the congregation joined the young man and placed his arm around his shoulders. An understanding of the shame, pain, and humility that an individual experiences when being accepted into the worship in this denomination appears to induce a genuine empathy among the congregants.[152] Over time, I witnessed what appeared to be an evolutionary process: many of the apparently shy, insecure, and emotionally wounded congregants became more comfortable with their surroundings. According to members of the congregation, an emotional and spiritual healing often takes place as the individual begins to accept their sexuality and reclaim their spirituality.

Gaining acceptance by other Christians is sufficient to solidify the identity revision for some gay evangelicals. Other methods include: (1) negating and devaluing the former identity as a hindrance to becoming "whole" Christians; (2) presenting the current gay Christian identity as part of an oppressed minority, thus viewing outside groups as "unenlightened," hostile, and misguided; (3) infusing many of the morals of evangelical lifestyle into the gay lifestyle by engaging in sexual activity only in a committed relationship; and (4) framing the change as a spiritual

[152] Rev. White claims the denomination plays an important role as a "field hospital" for the spiritually wounded: "the Red Cross of the churches." (Dart, 2001, March 21-28), p. 8.

journey, where the benefits of maintaining a revised self-identity are presented as primarily spiritual in nature.[153] The process of identity revision can be slow and uneven. The tensions that exist with absolute acceptance are complex for gay congregants and for congregational pastors who have to minister to the spiritual needs of the often-fragile psyche of the gay Christian.

Some gay men and lesbians grow up without any religious bonding, while those that have religious bonds feel abandoned, rejected, homeless, unloved, shamed, and enraged.[154] I observed what seemed to be the transformation of individuals from the self-loathing, spiritually depleted gay men and lesbians to confident social activist Christians that just happen to be gay men and lesbians. Members began to gain the self-esteem and courage to speak up and then out on issues regarding their orientation and religious faith.[155] The length of the process and the level of growth appeared to vary greatly from individual to individual. Certain factors, such as the view of same-gender sexual orientation in their religious upbringing, the negative or positive reaction to their sexual orientation by family and friends, and the personal acceptance of their identity, weighed heavily in the sexual minority's ability to reconcile their faith with their sexuality.[156] During a concert at the WFMCC the vocalist mixed songs and the message through conversation. It was clear that she was struggling with her traditional religious training and the idea of gay Christians. She declares,

> I have not been in church since I was sixteen. As I have said, religion confuses me. I am not able to understand it all at once. I do pray especially when I get worried or just need to talk to Him. Despite his hateful rhetoric, we have to love Jerry Falwell. He means well. I feel it is a blessing that I am

[153] Thumma, (1991), pp. 341-343.
[154] C. O'Neil, (1992), p. 35.
[155] This will be expanded on in the chapter addressing Christian social action.
[156] Informal conversations with members of the congregation.

> gay. I wouldn't be the same person if I were straight. I would have been critical of gays myself. So, I am glad God made me gay. But I am still shocked to learn that there are gay churches.[157]

Her statements move back and forth across the threshold of her belief in God's acceptance and the rejection and condemnation taught by traditional religions. Internalized homophobia is difficult to overcome for the majority of gay men and lesbians. The statements indicated that there is an additional burden for Christians who attempt to reconcile their faith with their sexual orientation.

Self-doubt about one's salvation and acceptance as a gay Christian has not been completely overcome by UFMCC's re-interpretation of the scriptures nor by the message of inclusion provided by the fellowship's theology. According to Rev. Horvath, there have been leaders in the membership of UFMCC who have been deeply involved in the denomination for many years, and still question God's mercy regarding their souls. A pastor near the point of death asks, "What if Troy (Rev. Perry) is wrong? He will be held responsible for us. God's judgement will be on him, right?" [158] This example indicates the fact that internalized homophobia is one enabler to self-acceptance that is extremely difficult to eradicate for some gay Christians.

Many of the congregants consider MCC an emotional retreat or spiritual outpost. Rev. Horvath states, "MCC is a safe haven." The local church's Webmaster adds,

> MCC has offered a spiritual outpost for me, no question about it. Each MCC I've visited has given me some kind of assistance for the space I was in as a lesbian. I believe when Rev. Elder Troy Perry had the first service, it was a truly historical moment in the history of the Christian Church and

[157] Personal communications.,(1996, March 9).
[158] Personal communications, (1998, May 5).

> in the history of the gay civil rights movement. To a great degree, organized religion has been the most critical and condemning of gays and then Rev. Perry had the vision to establish UFMCC.[159]

For many, MCC becomes a refuge, the one place where many believe they can be true to themselves and honest with others. Gay men and lesbians, who remain within the churches that reject same-gender sexual orientation, frequently stay in the closet to avoid becoming targets of the Church's homophobia and the gay communities churchphobia.[160] UFMCC offers a freedom from both the closets of sexuality and spirituality for many. The church provides a refuge from the world in which they live the lie of heterosexuality. In smaller communities anonymity is more difficult to maintain. The work environment may actually provide an easier place to conceal one's sexual orientation than attending a MCC congregation. At work in cities of all sizes, many gay men and lesbians acknowledge using the "appropriate" pronoun when making reference to their significant others or simply opting to not discuss their personal lives. Passing as straight is seen as necessary for job security, peer acceptance at work, and spiritual fellowship at church. Because of the association of UFMCC with gay men and lesbians, problems can arise for Christians attending a congregation of MCC. When asked if acknowledgement of membership at WFMCC was risky, a member admitted that there were some reservations. She replies.

> If I wear my MCC T-shirt to work, I stand a real risk being ostracized. Some stand the risk of being fired. Some stand the risk if they aren't out to their family of being rejected. There isn't the risk even if you are gay going to Baptist church as long as you are not "out." But if you go to MCC, there is more of a risk because of the strong outreach to the homosexual community.

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[159] Personal communications, (1998, June 28).

[160] C. Glaser, *Come Home! Reclaiming Spirituality and Community as Gay Men and Lesbians.* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990), p. xiii.

> The assumption is that you are gay if you attend. It is a political statement. It can be. It is safer to go elsewhere, you are likely continuing to have to live the lie. So, if you are walking into a church under a false pretense, knowing that if someone knew who you were, they would probably excommunicate you, then how open and safe can you be in your spirituality in that place?[161]

The member seems to be offering scenarios that argue from two directions in the discussion on being a gay Christian. You can worship with full acceptance at an MCC regardless of whether your sexual orientation is known. You can worship with that same acceptance in most other denominations as long as you keep your orientation closeted. This can be further substantiated by additional observations of this study. For example, it is worth noting that the many of members of the local MCC state that the majority of the city's residents are unaware of the church's existence in the community. The congregants also claim that when asked where they attend worship services, most individuals have no knowledge of what Metropolitan Community Church teaches. The public tends to hear the word "community" and associate it as being an interdenominational religious organization. Being unaware that MCC existed in the Wichita Falls community can be illustrated by a phone call to the local pastor from the news media. Rev. Horvath explains.

> It is interesting. When Brice Daniels from Channel Three,[162] called me, she said that they had tried to find people all over the community and no one would talk to them, or put themselves in the public's view out of fear of the ramifications. She said she had quite a few people that started turning toward us. She had no idea that we were here or that there was any sort of such "gay" church. I try tried hard to clarify that we were a Christian church with an outreach to the gay and lesbian community.[163]

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[161] Personal communications, (1998, May 26).

[162] Daniels is a news reporter for *KFDX* channel three, which is the local affiliate of the National Broadcasting Company (NBC).

[163] Personal communications, (1998, May 26).

MCC claims to provide a special outreach for the gay community and at the same time spread the message that the denomination is inclusive of anyone seeking Christ. Continuing to try to dilute the persistent image of MCC as a "gay" church, a minister in training states,

> MCC is truly a church of its time. There is so much work on a spiritual level that needs to be done. There are so many people that need to hear, not a dogma, but the message of the gospel: "God loves you." He didn't come into this world to condemn you." The whole message, the scripture isn't about the law, but a restored relationship. And the very foundation, once that relationship is restored, then we become or begin to have whole people. Christ's ministry was very much 3-pronged in itself.[164] He didn't just address spiritual needs when he dealt with people. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, forgave sins and sent people out to live in newness of life. He restored their relationship. And I think that is exactly what MCC is and needs to continue to be. MCC needs to be a place of ministry and outreach that crosses gender line, orientation lines, religious creeds, and dogma lines. We need to be the ones that reach out to a hurting and lost generation. We need to provide a refuge to all that have need for a safe place.[165]

Addressing the role the denomination specifically plays for gay Christians, I asked if members think MCC can provide something that other religions or gay organizations cannot provide. A member responded,

> MCC provides a safe place for those people that other religions and denominations have rejected. MCC provides a place [for gays] to discover and to find the real power of God in their lives. That is very true. [In] other gay organizations...people can find a way to express themselves, they can find people of a like nature, and they can find causes. But, they can't necessarily find that *piece or peace* (their emphasis) that fills the spiritual void in their lives.[166]

MCC repeatedly was described as offering a refuge and safe place to worship. A young pregnant woman talked with me about why she attended WFMCC. Going into great detail, she informed me that she was just getting out of an abusive relationship.

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[164] This is a parallel reference to UFMCC 3-pronged gospel of salvation, community and Christian social action.
[165] Personal communications, (1998, May 26).

She stated with seemingly unabashed honesty, "My lover and I broke up. She wasn't handling my pregnancy well and I needed someone to talk to."[167] The church was providing her a safe place. The congregation was planning a baby shower for her. When asked why she thought people attended MCC, she claimed,

> I can tell you why I think people go here. Others are hypocrites. I grew up in the Catholic Church. My parents are good people. Not all people are hypocrites, but lots are. People go to a gay church because your not wanted elsewhere or you have to lie. At this church you can be honest with yourself and God.[168]

Reverend Troy Perry preached in the small north central Texas parish of WFMCC. As the collection plate was passed, Rev. Perry asked members for short testimonials addressing two questions. First, "how did you meet the Lord?" and second, "how did you end up in the Metropolitan Community Church?" A young man stood and testified,

> I was raised in the church. There were lots of hell, fire, and brimstone sermons. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't be His creation. I went through a lot of trials. I lost my lover. And then I meet "R." I am here today through the love of God and my lover's great faith.[169]

The testimony of this young man and many others given during Perry's visit reiterated the feelings of being exiled from the faiths of their childhood. Repeatedly, I heard members claim MCC had provided a refuge from the condemnation of their sexuality by other denominations. Several indicated that to remain in other churches, they would have to be less than honest about their sexual orientation. Rev. Walker stated, "I became a Christian when I was eight years old, but I came home in 1981."[170] Her statement underscores the beliefs of other gay Christians.

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[166] ____, ibid.
[167] Personal communications, (1996, February 12).
[168] Personal communications, ibid.
[169] Personal communications, (1996, March 22).
[170] Personal communications, (1996, March 22).

BUILDING TRUST

Honesty is considered necessary for the establishment and maintenance of trust. MCC claims to be providing an environment conducive to establishing and regaining trust. One can argue if the UFMCC provides a refuge, it seems likely that those who find refuge have to trust the church and its community of believers. If an individual does not feel that they can trust others around them, the environment will not provide a sense of safety or protection against the fear of outside forces or internal threats. Trust is an important component of any institution that desires to mobilize its members for a cause. I asked one member of the church who had been dis-fellowshipped by her life long denomination what MCC meant to her. She replied,

> For me, MCC meant a place where I could be myself and still have a faith in God that was growing and able to be nurtured. And that I could trust (nervous laugh). Because, [in] the Church of Christ where I grew up, I didn't feel safe at the end because I was scared and felt like I didn't belong there anymore. So, what MCC gives me is the reestablishment of trusting in God and the people of the congregation...This is key point for the church, what has kept us going back. We felt like we could open up a part of our lives that is tender and precious to us. And realize that others have gone through those similar things and so they understand confidentiality. That was our number one thing.[171]

The partner of the dis-fellowshipped Church of Christ member, "LB," recounted how her trust in the confidentiality of discussing her sexuality with a clergyman had been shattered. Claiming a desire to find an answer to the conflict of her sexual orientation and her Christian faith, the woman sought a Baptist pastor. As a wife and the mother of a three-year old daughter, she was seeking spiritual guidance with her dilemma. Perhaps in an effort to address the problem, the Baptist preacher

[171] Personal communications, (1998, December 30).

decided to share this woman's secret with her husband and with the pastor of the congregation of her female lover. When asked if attending MCC had helped her re-develop a sense of trust, she confirmed,

> Although another pastor had really let me down before, I think the church does have a role in re-establishing a sense of trust. And that is a tough issue for me too. Because my trust has been abused in many ways by other clergy. I almost feel like I shouldn't trust anybody, but just the atmosphere at the MCC led me to have that trust again and feel that I could really trust the people there. Trust of self is a real issue.[172]

The statement that trust of self is an issue is further validated by a remark made by Rev. Walker, former pastor of the local MCC, who theorized,

> The idea that we have to learn to trust ourselves...there is a lot of things involved in being "in the closet." As I begin to see myself in different terms...I have come out of the closet and can now look at everyone else as the lesbian I am. I reclaimed the abandonment...We are taught that God abandons us. We learn at MCC that He doesn't. But because of our early socialization regarding God's abandonment, we abandon ourselves to keep from being who we are supposed to be. Can I trust someone who abandons me? So, I can't trust myself until I can recoup. I can't trust others until I can trust myself. So, it begins individually.[173]

The liberation of being both openly gay and a Christian produces a new energy and lifts the oppressive cloud of dual rejection for many. The honesty and trust manifest themselves in a variety of ways within MCC, including the display of personal affections. I witnessed what some one considers a generous amount of enamored physical contact between couples. Hand holding, little kisses, cuddling, and a general attentiveness normally reserved for more private moments were observed. A board member explained, "The church is the only place outside of the home or bar that you can feel truly comfortable touching your partner."[174] The

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[172] Personal communications, (1998, December).
[173] Personal communications, (1998, August).
[174] Personal communications, (1998, December 30).

atmosphere within UFMCC churches has been described as a "cultural thing," that is, indicative of gay cultural behavior. Often I witness a great deal of laughter and physical contact during the services. Rev. Wilson suggests that part of the laughter is due to nervousness about being in a church and of being one's self. Again, the paradox is being both a sexual minority and a Christian. "For many, MCC is the only place where couples are out of the closet or where they can hold their lover's hand in public."[175] The cultural aspect of UFMCC congregations' environments still carries a hint of the barroom rowdiness leftover from the time when noisy, crowded bars were the only places gay Christians were permitted to publicly meet. I admit that I was a bit uncomfortable with the open display of affection. I discovered that the issue has produced numerous arguments within the Fellowship. The arguments surrounded the question of "what is proper church etiquette in a gay male and lesbian church that is open to everyone?"[176] Goss asserts, "Queer Christians must be critical yet compassionate of these destructive social behaviors, examining their own behaviors and seeking out means to heal themselves."[177] This acceptance of the church as a refuge from condemning eyes of the broader society and thus, a place where gay men and lesbians felt able to "be themselves" made the church less threatening to people who were frightened by church.[178]

Realizing Cognitive Liberation

Many gay men and lesbians must first come out of the shame that religious organizations have associated with same-gender sexual orientation. Thus, spiritual

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[175] N. Wilson, (1995), p. 60.
[176] ____, ibid.
[177] Goss, (1993), p. 157.
[178] ____, ibid., p. 61.

liberation is necessary before they can participate in social liberation. UFMCC claims to offer a place of refuge and spiritual renewal. Religion plays a central and vital role for many, which makes it less easy to abandon. After finding an MCC and becoming active in the congregation, the same person who had resigned herself to live like she "was going to hell," states that upon finding God's spirit, she rededicated her life to Christ. She claims that the church's gospel message provided her with validation of self-worth that she was seeking in her life. She believes, "You have to have the spirit validated before you can have the rest of you validated."[179] The message of the UFMCC was a benefit that she was unable to find in the secular gay community. The cognitive liberation she gained through the church has given her the confidence to speak out on justice issues. As a child of God, she maintains she is no longer ashamed of her sexuality and through God's grace she has the courage necessary to be engaged: first, spiritually, second, socially and finally, politically. She affirms,

> The denomination is only thirty years old. The impact it will have on gay rights is yet to come. There is still a lot of friction in the community. There are still many who are hurt and fighting their own battles. You can't be politically active until you are healthy emotionally and spiritually. I am fortunate. If someone questioned me about attending MCC, I would be happy to pursue the conversation. I don't feel a need to hide. If I lose my job, God will provide something else. If a particular issue arose, I would not hesitate to be politically involved.[180]

Believing that God's love is not contingent on one's sexual orientation helps in the psychological healing process for many gay Christians. The validation of self through the MCC's message that one's sexuality is a gift from God contributes to cognitive liberation. Such liberation is necessary before an individual can actively

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[179] ____, ibid.

engage in social justice efforts. One member voiced this belief by positing,

> I believe that there is a psychological benefit to spiritual healing. If a person is spiritually sick they will be less capable of being comfortable in issues of social justice. I have been working in the mental health area for twelve years and I don't care what the pressures are, if a person is spiritually grounded they can take the stresses. If you find someone who is spiritually sick, things may be okay on the job or elsewhere, but not internally. The church provides a place for spiritual health, which I associate strongly with mental wellness, especially for homosexuals who find the rejection by organized religion difficult to reconcile.[181]

Cognitive liberation can increase confidence that social and political change is possible, as well as the motivation to push for such change.

The very essence of what the UFMCC is its role as a refuge for the gay and lesbian community physically, spiritually, psychologically, and socially. According to Rev. Walker, the church *has* (her emphasis) to be a refuge. The church organist echoes a similar sentiment regarding the church when asked to explain what the church as a refuge means.

> It means that people who have been shut out of the churches that they were raised in, the denominations of their families, those who have been turned away...they have a refuge...I feel like this is a refuge such that anyone can come in and learn first, that God loves them the way they are. Then it is God's place to minister to their heart and convince them that if there is a lifestyle...drinking...that they need to work on, then that is God's place. It is not our place. Our place is to make them feel loved and know that they have the support and the freedom to come and worship at this place. The church is offering something that other congregations aren't willing to provide. Our worship is adapted to the gay culture and acceptance of each other as Christians and equals. I think we have been an outreach to a lot of "unchurched"[182] people and MCC is their denomination.[183]

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[180] Personal communications, (1998, May 26).
[181] ____, ibid.
[182] "Unchurched" is a reference to individuals who have had little or no prior relationship with religious institutions for spiritual reasons.
[183] Personal communications, (1998, June 28).

The non-judgmental approach taken by UFMCC includes the use of inclusive language, which is gender neutral, so as not to cause discomfort among the fellowship. However, some members do voice concerns when some members refer to God as the "Mother" rather than the "Father." Rev. Perry responded to such concerns by claiming that some members may use, Father, while others prefer Mother. He claims some people need to balance the images of God. If a member has experienced emotional, spiritual, or physical trauma in a relationship with either parent, the need to see God in a different gender may be healing. The nurturing environment that the UFMCC tries to provide for the gay Christian is of utmost importance to many who have been disenfranchised. Defending the use of inclusive language as part of an accepting environment, Perry reminds, "You can't clean the fish until you catch them. You have to provide a refuge where wounded souls feel safe. When individuals feel secure, teaching can take place."[184]

The current WFMCC pastor, Rev. Horvath, shared with me her views on why the church as a refuge is necessary. She argues,

> I wish denominations would put us out of business. That is, become so open and affirming...Jeffress[185] the First Baptist minister said, "we love homosexuals" and I asked, "Then are we going to be able to walk hand and hand into your churches and celebrate Holy Unions? I don't think so, [that is], become open and affirming enough so that we can walk through your doors and be the people we were created to be, so [that] we don't feel we need to have that refuge somewhere." I would love to see the day when we would not need to have MCC churches. I would love for them [other denominations] to put us out of business and me have to look at my credentials and say where do I go from here? I don't see that happening soon, but we are making strides.[186]

These remarks indicate the hope that there will be no need for the UFMCC's mission

[184] Personal communications, (1996, March 22).
[185] Jeffress is the minister of the local First Baptist Church.
[186] Personal communications, (1998, June 28).

to serve the GLBT community of Christians. It also implies the measured expectation that the future role of MCC as a denomination will change as societal and faith communities' attitudes toward same-gender sexual orientation change.

Visibility can reduce the ability of the church to provide a refuge. Although UFMCC emphasizes that the church can never be closeted, bringing the church out of the shadows may expose its congregants when issues call for community involvement. The long-range goal of openly gay Christian to become visible within traditional denominations, such as Baptist or Methodist requires patience and faith. As MCC becomes more visible in the local communities, the exposure to both positive and negative repercussions can begin to develop. Negative consequences can vary from actual physical attacks and threats of violence against the church, the pastor, and its members to verbal rebuke or distancing of other denominations. Cognizant of these concerns, I asked Rev. Horvath what she believed was the impact of the recent news coverage that in effect had "outed" WFMCC to the city. We discussed the negative as well as positive aspect of this "outing." The pastor offered examples of both distancing and acceptance by other denominations. Regarding a negative reaction to MCC's presence in the community the pastor noted,

> When we were getting ready for Lent, there was a group here, the Catholics that holds vespers every morning and other churches participate. And MCC was thrown in (invited) and some said, "Absolutely not, how do we explain them?" The thought was, "Well, you would see the big 'Q' on their foreheads and you would know they were queers." I thought, "What do you mean how would you explain them? People come to worship." Well, the particular minister threatened to pull their church out if we came in.[187]

The positive benefits include an out-reach to sexual minorities, their families, and friends who are unaware of the church's existence, as well as heterosexuals who

are seeking a more liberal and inclusive fellowship of believers. However, church members were most pleased by the fact that despite publicity about MCC, other churches were demonstrating an acceptance of the congregation needed for healing and growth.

Speaking about the positive side of the church being "outed," the pastor explained,

> The fact is that despite the problem in the news, other churches still wanted us as part of the vacation Bible school.[188] Regarding vacation Bible school, they know who we are. This is about worship. We are working with the Lutherans on serving dinner one night. This is an outreach beyond the walls of religion. It chokes me up, because it puts us out there with the big guys.[189]

Her remarks illustrate the importance of such acceptance of the predominately gay congregation by more "traditional" churches. Several other denominations in town were not only willing to work with MCC, but also wanted openly and actively to include the congregation.

Public recognition as a legitimate denomination, along with the personal acceptance of self is part of the social and spiritual liberation of gay Christians. While conducting interviews, I asked whether MCC contributed to members' cognitive liberation. A board member and mother of two states,

> Yes, it goes back to the belief, if you are going to go to Hell because you are a lesbian. I believed that for so long, and then I learned it wasn't true. And I do have self-worth and my opinions do matter. My opinion didn't matter even to me for a long time, but through the church I have learned to value my opinion and feel others value it.[190]

Another board member responded in-kind by stating,

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[187] Personal communications, (1998, May 26).
[188] The "problems in the news" is a reference to the library book controversy mentioned in Chapter 3. It will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.
[189] Personal communications, (1998, May 26). The televised interview with the local MCC pastor and her life-partner in effect "outed" the pastor's son to the neighborhood children.
[190] Personal communications, (1998, December 30).

> It is difficult as one person or even with your partner to feel validation. It is easier when you go to church and see other couples. You see and benefit from the examples of another couples in the church. It is an outlet for other viewpoints and to broaden your perspective. Cognitively, you can put that in your schema and you accept yourself. You accept yourself more as you see others.[191]

Likewise, the church organist unequivocally believes that MCC, while providing a refuge, also helps in the gay man's or lesbian's acceptance of self. She adamantly declares,

> I have seen people come here the first time, sit very quietly and weep. After the come and continually hear God's message of love and acceptance that they can be both a Christian and gay...the next thing you know, they are passing out the bulletins, making announcements. So, there is a mental liberation going on...a cognitive liberation going on, most assuredly.[192]

Repeatedly, congregants described WFMCC as a physical and spiritual refuge. A member of the congregation offered a perspective that reached beyond the stigma of being identified as a gay man or lesbian. Coming out of a Black church heritage she stated,

> I think the benefits that the church provides the community is the sense of 'God loves you no matter who you are.' I think that is very necessary. I think it is very necessary in spite of sexual orientation. I think people get beat up a lot in society and it has very little to do with sexual orientation. As society we tend to be cruel to others to magnify ourselves as being better. We have gotten away from being kind. I think the Church gives people a place to go, some place for their spirit to heal, and for some a place for their spirit to grow. And it allows them to be themselves without all the baggage...without bringing the damage and then, heal.[193]

The remarks supported an understanding of MCC's role in providing a refuge to heal the spirit and source for cognitive liberation. Supportive statements abound. The

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[191] Personal communications, (1998, December 30).
[192] Personal communications, (1998, June 28).
[193] Personal communications, (1996, March 24).

song leader elaborated on the role of MCC as a refuge and source of cognitive liberation as key ingredients for doing social justice by trumpeting,

> I was kicked out of the church in Georgia and I thought "what am I doing pursuing a degree in music?" I had to stand up in front of the church and answer all the questions about my sexuality. In 1980, I stumbled across MCC. I had been told of the church with old style Christianity that welcomed gay men and lesbians...I had felt hopeless about my spirituality. And when I attended MCC and after the sermon, I thought, I am home...MCC has always been a place that has provided the gay person with the assurance that God loves them. They may not have been out there marching, but because they are Christians, they have a sense of validation.[194]

These comments stress the importance and necessity of the role MCC plays as a refuge in the emotional and spiritual healing of many gay Christians.

In this chapter, I began with a discussion of the literature addressing the traditional interpretations of the scriptures regarding homosexuality. The condemnation and exile that accompanies same-gender sexual orientation has been discussed. Likewise, a partial analysis of the ongoing debate surrounding re-interpretation of the biblical text has been included as theological foundation. The view of the Bible through "new eyes" offers an alternative approach to examining the scriptures. By reading the scriptures with a changed heart and mind, theologians of certain faiths are attempting to shift the paradigm of biblical interpretation. Specifically, I have addressed UFMCC's claim that the lens of a new interpretation of the Bible offers acceptance of the dual identity of sexual minority and Christian. Utilizing hermeneutics, theologians are revisiting the scriptures, which have been used as an authoritative blade to cut the homosexual out of the institutions of spiritual redemption, social equality, and political power. The UFMCC preaches a message that sexual orientation is not a sickness or a sin, but rather a gift from God. The environment and practices of Metropolitan Community Church provides a refuge for many gay Christians according to the denominations literature and many of the

[194] Personal communications, (1998, May 27).

members I interviewed.

The denomination claims to provide a gospel balm to soothe and heal the spiritually wounded. UFMCC's interpretation through "new eyes" offers a message of inclusion, which furnishes a safe place for overcoming oppression sickness. The denominations is hopeful that by editing or replacing the mental and emotional tapes with affirming messages of self-worth, reduction and deletion of the sedative scripts of addiction will result. The hope of MCC is that with affirmation as a child of God, the nauseating feelings of fear, shame, and guilt will begin to subside and salvation will be claimed for some in the gay community.

I have tried to offer evidence supporting WFMCC's efforts in achieving the first prong of UFMCC's gospel: providing an emotional and spiritual refuge for the sexual minority while embracing salvation. For many, trust in self and other can be re-established in a safe and soothing environment. Having had one's maturity, morality, and spirituality challenged by society makes the development of trust crucial to the process of becoming healthy gay Christians. The cognitive liberation experienced by many I interviewed, attests to the importance of the church as a refuge and a place to develop trust. The healthy individual can become stronger and more secure in the faith and their self-worth. A trust in others can take root. The song director's comment, "They may not be out there marching in parades, but because they are Christians, they have a sense of validation," underscores the accomplishments of the local congregation. A refuge providing validation is perhaps the first step in lining up for the parade.

One must acknowledge, if UFMCC provides a refuge from the broader society and from the secular gay community for some sexual minorities, as it claims, it is not a major intellectual leap to state that MCC may be an institution that helps its congregants establish a new sense of hope and community. In the next chapter I will address the role WFMCC plays in building community for those who are seeking a

spiritual and social center among other gay Christians.

Chapter 5: The Church as a Community

> *...they were clearly the voice of the second language, second in the obvious senses of place and power*[1]
>
> *The second language of community is overwhelmed and struggling merely to survive...The world de Tocqueville describes reminds us of the second language of community that Bellah finds still alive today.*[2]

The concepts of hope and community are closely linked in a democracy. Bellah[3] and his co-authors posit that the American experience contains hope. Similarly, Fowler[4] states that an intellectual discussion regarding community is important because community is, in fact, a source of hope. In making the connection between religion and community, I remind the reader that a religious understanding of community is familiar to Western political thought. One needs only to look at the thoughts of Bell[5] and Bellah[6] to be reminded that community is inescapably tied in practice to religion. Fowler states,

> From the age of the Constitution to the New Age, religion and community have often been connected in American intellectual thought and political debate. Indeed, religious and spiritual perspectives commonly affirm community. It is the central organizing concept of religious political thought today, promulgated sometimes by those who are aware of the rigors of the struggle, sometimes not, but always by those confident of the sacredness of their mission. Thus, while they often exemplify the mixture of caution and hope about community that is so recognizable in contemporary American political thought, their favorite word is hope

Going beyond Bellah's belief that the individual's only hope is religion, Tinder declares,

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[1] A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday/Anchor (trans. 1964).
[2] R. Fowler, *The Dance with Community*. (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1991).
[3] R. Bellah, R. Madsen, W. Sullivan, A. Seidler, and S. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. (Berkley: University of California Press, 1985).
[4] Fowler (1991), p. 37.
[5] D. Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. (New York: Basic Books, 1978).
[6] Bellah, (1985).

> Without religion individuals cannot carve out a path to human dignity, the absolute requisite for any community if it is to endure. Only God can do that. Without divine grounding we are wounded beings who will never create, much less experience, community.[8]

Likewise, Tocqueville argues that religion is quintessential in maximizing community in America. Drawing on his observation in America. Tocqueville believes that the key to Americans' ability to make democracy work is their penchant for civic association.[9] He holds that we earnestly seek association in the realm of our private lives and feelings. Tocqueville believes that within the family, patriotism and religion lay the foundation for public community. Tocqueville writes,

> Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of dispositions are forever forming associations. There are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but others of a thousand different types—religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive...Nothing, in my view, deserves more attention than the intellectual and moral associations in America.[10]

The importance of feeling a sense of community, of belonging, should not be underestimated when studying man's relationship to self and the broader society. Wuthnow's study of small groups indicates that the reasons given for joining these groups are "to gain a feeling of community" and "to find spirituality."[11] When individuals begin connecting community and spirituality, Fowler states, "Community goes deep into our souls, and in the process helps us to understand ourselves in quite rational terms."[12] However, the gay Christian has been socialized to believe that the two identities of being gay and Christian are incompatible and therefore an irrational

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[7] Fowler, (1991), p. 141.
[8] G. Tinder, *Community: Reflections on a Tragic Ideal.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1980), pp. 145-159.
[9] de Tocqueville, (trans. 1964), p. 65.
[10] ____, ibid., pp. 181-185.
[11] S. Lipset, Excerpt from "Malaise and Resiliency." *Journal of Democracy*, (July 1995): 2.
[12] Fowler, (1991), 9.

concept. According to Goss, gay Christians argue, "reformists' efforts have lacked critical practice to engage the churches or the courage to embrace exile from the churches." [13] Reformists have failed in their attempts to develop inclusive, egalitarian communities within the churches. As a result, many gay men and lesbians are faced with the injustices of the churches.[14] Thus, to develop a sense of community their world needs to be seen as rational. Among the exiles from other churches, MCC's congregants have sought to create an alternative community.

Making one's life rational in a world that considers same-gender sexual orientation unnatural, immoral, and irrational is a difficult challenge. Searching for an alternative space that offers the feeling of community and allows the gay men and lesbians to find spirituality can seem impossible. The Metropolitan Community Churches state that the moral leadership that this Fellowship attempts to provide for the larger community is an important part of the church's function. The UFMCC claims that its very existence creates community where it never existed. According to information provided by the WFMCC, the denomination recognizes itself as a *Church of Liberation for a Community in Need.* The need increases, the church argues, because of changing political climates, health crises, and attacks from the religious right.[15] When discussing the decision to attend MCC, a member spoke of the need to

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[13] R. Goss, *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), p. 122.

[14] ____, ibid.

[15] This is according to a packet prepared by Wichita Falls Metropolitan Community Church. *Discovery Class: The Love of God for the People of God,* 5. The packet is part of the educational process for perspective members of the denomination and includes the following explanations: (1) "Why We are a Fellowship with seven reasons and a conclusion: (a) A More Effective Witness, (b) An Important Symbol in Our Community, (c) Programs in Christian Living and Loving, (d) Community Value, (e) The Importance of the General Conference, (f) The Value of Fellowship Structures and Leadership, (g) General Church Services, (h) Conclusion on Tithing; (2) A Theology From the People: (3) Emphasis on Christian Social Action; (4) Five Most Frequently Asked Questions About the UFMCC which are: (a) Is the UFMCC a Gay Church?, (b) How Can UFMCC Best be Described in

connect community and spirituality. In reference to community the member stated,

> My first call to the MCC was just looking for a support group and looking for a body of believers. I didn't know how much I would find there. I had visited many different churches. For example, the Methodist's teachings I could identify with, but [I] could never find peer groups in that church. I came to MCC and started meeting people who where professionals like myself with similar family backgrounds. Those people quickly became more than just friends or fellow church members. They started becoming integrated in to my life in every way outside of church. These are the people that I meet with throughout the week, work with, go to movies with, have over for dinner or go to a football game with. The community has become important to me.

The community provided by MCC connected to spirituality in a rational manner for this member. She continued,

> I have found my spiritual needs have been met so much better here than anywhere else. Things have started making sense that never made sense before. I started feeling that it could be and was a reality to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. And I started seeing the whole reason behind the church community: the fantastic support. I began to see how hard it is to have a continued faith by your self. You need the fellowship. It is so important. You don't have to be scared or hide a part of yourself, no matter what that part is. You don't have to feel you won't be accepted. I don't feel the hypocrisy I felt growing up in the Southern Baptist church.[16]

According to Stoltz, gays have an innate understanding of the value of community. He states, "Being alone can kill us, literally and figuratively. In community we have found our salvation, so it is only natural that we seek our salvation as a community."[17] Fowler suggests the belief that religion forms a bridge to community

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Terms of Theology and Liturgy?, (c) How Did MCC Start and What is the Scope of its Ministry Today?, (d) What Type of Governmental Structure Does UFMCC Utilize? And (e) It is said that UGMCC is a Church "For ALL People." What does that Mean? (5) Inclusive Language; (6) Statement of Faith; (7) Sacraments and Rites; (8) The MCC Cross; (9) Listing and location of the Districts; (10) History of Wichita Falls Metropolitan Community Church (WFMCC); (11) WFMCC bylaws; (12) Standard Operating Procedures; (13) Job Descriptions for Board of Directors, Clerk, and Treasurer; (14) Stewardship; (15) Requirements for Staying an Active Voting Member of WFMCC and Removal of a Member Procedures and (16) A Statement of Membership Commitment WFMCC.

[16] Personal communications. (1998, December).

[17] E. Stoltz, "Gays Find Community of Faith in Church." *Gay Theological Journal: Homosexual Hermeneutics on religion and the Scriptures*, 2 (May-August, 1999): p. 49.

emerged in the movement toward religious community in the 1960s.[18] WFMCC's treasurer echoed the idea of religion forming a bridge to the community. Passionately envisioning the role of the church, she explained,

> The church has got to have not only an internal vision, but it has got to also be willing to be on the forefront of building bridges. It is time that we get beyond a separatist, once you start healing, the next natural process is that you are able to accept...I think we try and mask things under the term homosexual. Well, we can't do that. Some say we are a gay church. That is not true. It is scary, but we have to be willing to build those bridges and step out of those stereotypes...be willing to have the community as a whole see that we are not those stereotypes. To bridge to the larger community is part of the meaning of the three-pronged gospel of MCC.[19]

When seeking a place where gay Christians could connect community and spirituality, the geographical location of the congregation of this study is viewed as significant. The former pastor of the local congregation suggests,

> I think people in the "Bible Belt"[20] grow up with the concept of spirituality. You can take spirituality away from us, but we are more likely to find it again. We in the "Bible Belt" are more likely to seek it out or create it for ourselves. The "Bible Belt" MCCs are not just an outlet. They are congregations that want the spirituality that they can't have honestly anywhere else. Remember [that] it was a little southern boy out of the "Bible Belt" that founded UFMCC.[21]

The pastor sees a connection between southern Protestantism and spirituality. The largest congregations of the UFMCC are not located in California but in the Bible Belt states such as Texas and Florida.[22] In the Bible Belt states, "churchgoing is a

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[18] Examples of religious community movements of the 1960s include the Christian community movement, the Alinsky-influenced religious groups, and the New Age religious orientation. (See Fowler, 1995), pp. 133-144.

[19] Personal communications, (1998, May 26).

[20] "Bible Belt" refers to those sections of the United States, especially in the South and Middle West, where Protestant fundamentalism prevails. *The American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd College Edition.*

[21] The reference to the little southern boy is a reminder of Rev. Troy Perry religious roots. (Interview August 1998).

[22] Resurrection MCC in Houston recently dedicated a new ten-acre property and is building to 1,500 in attendance. Sunshine Cathedral MCC in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, agreed in February 2001, to purchase for $2.15 million an existing church that includes a 875-seat sanctuary and a 250-seat chapel

habit, if not a must."[23] According to Rev. Perry, "It's what people talk about at work—it doesn't matter whether you are straight or gay."[24] The conservative nature of the doctrine preached by the UFMCC may seem paradoxical. Those who do not accept homosexuality as a "gift from God" believe it is incompatible with traditional religious values. The liberalization of religion, according to Wald can be understood to be a lowering of the barrier between religious groups and the relaxation of orthodoxy.[25] Nonetheless, Perry came out of a Southern Baptist and Pentecostal religious upbringing to found UFMCC. A strong belief in personal spiritualism exists among Pentecostals[26] and Southern Baptists have been associated with social conservatism and a belief in a personal relationship with God.[27] Referring to the conservative nature of the UFMCC, a parish consultant stated,

> By in large, the leadership of MCC is more conservative than popular public opinion would believe. This is an important point. One of the reasons for MCC's growth is that there is a huge vacuum they are filling and presently there is an absence of competition....MCC is not liberal compared to the United Churches of Christ. In fact, many of the clergy of MCC are theologically conservative except on the issue of homosexuality. This is not realized by "straights." There is a paradoxical situation of the image and the reality of MCC.[28]

The view of UFMCC as a "gay church" is one that Perry has rejected. Nonetheless, the perception remains. The reality of the denomination being a Christian church with a special outreach to gay men and lesbians is met with skepticism. The

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according to J. Dart, "The Success of the MCC: Gay and Mainline." *Christian Century* (March 21-28, 2001), p. 7.

[23] ____, ibid.

[24] ____, ibid.

[25] K. Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States*. (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1997), p. 4.

[26] R. Fowler, A. Hertzke and L. Olson, *Religion and Politics in America*. (2nd edition), (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), p. 39.

[27] Wald, (1997), p. 154.

connection of spirituality and the gay community remains foreign to most religious conservatives.

Building Community Through Empowerment

According to Fowler, "the concept of community invokes the notion of commonality, of sharing in common, being and experiencing together."[29] For the gay community of Christians a shared understanding of each other's experiences and an acceptance of each other and self within the community is crucial for rationalizing their role in society. Sandel believes that community involves "fellow-feeling" and is a communal "mode of self-understanding" which is in part constitutive of the individual's identity.[30]

It is difficult to maintain a community when it is continually being decimated by disease. MCC's struggle to develop and sustain an alternative space for the exiled while the ravages of an unmerciful virus tore through the gay community has been especially poignant. The community has been relentlessly afflicted with emotional and spiritual abuses. In addition, increasing social, physical, and political rejection has occurred because of the AIDS epidemic. The gay community has fought to remain connected, rather than retreat back into the closet. The pandemic caused many to seek the comfort of the church. A Catholic health administrator stated,

> I found MCC to be a place where I could bring a person with HIV disease or AIDS to worship services and trust that they would be treated with love and with respect and with dignity—that no one would be afraid to touch them or hold them.[31]

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[28] Telephone Interview (March 25, 1998) with Lyle Schaller. Mr. Schaller has been a parish consultant for 40 years. He has written over 45 books on congregational life.
[29] Fowler, (1991), p. 3.
[30] M. Sandel, (1982). *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 150; also see J. Hillery, Jr., July 1955, *Rural Sociology, 20:* pp. 111-113.
[31] J. Dart, (June 7, 1991). "Church for Gays Alters Mainline Religions' Views." *Los Angeles Times,* pp. 1A, A36-A37.

The UFMCC congregations have swelled in numbers because of the AIDS crisis, but are devastated by its effects. The virus has taken a toll on MCC members and clergy. From 1982 through 1991 figures estimate 4,500 members or regular churchgoers of MCC have died of AIDS and related diseases. Six of UFMCC's pastors succumbed to AIDS in 1990-1991. With bad news coming in almost monthly, Rev. Perry declared, "All of this could overwhelm us but we won't let it."[32] One of the members of the local WFMCC informed me that upon experiencing the loss of their first pastor from complications of AIDS, the congregation was disoriented and insecure. The depth of the struggle to find refuge and retain a sense of hope in the religious community of gays caused the small fellowship to feel threatened. As the reality of death touched too close for comfort, many of the male members of the congregation withdrew. Some of the male congregants were HIV positive, had already developed AIDS, or had friends and lovers fighting a seemingly losing battle against the virus. Both the lesbians and gay men of the congregation felt perhaps God's judgement for their sexual orientation was being manifested through AIDS.

UFMCC's leadership sought to help the WFMCC congregation put the pieces of their spiritual lives and their sexual orientation into a rational picture: a picture that could restore trust and hope within the gay Christian community. The South Central District's leadership was called upon to minister to the needs of the local MCC. An effort to assist in the process was begun. Clark Freisen, district coordinator, contacted the new pastor, Rev. Walker. The pastor[33] was instructed to begin the

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[32] ____, ibid., p. A36.

[33] According to *Metropolitan Community Church of Wichita Falls By-laws, Article IV, B.*, "The pastor shall be a person called according to UFMCC by-laws. A petition to remove the pastor in compliance

process of helping the congregation regain its trust, hope, and community. In order to move the congregation in this direction, the pastor was to accomplish three things: (1) help the congregation heal from Rev. Presley's death; (2) get the congregation to put a sign on the building, and (3) to get the congregation their own building. Each of these goals would require courage, trust, hope, and community building on the part of the minister and the congregation. According to the pastor, the congregation began the slow process of healing emotionally. Rev. Walker claims that she offered sermons that soothed the pain and lifted the grief felt by the congregants. The messages were filled with passages emphasizing the hope that can be found in trusting Jesus. Acceptance of losing Rev. Presley as the reality of the ravages of a disease rather than the judgement of God gradually occurred for many. The male members began to return to the church community and became involved in the activities available at MCC.[34]

Once a gay Christian begins to feel spiritually "whole" or healthy the individual slowly becomes part of the religious community. Responding to a question concerning the church as community, one member replied,

> MCC is my community. It is my family. It is my avenue, my venue, for service to God, for discipleship. MCC also legitimizes for me, after many years away from...Christianity... MCC feeds my spirit, my being, and gives me a place to come to be in community[35]

Many gay Christians have been exiled from their prior faith communities. The result is the need for the development of a sense of community among gay

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with UFMCC by-laws, Article V. B. 2, (b), 2 must be submitted to the Clerk of the Board of Directors" (1996), p. 1.

[34] Personal communications, (1998, August).

[35] Personal communications, (1998, June 28). This member designs and maintains the web page for the local congregation. She was once a "Sister" in the Catholic Church, a pipe carrier who practiced the

Christians. Community develops with self-acceptance, acceptance of others, and the realization of God's acceptance of them. Frequently, I heard the members' claim that MCC provides a nurturing environment: "a spiritual hospital" for soul healing. Once the refuge of the church is seen as a secure place for gay and lesbian Christians to worship, a sense of community involvement within the congregation can develop. Trust, hope, and community are connected.

Trust can be difficult to establish. It would take time for Rev. Walker to fulfill her second promise to the district of posting a sign announcing to the neighborhood that an MCC was located in the area. Lessons delivered from the pulpit focused on establishing trust in God, self, and the community. The sign in front of the building on Wichita Street in "Little Tijuana" was slow in coming. The members were afraid to put a sign on the church. For some members, placing the sign in front of the building and attending worship services at that place would be a form of outing themselves. The sign that finally was placed outside the church did not say "Metropolitan Community Church." Instead, it read, "The Love of God for the People of God." Rev. Walker confided that she believed that the reluctance to put any sign in front of the building was because "the thought of liberation hadn't happened for most of them." She acknowledged, "we worked slowly with the congregation."[36]

For five years, the minister drove from Oklahoma to lead the congregation through sermons, counseling, Bible studies, holy unions, funerals, fund raisers, banquets, revivals, district conferences, special holiday programs, social gatherings,

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pipe ceremony around the cycles of the moon and sun and a student of Sufi movements and meditation.

and talent shows. According to the pastor's Annual Report, twenty-one new members were received into the congregation in a single year.[37] The community was growing spiritually and numerically. Refuge, salvation, trust, hope, and a sense of community were being provided to an increasing number of the sexual minorities in the area.

The Role Of Information In Community Building

The sharing of information is important for establishing trust and building community. The information provided to the congregants and shared within the fellowship helps to stimulate the church's involvement with social justice causes. While conducting my research, I witnessed a variety of means utilized by the church to disseminate information to its congregants. Certainly, the most routine method of sharing information was done through the announcements and newsletters. After reading the weekly announcements and newsletters, I understood that members were informed of congregational, budget, and board meetings. Through these sources of information, Rev. Perry's national initiative fund-raising visit to the church was announced and the purpose explained. Frequently, the pastor announced that membership classes were open for those who did not seek membership in MCC, but simply wanted a better understanding the mission, rituals, and history of the denomination. PFLAG, Al-Anon, and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings scheduled to be held at the church were noted in the newsletters. Training classes for those helping

[36] Personal communications, (1999, August).
[37] Data provided by the Pastor's Annual Report prepared for the congregational meeting (1996, March 31).

with the routine Sunday morning worship service were listed. Board position[38] openings were announced and qualifications for those seeking the positions were outlined. Ideas for fund-raisers were requested and church social activities commanded newsletter space.[39] The newsletters also included recognition of the paid advertisements by businesses in the community that were "gay friendly" or gay owned. Keeping members current on church activities, leadership decisions, and financial concerns helps those attending the congregation to feel part of the church community. Similarly, the monthly newsletters keep the members informed of activities of the choir, fund raising efforts, the soft ball team's victories, prayer group meetings, concerts, church sponsored workshops and special classes, food drives, updates of activities throughout the district, and conference reports from the lay delegate and UFMCC headquarters. The members are offered additional information regarding both spiritual and secular events within the gay and lesbian local community. The inclusion of district and national news connects the local community to the larger denominational community.

In one newsletter, an article explained how members could become involved in the broader community by volunteering. The article was titled "Do You Enjoy Building Up the Body of Christ? Interested in Seeing a Family Settled in a New Home?"[40] The purposes and activities of Habitat for Humanity were explained and

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[38] According to *Metropolitan Community Church of Wichita Falls By-laws, Article IV, C.*, "The Board of Directors shall be elected from among the active members. The Board of Directors shall consist of the Pastor and six lay members. The term of office shall be for three years. The terms of office shall be staggered. The Pastor shall serve as a member of the Board for as long as he/she holds the position of Pastor" (1996), p. 1.

[39] Activities included birthdays, luncheons, picnics, jogging, and biking in the park group activities.

[40] Several members of the congregation are actively involved in Habitat for Humanity and a friend and frequent visitor to the church serves on the executive board of Habitat for Humanity (Personal communications).

times and places for helping were provided. In addition, a monthly article by the local president of PFLAG updating the congregations was included.

Members of the individual congregations of UFMCC can also develop skills and gain information through use of materials provided by the national newsletter. UFMCC publishes a resource catalogue that is available upon request. The catalogue lists more than 140 books, pamphlets, and resources available through the UFMCC's Resource Center. Topics addressed include: HIV/AIDS ministry materials, children's programming ideas, ways to reach and keep new members, suggestions for integrating spirituality and sexuality, and fund raising ideas. In addition UFMCC provides information on sources for brochure, flyer, and bulletin publications.[41]

In this conservative town, the church may be the primary source of information to many in the gay community. Many are hesitant to subscribe to gay and lesbian publications for fear that the delivery of such materials could put them at risk of being identified as sexual minorities.[42] The bar provides some information, but many gay Christians do not visit the local gay bars. Public access television and the local PBS affiliate do not air any of the current gay and lesbian programming that is available in larger, more liberal cities.[43]

Announcements and comments made from the pulpit often led to casual conversation and prompted serious political and spiritual discussions. In the parking

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[41] Suggested publishing sources provided by UFMCC include catalogues from Paper Direct, Baudville Desktop Publishing Solutions, Ramco Paper Supplies, NEBS, and Esselte. Telephone numbers and e-mail addresses were provided for each source.

[42] The Director of Music for the local MCC informed me that when her parents came to visit, she hid all gay periodicals and stored any pictures that displayed her and her partner together. This is interesting, since her parents are aware of the same-gender sexual relationship. The desire to be accepted and to not offend her parents is indicated by her attempts to "closet" any item that implies lesbianism. Personal communications, (1996, March 23).

[43] Personal communications, ibid.

lot and over lunch, members debated the importance of the issues reported in the newsletters, announcements, and sermons. I observed political discussions on the possible bombing of Taiwan; hate crimes and the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Association (GLBA),[44] the National Organization of Women, the "Souper Bowl" (a national canned food drive), a resolution on gay/lesbian child adoption,[45] National Education Association's Pride Week in public schools, House Resolution 1045,[46] freedom of speech as it related to the library book controversy,[47] the Millennium March on Washington, and a freedom of religion court case involving a member of the congregation.[48] The "parking lot" discussions provide the opportunity for members of the church to analyze, evaluate, and appreciate differing opinions by articulating their own views on the issues. Such skills are considered to be beneficial not only in evangelizing, but also for social movements and political activism. With the interplay of ideas among members, one can see that community is, as Cochran formulates, not the opposite of tolerance or diversity, but is about the realization of tolerance and diversity.[49] This could be a likely concern since the denomination is composed of members with a wide divergence of religious background, political ideologies, and experiences. Being hospitable to other's views is essential for the development of community. Cochran also argues that commitment and faith are central to the development and maintenance of a sense of community.

As members gain new information, they begin to think about issues that they may previously have not considered important. With civic skills being developed

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[44] Personal communications, (1996, February 25).
[45] ____, ibid. (1996, February 11).
[46] ____, ibid. (1996, February 17).
[47] ____, ibid. (1998, May 17).

through participation in the activities of the church, members began to have more serious discussions on issues that impact the church community and the gay and lesbian community beyond spiritual concerns. With increased utilization of the skills, members often become more politically active. The children's Bible study teacher affirms,

> I can think of several people within the church community, who have never been involved in organizing a petition or phone banks or in any sort of organizational capacity, who have [got involved politically] because of being members of the church. As you become involved and feel accepted by the church and feel more comfortable in the community you want to get more involved. You start volunteering for things. People that would never get involved in anything, if they had not become members of the church. They first get involved in volunteerism through the church. I believe a lot of people are trained for activism through the church.[50]

Community can grow only where dialogue and openness sprout.[51] Formal monthly business meetings are open to the congregation and offer more opportunities to receive information regarding the budget, the success and failure of programs, fund-raisers, and discussions of future programs and projects. The needs of the congregation and the physical plant, fiscal demands, and the concerns of the pastor and the broader community are discussed. Parliamentary procedures are followed; reports are filed, printed, and distributed to members of the church prior to the congregational meetings.[52] These meetings provide the members opportunity to become familiar with the activities, projects and budget demands of past programs, suggestions and projections for future projects. The members come to the meeting

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[48] ____, ibid. (1999, March 19).
[49] C. Cochran, *Character, Community, and Politics*. (University: University of Alabama Press, 1982).
[50] Personal communications. (1998, December).
[51] Fowler, (1991).
[52] According to *Metropolitan Community Church of Wichita Falls By-laws, Article IV, A.*, "The government of this church shall be vested in its members meeting in congregational meetings" (1996, p. 1.

prepared to offer input into the management of the church and its programs. The meeting's agenda is well defined and includes reports from the pastor, treasurer, music minister, lay delegate, trustees, deacons, and newsletter editor. After each report, members of the congregation are allotted time for questions and comments. Each speaker is required to address his or her question to the board members from a microphone. The pastor argues that this affords exposure to how questions are handled at the district conference. This is another example of how the church is helping members develop skills that can be demonstrated in the secular world as well as in the church.[53]

An atmosphere conducive to open dialogue is encouraged. For weeks prior to the annual congregational meeting, the congregants are reminded of the upcoming event by means of announcements, bulletins, and newsletters. The annual congregational meeting is a "State of the Church" address for the congregation and a forum for planning the upcoming year.[54] Through these meetings the congregation gains information regarding the fiscal operation, as well as the spiritual accomplishments and goals of congregation. The processing of this information allows the congregation to evaluate the cost/benefit or cost/effectiveness of the church's programs. Clearly, program evaluation skills can be important tools in enhancing the chances of successful civic participation as well as religious activities.

Information sources from organizations and individuals outside the church can enhance the church's resource network. On several occasions, I noted that guest were

[53] Examples of the transferal of these skills to a secular, civic environment will be described in the following chapter.

scheduled to speak on topics relevant to the congregants' needs and concerns. For example, on Mother's day 1998, a member of the national leadership of PFLAG spoke to the congregation. I observed local attorneys conducting a seminar to answer questions and offer legal advice concerning protecting gay relationships. The president of the "Circle of Hope" food pantry for people living with AIDS was also a guest speaker for the congregation. Such speakers supplied the congregation with information covering a wide range of topics important to civic voluntarism and civil rights and liberties. Within the denomination's leadership, the South Central District Coordinator, the senior pastor of the MCC in Los Angeles, and founder of UFMCC all had occasions to inform the congregation of economic, spiritual, and political developments from the district to the national level.

The church also established a smooth running network of members who assist in telephoning others to disseminate information regarding various issues impacting the church. Prayer request for the sick, the calling of special meetings, request for assistance with food, monies, and physical labor[55] for the church are examples of the communications network responsibilities. Members were activated through the telephoning network developed by the congregation's leadership. The establishment of the telephone network is a resource that is transferable from non-political to political mobilization networking. In a situation involving social justice, the church used the telephone and Internet to disseminate information concerning a child custody case involving a member of the congregation. A special meeting was called to pray

[54] According to *Metropolitan Community Church of Wichita Falls By-laws, Article V*. "Congregational Meetings, the annual congregational meeting shall be held each year in the month of March. It shall be conducted in accordance to UFMCC by-laws, Article IX, C" (1996), p. 2.

for the members involved in the legal battle. The prayer service was conducted within in a few hours. The existence of an organized system to disperse information was effective. My observation of the congregations' use of networking skills is reinforced by the literature. According to McCarthy,

> The success of the pro-life movement was its ability to build on the established networks and resource of the Catholic church, which provided leaders, church-based facilities, and an available pool of activists that could activate phone trees and local mobilization to great effect.[56]

With the increased access to computers connected to the Internet, extensive information is being transmitted at a moment's notice throughout the Fellowship. On the national level, newsletters, special reports, alerts, and statements are dispatched frequently. Likewise, the district headquarters provides monthly newsletters via cyberspace. The local congregation's pastor uses the Internet to inform the congregants, district, and national headquarters of up-coming events, rising concerns and continual problems facing the congregation. The pastor updates members "on-line" almost daily. In addition to providing general information and stating immediate needs and concerns, the Internet is used to provide daily devotionals. The Internet assists the local congregation, the district, and the national level of the denomination in providing an additional means for furnishing encouragement, spiritual refuge and community through chat rooms. General news from around the Fellowship and a personal connection is available to each member who is connected by e-mail. The cyber correspondence helps link the members with the institution of the church and each other, thus increasing a sense of community. I have received e-

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[55] Examples of physical labor include mowing yards, moving furniture, painting, planting flowers, and repairing fences.

mail messages from the pastor concerning prayer requests, announcements of church sponsored concerts and picnics, PFLAG meetings, and local television programming addressing gays and the Bible.[57] The examples of information dissemination methods illustrate how members of the congregation gain knowledge regarding church activities and issues effecting the GLBT community regarding legal, medical, and political concerns.

Community Growth And Empowerment

The growth of the congregation provided the pastor with an opportunity to comply with the final goal set forth by the South Central District's leadership. With the continuing growth in the number of people attending WFMCC the building became inadequate for the needs of the congregation. The church decided to purchase a building. Searching for a building required the building search committee to face the city's realtors. When asked if the search committee faced any difficulties in finding a facility, a committee member stated.

> Well, we were looking at one church downtown. I guess the realtor had told the people who owned the church building who we were (homosexuals). A lady came into the church while the realtor was showing the building to us. The lady asked us to leave. She said that their congregation had decided to use the building for storage.[58]

The decision not to sell the building may not have been related to the sexual orientations of the potential buyers, but the comments by the committee member indicated the congregation's difficulty in ruling out the fact that sexual minorities would utilize the building might have been the reason. The member believed that the

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[56] J. McCarthy, "Pro-life and pro-choice mobilization: Infrastructure deficits and new technologies." In M. Zald and J McCarthy, (Eds.), *Social movements in an organizational society*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1987), pp. 49-66.

[57] Rev. Horvath was featured on the television program addressing gays and the Bible.

[58] Personal communications, (1996, February 11).

congregation's primary sexual orientation could possibly have been a reason the owners of the old church decided to keep the property. If locating a property that MCC could purchase caused difficulties, the question of getting financing to make the purchase warranted a query. When I asked, once a facility was located, if there were any problems securing a loan because of MCC's "gay church" identity, the committee member responded, "No, we had worried about that. So, to avoid that situation [resistance] we decided to 'owner finance' the property."[59] Deciding to finance the purchase of a building required the gay Christian community to step out on faith. Owning their own property helped to solidify a real sense of organizational cohesion and purpose within the community.[60]

Finally, the local MCC had its very own worship space. The "new" facility is the only gay and lesbian owned public structure in the community. The purchase of the church building once again placed the gay Christian Community on the fringes of the mainstream neighborhoods. The building had previously been a holiness church. It is located in an area of the city referred to as "Dog Patch." The area is primarily a low income, interracial neighborhood. The church, located in a small residential area, is wedged between used car dealerships, a lumberyard, liquor store, and a flea market. Several volunteers from the congregation worked repairing the plumbing, replacing the floor, rewiring, and painting. Like an old fashion barn raising, members and friends of the church came together to personally invest their time, talents, and money in the facility which housed the social and spiritual hub of their community. Clearly,

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[59] ____, ibid.

[60] According to *Metropolitan Community Church of Wichita Falls By-laws, Article VI*, "In the event of the dissolution or abandonment of this church, UFMCC shall be the successor (501) (C) (3) corporation designated to receive the churches' property" (1996), p. 2.

the action taken by the congregation resembles what Block reports, "pioneer barn-raising spirit of neighbors helping each other in good times and bad has become the foundation for domestic public policy reform."[61]

The move into the building was a big event for the congregation. As the pastor worked slowly with the congregation in addressing their collective and individually internalized homophobia, they began to take in a breath of empowerment. At 9:00 a.m. on July 31, 1995, twenty cars decorated with rainbow hued balloons formed a caravan and drove from the building on Wichita Street across town to the newly purchased facilities on 26th Street. According to the pastor, it was a bold and frightening journey for many of the members. The day the church sign was erected at the new location was regarded as a very big step for the congregation. The homemade sign had a rainbow flag on one side. This time, however, the name "Wichita Falls Metropolitan Community Church" was displayed on the other side of the sign. The pastor's spouse stated, "We spent a lot of time taking pictures of the sign. It was *empowerment* (her emphasis). People wanted to stand next to the sign and get their picture taken."[62] The placing of a sign that identified the congregation as an MCC indicates that spiritual and emotional healing was taking place in this church family. No longer were the congregants so uncomfortable with their sexuality and Christianity that the vague sign from the former location, which read "The Love of God for the People of God," would suffice. A reduction in self-loathing and an increase in trust were physically and psychologically displayed through the placement

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[61] S. Block, "The Nonprofit Sector: Its History, Essence, and Philosophy." In D. Gies, J. Ott and H. Shafritz, *The Nonprofit Organization: Essential Readings*. (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, Inc., 1990), p. 3.

[62] Personal communications, (1998, August).

of the sign. This was also indicated by the desire of the members to be photographed standing beside it. The caravan, the purchase of the building, and the placement of the sign can all be viewed as accomplishments that serve to generate pride, strengthen self-worth, and enhance the organization's sense of purpose and the community's permanence.

Community empowerment accompanied the purchase of the building. The dedication of the new building provided an opportunity to have the congregational pride and communal spirit increase again. In January 1996, WFMCC held its sixth anniversary banquet; toasted the pastor's fifth year as minister to the congregation, and dedicated its new building. The church received encouragement from the national level of government during the banquet, when the pastor read a letter from President Clinton congratulating the congregation on it efforts.[63] President Clinton's letter stated in part, Our country was founded on a tradition of religious liberty, which helps to unite our nation of diverse faiths and creeds and gives us common ground for tolerance, healing, and understanding.[64] Following the reading, the pastor held the framed letter high in the air. The audience provided a standing ovation. The key words, "diverse," tolerance," "healing," and "understanding" appeared to be eagerly taken in by the audience. The value of self appeared to be increased by the recognition of this primarily gay and lesbian congregation by the President.[65] The pride that came with the presidential letter is demonstrated by its placement on a wall of the church. The framed letter is located next to photographs of past ministers.

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[63] The pastor had contacted President Clinton to inform him of the church's dedication ceremony and to request a congratulatory note. Personal communications, (1998, August).

[64] Letter from President Bill Clinton,. Personal communications, (1996, January 2).

members of the congregation who have died, and plaques listing the names of congregants who have received recognition for their service to the church.

The pride that came with the presidential recognition of the local MCC as a religious community, as well as the congregational recognition for those who have served this community provides evidence to support the American intellectual proponents of the model of Christian community. Palmer insists,

> First of all, people must nurture community and make a commitment to it in their congregation, church and otherwise in their private lives. Such a mission is important in itself because we need the time and space in our private lives that communities can provide us. Moreover, they can allow us to go out of that world renewed and less "obsessive and fearful" to erect a more communal public life.[66]

A major portion of the ministry of the UFMCC addresses the issues associated with self-hate and fear brought on by internalized homophobia. Participating in the activities of the church is one of the indicators that members are becoming emotionally healthy. The barriers to full social participation among members of an oppressed group are psychological as well as external. Rochon argues that it is understandable that people will accept the sacrifices of participation when the reward is an increase in one's sense of dignity, self-worth, and control over the environment.

As the congregants began to develop a sense of trust, they address the issues of their faith and their sexuality. Having a sense of community provides support and credibility to their lives. With increased trust in others and themselves, the members begin to want to be part of the church family. Becoming part of the fellowship is often accompanied by a desire to participate more actively in the works of the church.

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[65] Despite the "don't ask, don't tell policy" of the Clinton Administration, the gay community appears appreciative of the fact that Clinton is the first president to address the civil rights of sexual minorities.

Attending Bible study, passing out the bulletin, serving communion, volunteering to clean the church building or grounds, singing in the choir, and delivering announcements are examples of the individual's development and increasing involvement in church activities that I observed. The voluntary participation in church activities and assisting in carrying out the duties of the worship services are done with spiritual and social motivation, the skills are transferable to secular activities. It is important to point out that the skills developed through church involvement contribute to the depth and breadth of congregational resources available not only for spiritual and social purposes, but also justice issues that the church chooses to engage. The increasing number of resources gained within the church are transferable to larger political issues in the local community.

In order to have genuine success when utilizing organizational, speaking, fund raising, and other skills developed through church related activities, the nurturing of a positive self-image seems necessary. When one lacks self-confidence the chances that they will integrate the skills into their efforts appears unlikely. Therefore, it seems logical that a church whose membership primarily consists of gay men and lesbians would see the need to address internalized homophobia. By addressing any such concerns, the church could help provide remedy for self-depreciating feelings that could hinder active participation and utilization of skills in the activities of the church and for social activism in the broader community.

Growth and empowerment enabled the congregation to look beyond the refuge of the church community. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the emotionally and

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[66] P. Palmer, *Company of Strangers. Christians and the Renewal of America's Public Life*. New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 123, and Chapters 4 and 7.

spiritually wounded found a place to heal in the refuge of the church. Many congregants developed a sense of legitimacy and validation. With healing, came healthy spirits and a newfound trust in self and others. The gay Christians became more willing to engage in establishing and taking part in their new religious fellowship and its ministry to the broader community.

There is evidence that the growth of the local gay Christian community encouraged interest in reaching beyond the walls of the refuge and community of WFMCC. As the image of the church as a community began to strengthen, increased self-esteem was generated. For instance, one woman who was very shy and generally shifted her weight from one foot to the other, seldom made eye contact, and wrung her hands when speaking to anyone, eventually was able to assist in conducting the worship services. As it became evident that the young woman was becoming more comfortable with her surroundings and more trusting of the congregation, she joined the choir (safety in numbers). As her level of security and self-confidence improved she began to serve as an acolyte during communion. Eventually, she was able to offer prayers and read scripture before the congregation. Gaining confidence in your ability to participate more directly in the services can led to greater self-esteem and the belief that you can do things you had previously been weary of attempting. Conquering your fears involves accepting and valuing yourself. I continually saw this type of emotional and spiritual growth occurring among the membership. This newly realized self-worth can, in turn, encourage the individual and the congregation, both in a social and communal sense, to begin reaching out to others beyond the safe refuge of the church. For example, with the acquisition of the larger building, the

church increased its outreach in the community beyond church related activities. Groups, meeting in the facilities, have included Alcoholic's Anonymous (AA), Al-Anon, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), and an AIDS quilt-making group.[67] The church also began to advertise on a regular basis in the city's newspaper.

Once a church opens its doors for use by gay friendly organizations in the community, a sense of responsibility to step out beyond the safety of the church walls can be considered. WFMCC, desiring a broader outreach and greater visibility, has moved toward community involvement. Interdenominational efforts have become more apparent in the activities of WFMCC. For example, the church joined with other denominations across the country in collecting canned goods for the needy on what was designated as "Souper" Bowl Sunday[68] according to the January 14, 1996 WFMCC service program. WFMCC also joined "Circle of Hope" a program organized by the local United Methodist Church in a food pantry and distribution of supplies and services to people living with AIDS. Participating in activities with other denominations will increase the network that may be utilized for social action. Establishing working relations with other organizations is important to the local congregation because such joint efforts help in community building and recruiting additional resources for pursuing social justice. Minkoff summarizes how, Putnam claims horizontal networks of social interaction and the densities of associational life foster norms of reciprocity and trust, decrease incentives for opportunistic behavior,

[67] This quilt-making group sews quilts for those living with AIDS.
[68] Personal communications. (1996, January 11). The "Souper Bowl" project was part of a national food bank drive. MCC worked through the guidance of the United Methodist Church in the community.

and serve as a model for subsequent collective action.[69]

With the physical and spiritual growth, the needs of a congregation change. In May of 1997, Rev. Walker resigned, citing that the church had reached a point in its existence when a full-time pastor was needed in order for church growth to continue.[70] Immediately, the board of directors contacted district headquarters for advice. Heeding the counsel offered by the district leadership, the local congregation organized a search committee.

The guidance provided by the district office in the congregation's search for a full-time pastor helped the board members and the congregations to develop additional skills in organizing and recruiting. Decisions had to be made as to what the congregation's needs were and what qualifications should be included in the job description for a pastor. The denomination's method of advertising the position through the national and regional newsletters, writing the job description, deciding on what documentation to requested from the candidates, reviewing the applications, scheduling interviews, booking sermon presentation dates, and the process of selection, all had to be learned and applied by the Board.[71] In addition, the Board periodically informed the congregation of the progress of the search. An itinerary for the "candidating"[72] weekends was formulated and implemented. Following a

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[69] D. Minkoff, "Producing social capital: national social movements and civil society." *American Behavioral Scientist*. 40 (1997 March-April): pp. 606-621.

[70] Over the years the pastor had commuted a minimum of two times a week as part-time pastor. Despite her part-time status, the pastor documented an average 44.56 hours per week in church related work. Pastor's Report, Annual Congregational Meeting. (1996, March 31). On a personal level, the pastor's health was making it difficult to maintain a full time position as a secondary teacher and log an average 720 miles a month commuting to carry out her duties as pastor.

[71] A non-board member also served on the search committee as it collected, sorted and studied the candidates' application documents. (Personal communications).

[72] "Candidating" is a term used by the denomination to describe the actually interview process. Along with review of the credentials and sermon presentation, fifteen minute blocks of time were scheduled

defined protocol for the interview process, the congregation voted on the candidate's acceptance or rejection. On August 3, 1997, the congregation held a special meeting and elected Rev. Nancy Horvath as their first full-time minister.

Since the arrival of Rev. Horvath, her spouse, and their son, WFMCC has participated in an interdenominational vacation Bible school with four other churches of various denominations. Horvath taught the adult class and a WFMCC board member taught the fifth graders. Assigning the adult and fifth grade classes to members of WFMCC was considered a major victory for the congregation. Members of the other denominations were willing to allow a lesbian pastor to represent the interdenominational Bible school to the community. More importantly, the churches allowed a lesbian to teach their children, despite the stereotypical belief held by a segment of society that gay men and lesbians are predators. The new pastor serves on the board of directors[73] for "Circle of Hope" and is a member of a group of pastors from several denominations[74] in town who meet weekly for prayer, sharing of experiences, and breakfast. The church has continued to advertise regularly and announces its worship service times and special events in the local paper.

Community And Political Social Capital

The church provides an atmosphere conducive to the development of a multitude of skills that can be utilized for civic purposes. The literature discusses the ability to transfer non-political social capital to political activism. According to

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for members and friends of the church to privately visit with the candidates to voice concerns and ask questions. The congregation was also invited to attend a luncheon with each candidate. (Personal communications).

[73] In 1999, Pastor Horvath assumed the position of president of "Circle of Hope." (Personal communications).

[74] Pastors, which participate in the weekly gatherings, are from the following denominations. Presbyterian, Episcopal, Methodist, Lutheran, First Christian and Metropolitan Community Church.

Verba, Schlozman, and Brady,

> The boundary between political and non-political activities is by no means clear...Voluntary activity in both the religious and secular domains outside of politics intersects with politics in many ways. First...participation in these spheres is in many ways a politicizing experience. Under taking activities that themselves have nothing to do with politics...managing the church soup kitchen, can develop organizational and communication skills, which are transferable to politics.[75]

Along with providing the opportunity to assist members in the development of portable skills, churches frequently encourage political participation by supplying facilities and information pertinent to political activism. Verba continues,

> In addition, these non-political institutions can act as the locus of attempts at political recruitment: church and organization members make social contacts and, thus, become part of networks through which requests for participation in politics are mediated. Moreover, those who take part in religious or organizational activity are exposed to political cues and messages—as when a minister gives a sermon on a political topic...churches undertake many activities—ranging from aiding the homeless to funding cancer research to supporting the symphony—that are also undertaken by government.[76]

Normal practices within churches provide opportunities for the development of civic skills and social and political resources. Mobilization by the clergy and support from congregants are part of the ordinary activities experienced by churches. Leading the singing or Bible study, delivering announcements or writing articles for the newsletter, organizing fund raisers or luncheons, serving on the church board or speaking out at church business meetings all offer occasions to procure the basic skills essential for participation in the political process. Resources, such as letter-writing, speechmaking, organizing, mobilizing, and fund raising are regarded as

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Personal communications. (1998, May, 25).
[75] Verba et al., pp. 40-41.
[76] ____, ibid.

central to participation. Churches are seen as important purveyors of such resources.[77]

According to Rochon, the internal politics of an organization are also a training ground for enhancing political skills. He posits,

> The perspective of skill development offers an additional consideration, namely that a participatory decision process demands a high level of member involvement and therefore encourages the same skills activists will need in order to carry out a movement's work in the social and political arenas.[78]

Verba, Scholzman, and Brady claim religious institutions and non-political organizations produce the factors that foster participation that can link political life to social life.[79] Putnam argues,

> Trust and engagement are two facts of the same underlying factor—social capital...Social capital refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.[80]

Trust is important if the church is going to be a force politically. Trust is one of the areas that MCC works on with congregants. According to Putnam,[81] democratic institutions, governments, must be built up in the everyday traditions of trust and civic virtue among its citizens.

Rochon states that participation offers more than the possibility of elevation to a higher plane of spiritual and moral fulfillment, it constitutes an education in the process of social and political interaction.[82] The church can provide benefits to its congregants by addressing the internalized homophobia that hinders political and

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[77] S. Verba and K. Schlozman and H. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Volunteerism in American Politics*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995).
[78] Rochon, (1998), p. 137.
[79] ____, ibid. (1995), p. 17.
[80] R. Putnam, (1995), pp. 63, 73.
[81] ____, (1993).

social activism. According to Pateman, direct participatory politics increases human esteem.[83] In an interview conducted at the home of a member of the church's board of directors, the issue of the church's role in the development of skills and the possible benefits of skill building was posed. In a response to the query, the member replied,

> I think these sort of civic skills such as, speaking, organizing, and fund raising can be developed through the church. Oh, yes, for me, the church has been a big part of it. When I came eleven years ago, I sat in that pew and never said anything. I hardly said hello to anyone, much less, attempted anything else. Now, through MCC, I have learned I can be vocal for my kids at school.[84]

Trust, community, and skill building all contributed to this member's ability to claim her place as a Christian. The cognitive liberation she found through MCC has equipped her with the social capital needed to move beyond the refuge of the church. She continued,

> I can say, "I am a lesbian and that's okay." And "my kids have two mommies and that's okay"... I think through the church I have learned to speak out. I don't think I had that ability before I went to the church. It is due to empowerment. First, I find comfort for myself, and then trust in others. Then I began to get involved. Confidence comes with self-esteem, then pride as a child of God and now I can take it beyond the church building.[85]

Developing Skills Within The Community

Recruiting and hiring the new pastor provides an example of how the congregation's leadership and members gained skills through participation in the organization's administrative responsibilities. Such skills are routinely utilized in the personnel management arena of secular society and there is evidence to indicate that

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[82] T. Rochon, *Culture Moves: Ideas, Activism, and Changing Values*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 135.
[83] C. Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).
[84] Personal communications, (1998, May 26).
[85] Personal communications, ibid.

such skills, though developed in this case, through a religious institution, are adaptable to civic and secular purposes. Rochon states, "Skills of organizing and persuading can be almost learned in any organizational environment."[86] Discussing the sources for political skill building, Brady, Verba, and Schlozman[87] found that over 20% of their sample of the American public had the opportunity to write a letter, give a speech, organize a meeting, or take part in making a decision in their church or synagogue.

The church provides equal access to the opportunity to learn civic skills that other organizations may not provide.[88] Churches, especially Protestant denominations apportion opportunities for skill development relatively equally among members. For example, most Protestant denominations allow for greater lay participation in the liturgy. At WFMCC, I observed a volunteer "sign up" sheet being passed through the congregation. This sheet was seeking, anyone in the congregation who would like to take part in the worship service activities including: scripture reading, making the announcements, helping serve communion, leading prayers or the song service, and chairing committees. Because "most Protestant denominations are organized on a congregational basis with authority vested in the congregation itself rather than in a church hierarchy,"[89] involvement in decision-making and development of fund-raising projects enhances the civic skills that congregations can collectively and individually acquire. A variety of skills are necessary for any organization to function, whether the skills are utilized internally by the organization

[86] Rochon, (1991), p. 136.
[87] Verba et al., (1995).
[88] ____, ibid.
[89] Verba, et al., (1995), p. 321.

for the successful operation of the group or externally to reach and serve the boarder community. An increase in a broader community outreach has continued to develop for the WFMCC and will require utilization and expansion of the congregation's resources.

Resources, that is, social capital, constitute what Machiavelli called *virtu civile.*[90] Social Capital[91] is part of a larger reserve of skills and social networks that organizations can develop. On one occasion, I was able to witness the presentation of a conflict resolution and goal setting workshop. The following detailed observation is provided to illustrate the church's attempt at skill building among it congregants. At the request of several members, the board of directors decided to sponsor a workshop to address the undercurrent of conflict that was hindering the work of the church. At the invitation of the pastor, an educational specialist conducted the workshop. The workshop entitled, "Conflict Resolution: How to Put Out Fires Without Burning Souls" was held on a Saturday in the church building. The workshop was divided into four sessions. The first session's objectives included the following: (1) developing an understanding that conflict is a natural and necessary part of life; (2) learning the different methods of managing conflict; and (3) developing an awareness that competition and collaboration as the two main strategies for resolving conflict and for negotiation. Participatory activities and the inclusion of charts and diagrams

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[90] This is "civic virtue." This is an ingrained tendency to form small-scale associations that create a fertile ground for political and economic development. This civic virtue expresses and builds trust and cooperation in the citizenry. See N. Lemann, "Notes and Comments: Kicking in Groups." *The Atlantic Monthly*. 227 (1996 April): pp. 22-26.

[91] According to Putnam, the term social capital has been invented at least six times in the twentieth century. In each case, attention is directed to the belief that social ties increase productivity. Putnan's list of term inventors includes: L.J. Hanifan in 1916; Canadian sociologists in the 1950s; Jan Jacobs in the 1960s; Glenn Loury in the 1970s; Pierre Bourdieu, Ekkehart Schlicht and James S. Coleman all in the 1980s. Putnam, (2000).

were used to explore the causes of conflict, the dangers and opportunities provided by crisis, approaches to conflict and negotiation, and conflict resolution methods. The ability to recognize that conflicts are a natural part of an organization's character enables the members to search for the means to resolve the problem. Often conflict resolution programs are held to educate managers in various organizations. Again, I remind the reader that the methods taught in one type of organization are transferable to other types of organizations: from non-political to political.

The second session focused on the following objectives: (1) developing a framework for collaborative negotiation; (2) understanding the elements of the negotiation process; (3) distinguishing between needs/interests and positions; (4) understanding the positive bargain; (5) understanding the importance of planning and (6) learning how to use a planning form. During this session, the conflict resolution trainer sought to help those attending develop additional skills. The skills discussed included: perspective taking (the single perspective based on an egocentric or ethnocentric view and the multiple perspective); how to identify the negotiating climate (hostile or friendly, competitive or collaborative), and what the implication of each climate holds for conflict resolution. Through this session the church was offering training in skills that are easily transferable from non-secular to secular environments. Within the church the need to work as a collective unit is important if the congregants hope to have a cohesive identity that will provide refuge, community, and unity when addressing social justice concerns. Gamson emphasizes, "The best long run guarantor of democratic participation is collective identity that incorporates the idea of people as collective agents of their own destiny, and adopts a practice that

encourages them to be active and collaborative."[92] Skills of this kind can also be useful for building bridges among various groups engaged in political and social justice efforts.

The exercises in the third session included a negotiation analysis questionnaire, a scoring sheet, and instructions for interpreting the score. In this session the objectives addressed included: (1) learning tactics used in negotiation, (2) learning how to select the tactic that is appropriate to your negotiation situation, and (3) practicing the most useful tactics.

The fourth session of the workshop addressed goal setting. The Board's belief was that conflict resolution skills were need by the congregation in order to advance the church's goals that were being hindered by interpersonal conflicts. By offering lessons on conflict resolution the workshop moved toward interrelationship among self, family, church, friends, and the larger community. Following a series of participatory activities that were designed to help the members gain a better understanding of interrelationships, the congregation began a brainstorming session on goal setting for the church. With a better grasp on how to negotiate, the congregation was able to develop an extensive list of mutually acceptable goals. A collaborative discussion on the means and methods required to reach the goals was also productive. Again, the skills learned through this workshop can be utilized for non-religious participation by the church as a group or individually by members. As a result of this workshop, the participants began to handle the conflicts that existed among the members and the leadership in a more appropriate manner. Not all of the concerns were resolved completely, but the overall environment of the congregation

[92] W. Gamson. "Commitment and agency in social movements." *Social Forum*, 6 (1991): p. 49

did appear to improve with the application of the skills of coalition building, increased cooperation, and earnest efforts to reach compromises. The pattern of separating in to two "camps," one supportive of change and the other group resistant to change dissipated and a more congenial relationship reappeared among those supporting different opinions. Negotiation, communications, and the identification of what differences were significant and required additional discussion and which differences could be quickly resolved through compromise were addressed. A major action was taken, at least in part, because of the workshop. The goals that were set during the last segment of the workshop brought results. The congregation had been struggling with the prospects of hiring a full-time pastor. Clinging to the part-time pastor and unwilling to accept the fact, that Rev. Walker could not assume the full-time position had caused a malaise to fall over the congregation. The conflict over the need to organize a search committee and accept the realities of the financial commitment that a full-time pastor would require were finally resolved. The realization that Rev. Walker would be leaving and a new pastor would be hired produced anxiety among the congregants. However, the techniques taught during the workshop helped make the transition successful.

The decision making process demands a certain level of member involvement and administrative skills. A series of leadership classes were provided at the local MCC.[93] The effective leadership training classes were based on Maxwell's "The 21

[93] Personal communications. Leadership training is provided the second Sunday of the month, as noted in "Voice of the Falls" newsletters. In addition, each Wednesday night a study of these laws from a Biblical perspective is offered.

Irrefutable Laws of Leadership."[94] It is interesting to note that MCC draws on broader discourses and resources from both religious and secular organizations to enrich the skills and increase the information available to its congregants. This is indicated by the employment of Maxwell's leadership training and the utilization of the education specialist's conflict resolution workshop. Rochon suggests training offered in an organization can serve a purpose beyond the organization. He states,

> Internal politics of the organizations are also a training ground, which enhances political skills. Much has been made of the virtues and vices of the consensus style of decision-making. This is normally seen as offering the advantage of preventing an entrenched leadership.[95]

The workshop was structured to actively involve the congregants in all of the skill building exercises.[96] Rochon posits member involvement encourages the same skills that activists will need in order to carry out work in social and political arenas.[97]

There are numerous opportunities within the church to develop fundraising skills. The techniques of fund-raising are mastered to help compensate the financial needs of the church. The opportunities for development of the skills necessary for fund raising naturally arises in the course of many church-based activities that have no demonstrable political content. Just as members have the opportunity to serve on the church hiring committee or oversee the church budget, they are frequently called upon to help raise the much-needed funds for church activities and mission work.

The traditional needs of a congregation may require more than the money

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[94] J. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow the Laws and People Will Follow You.* (Nashville, Tennessee: *Thomas* Nelson, Inc., 1998).
[95] Rochon, (1998), p. 137. See S. Barkan, "Strategic, Tactical and Organizational Dilemmas of the Protest Against Nuclear Power." *Sociological Problems*, 27 (1997, October): 19-37; G. Downey, "Ideology and the Clamshell Identity" Organizational Dilemmas in the Anti-Nuclear Power Movement." *Social Problems*, 33 (1986, June): pp. 357-373.
[96] Personal communications.
[97] Personal communications.

taken in through tithing. Financial needs have often been addressed through fund-raising efforts. Examples of areas where the local MCC implemented fund-raising techniques include the following: (1) raising money for a building fund; (2) covering expenses for building improvements; (3) covering the cost of sending certain members to district conference and the pastor, her family, and the lay-delegate to the national conference; (4) paying for materials for special events, and (5) anniversary banquet expenditures.

The numerous financial needs of the congregation encouraged the development of skills in fund-raising. The following examples demonstrate a multiplicity of creative means for raising revenue. Along with conducting the more traditional annual silent auction and/or the selling of raffle tickets for donated items, WFMCC held garage and bake sales as well as accepting donations at ice cream suppers and the annual chili cook-off. The church also used what would have to be considered unconventional fund raising methods. Examples of nontraditional fund raising include hosting of a talent show at the church and live and lip-syncing performances by church members at the local gay bar. Clearly this is not a fund-raising technique utilized by most religious organizations. It is quite unique to the gay and lesbian community. I must note that what made the MCC talent show unconventional was not the homemade brownies, nachos, candies, and raffle tickets that were sold during the show, but the "drag show" performers, jokes, and songs that made fun of gay stereotypes. I observed that the audience responded favorably to hymns, contemporary religious songs, dancing, "drag" performances, silly jokes, and sexual innuendoes without reservation. Songs concerning coming out to one's

parents met with the same applause and monetary offerings as spiritually inspired performances of contemporary Christian music. I was surprised to see the church organist, dressed in drag, using the stage name "Amanda Lay" (read: a man to lay), close the show by singing the hymn "Trust in Jesus." I was taken aback by the obvious innuendo suggested by the name used by the singer in drag. It seemed inappropriate for a church fund-raiser. The congregation clearly had no problem with the stage name or the choice of songs, as many were observed laughing at the innuendoes and raising their hands in praise during the song. This scene certainly could send a discordant message to many conservative religious groups and others that utilized stereotypes of the gay community to justify condemnation. The culture associated with the gay community does not seem to stop at the church house doors. Despite the conflicting images witnessed during the fund-raiser, the audience and participant seemed to enjoy the evening. In what apparently was intended to strengthen the communities bond and claim to empowerment, the entire cast of the talent show was joined by the audience in singing the lyrics, "Celebrate our uniqueness, Celebrate with pride, don't let our differences come between us."[98] It appeared to be liberating for many as they stood singing the closing song, holding hands, and smiling broadly.

The congregation seems to make the church the center of their social, as well as spiritual life and community. They appear to be able to separate the purpose of the gathering in the building. With the bar being the only other gay prevalent facility in town, the church building may be the one place they can use as an outlet for what the congregation considered gay and honest. In other words, some members seem to be

[98] I viewed of the talent show/ fund-raising video provided by the church library.

claiming both the gay culture and Christianity without feelings of condemnation or contradiction.

UFMCC by the design of its organizational structure provides occasions to widen its leadership horizons. The leadership at the district level of UFMCC provides additional opportunities to enhance its church community and develop civic skills. Having already discussed the congregational business meetings as a forum for exposure, development, and practice of organizational skills, I offer additional data supporting the development and application of civic skills provided at the district level of the church organization. I attended the South Central District Conference of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches held May 16-19, 1996 at the Wyndham Hotel in Austin, Texas. The South Central District is composed of twenty-eight congregations in four states. The congregations are located in Texas (16 congregations), Louisiana (4 congregations), Arkansas (4 congregations), and Oklahoma (4 congregations).

The diversity of organizational skills exercised to conduct this conference was apparent. Members of WFMCC's congregation staffed the registration table. The WFMCC's treasurer held the position of district conference coordinator for the 1996 event.[99] Several members from the WFMCC congregation took active roles in the conference. One member helped translate all materials into Spanish; one played the organ for the worship services, and ten members sung in the choir and/or played in the orchestra. One member from WFMCC participated in a liturgical dance number and another member helped with signing the service for the deaf and hearing

impaired.[100] Approximately twenty-five members from WFMCC attended the conference. Parliamentary procedures and the rules and by-laws were followed in a professional manner.[101] Members of the local congregation managed the registration table and distributed conference packets. The color-coded conference packet contained the following: (1) 1995 district conference report; (2) 1995 special meeting notes; (3) the business meeting agenda; (a) a report of the 1996 district's committee conference-call meeting; (b) the district-UFMCC acting district coordinator report, (c) the district health ministry coordinator's report; (d) the UFMCC ministry district priority survey; (e) a strategic planning report; (f) the district committee approved budget proposal; (h) proposed district by-law revisions; (i) district leadership position nominees' resumes, and (j) a schedule of conference events. The extensive information concerning the organizational structure, budget, by laws, and candidates for church offices gave members the opportunity to be involved in the inner working and decision-making process of the church organization.

A wide variety of worship preparation rehearsals, meetings, and workshops were offered along with twice daily worship services and a conference closing banquet and dance (with a cash bar).[102] The schedule of activities included a meeting for the district nominating committee, liturgical dance, choir and orchestra rehearsals,

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[99] The district conference staff consists of district conference coordinator and assistant coordinator, worship coordinator and assistant, coordinator of music and assistant, sound technician, and coordinator of interpretation.

[100] The members of my local congregation of study demonstrated a variety of talents and skills as they helped with almost every aspect of the conference. The willingness to utilize and develop further the skills they possess indicates the possibility of the congregation enhancing a large number of resources for participation both religious and non-religious.

[101] Copies of the parliamentary procedures were provided to each member of the legislative body of the church as a reference during the business meetings

[102] The cash bar took me by surprise. No one seemed to abuse the wine that was served. The dance was more of a dance of joy than a romantic interlude. Parents, partners, and children danced gleefully across the room.

a district business meeting, a plenary session, education forums, an open forum, workshops, Bible study sessions, Alcoholic Anonymous meetings, and Samaritan[103] education forums.

The workshops were designed to promote the development and enhancement of leadership skills and church growth. The "Being an Effective Lay Delegate" workshop focused on how the congregations' lay delegates could more effectively serve the local church year-round and be better prepared to inform their congregation of upcoming events and district concerns. Included in this workshop was a review of the districts' governing structure and an introduction to parliamentary procedures. The "Faith, Fellowship, and Order (FFO)" workshop titled, "What is Spirituality?" included a forum for discussing the various approaches to spirituality.[104] A professional consultant on organizational growth conducted "Challenges to Expect as Your Church Grows" (Parts I and II), which spoke to the concerns that each stage of church growth presents a congregation and the broader community. The participants in this workshop had the opportunity to identify what phase of development their church was currently experiencing. The phase-specific challenges being faced and practical action-ideas to overcome the challenges to growth were examined. Because there is a growing number of children and young adults in the Fellowship, the workshop, "Teens and Young Adult Ministry," addressed the ability of a church to have a powerful ministry with teenagers and an effective ministry with young adults. The "Growing the Church" workshop discussed six characteristics that help determine the growth of a church. An example of empowering congregations within

[103] Samaritan is the UFMCC "preacher school."

the district was observed during the "Working Toward a Working Board of Directors" workshop, which was conducted by the Board of Directors of Harvest MCC (Denton, Texas), who related their experience in becoming a true working board.[105] Each workshop was open to anyone attending the conference and offered a wide range of skill building opportunities, exercises, and information. In all the workshops I attended, the participants asked substantive questions, engaged in brainstorming, sharing of experiences related to the topics, and took copious notes. The majority of those attending the workshops requested additional information from the presenters and exchanged business cards or e-mail addresses. I observed members from WFMCC attending the various workshops. The sharing of information, articulation of their needs, concerns, and goals, as well as the networking opportunities provided the congregants with additional resources and a forum for exercising and developing their organizational skills. The conference attendees were able to take back to the local congregation a plethora of new and innovative program ideas and techniques to further the goals of the church. The sharing of ideas and concerns contributes to the broadening of the gay Christian community. The potential for enrichment of the resources available to the local congregation was high because almost 50% of the members of WFMCC attended the conference.

The development of communication skills is important for building and maintaining organizational cohesiveness and mobilization potential. Verba proposes, "that people learn communication organizing skills in a variety of settings" and

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[104]Personal communications. Approaches covered included the use of scriptures, prayer, worship formats, guided meditation and embodiment.

concludes, "the exercise of this single skill in a nonpolitical domain leads to an increase in political activity."[106] An opportunity for district members to voice their concerns was offered through an open forum, "The Future of Our District." The district committee conducted the forum.[107] The district leadership developed a "Church Visitation Initiative." Through the initiative, each church in the district was provided an opportunity to voice their vision for their congregation. The committees, which visited each church, collected data from the congregations. After the data was collected it was grouped into six categories. The categories included Leadership-clergy, Leadership-laity, Churches and New Works, District Offices and Staffing, Communication, and UFMCC/Miscellaneous. Each category contained goals, implementation (proposed actions), and a general time-line. The visitation initiative and strategic planning report indicates the Fellowship's interest in empowering all the congregations by bringing them into the discussions within the larger church community. By providing the congregants a means to communicate their concerns and present their goals for their individual parishes and the district, the denominational leadership illustrates a desire to create a hospitable, connected community. If the community is interested in strengthening its resources, it can and must be a place of hospitality.[108] Their views were gathered, analyzed, and summarized in the church visitation report. Inclusion of the individual congregations by the leadership can help each congregant involved in the process feel they are a

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[105] UFMCC South Central District Conference Booklet issued at the South Central District of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Churches 1996 Annual Conference: *One Body, One Spirit, One Hope*. Wyndham Austin Hotel, Austin, Texas, May 16-19, 1996.
[106] Verba et al., (1995), p. 352.
[107] The district committee consists of the district and assistant district coordinators, district clerk, district treasurer, and district lay representative.
[108] Cochran, (1982).

valued member of the denomination. Strategic planning is a management technique implemented to give the stakeholders ownership in the organization's vision and mission in society. This can serve to enhance self-esteem, dignity, and foster a sense of control over the environment, all of which are important in community building, movement participation, and a willingness to make sacrifices for a greater good. As an observer of the business meetings and the procedures utilize to gather, analysis, report, and the time provided for debate by the district congregations struck me as rather ordinary in respect to American religious organizations. If I had been given the opportunity to observe or read over the agenda of the business meetings without any knowledge of the sexual orientation of the majority of the conference attendees, the meeting would be just another example of a mainline Christian denomination going about conducting its yearly business. The meetings and workshops provided substantive information through professional presentations that were spiritual in focus. Despite the similarities to other denominations' conferences and business meetings, one event did occur that served to remind the congregations attending the SCD conference that they were not part of an ordinary gathering of an American religious organization. While observing the registration process in the foyer, I heard a man complaining to the hotel management that the groups of queers should not be allowed in the building. The management informed the customer that the church group had the same right to hold their conference and utilize the facilities of the hotel as would any other guest or group.[109]

Democracy in action was observed during the district conference. The clergy and lay-delegates participated in the election of new members to various positions in

[109] Personal communications, (1996, May 17).

the district. The political organization of the district divides the legislative body into two houses: the House of Laity and the House of Clergy.[110] The district nominating committee reviewed resumes for the district offices and interviewed nominees. The nomination committee provided a slate of recommended candidates at the business meeting (Appendix H). The attention paid to the procedural by-laws and the division of responsibilities among the clergy and the lay-delegates of the congregation underscore the inclusiveness of the denomination's approach to the organizational structure and sharing of authority in MCC. The bureaucratic nature of the process indicates the desire to manage the meetings with the utmost concern for fairness and consistency.

The similarities to conventions, elections, meetings, and conferences held by "mainline" or traditional denominations and secular civic or political organizations are apparent. The members were able to actively participate by being personally engaged in the proper procedures for conducting a formal business meeting. The exposure to the election process and the other aspects of the business meetings can serve to increase their organizational skills. The format for conducting the meeting is included to illustrate the information and training through participation offered to congregants who attended the conference.[111] By following the parliamentary procedures, participating in the agenda, and the utilizing the appropriate terminology, members could "hone" their skills. The business meeting began with the call to order, which was followed by an opening prayer (Appendix I). The agenda is

[110] According to the By-laws of MCC, The Lay Delegate will report to the congregation on the results of all conferences attended. Each congregation shall elect a lay-delegate and an alternate lay delegate to serve in the event of the delegates' inability or unwillingness to fulfill the term of office. (Personal

included for comparison to religious organizations and business meeting agendas conducted by secular organizations. Organizations, regardless of their purpose, develop rules and procedures to be followed. Likewise, all organizations have guidelines relating to division of labor and means of insuring accountability.

Politics were evident during the election process. The first thing I noticed was what appeared to be the interplay of gender politics. A prominent male pastor in the district approached the microphone provided for questioning the proceedings and voiced his concern that the only candidates being considered for the position of district coordinator were white women. He went on to offer his reasoning for why this might not create problems in the hiring process by stating, "This probably will not cause any legal problems, since the candidates are women, but it they were two white men...this could openly expose us to legal problems. Remember this is a employment position." Those directing the business meeting replied that after examining the applications and much prayer, the search committee felt these two nominees were the best qualified for the position. They stated, "We hope this answers you question and alleviates your concerns." The pastor informed the committee that they had not really answered his question. He acknowledged that prayer was certainly important to their decision making process, but just *feeling* that the nominees were the candidates to consider, posed a problem for him. A couple of other male members agreed with his statement. At this point, the committee spokesperson began an detailed explanation of the search process and referred the audience to their conference packets by citing the qualifications for district

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observation of the document of the Metropolitan Community Church of Wichita Falls bylaws, updated June 2, 1996 following approval at the March 1996 congregational meeting).

coordinator that were approved during the SCD Committee Special Meeting held in Dallas in June of 1995. In the tradition of a minister referring to book, chapter, and verse, the committee member requested the legislative body to turn to page 8, issue 7, lines 181 through 198 of the document. The committee chair then proceeded to read the cited section of the document. Upon completion, the pastor who was questioning the process returned to his seat and the committee chair returned to the meetings next agenda item.[112] I heard one observer state,

> Sexism even in the gay and lesbian community. You would think, at least here, you wouldn't see the continuation of discrimination. It is as ludicrous as it would be if at a Black Baptist Convention, someone complained that there weren't any light-complexioned black nominees.[113]

Politics were not limited to gender issues. Efforts to secure votes for each of the candidates were undertaken. Lobbying for votes among the clergy and recommendations or cues were given to the lay-delegates by their respective pastors. Both candidates were allowed ten minutes to speak, followed by a question and answer period. The message delivered by the candidate from New York offered what were considered to be new and innovative approaches to improving the work of the

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[111] The South Central District's parliamentarian conducted the business meeting.

[112] Personal communications. (1996, May 18). According to the explanation provided, the district coordinator search committee mailed thirty-seven individuals packets on the position. The packets contained a profile of the ministry of the district coordinator based on the responses to what requirements and needs the congregants believed the district coordinator should possess which were compiled in the Church Visitation Summary Report. The qualifications adopted at the June 1995 meeting of the SCD Committee included: (1) Candidates must demonstrate ability in the "4 functioning areas" outlined in section V of the Church Visitation summary report: a. Administration, b. Information/Resources, c. Pastoral support, and d. Facilitating Community and Vision; (2) Candidates must have at least a bachelor's degree in a relevant field: graduate-level degree preferred but not mandatory; and (3) Background checks—including credit and criminal checks and drug test—will be conducted on all final candidates. (South Central District Committee. "Special Meeting" minutes (Dallas, Texas, June 9-10, 1995), p. 8. The committee chair reported that there were only five responses out of the thirty-seven packets that were mailed out. The committee reviewed the packets and made conference calls interviews. After examining the applications, conducting the conference call interviews, praying, and polling the committee members, they voted unanimously to bring in two nominees for presentations before the SCD legislative body.

[113] ____, ibid.

district and a plan for insuring greater accessibility of the district's leadership to each congregation. Some of the points addressed by Rev. Nealy included the need for community building and addressing the internalized oppression cause by religion. She referred to this as "spiritual abuse." She discussed the internalized homophobia of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people that can cause "enlightened" heterosexuals to feel excluded from the denomination. Acknowledging that MCC's primary outreach was to the GLBT community, Nealy insisted that the church was a Christian church and must address the issue and become more inclusive. She declared the reality that no longer was the church, as in the early days, just trying to survive it was time to reach out to other communities.

This message obviously resonated with the legislative body, as Rev. Eleanor Nealy of New York was elected on the first ballot. I found it somewhat interesting, that the momentum and the results of the election of the district coordinator went to a woman from New York rather than her competitor who was from within the district (Louisiana) and had been a minister in MCC's for a number of years. I ask Rev. Walker why she thought the vote went as it did. She explained, "Experience, qualifications, vision. That sums it up in three words. Her talk simply blew us away!"[114]

The conference plenary session offered an excellent opportunity to see the dissemination of information and mobilization efforts. UFMCC's Minister of Justice's use of the media for mobilization was demonstrated by one of the plenary sessions of the conference. Rev. Mel White, UFMCC Minister of Justice, was the speaker. The plenary session was well attended by WFMCC members. During the

session, Rev. White offered instructions on how to contact the media, make use of public access television, and conduct presentations of his video challenging Pat Robertson's "untruths" regarding gay men and lesbians and other groups in society. White also supplied those in attendance with handouts on how to order the video and how to subscribe to his Justice Report Journal. He also discussed his "Soul Force" principles.[115] Mobilization techniques were presented and White encouraged implementation of the methods.

At the district level, MCC's members had the opportunity to network, utilize fund-raising techniques, volunteer, gather information, and actively participate in a wide range of events including hosting the district's hospitality room. While the lay representative, pastor, and several observers from WFMCC attended the business meeting; other members of the congregation attended various rehearsals and workshops. Some members continued to staff the registration and information table. Some networked with other congregations and shopped in an area that was designated as the "Country Store" corner. Here individual congregations set up booths to peddle their homemade crafts for fund-raising purposes. Booths provided items with a gay and lesbian theme,[116] such as "freedom ring" necklaces, rainbow candles, bumper stickers, automobile license plate frames, sand art, bookmarkers, Christmas

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[114] ____, ibid.

[115] Soul Force refers to love, truth, humility, and forgiveness the subject of the writings of Mahatmas K. Gandhi. A more detailed discussion of the principles of Soul Force will be discussed in Chapter Six. Rev. White has offered Soul Force updates through his web site and has begun to hold Soul Force seminars. A detailed discussion of the plenary session is provided in the following chapter.

[116] Rainbows, inverted triangles, and use of the colors pink and purple. Gay men in nazi death camps were required to well inverted pink triangles that marked them for special abuse. The pink triangle has come to symbolize the phrase, "Never Forget, Never Again." Origin of Gay and Lesbian Symbols. Retrieved on October 10, 2000 from http://www.swade.net/swadepages/symbols.htm. Also see Histories of Common Pride. Retrieved on October 11, 2000 from http://www.geocities.com WestHollywood/1769/history.html.

decoration, and clocks. WFMCC participated in the country store corner and sold out of most items. Many of the smaller congregations had volunteered their time and talents making the craft items for the conference store. In addition, booths from the Cathedral of Hope (Dallas) supplied books by UFMCC Reverends Mel White, Michael Piazza, Nancy Wilson, and Troy Perry.[117] Other booths contained pamphlets on UFMCC and brochures from various congregations in the district. The country store corner provides an opportunity to enrich the solidarity of the denomination's congregations, build confidence for the individual members, and give both a sense of a larger purpose. In addition the corner contributed to fund-raising, information dissemination, and community building through networking with the churches in the district.

Looking beyond the local and district tiers of UFMCC, the national and international levels of the denomination is actively involved in increasing the social capital of the organization through networking, skills building and community enrichment. Along with the benefits of attending the district conference are the opportunities for skill building provided by the international conferences. Although unable to attend an international conference, I did gain access to congregational reports, Internet updates, and district and national newsletters regarding conferences. Data regarding the programs of the international conferences helps in gaining insight into the role that the conferences play in skill development. Knowledge of the means used to assist members in becoming better informed about the church as an organization contributes to understanding of the breadth and depth of community

[117] Other items sold by the Dallas congregations included: musical tapes by UFMCC musicians and singers, wall plaques, cards, stationary, and other miscellaneous items of a spiritual/ religious nature.

building attempted by UFMCC. Opportunities to gain skills and information were provided at the General Conference XVIII held in Sydney, Australia in 1997. During the business conference, delegates elected elders, approved a new mission, statement of the church's vision and core values, and adopted the new ministry priorities that would form the basis of UFMCC's new budgeting process. All of these areas require understanding of organizational, management, and budgeting techniques. Those participating in the business meeting were provided an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the processes involved maintaining an organization from an international perspective.

The importance of the General Conference is its value to individual churches and members. The conferences provide a place where churches can come together, where individual members and clergy can mingle and learn from each other, and where all can contribute their thoughts and needs to the direction of the future of the denomination. The conference provides a forum for hammering out problems and debating issues of urgency.

The structure of the Fellowship is designed to enable the Board of Elders to provide a united leadership. The elders are responsible for the administration of the Fellowship between General Conferences and articulation of Fellowship policies. They are accountable as a sounding board for Districts and local churches. This is intended to provide a means to improve the Fellowship as a whole, in terms of its responsiveness to the needs of the members.[118]

Elders, district coordinators, and other church officers provide help to

[118] According to a packet prepared by Wichita Falls Metropolitan Community Church. *Discovery Class: The Love of God for the People of God*, pp. 5-6.

churches in solving problems and charting direction as noted by UFMCC guidance of the local congregation of WFMCC. Church officials travel to the local congregations to assist when the need arises. Such visits help the local congregation to feel part of the entire Fellowship. The value of leadership is noted by workshops addressing the development of leadership skills. Meetings with district coordinators and pastors, along with clergy conferences provide a church or pastor with new perspectives on pressing problems. The Fellowship's conferences are designed to offer renewal and revitalization for the local church members and clergy. A workshop titled, "Doing Yourself Justice: Reconnecting Personal Power for Effective Leadership in Ministry" was held at the Sydney Conference. Such a workshop addresses cognitive liberation as a source for strengthening confidence in leadership abilities. Additional retreats and training opportunities are provided throughout the year by the denomination's leadership. The individual churches' concerns are met with problem solving and conflict resolution techniques addressed through the Fellowship's commissions. The commissions include Government Systems, the Commission on the Laity, and the Faith, Fellowship and Order.[119] Other workshops were offered at the General Conference. The conference had workshops that addressed Biblical interpretation including one entitled "Eunuchs, Euphemisms, and the Politics of Biblical Interpretation." As indicated by the workshop titles, the refuge of Biblical interpretation and training in leadership are clearly important to UFMCC.

The three-prongs of the denomination's gospel are continually reinforced. In addition to messages encouraging empowerment through an inclusive salvation and community building, social justice was addressed. The keynote speaker for political

[119] ____, ibid., p. 6.

and social justice at the 1997 conference was Dr. Chung Hyun Kyung.[120] According to UFMCC's newsletter, Dr Chung's theological questioning "comes from her anger and hope as a Third World woman who refuses to be victimized by any kind of colonialism." UFMCC reports that Chung's theology "is also inspired by her burning desire for self-determination and it originates from a liberation oriented, Third World interpretation of people's history." Her discourse on the rights of women indicates that social justice issues reaching beyond concerns directly related to gay men and lesbians are addressed by the denomination. Chung's keynote address was "Love in the Time of AIDS: Reflection on a New Civilization, which empowers our Resistance, Liberation, and Healing for the 21st Century."[121] The topics of the XVIII General Conference illustrated UFMCC's commitment to social justice, self-esteem, salvation, and community building at all levels of the denomination. The workshops offered opportunities to enhance the skills necessary to pursue the goals of the denomination and to move beyond the institution of religion with activism. Issues regarding racial discrimination and nuclear proliferation have been recent concerns pertinent to the denomination's social justice agenda.

The Fellowship provides many forms of support to the congregations through the district offices and conferences and the congregations offer support for the Fellowship. Services, such as assistance in the designing of program packets and brochures, publishing books, providing a music ministry, guidance and information through newsletters, e-mails and telephone communications are provided. A number

[120] Professor of Ecumenics at Union Theological Seminary and author of *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology*. See S. Robinson. "Dr. Chung Hyun Kyung: Key Ingredient to Successful Conference!" in *Keeping in Touch*. (Santa Monica, CA: UFMCC Publishers, 1997, September, 1-2).

of activities are offered to the communities, churches, clergy, and laity through these services. Support for the Fellowship comes through tithes from local Metropolitan Community Churches. Each church forwards tithes monthly to the Fellowship offices. The tithes are based on the amount of tithes received by the congregation. The Fellowship receives 10% and an additional 5% of the local church's tithe is sent to the district by the international office. This means that 15% of what is given on a Sunday morning at the local congregation automatically goes to the Fellowship and District.[122]

As with the local level, the international tier of the Fellowship turns to fund-raising to support programs and projects above the regular expenditures of the denomination. The following example illustrates how the Fellowship is able to raise additional monies through individual congregations. The little WFMCC congregation, which just five years prior could not afford to pay their pastor over $50.00 per week shocked themselves when on March 22, 1996, seventy people gathered in the church sanctuary to hear and pay tribute to the UFMCC founder, Troy Perry. Perry, in an effort to raise 3.4 million dollars to purchase a building complex to house the Fellowship's global offices and MCC-LA, was in the midst of a speaking tour for UFMCC's national Capital Campaign. The crowd accepted his challenge and embraced his worldwide vision. When the collection plates were passed and the gifts and pledges tabulated the amount of the cash and pledges equaled more than $10,000!

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[121] ____, ibid., p.2.

[122] According to a packet prepared by Wichita Falls Metropolitan Community Church. *Discovery Class: The Love of God for the People of God.* pp. 6-7.

In addition, funds often labeled 'love offerings"[123] are collected for religious music concerts[124] held at the local church to support the district and international music ministries. This provides an indication of resource mobilization being developed through a non-political effort. Such mobilization could potentially lead to the church's involvement as a provider of economic resources for political purposes.

The 1999 UFMCC World Jubilee and General Conference Nineteen can provide more recent examples of skill building opportunities at the international level. Registrants from the following countries attended the conference:[125]

Argentina	England	Philippines
Australia	France	Puerto Rico
Brazil	Germany	Russia
Canada	Ghana	South Africa
China	Mexico	Switzerland
Denmark	New Zealand	Taiwan
United States	Venezuela	Zimbabwe

National and International community building within the denomination occurs biennially with the international conference of UFMCC. Rev. Horvath, her spouse, and their son, along with the lay delegate from the WFMCC congregation attended

[123] Personal communications. A "love-offering" is a monetary donation made to the performers following each concert. This is money given above regular contributions to the church and is not considered to be part of the members pledged tithing.

[124]Personal communications. Several members of UFMCC provide a ministry through music. These individuals and bands travel around the Fellowship offering concerts for room and board. One such performer, Marsh Stevens, travels in a mobile home from congregation to congregation across the United States. Ms. Stevens began song writing at the age of sixteen. Her most famous religious song, which has been recorded by several well-know gospel singers, is "For Those Tears I Died." The song has been published in numerous hymnals. Unfortunately, some denominations have torn the song from their hymnals and returned them to Ms. Stevens upon discovering that she was a lesbian. Stevens musical ministry is called B.A.L.M. (Born Again Lesbian Music) Ministries and is an outreach of the Southwest District of UFMCC. The ministry publishes a newsletter three times a year (B.A.L.M. Publishing: Costa Mesa, CA). Stevens and other gay and lesbian religious ministries sell tapes, compact disks, autographed portraits, bumper stickers, and tee shirts to help support their work. The local congregations collect, what is referred to as "love-offerings," following the concerts. One such band, "Melanie B. and the Bad Girls," performed at the local gay and lesbian bar. The band's music was a combination of rock, blues and jazz with a spiritual, gay pride message. This demonstrates the congregation's spiritual outreach to the broader gay and lesbian community.

the conference and dedication of the UFMCC World Centre held in Los Angeles, California.[126] Nationally renowned speakers included Rev. Dr. Jimmy Allen,[127] past president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Rev. Yvette Flunder,[128] senior pastor of the City of Refuge Community Church in San Francisco and Dr. R. Stephen Warner, professor of sociology at the University of Chicago. Networking across communities serves to expand organizational resources. Developing alliances with other organizations and individuals outside a particular community brings additional voices, energies, ideas, skills, and legitimacy to the goals and missions of the primary group. The increase in social capital, the connection among individuals and social networks enhances the likelihood of reciprocity and trustworthiness. Putnam claims,

> Networks of community engagement foster sturdy norms of reciprocity...A society characterized by generalized reciprocity is more efficient than a distrustful society...we can get a lot more accomplished. Trustworthiness lubricates social life...Civic engagement and social capital entails mutual obligation and responsibility for action. As L.J. Hanifan and his successors recognized, social networks and norms of reciprocity can facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit.[129]

The World Jubilee and General Conference offered more than sixty workshops to foster personal growth, encourage leadership development, explore

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[125] J. Birkitt, Jr., (Ed.), Global Gathering in *Jubilee Update*. (West Hollywood, California: UFMCC World Jubilee (1999, June, 1).

[126] The local MCC, through fund raising activities provided the necessary money for room, board, transportation, and registration fees for the conference for those representing WFMCC.

[127] Allen was removed from his ministry due to AIDS in his family. He authored *Burden of A Secret: A Story of Truth and Mercy in a Family Faced with AIDS"* in which he describes the death of a daughter-in-law and two grandsons due to complications from HIV/AIDS. He is opposed to same-gender sexual behavior as a Christian lifestyle, but believes in compassion and ministry for the gay and lesbian community and that parents should love their gay and lesbian children (Yahoo e-mail general conference article, (19, July 1999), "UFMCC Meets in Los Angeles" (provided by e-mail correspondence by the WFMCC webmaster).

[128] Flunder's congregation combines a gospel ministry with Christian social action. Under her leadership, the City of Refuge has established three residential facilities for person with HIV/AIDS, including the first ever, residential facility for African American women. She also serves as President of the Black Adoption and Research Placement Center and President of the Northern California-Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ.

activism, suggest methods for outreach to the GLBT communities, address the faith concerns of the gay community, supply information for an AIDS ministry, offer training in the use of technology, provide resources to support local church ministry, and promote inclusive Christian spirituality. Pre-conference institutes held in conjunction with the 1999 conference provided in-depth training in the specific areas including the Asian and Pacific Islander Institute,[130] Families Together: Children's Ministry Institute,[131] and Becoming a Better Community Organizer and Building Effective Teams for Ministry. Of particular interest to skill building was the Community Organizer Institute, which offered advanced leadership skills for active clergy and lay leaders who had the desire to increase their effectiveness and expand the scope of their work. Seeking expertise beyond the denomination's leadership, David Fletcher, Senior Fellow of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute (USA) led this program. The collaboration between secular organizations and the church increases the network and resources available for political and social activism. An important purpose of building bridges to other gay organizational networks is to encompass people across diverse social cleavage. Bridging is helpful in linking to external assets and for information diffusion.[132] The "Building Effective Teams Institute" sought to maximize the creative potential of all individuals toward

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[129]Putnam, (2000).

[130] The purpose of this institute was to claim a vision for outreach to Asian and Pacific Islanders.

[131] This institution provides evidence of the growing number of children in this denomination. In addition to this pre-conference institute, a Junior Jubilee, which offered daily programs with age-appropriate opportunities to learn about worship and the way in which children can participate, as well as, child care was provided at the conference. As the denomination grows, congregations are developing Sunday school and Vacation Bible School programs from their children.

[132] The gay Christian community must build bridges to connect the diversity of the subculture, as well as the broader culture, which share their social justice concerns. For example, bringing together organizations for a common cause was utilized successfully by the civil rights movement and has begun to occur in the area of gay rights see Putnam, (2000).

achieving agreed upon goals or objectives. The emphasis was on the successful team approach to ministry, which had been developed by MCC San Diego.[133]

All of the speakers, institutes, and workshops are avenues through which the church can develop and enrich information dissemination, the use of media methods, fund-raising and mobilization techniques, leadership training and other skills of its members.[134] The global assembly of congregation indicates the denomination's efforts to build community and increase the skills of its members in the areas of spiritual and social justice on an international level.

The UFMCC has many contacts in the straight world and ties to "mainline" religious circles. As mentioned in chapter three, Rev. Gwynne Guibord, the MCC ecumenical, interreligious officer was elected president of the California Council of Churches. In addition, the MCC, the United Church of Christ, and the Christian Church jointly backed a new congregation in Berkeley in an effort to bring Christians together regardless of sexual orientation. Routinely, MCC pastors and lay leaders attend the Robert H. Schuller Institute for Successful Church Leadership. This indicates the efforts of MCC to connect with more traditional mainline religious organizations and institutional programs. Developing alliances with more traditional denominations and social approved programs can benefit the UFMCC's ability to

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[133] Information concerning the 1999 General Conference was provided by a brochure entitled, "Jubilee of Joy" mailed by UFMCC Headquarters

[134] The agenda for the UFMCC General Conference 2001 included special guest who addressed the skill building techniques many in the denomination were seeking and included: (1) Donna Red Wing, the Director of the Outgiving Project of the Gill Foundation—a program that provides intensive fundraising and other skills-building training to communities throughout the country; (2) Thomas Bandy, an author who consults with congregations for church growth and transformation and leads events for visioning and leadership development; (3) James Noel, an Associate professor of American Religion, who encourages his students to devote themselves to understanding the processes through which societies, congregations , and diverse groups come to terms with history, community life, and the challenges of the future. *Journey to the Promise: UFMCC World Jubilee and 20th General Conference.* Retrieved on July 6, 2001 from http://www.ufmcc.com/GC2001brochure.jpg.

increase its resource base for activism and enhance the Fellowships integrity. By establishing a relationship with the respected Schuller Institute, the legitimacy of MCC is advanced. In the fall of 2000, the National Council of Churches chief, Robert Edgar, a Methodist minister, spoke at the anniversary service of MCCLA and in February 2001, Anglican Bishop Christopher Mayfield of Manchester, England, preached at MCC Manchester.[135]

The local, district, and international levels of member training and organizational involvement opportunities, made available through UFMCC, contributes to the stockpile of skills necessary for both non-political and political purposes. According to Verba,

> Acquisition of skills depends upon the level of skill opportunity provided...the extent to which involvement...is socially structured; and the extent to which opportunities for skill development are socially structured among those affiliated.[136]

Because there is little stratification within religious organizations by income, race, ethnicity, and/or gender, the opportunity for skill development are equally available to all members. The numerous opportunities to develop decision-making, communication, writing, fund-raising, leadership, and organizational skills illustrate the denomination's commitment to include the congregants in the Fellowship's community.

Once skills are learned and utilized, they become mobile and can be transferred from one organization to another type of organization.[137] Such non-

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[135] Dart (2001, March 21-28), p. 6.
[136] Verba et al., (1995), p. 320.
[137] See N. Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World.* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1997); C. Milofsky, (Ed.), *Community Organizations: Studies in Resources Mobilization and Exchange.* (NY: Oxford Press, 1987); R. Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and America's New Quest for Community.* (NY: Free Press, 1994).

political volunteerism could prove to be a precursor to political participation. According to Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, "involvement in the non-political spheres of American voluntary activity can enrich the stockpile of resources relevant to political action."[138] Successfully establishing a relationship of service with part of the boarder religious community can help set the stage for building community beyond spiritual concerns.

In anticipation of the development of the gay Christian community and in an effort to challenge the congregation, the leadership of UFMCC admonished WFMCC to pick up the third prong of the fellowships' gospel: social justice. Believing it was time for the local congregation to reach outside their small community into the political community, UFMCC's leadership attempted to mobilize the congregation. This was indicated by the keynote address at the church's anniversary banquet in 1996. Speaking at the banquet, the Reverend Elder Nancy Wilson, senior pastor of the "mother church," MCC-LA noted that it was an election year. She spoke on the spiritual aspects of social movements for social justice. She emphasized that the three-pronged gospel of UFMCC incorporated the concepts of human rights and democracy. Rev. Wilson urged the audience to make a concerted effort to contact politicians and to vote.[139] Wilson implored,

> Salvation, community, and Christian social action are all part of the effort to insure human rights. We must be political. We need to develop allies, form social action committees, be advocates for the poor, fight racial discrimination, contact politicians, access the media, register and vote, be open to the community and be part of a spirit filled social movement for social justice.[140]

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[138] Verba et al., (1995), p. 8.
[139] Personal communications, (1996).
[140] Personal communications, (1996, January 13).

The connecting of democracy and community involvement is indeed relevant to society if democracy is to flourish. Alperovitz and Faux recognize the substantive value by stating, "In an age of alienating megasystems, impersonal technology and forced mobility, whether we can expand democracy depends on the success of that search for community."[141]

In this chapter, I have attempted to examine how the UFMCC at the national, district, and local levels provides an alternative space for those exiled from their church, family, and social environments. The importance of community in a democracy has been explored. I have tried to demonstrate how the denomination attempts to build community and foster social capital through a variety of church programs. I have provided data collaborating the church's efforts to connect community and spirituality. Gays that have been honest about their sexuality only to have their families betray that trust and sever the bonds of kinship are likely to have reservations when considering developing new social and emotionally supportive communities. Because the GLBT community often experiences rejection by friends and/or the condemnation by their churches, the reconnecting in a community of gay Christians provides evidence that there is an effort to increase the trust and hope within the denomination. The conferences, communication networks, fund-raising events, leadership lesson series, and the conflict resolution workshop helped educate and provide training for the congregants. The resources developed and stockpiled by the WFMCC have potential beyond the walls of the church and the gay subculture. The evolutionary process of claiming community and individual empowerment by the members of the church was illustrated through the purchase of a building, the placement of a sign, and the hiring of a full-time pastor. A number of areas within the church's programs and projects offer substantial opportunities to develop and

[141] G. Alperovitz and J. Faux, *Rebuilding America: A Blueprint for a New Economy*. (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 275.

enhance volunteer skills necessary for both religious purposes and social justice efforts. The information disseminated throughout the church from the local, district, and national levels of the UFMCC organization encourages the congregants to take a personal interest in the operation, goals, mission, and management of the Fellowship, and serves to build a wider sense of community. Developing interest and becoming knowledgeable increases the chances that a member will be active. Likewise, the theory of participatory democracy assumes that being active may increase engagement, as a participant becomes more interested, informed, and productive.[142] Because community is often the goal of participatory democracy, the development of a religious community for an oppressed segment of society is significant. The skills gained through this community's domain of the church have the potential to be beneficial in political engagement. The importance of this particular community's role in pursuing social justice will be examined in the following chapter.

[142] Verba et al., (1995), p. 344. Also see Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

Chapter 6: The Church as an Agent of Social Justice

Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.[1]

Seek justice, encourage the oppressed.[2]

In the previous chapters we have seen how the UFMCC and a local congregation of the denomination have implemented the first two prongs of its gospel mission. In chapter four we examined how the UFMCC, and in particular the local congregation of WFMCC, provided a refuge for healing and belonging among gays. Chapter five illustrated how that sense of community helped members develop civic skills and social capital. In this chapter we will see how that community support enabled congregants to become more politically active in the gay rights struggle, and how the local congregation became the focal point of this social justice activism. This story helps substantiate my argument that the MCC plays a unique role in the gay rights movement and suggest the importance of faith communities in the American cultural, social, and political experience.

When thinking about the gay liberation movement, images of nonviolent, hymn singing protesters conducting prayer vigils neither readily comes to mind nor do we associate such actions with gay rights activists. It is more likely that the more radical aspects of the gay community are frequently brought to mind. No doubt the media has contributed to the more radical perceptions as has the more flamboyant members of the GLBT population. The cameras capture the drag queens, scantly clad, excessively amorous gay men, and topless, tattooed, motorcycle-riding lesbians. Clearly, such images are deserving of some justification. In fact, the gay and lesbian

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[1] Micah 6:8.

community celebrates an event know as "Stonewall" as the birth of the modern day gay rights movement. In the early hours of June 28, 1969, in Greenwich Village a raid by New York City police on a gay bar named the Stonewall Inn, resulted in a riot that lasted throughout the weekend.[3] The bar was the frequented by drag queens and "bull dykes." This "seemingly insignificant disturbance symbolically ushered in a new stage" of the gay rights movement.[4] "The riot impacted New York's homophile circles and wider inchoate community of uninvolved gays. Because New York is a communications center, the riot was reported across the nation and inspired the formation of radical 'gay liberation' organizations."[5] The event of the Stonewall Inn riot marks the passage from being a homosexual to being gay.[6] The medical term "homosexual"[7] has historically been used as a broad descriptive term for feelings and behavior and for people who are attracted to their own gender.[8] The term "gay" was a rejection of arguments from authorities on homosexuality. Just as many African

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[2] Isaiah 1:17.

[3] M. Cruikshank. *The Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement* (Great Britain: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1992), p.3.

[4] S. Licata, "The Homosexual Rights Movement in the United States: a Traditionally Overlooked Area of American History." In S. Licata and R. Peterson, (Eds.). "Historical Perspective on Homosexuality." *Journal of Homosexuality*, 6, no. 1-2, (Fall/Winter, 1980-81), p. 178.

[5] E. Marcus. *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights 1945 - 1990: An Oral History*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), pp. 170-172.

[6] Cruikshank, (1992).

[7] In 1869, a Hungarian doctor, Karoly Maria Benkert, coined the term "homosexual" (W. Blumenfeld and D. Raymond, *Looking at Gay and Lesbian Life*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), p. 368.

[8] ____, ibid. "Homosexual," the term that psychiatrists, lawyers, teachers, and the clergy have historically used, is rejected by many gays and lesbians. According to Blumenfeld and Raymond, the term "homosexual" reflects a narrow, clinical focus on sexual conduct itself, giving rise to a popular belief that this orientation is only about sex (17). The current use of the term "gay" is viewed as a political term coming out of the Stonewall riot. Although, as a plural term, "gays" applies to both male and female, most female homosexuals prefer to be called lesbians. It should be noted that the term gay was used prior to the Stonewall riots. According to Chuck Rowland, a founder of the secretive Mattachine Society, the term "gay" was being used in the 1930's as a replacement for the term homosexual. He explains, "A lot of people, Jews and non-Jews, use Yiddish words like *schlepp* and *meshuga*. These words separate them culturally from those who would never have heard of such words," likewise, "as gay people, we used certain language, certain words," (Marcus, 1992), p. 23. The Mattachine Society was concerned with homosexual social issues.

American have rejected the term "Negro" because it was imposed on them, "Gay" was a "radical move away from victim or criminal status to status of a self-defining minority"[9]

Many in the gay and lesbian community believe they have not only been ostracized politically, but also spiritually. Therefore, efforts to gain political rights for the gay community would involve gay male and lesbian clergy and the religious organization of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC), which we have learned was founded by Troy Perry in an attempt to provide refuge, community, and social justice. According to Sullivan,

> No civil rights movement has ever succeeded in this country without the support of the churches. They provide the moral ballast and spiritual witness that raises a civil rights movement from being a footnote in interest-group politics to being a moral and human crusade...And this is particularly true in the gay civil rights movement. By far the most common reason people give to oppose equality for gay men and lesbians is religious reasons.[10]

Recognizing the duel bondage oppressing the gay community, UFMCC founder, Rev. Perry preaches a gospel that includes Christian social justice.[11] Noting his denomination's commitment to gay liberation, Perry likes to remind the gay and lesbian community that UFMCC was established prior to the beginning of the modern-day gay rights movement. UFMCC, from its founding in 1968, has included social justice in its mission statement and has been involved with the actions taken by

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[9] Cruickshank, (1992), p. 60. Modern day gay liberation emerged for several reasons including: (1) pervasive police harassment in the 1950's and 1960's, (2) weakening taboos against discussion of homosexuality, (3) social changes and protest movements in the 1960's, (4) groundwork laid by the early homosexual rights movement, and (5) growth of a gay subculture. See J. D' Emilio and E. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 319 and Cruickshank, (1992), chapters 3 and 7.

[10] A. Sullivan, "Winning the religious war." *The Advocate*, (1997, October 14), p. 91-93.

[11] The name Social Justice encompasses the struggles of people everywhere who work for gender equality, democratic government, economic opportunity, intellectual freedom, environmental

the broader gay liberation movement, including protest marches.

A link between political and religious values exists. This link provides ideological factors that significantly influence attitudes toward social regulatory policies, according to Wald.[12] Communal religions are "more likely to support liberal political causes than their religious opposites."[13] Leege and Welch argue that a communal approach to religion is associated with more liberal outlooks and can be defined in the social justice mission of the church.[14] Benson and Williams' study of the schemas of religion held by members of congress addressed four different aspects of religious philosophy that represented different ways of understanding religious truth.[15] Religions that focus on social problems fall along the dimensional lines of a communal religion. Referring to the study of Benson and Williams, Wald analyzes the different aspects of personal religious philosophy of members of Congress and concludes,

> The communal label is assigned to individuals who identified the human problem as lack of community and fellowship, regarded working for social justice as the route to salvation, and expected their efforts to produce peace and harmony on earth...Communitarians were defined by belief in the social justice mission of the church, the need to change institutions.[16]

Based on the literature, the UFMCC can be classified as a communal religion. The congregants are often exiled and are searching for a refuge and a new source of community and fellowship. The Christian social justice mission of the Fellowship is partially grounded the idea of changing religious, social, and political institutions that

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protection and human rights. Social Justice. Retrieved on August 6, 2001 from http://members.tripod.com/~goforth/social.

[12] K. Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, (3rd edition), (Washington DC: CQ Press, 1997).

[13] ____, ibid., p. 205.

[14] D. Leege and M. Welch, "Religious Roots of Political Orientations: Variations Among American Catholic Parishioners." *Journal of Politics* 50, (1989): pp. 137-162.

[15] See P. Benson and D. Williams, *Religion on Capitol Hill: Myths and Realities*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982) for full examination of their research findings.

[16] See Wald, (1997), pp. 204-205.

discriminate against sexual minorities. Therefore, the denomination's three-pronged gospel message aligns the church with the more liberal communal religions.

UFMCC: The Third-Prong of the Gospel Message

When Rev. Troy Perry incorporated the three-pronged gospel of salvation, community, and social justice as the message of UFMCC, he had an understanding of the healing process and the empowerment gained through social justice activism. Perry believes acceptance of self and finding a place to belong are necessary for many in society who have been oppressed, exiled, and spiritually assaulted. This belief may have come from his first hand experience with discrimination as a gay Christian. As Perry developed trust in self and others, he found the empowerment to fight for the gay and lesbian community. What caused him to envision a denomination with these three objectives is not known, but he gives God the glory. What caused other sexual minorities to share his goals may have come from Perry's ability to convince them that sexuality was a gift from God.

Perry has demonstrated the ability to motivate and mobilize his congregations' efforts in encouraging spiritual growth and social justice activism. The rapid growth of the denomination and the increasing role it plays in the gay rights movement testifies to Perry's charismatic leadership style.[17] Perry has been called "a 'religious entrepreneur' in a long tradition of U.S. preachers," who "recognized a 'cultural market' of emerging gay communities and counter culture movements in the late 1960's."[18] Charismatic leadership is the driving force behind certain social

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[17] Regarding UFMCC's growth and increased activism, the denomination grew from 13 in attendance to 1,000 in its first year. Perry's political activism began with being arrested for blocking a sidewalk and has progressed to being invited to the White House to meet with President Clinton twice in the same year. See T. Perry and T. Swicegood, *Don't Be Afraid Anymore.* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990) and UFMCC Moderator Joins Religious Leaders at U.S. White House Second Visit This Month...President Undeterred by Radical Right Protests. Retrieved December 12, 1997 from http://ufmcc.com /whhonor.htm. M Wilcox's University of California in Santa Barbara doctoral study of MCC credits Perry's success to "his own charisma and organizational abilities, and the abilities of those who helped to found the church." J. Dart, "The Success of the MCC: Gay and mainline," *Christianity Today*, (2001, March 21-28), p. 7.

[18] ____. ibid. The quote is credited to sociologist Steven Warner.

movements. The theory of charismatic movements argues that leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. arose because they posses extraordinary personalities and the abilities to "preach, create, and demand new obligations from followers."[19] The charismatic authority of leaders such as King exists especially in periods of extreme stress and/or crisis. Because Christianity and the desire to take the gospel message to others was an integral part of Perry's life, the continual rejection by religious institutions inspired him to envision an acceptable alternative to traditional beliefs regarding sexual minorities. Thus, Perry's motivation for establishing a denomination with an outreach to the gay community came from the personal struggle of being placed outside the church because of his sexuality. Feeling a sense of being exiled, Perry realized the struggle of being gay and Christian could create a real crisis of faith and great emotional stress for other gay Christians.

Reverend Perry's desire to use his newly established church as an instrument in the gay liberation movement follows precedents. The authority and legitimate place taken by spiritual leaders and organizations in liberation efforts is well established. The book of *Exodus* can be cited as an example of Moses' part in leading the enslaved Israelites out of Egypt. Historically, one needs look no further back than the Black churches to note organized religion's involvement in liberating oppressed segments of society. Black churches played a significant and instrumental role in the Civil Rights Movement. In a study of southern Blacks during the early 1960s, Matthews and Prothro recognized the importance of religion to political mobilization among Blacks.[20] The churches provided the ministers who were principal figures in the organization and commitment of resources to protest efforts.[21]

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[19] M. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. (New York: Free Press, 1947), pp. 360-366. See L. Lomax, *The Negro Revolt*. (New York: New American Library, 1966), pp. 97.
[20] D. Matthews and J. Prothro, *Negroes and the New Southern Politics*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966)
[21] A. Morris, "Black Southern Student Sit-In Movement: An Analysis of Internal Organization," *American Sociological Review*, 46 (1981): pp. 744-767.

In the African American community the Black churches provided a refuge from the oppression inflicted by broader society and a place to replenish one's spirit for the continuing struggle for equality.

Black theologians see African American religion as a force with the capacity to provide leadership, a sense of purpose beyond the pulpit, and the development of organizational and fund-raising skills. To engage in political liberation and activism it is essential to have a desire to better a disenfranchised segment of society and to enhance their social and political capabilities.[22] According to Martin Luther King, Jr.,

> ...a religion true to its nature must also be concerned about man's social conditions...any religion that professes to be concerned with the souls of men and is not concerned with the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social conditions that cripple them is a dry-as-dust religion.[23]

African American churches have had success in improving the plight of Blacks by claiming the scripture should eliminate rather than grant the bondage placed on them through slavery, segregation, and discrimination. Similarly, UFMCC teaches a "new eyes" reinterpretation of the scriptures that offers liberation.

It seems reasonable to argue the organizational structure, skills, and liberating message of religious institutions could and have assisted others in their quest for social justice. The role religion can play in gaining rights for gay Christians is supported by this suggestion.

Until we have tackled those religious reasons at their core, the political

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[22] H. Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited.* (Richmond: Friends United Press, [1949] (1981); J. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power.* (New York: Seabury Press, [1970] (1986). *A Black Theology of Liberation.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1972). *Spirituals and Blues: An Interpretation.* (New York: Seabury Press); V. Harding, *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America.* (New York: Vintage Books; P. Paris, 1983), *The Teachings of the Black Churches,* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; C. West, (1985), *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity.* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), and *Prophetic Fragments.* (Grand Rapids, MI: African World Press, 1988).

[23] M. King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 36.

> opposition will be impossible to fully dislodge. Until we have fought the theological battle through every scriptural verse and every natural-law argument and every liturgical rite, we can forget making real headway in the secular sphere. The battles are distinct, but until we have won one, we will be able to fight the other only to a draw.[24]

UFMCC has continued to fight the battles of biblical interpretation, which have been the primary sources of condemnation for gay men and lesbians. As in Black churches, UFMCC has been spreading the message of refuge, salvation, community, and social justice.

The belief that being a child of God brings confidence and the ability to take concerns beyond the walls of the church have been emotions that encouraged individuals to participate in the political and social environment throughout history. Again I look through the African American lens for a clearer perspective of how dignity, gained through a relationship with God, has enabled and often required political activism. Martin Luther King, Jr. emphasized the individual's responsibility to establish a relationship with God based on taking responsibility for his or her own actions. King believed he had no option but to mobilize people to fight the injustice of segregation and racism. Rochon noted,[25]

> Cornel West points out that the dominant and reoccurring theme of King's message to those that would join the civil rights movement summarizes King's mobilization powers as residing in his ability to convince people that the struggle itself was sufficiently worthwhile and ennobling to compensate for the great price in each participant would have to pay. The hostilities, threats, injuries that each would have to endure was a testimony to their dignity, self-esteem and courage.[26]

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[24] Sullivan, "Winning the Religious War." *The Advocate*. (1997, October 14), pp. 91-93. Sullivan is the former senior editor for *The New Republic*, is author of *Same-Sex Marriage: Pro and Con* and *Virtually Normal: An Argument About Homosexuality*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).

[25] T. Rochon, *Culture Moves: Ideas, Activism, and Changing Values*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 135.

[26] West cites Luke 4:18 "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor" as the verse King used as justification for his calling to mobilize people to participate in the civil right's movement. See C. West, "The Religious Foundations of the Thoughts of

UFMCC: Christian Social Action

As with the ministers of the African American churches, UFMCC's pastors preach a gospel that calls for social justice. Early in the denomination's development, Perry incorporated the call for "doing justice" as an integral part of the church's mission.[27] UFMCC has sought to provide a spiritual refuge for an oppressed group and to become a force for doing justice on behalf of the oppressed. Actively pursuing social justice has help to define UFMCC as a group engaged in a social movement.[28]

An understanding of what constitutes a social movement can assist in understanding UFMCC's role in gay liberation. Citing the literature, McAdam considers a social movement a "tactical response to harsh realities of a closed and coercive political system."[29] Similarly, Tilly asserts that social movements consist of a series of challenges to established authorities in the name of an underrepresented constituency.[30] Hannigan, supporting the connection between religious and political roles in social movements, concluded in his early writings that social movements did not attempt to distinguish between religious and political collectivities.[31] The literature has repeatedly positioned religion within the wider study of social change.[32]

Martin Luther King, Jr." In P. Albert and R. Hoffman, (Eds.), *We Shall Overcome" Martin Luther King Jr. and A Black Freedom Struggle.* (NY: Pantheon, 1990), p. 115.

[27] "Doing justice" is the term UFMCC utilizes to refer to the denomination's efforts in working for justice on behalf of the entire gay community. The church's call to social activism takes the phrase "doing justice" from the scripture, which reads, "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does God require of us? Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

[28] See Maxwell and Oliver, *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change*, 7 (1984): pp. 1-27.

[29] McAdam, (1982), p. 20.

[30] C. Tilly and L. Tilly, *The Rebellious Century: 1830-1860.* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1975).

[31] J. Hannigan, "Social Movement Theory and the Sociology of Religion: Toward a New Synthesis," *Sociological Analysis, 52*, 4 (1991): pp. 311-331.

[32] E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life.* (New York: The Free Press, 1965); M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* Translated by Talcott Parsons, (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1958). Also see G. Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind.* (New York: Viking Press, 1960 [1895]).

Noting the efforts of the religious right to mobilize its adherents in condemnation of gay rights, UFMCC has attempted to engage its congregations through a gospel mission of Christian social action to change society's resistance to granting gay equal rights.

The role of southern Black churches in the Civil Rights Movement serves as the prototype of religious institutions' involvement in social change.[33] In appreciation of the example provided by Black churches' liberation efforts, UFMCC's congregations across the nation offer special services honoring the efforts of Martin L. King, Jr. and apply his nonviolent protest techniques to their social justice actions. Although church groups are frequently mentioned as an external "sponsors," which provides an input of resources to social movements.[34] In the case of UFMCC, the denomination can be seen as an internal sponsor. Its membership base is part of the oppressed segment seeking gay rights. While most church groups condemn same-gender sexual orientation and would not consider serving as an external sponsor to the gay rights movement, UFMCC seeks to exonerate the gay Christian. More importantly, in communities where the MCC congregation is the only organized segment of the gay community, its physical and intellectual resources are likely to be in the forefront of any grassroots efforts. According to Humphreys,

> Most religions begin as social movements, and all revolutions are moral ones. That does not mean moral movements and religions are to be equated; rather

[33] Klandermans and Oegema note that mainstream churches have played a role in the Dutch peace movement. "Potentials, networks, motivations, and barriers: Steps toward participation in social movements." *American Sociological Review*, 52 (1987): pp. 519-531. The churches helped to build legitimacy for the peace movement among those who were not part of the movement's direct membership. See Hannigan, (1991), p. 315. Also see A. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*, (New York: Free Press, 1984), and D. McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency: 1930-1970*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

[34] McAdam, (1982), p. 22.

> they are symbiotically related. Every liberation movement has its religious side and religions have their prophetic consciousness.[35]

Christian social action remains an important and controversial aspect of the UFMCC's gospel message and mission. The role the denomination has played and continues to play in politics can be illustrated through numerous instances of activism initiated by UFMCC, its leaders, and its members. For example, early in the denomination's growth, a negative reaction to the UFMCC's involvement in politics became apparent. In April of 1969, plainclothes vice squad officers visited the church at the request of a man who was seeking public office in Los Angeles. Part of his campaign was to verbally attack the gay community. According to Rev. Perry, the officers stayed in the bathroom and tried to sexually entice the members. The police left upon the realization that members of the congregation were watching them. Despite having tolerated the officers' intrusion into the worship service, Perry told his congregation if they voted for the candidate in question, they would surely die and go to hell. Perry's remarks seem rather inappropriate and severe. His passion for gay rights would cause problems for him within the denomination. Despite his harsh rhetoric, the congregation's activism was illustrated when their political tactics went beyond simply not voting for the gay opposition candidate: the church actively campaigned against the man. Upon his defeat, the congregation celebrated its role in one of the first victories at the polls in which the UFMCC participated along with the rest of the gay community.

The political and social activism that Rev. Perry sought with such vigor

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[35] L. Humphreys, *Out of the Closet: The Sociology of Homosexual Liberation*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), p. 146.

increased in intensity.[36] However, the heightened political involvement by the church spurred resistance within the denomination. This objection was demonstrated when Perry decided to organize and conduct a Gay Pride parade. Despite a great deal of political maneuvering and stalling by the city officials, Perry secured a parade permit from the California Superior Court after gaining the assistance of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Common to activism, seeking allies and gaining external support helped to facilitate Perry's objective.[37] However, securing the permit was not the only problem Perry faced. Without seeking advice from the board of directors of UFMCC, Perry decided to begin a prayer-vigil and fast following the parade.[38] The purpose of the fast was to stimulate meaningful dialogue about changing the laws that were used to harass and discriminate against sexual minorities. The use of fasting is not a new concept as both Mohandas K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., utilized this political protest method.[39] Specifically, the laws Perry chose to protest dealt with sexual activity between two men. In California, as

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[36] T. Perry, *The Lord is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay*, (4th edition). (Los Angeles, California: Universal Fellowship Press, 1994). Gaining momentum from the victory, Rev. Perry and eight MCC-LA members demonstrated later that same month against Los Angeles office of State Steamship Lines because it fired a man for publicly acknowledging his sexual orientation.

[37] In 1920, the ACLU was founded as a national public interest law firm committed to protection of individual rights. The organization did not adopt a positive position on lesbian and gay rights until the late 1960's. See P. Cain, *Rainbow Rights: The Role of Lawyers and Courts in the Lesbian and Gay Civil Rights Movement.* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), p. 67. The ACLU has supported the causes and concerns of MCC on numerous occasions. Media attention, financial support, and legal assistance made by external support groups are considered essential for the success of social movements. Although external support can be beneficial, such support can also be a liability. According to the political process model, the interests of the insurgents and the external support groups are likely to diverge. Such divergence can result in imminent control potentialities. See D. McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 166-168.

[38] ____, ibid., p. 173. Perry acknowledges that he "stunned his congregation, irritated some of his board of directors and set off on a crusade that is still going on" today.

[39] Examples of nonviolent protest methods such as sit-ins, pray vigils, fasting were utilized by both Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mohandas K. Gandhi. See McAdam, (1982); Morris, (1984); Zald and McCarthy, (1979); W. Bainbridge, *The Sociology of Religious Movements.* (New York, Routledge,

in most states, oral and anal copulation were felonies and any kiss, suggestive gesture, embrace, touch, or unseemly remarks were considered misdemeanors. For committing any of these offenses, imprisonment of up to six months and a fine of up to $500 were required. For repeat offenders, or those committing felonies, the threat of prison at Atascadero was a possibility.[40] While protesting, Perry was arrested for violating a city ordinance regarding the blocking of a public sidewalk. Not to be deterred, he moved the fast to the steps of the Federal Building and proceeded to distribute leaflets urging everyone to telephone, telegraph, write, or go see his or her assemblymen and senator with the goal of getting the "Brown Bill" out of committee for a vote.[41] As a result of Perry's actions, Councilman Robert Stevenson sought a list of grievances concerning police harassment, police brutality, unfair law enforcement, and discriminatory practices at the local level.[42] The councilman promised to push reform of the laws through the legislature. Because Perry believed that the dialogue helped to build understanding in the heterosexual community, UFMCC congregations continue to work to improve communications and increase tolerance within "straight" society.

Political and social activism is not always praised, even within the community on whose behalf it was instigated. Perry's increasing commitment to social activism had consequences. Not all of the members of the board of directors of UFMCC were

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1997), pp. 337-339; J. Wallis, *The Soul of Politics: Beyond "Religious Right" and "Secular Left."* (New York Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1995), p. 226.

[40]Perry and Swicegood, (1990), pp. 173-174. As a prison for sex offenders, Atascadero practiced shock treatment, chemical therapy, and aversion therapy on its prisoners.

[41] Assembly Bill Number 437, introduced by Assemblyman Willie Brown of San Francisco, would legalize sex acts in private between consenting adults. The bill was stalled in the Criminal Procedures committed by Chairman Frank Murphy, Jr., Republican of Santa Cruz. (Perry, 1972), p. 201.

[42] M. Thompson, (Ed.), *Long Road to Freedom: The Advocate History of the Gay and Lesbian Movement.* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), p. 34.

pleased with Rev. Perry's protests. After Perry was convicted and given a 90-day sentence, he discovered the role of social activism was not as broadly understood with in the denomination as he had hoped.[43] Upset by Perry's social activism and subsequent arrest, a takeover of MCC was attempted. Certain members of the board of directors of Metropolitan Community Church of Los Angeles[44] (MCC-LA) tried to fire Perry. Because the church often served as a refuge from broader society, Perry's militant gay actions frightened MCC parishioners who wanted a cozy closet in which to worship.[45] Some members felt Perry had disgraced the church by getting arrested in a gay-rights demonstration. According to news reports, "Perry's fast looked to conservative parishioners like a filthy hippie encampment."[46] Congregants who took a very conservative posture regarding UFMCC's approach to any social reform felt political actions, such as demonstrations, fasts, and marches were premature. Conservative members were unsure about continuing involvement with Christian liberation theology. They believed that the church had done all it should to promote public enlightenment and religion and politics should not be combined.

The belief that religion and politics should not be mixed may come for many Americans, at least subconsciously, from remembering their civics class discussions on the "high wall of separation between church and state" oratory of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. The Supreme Court in opinions written by Chief Justice Earl Warren, Justice Hugo Black, and more recently Justice William Brennan

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[43] Perry appealed the case and on January 28, 1971 in *People of the State of California 71-45 v. Troy D. Perry* (Trial Court No. 364357, *CR A* 9777), the case was remanded for a new trial.

[44] The board members, who wish to fire Perry, opposed Christian social action (Perry and Swicegood, 1990), p. 63.

[45] R. Fowler, *Unconventional Partners: Religion and Liberal Culture in the United States.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989).

have used the metaphor, "wall of separation." The phrase does not come from the Constitution, statute, or an official document. The expression comes from a letter written in 1802, by Thomas Jefferson to a group of Baptists in Connecticut. The concept of separation of church and state dates back to the Middle Ages, "when the doctrine of the two swords (the secular and the spiritual sword) was recognized by both spiritual and temporal powers.[47]

We as a nation sustain an intellectual understanding of the separationists' perspective at least theoretically. After all, we do not want an established state religion. However, complete separation in practice becomes more complicated for most of us. Reciting the pledge of allegiance, accepting the inscription "In God We Trust" on currency, and being receptive to a tax-exempt status for nonprofit religious organizations signals our ambivalence. In fact, Fowler, Hertzke, and Olsen cite, 70 percent of the population favor prayer in school and more than half of the population believes the government should restrict unpopular religious groups such as Hare Krishnas.[48]

Perry, emphasizing the fact that in the early Christian church, God required social action,[49] insisted UFMCC should never abandon its mission. Fortunately for

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[46] J. Kepner, "Gay Lib Now." In M. Thompson (Ed.). *Long Road to Freedom*. New York: St.Martin's Press, 1994), p. 34.

[47] G. McKenna, *A Guide to the Constitution: That Delicate Balance*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1984), pp. 268-269.

[48] Fowler et al., (1999), pp. 222, n19. (see *The Williamsburg Charter Survey on Religion and Public Life* (Washington, DC: Williamsburg Charter Foundation, 1988).

[49] T. Perry and T. Swicegood, *Don't Be Afraid Anymore: The Story of Reverend Troy Perry and The Metropolitan Community Churches*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990). Jesus overturned tables at the temple in Jerusalem to make a point. It symbolized the destruction of the temple. His action was premeditated, carefully orchestrated, and stages as what liberation theologian and political activist Ched Myers terms *messianic theatre*. See R. Goss, *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1993), pp. 145-147. Also see Ched Myers, *Binding the Strongman*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), p. 291.

Perry, the majority of the congregation supported him[50] and social action became a practice of the denomination. Therefore, a serious commitment to social justice began to evolve within UFMCC. Denominational support was affirmed when the 1971 UFMCC General Conference created the Commission of Social Action. In 1972, members of MCC conducted a "lay in" at the Democratic National Convention at the Deauville Hotel, in Miami, in an effort to get an audience with George McGovern, the newly nominated Presidential candidate.[51]

Despite the growing endorsement of UFMCC's activist's role, resistance within the denomination to Perry's push for UFMCC to participate in political activism did not disappear. For example, fear of party entanglement raised concerns in the early 1970s, affirming that not everyone within the UFMCC family supported political involvement. The negative reaction to social activism by some members of UFMCC was observed as a hostile effort to overthrow the stability of UFMCC occurred in 1972 when the MCC-Denver pastor and interim district coordinator, Ron Carnes, pulled his congregation from the fellowship. The issues that caused the withdrawal of the Denver congregation involved the invitation and speech of Assemblyman Willie Brown at UFMCC's General Conference. Rev. Carnes strongly objected to what he held was a politically partisan speech. According to Perry, Assemblyman Brown's talk concerned gay rights and not Democrat or Republican rhetoric.[52] Many UFMCC members believed that religion and politics should be kept

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[50] The congregation voted 110 to 11 to reject the usurpers and maintain the priorities of salvation, community, and Christian social action according to Perry and Swicegood, (1990), p. 33-64.

[51] Additional confirmation of the church's commitment to the expansion of social action programs was acknowledged with the establishment of a national prison ministry in 1972. The purpose of the ministry was to provide pastoral care and counseling for those imprisoned as well as support for the paroled.

[52] ____, ibid., pp. 63-67, 75.

separate.

Internal opposition to the church's active participation in politics has occasionally resurfaced. The belief in the separation of church and state (read: politics) has continued to restrain the role the denomination is able to play in social activism. Nonetheless in 1975, UFMCC formed the Racism Task Force[53] to work within the Commission on Social Action and later opened a field office in Washington, D.C. to initiate and lobby for Social Action.[54]

The role of social justice as part of the three-pronged gospel of UFMCC continued to evolve. Having become recognized as a leader in social activism, Perry was one of eighty persons invited to meet with Jimmy Carter in Los Angeles in 1975 when Carter was seeking the Democratic Party's nomination for president. Carter's interest in social justice issues would result in a second meeting in 1977, when Perry and fourteen other gay and lesbian leaders went to the White House to discuss their political agenda with newly elected President Carter. During the meeting, Perry presented a paper on gays and religion in which he stated that his purpose was to "show that not every established non-gay church...is filled with hatred when it comes to allowing gay and lesbian people to live productive lives."[55] The White House invitation and meeting with President Carter signaled Perry was becoming a prominent figure in the gay rights movement. Pointing out the importance of UFMCC's push to obtain social justice, Perry stated,

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[53] UFMCC held an African American conference in April of 1998 and A Latino/a Outreach Conference in November 1998. The conferences encourage a commitment to multicultural diversity. *Keeping in Touch* ,(Santa Monica, CA: UFMCC Publishers, 1998 June), 4; Birkitt, Jr., (Ed.), Leadership News from UFMCC" (1998, August 28), ufmcchq@aol.com.

[54] The Washington Field office was closed in the summer of 1981.

[55] Perry filled a folder with a list of religious denominations that had made positive statements about the rights of homosexuals (Perry and Swicegood, 1990), p. 185.

> Justice is all that we, like many other minorities, are seeking. For that reason many gay ministers in Metropolitan Community Church have had no choice but to be interested in the politics of our detractors, and the politics of protecting human rights. For that reason I served for a time on the board of directors of the Gay Rights National Lobby. And for that reason, I spent a considerable amount of time communicating with our elected state officials.[56]

Rev. Perry continued to practice what he preached regarding the importance of social activism. In 1977, he returned to the Federal Building to fast an effort to raise money to defeat the Briggs' Initiative, which was an attempt to ban gay teachers from the classroom.[57] Perry's protest-fast raised $104,000 to fight the initiative. The following year, Rev. Perry and members of MCC congregations helped form the Bay Area Committee Against the Briggs Initiative (BACABI) and ran radio commercials opposing the initiative. In addition, Perry debated Senator Briggs during the heated campaign period. Through these efforts gay men and lesbians were inspired to organize a major political campaign. Proof of their abilities to be politically active, was noted when a large amount of money was raised to help overwhelmingly defeat Proposition Six (Briggs Initiative).[58]

Developing fund raising skills has proven to be important to social movements. Perry's ability to energize the gay liberation movement through fund raising and other social justice activities has brought him national recognition. For

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[56] ____, ibid., pp. 297-298.

[57] In *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* the journal claims that previously the extension of civil rights protection to gay men and lesbians has proven controversial as evidenced by the heated debate accompanying anti-gay ballot measures, as well as the introduction of gay civil rights legislation. Anita Bryant's 1977 campaign to repeal a gay right ordinance in Florida inspired the "Briggs Amendment" targeted at gay and lesbian teachers. The Religious Right, under the leadership of Jerry Falwell led the campaign in California to pass the Amendment allowing school board's to fire or refuse to hire teachers who were homosexual (J. Schacter, "The Gay Civil Rights Debate in the States: Decoding the Discourse of Equivalents." *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review*, 29, (1994): p. 288. The defeat of this proposition established a pattern that continues (Thompson, (Ed.), (1994). In the 1998 state legislature of Oklahoma a bill passed in the House, which would ban gay teachers from the classrooms.

[58] Perry and Swicegood, (1990), pp. 139-174.

example, in 1978, he received the American Civil Liberties Union Award for commitment and leadership in the field of civil rights.[59] Perry has served as a member of the Los Angeles Commission for Human Rights and was the first openly gay person in America to be appointed to any type of commission. Rev. Perry is listed among "Who's Who" of the most influential gay and lesbian leaders whose national organizations are shaping the debate on equal rights.[60]

The following examples illustrate the continuing role that UFMCC has played in politics. Under Perry's leadership, MCC congregations were participants in the March on Washington in 1979, 1987, and 1993. Perry and UFMCC's involvement in the 1979 March on Washington offers validation of their commitment to nonviolent Christian social action.[61] The *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision motivated the 1987 march.[62] Standing before the Lincoln Memorial, Perry delivered a sermon meant to inspire those among the crowd who would be protesting in front of the Supreme Court later in the week. Perry, anticipating the peaceful disobedience, said,

> We must let the Supreme Court know that we are protected by the United States Constitution just as much as any heterosexual... and we will fill the jails if necessary, before we ever let any court, even the United State Supreme Court, rule away our freedom to exist.[63]

UFMCC has continually encouraged the GLBT community to find new

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[59] California's U.S. Senator, Alan Cranston, presented the award to Perry before twelve hundred people. Senator Cranston stated, "Isn't it interesting, what crazy laws concerning homosexuals are still on the books...in Kansas, in this...enlightened age, it is still against the law for Troy Perry to drive a taxicab?" (Perry and Swicegood, 1990), p. 295.

[60] C. Bull, "The Power Brokers." *The Advocate*, (1998, June 23), pp. 66-70.

[61] Rev. Perry was the first speaker at the 1979 March on Washington where 100,000 sexual minorities were present. See T. Duane, "My Perspective: From Stonewall to the capitol." *The Advocate*, (1999, March 22), p. 11.

[62] In the *Bowers'* case the Supreme Court in a 5-4 decision rejected the claims of Bowers that laws prohibiting sodomy between consenting adults (same gender) violated the Constitutional right to privacy (*Bowers v. Hardwick, 478 U.S. 186*, 1986).

[63] Perry and Swicegood, (1990), pp. 198-199.

strategies to reach their goals. Blending community and social action, Perry performed the first same-sex union in December 1968. UFMCC's "Rite of Holy Union" is the spiritual joining or "a covenant between two people, before God, to love one another, care for one another, and be committed to one another."[64] Perry's denomination welcomes people like himself, those gays, lesbians, and bisexuals who have been shunned by more traditional religions. Each year his churches preside over 5,000 "holy union" ceremonies for gay couples. The 1993 Gay and Lesbian March on Washington included worship services at the Lincoln Memorial. What gay activists refer to as "The Wedding" of hundreds of gay and lesbian couples on the steps of the Internal Revenue Service Building was performed by Rev. Perry. The ceremony represented a call for the legalization of same-gender marriages.

Institutionalizing the Social Justice Program

Social justice as a prong of UFMCC's gospel message continued to evolve within the organizational structure of the church. Twenty-four years after the solidifying of a program for social action, the denomination selected the program's leader. On January 1, 1995, Mel White, former ghostwriter for such evangelical and political leaders as Jerry Falwell, Francis Schaeffer, Billy Graham, Pat Robertson, Jimmy and Tammy Bakker, W.A. Criswell, Jim Kennedy, and Oliver North, was appointed National Minister of Justice and Reconciliation for UFMCC.[65] White, like

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[64] N. Horvath, *Voice of the Falls*, (2000 October), p. 1.

[65] M. White, *Stranger At The Gate: To Be Gay And Christian In America*. (New York: Plume, 1994). In 1985, Pat Robertson hired White to ghost write *America's Dates with Destiny*. (p. 204). White ghost-wrote and directed the final version of Francis Schaeffer's film series *How Should We Then Live*. (144) and James Kennedy's film, *Like a Mighty Army* in 1990 (p. 226). White did ghost writing for Jerry Falwell in 1985 and 1986 including his book *If I Should Die Before I Wake!* and Falwell's autobiography, *Strength for the Journey* in 1987, (pp. 146, 196-197, 218). White helped write the book *Approaching Hoofbeats* with Billy Graham in 1981, (pp. 171-172, 303), and was summoned to ghostwrite Jim and Tammy Bakker's autobiography in 1986, (p. 207). In 1990, White wrote *Standing*

many of the leaders of UFMCC, was raised in a conservative Christian church and struggled with reconciling being gay and Christian for many years.[66] White represents the congregations of UFMCC and other groups and individuals in the struggle for justice on behalf of gays and non-gays alike.

The social activism of Jesus, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. provided inspiration and guidance for the social justice mission of UFMCC envisioned by White. Having spent years studying the teaching of these charismatic leaders, White developed seventeen principles that he believes are required if sexual minorities are to succeed in their struggle for justice. The principles are: (1) believe that God is on the side of justice and truth; (2) believe that God is pleased each time we, too, take our stand for justice and for truth (or against injustice and untruth); (3) believe that within everyone (even our "worst" adversary) there is an amazing potential for positive change; (4) see our adversary not as an evil person, but as a victim of misinformation as we ourselves have been; (5) try to win our adversary's friendship and understanding; (6) persuade our adversaries on the basis of truth alone (without half-truth, exaggeration, or lie); (7) speak the truth in love; (8) speak the truth in love relentlessly; (9) refuse to break off negotiations (speak the truth in love relentlessly) even with our most "hopeless" adversary; (10) attack the false idea, not the person who holds that idea; (11) believe that it is as much a moral obligation to refuse to

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on the Promises, the autobiography of W. A. Criswell, pastor of Dallas's First Baptist (p. 224). White is uniquely qualified for his justice ministry. White holds a Ph.D. in communications and film from the University of Southern California and a second in religious studies from Fuller Theological Seminary. In 1965, Dr. White founded Mel White Productions, Inc. By 1985, he had produced 53 prize-winning motion pictures and television documentaries. Since 1972, White has written 16 books, 9 of them best-sellers. M. White, *Stranger at the Gate: To Be Gay and Christian in America*: Justice Minister, Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. Retrieved on June 18, 1997 from http://www.melwhite.org/resume.html.

cooperate with evil as it is to cooperate with good; (12) insist the means must be as pure as the end; (13) create a network of allies and insist that the spirit of "soul force" (love, truth, humility, and forgiveness) guide our relationships with our allies as with our adversaries; (14) refuse to participate in any form of physical violence: (15) avoid internal violence of the spirit (hate) as well as physical violence; (16) accept and absorb suffering without retaliation, and (17) do not fear death. White labeled his seventeen principles for doing justice, "Soul Force."[67] Claiming the "soul force" principles came directly from the writings of Mohandas K. Gandhi[68] and Martin Luther King, Jr.[69] White stated,

> We must not lose this struggle against injustice. Jesus gave us the motive. Gandhi gave us the method. And Dr. King combined the motive and methods of "soul force" in his own historic civil rights crusade. Those "soul force" principles could renew our justice movement and bring hope and healing to our wounded community.[70]

Leaders in social movements realize that groundwork has to be laid before the movement's efforts can be activated. Organizing, developing, and pooling resources is important if an aggrieved people are to effectively advance their cause.[71] Determined to teach others nonviolent methods for the advancement of social justice, White began sharing his techniques.[72] While delivering the closing address at the

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[66] According to Dart (2001, March 21-28), in the early years of UFMCC, two out of three clergy came from the ranks of mainline and evangelical churches, many ultra conservative (p. 7).

[67] *Satyagraha* is the Indian word for "soul force" and the subject of a book written by Mahandas K. Gandhi. See *Satyagraha in South Africa* (Canton, Tennessee: Greenleaf Books, 1979).

[68] White relied especially on Mahandas K. Gandhi's *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments With Truth*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957) and *Satyagraha in South Africa*, (Canton, Tennessee: Greenleaf Books, 1979).

[69] See Martin Luther King Jr.'s *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991).

[70] Justice Net. Soul Force Seminar on the Web. (1998, November 1). Retrieved on June 18, 1997 from http://www.melwhite.org/sfseminar.html

[71] B. Fireman and W. Gamson, "Utilitarian Logic in the Resource Mobilization Perspective." In Zald and McCarthy, (Eds.), *The Dynamics of Social Movements: Resource Mobilization, Social Control, and Tactics*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Winthrop Publishers, Inc., 1979), pp. 9-10.

[72] On behalf of civil rights for Blacks, the philosophy and tactics of nonviolence were first introduced in Montgomery, Alabama. Experts conducted mass meetings of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). Blacks, including Rev. Ralph Abernathy and Rev. Glenn Smiley of the Fellowship

"Spotlight on the Right Conference," sponsored by the Institute for Study of the Religious Right and the Multi-Cultural Collaborative on November 21, 1995, White outlined five tips for social action. The suggestions were: (1) never be silent or inactive in the face of injustice; (2) a belief that the Creator is at his/her heart, pro-justice; (3) we have an amazing ability to change; (4) the only thing we have to counteract misinformation is truth; and (5) don't confuse the adversary with the adversary's ideas.[73] The seventeen principles and the tips for social action suggested by White have been distributed to UFMCC congregations, including WFMCC, through publications, an Internet web page, and plenary session at regional conferences within the denomination. Along with the dissemination of this information for educational purposes and speaking to the urgency of "doing justice," White has conducted training sessions in peaceful civil disobedience. UFMCC has pursued these five suggestions for social activism, as has the congregation of my case study.[74]

A summary of the activism undertaken by UFMCC, motivated by White's leadership position as Minister of Justice, supports my findings regarding the growing role of the denomination in the gay liberation movement. Clearly, social action began to take a greater role in the mission of UFMCC shortly after White was installed as the Dean of the Cathedral of Hope (COH) MCC in Dallas in 1993.[75] While serving as Dean, White traveled to 28 states, speaking, organizing, lobbying, and protesting injustice. White's leadership position was put to the test when thirteen days after he was installed as Dean of COH, President Clinton announced his "Don't Ask, Don't

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of Reconciliation were systematically trained in the strategies of nonviolence according to A. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*. (New York: The Free Press, A Division of Macmillan, Inc., 1984), pp. 40-41, 66.

[73] M. White, "Activist Guide: Five Tips for Social Action." *Freedom Writer Magazine, 13*, (1996 March): p. 11.

[74] I observed the local MCC offering prayer on behalf of their adversaries and the pastor reminding the congregation that the adversarial ideas espoused were the thing to address, not the messenger.

[75] Cathedral of Hope has a congregation of over 1,400 and is the largest MCC in the fellowship.

Tell" compromise plan for ending the ban on gay men and lesbians in the military.[76] According to the policy, gay men and lesbians would be allowed to serve in the military as long as they did not disclose their sexual orientation publicly or privately.[77] White's concerns with the policy were validated when findings by the Service Members Legal Defense Network revealed 563 instances of military commanders violating the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy by pursuing or harassing suspected gay personnel. The study indicated a 27% increase in policy violations from the 1996 total of 443.[78] A report leaked by the Pentagon on April 6, 1998, showed that the number of discharged gay and lesbian troops has soared 67% since "don't ask, don't tell" was instituted in 1994.[79]

On July 30, 1993, leaders of the gay and lesbian community gathered in Washington, D.C. to protest the president's compromise. Leaders scheduled to attend included: David Mixner, a gay community leader and one of President Clinton's campaign advisers, Tim McFeeley, executive director of the Human Rights Campaign Fund, William Waybourn, executive director of the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, Tanya Domi from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and their allies including Patricia Ireland, president of the National Organization for Women. Realizing that no one representing lesbian and gay religious or spiritual organizations was on the leadership list, White flew to Washington D.C. to join with the political activists in the protest. White was arrested along with the other leaders who spoke during the protest.[80] Perry mobilized a campaign to telephone and write President

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[76] See 10 U.S.C. § 654. Also see L. Korb, "The President, the Congress, and the Pentagon: Obstacles to Implementing the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' Policy," in *Out in Force: Sexual Orientation and the Military*. G Herek, J. Jobe, and R. Carney, (Eds.), (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 290-301.

[77] Between 1980 and 1990, the military dismissed 16,919 service members for same-gender sexual orientation, at a cost of approximately $500 million according to a 1992 GAO report (White 1994), p. 277.

[78] *The Advocate*. (1998, March 31), p. 14.

[79] J. Gallagher, "Cracking Under Pressure?" *The Advocate*, (1998, May 12), p. 15.

[80] ____, ibid., pp. 278, 281.

Clinton and members of Congress on behalf of lifting the ban.

White has long believed in an intense response to the Religious Right. Using the "Word" as a two edged sword, gay and lesbian rights can be advanced by gay Christians according to White. Prior to his appointment as Dean of COH, White had begun to monitor Pat Robertson's *700 Club*. In 1989, Robertson and other televangelists began to use "the homosexual threat" to raise money and mobilize volunteers. White sent Rev. Jerry Falwell and other conservative leaders a letter in 1991 to inform them of his sexual orientation and to request a meeting.[81] Despite the fact that White had been the ghostwriter for several conservative religious leaders, his acknowledgment and request were not received in the spirit he had hoped. According to White, "No one would accept my request to sit down as brothers in Christ to discuss the new biblical, theological, pastoral, and scientific data about homosexuality that might help inform my old friends on the religious right."[82]

Being well informed of your adversaries' messages and goals is important when social movements seek to respond strategically and effectively. For years, White listened to Robertson's anti-homosexual rhetoric. For two years White tried to meet with Robertson privately, to discuss how his campaign was leading to discrimination, suffering, and death for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. Robertson's refusal to meet privately prompted White to take his case to the public. The use of the media is a well-established tactic of social movements. Visibility boosts morale and has the ability to affect others by drawing attention to the message of the activists.[83] Typically, movements realize they must become interesting to the media in order to get media coverage.[84] According to the literature,

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[81] C. McGraw, "Christian and Gay." *The Orange County Register*, Accent, (1997 April 29) pp. 1,6.
[82] M. White, (1994), p. 251.
[83] H Molotch, "Media and the Movement." In Zald and McCarthy, (1979), p. 7[illegible].
[84] The local congregation of WFMCC received media attention when the media found the church's role in several controversial issue before the community were addressed. A discussion of the specific instances of media coverage will be covered later in the chapter.

"No news is bad news."[85] Therefore, even unsympathetic news coverage tends to be an organizational constructive force that energizes the movement.[86] White, utilizing the nonviolent protest methods of Martin Luther King, Jr., set out to incorporate the media into his social justice efforts. On Valentine's Day, 1995, White, hand-delivering his written argument against the anti-gay rhetoric of the *700 Club*, attempted to visit Robertson's office. Upon entering the campus of Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), White was arrested for trespassing. Instead of paying the small fine, he elected to fast in jail while waiting for Robertson to visit.

White's strategically planned trespassing, arrest, incarceration, and fasting served to draw media attention to his cause. His 22-day prison fast following the arrest made headlines across the nation.[87] When Pat Robertson finally visited the Virginia Beach City jail, White requested Robertson to consider three things. First, tell his *700 Club* viewers about the terrible rise of hate crimes against lesbian and gay children. Second, condemn anyone who commits or incites those crimes. And third, meet with delegates from Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-FLAG) to hear first hand the consequences of anti-homosexual campaign being waged by conservative Christian leaders.[88] With media attention directed toward his imprisonment and fast, White pleaded with Robertson.

> If you knew how many innocent gay men we've buried in the last year who were murdered by bashers who thought they were doing God and the world a favor, you would understand why I take your false and inflammatory rhetoric so seriously.[89]

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[85] ____, ibid., p. 72.

[86] Examples of garnering news coverage as a means to utilize the institution of the media as an instrument for making gains within a movement include: the women's liberation movement's use of bra-burning; the civil rights movement's use of sit-ins, marches, and the Freedom Riders; and students' movement against the Vietnam War public burning of draft cards.

[87] J. Walsh, "One Man's Journey to Find God, and Himself," *Oasis Magazine*, (1996, February). Retrieved on August 6, 2001 from www.oasismag.com/Issue/9602/oasis-controversy.html.

[88] This is a suggested press release to precede the public showing of White's *The Rhetoric of Intolerance* video *The Justice Report*, (Special Edition), p. 9.

[89] ____, ibid., p. 17.

Robertson did go on the air to say that he abhorred the growing violence against gay and lesbian people.[90] The media attention generated by White's arrest and fast successfully created a climate in which Robertson had few options other than the broadcast. White was aware that movement activists must find ways of utilizing media coverage to communicate with followers, reach out to recruits, and neutralize possible opponents. Beneficial use of the media is, therefore, a "means for organizational goal attainment."[91] No doubt the status of White and Robertson prompted the media's interest in the story. However, there are times when the issue catches the media's attention rather than the status of those protesting, which will be addressed later when discussing the congregation of WFMCC.

As UFMCC's appointed Justice Minister, White's efforts to subdue Robertson's message has continued, as have his attempts to meet with Robertson. White's continued monitoring of the *700 Club* has revealed that Televangelist, Pat Robertson frequently makes reference to gay rights as "special rights." It is important to note that what gays regard as civil rights or gay rights generally refers to ordinances that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in housing, employment, and public accommodations.[92] These rights are viewed as "special rights" in Reverend Lou Sheldon's Traditional Values Coalition video *Gay Rights/Special Rights.*[93] This anti-gay language has become the standard slogan for

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[90] www.melwhite.org/resume.html.

[91] Zald and McCarthy, (1979), pp. 71.73.

[92] R. Smith and R. Windes, "The Progay and Antigay Issue Culture: Interpretation, Influence and Dissent." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 83 (1997): pp. 28-48. See B. Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement.* (Boston: Twayne, 1987), pp. 74-76; D. Herman, *Rights of Passage: Struggles for Lesbian and Gay Legal Equality.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 4; J. D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 150.

[93] *Gay Rights, Special Rights: Inside the Homosexual Agenda.* Videocassette. Jeremiah films, 1993.

the religious right's political activism in opposition to gay rights.[94]

White has accused Robertson's *700 Club* of using fear, misinformation, and false claims to support an anti-homosexual bias despite his promise to tone down the rhetoric. During a broadcast of his television program, Robertson, justifying his belief that gay rights are special rights, explained,

> It's not a question of denying anybody any rights. It's a question of giving special privileges to people on account of how they perform sex acts. That's what it amounts to. That's the bottom line. It has nothing to do with being good to people who are of this persuasion. It's a question of do you give them special privileges.[95]

Adding to the argument, Robertson's co-host asked the audience, "if you say you have special rights accorded to you by your sexual preference, at what point is something off limits? Because as long as it's under the guise of my sexual preference, what can you say no to?" Robertson went on to claim,

> Somebody could be involved in pedophilia, bestiality, all kinds of sado-masochism and none of them is off limits. Even snuff films...What we're asking you to do is simple. We want you to join the *700 Club*, it's a commitment of just 65 cents a day.[96]

Frustrated with Robertson's message, White chastised,

Approximately 45,000 of these videos where sold by January 1994. According to Herrell, the core theme of the political campaign of the video has "special rights" taking on three senses. First, rights for gays and lesbians are undeserved because homosexuals have not suffered a history of oppression and are "well-educated, socially mobile and financially comfortable." Second, the rights requested by gays are not enjoyed by others, thus special rights are "something more than civil rights guaranteed to all citizens." Finally, special rights are the rhetorical intensification of special interest, therefore, rights claimed by "special interest groups against the general good." (R. Herrell, "Sin, Sickness, Crime: Queer Desire and the American State." *Identities*, vol. 2 no.3, 1996): p. 282. "Special rights" are associated by antigay groups as affirmative action status, preferential quotas, and other rights that belong to legitimate minorities according the video. Those using "special rights" rhetoric claim that legal recognition of sexual orientation as a status legitimates homosexuality, (A. Scalia, "Dissent. Romer v. Evans." *Supreme Court Reporter* 116.16, 1996): pp. 1629-37.

[94] J. Gallagher and C. Bull. *Perfect Enemies: The Religious Right, the Gay Movement, and the Politics of the 1990s*. (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1996).

[95] M. White, (producer), "The Rhetoric of Intolerance: An Open-Letter Video to Pat Robertson From Dr. Mel White," [transcript]. In S. Behrens, (Ed.), (Special Edition), *The Justice Report: A Journal of C.G.L.J., Inc.* Pasadena, California: Christian Gays and Lesbians for Justice, Inc., 1996), p. 15.

[96] ____, ibid.

> In your campaign to convince *700 Club* viewers that lesbian and gay Americans want "special rights" is as bogus as your newscasts. We want no special rights, only the rights guaranteed us by the Constitution. And stop saying "sexual preference," please. It's sexual orientation. Did you "choose" being heterosexual because you "preferred" it? And you and Ben should both be ashamed comparing our sexual orientation to pedophilia, bestiality, and even snuff films. And so it goes, more fear, more intolerance, more information flowing out of Virginia Beach, toxic waste, polluting the environment. And almost always connected somehow with an appeal for money.[97]

One of the most controversial rights being discussed by the gay and lesbian liberation movement is same-sex marriage. In chapter five, we saw how holy unions were interpreted by UFMCC to be important for empowering members of the GLBT community. The sincere desire of gay and lesbian couples to have their relationship validated is important to many, not only for the social equality reason, but also for religious reasons. Conversely, many secular and religious organizations strongly oppose same-sex marriage. The Christian Broadcasting Company (CBN) programming offers sermons and discussions regarding same-sex unions. According to White's report to UFMCC, Robertson's *700 Club* misuses the Bible to condemn same-gender marriage and the growing number of Jewish and Christian leaders who support it. Robertson declared,

> We talked earlier about recognizing homosexual marriages. That is just unbiblical, unscriptural...This council of rabbis, these churches that are saying we've got to acknowledge this quote loving relationship. God says, I don't recognize it... And I'm for sticking with God.[98]

In response to the message of the *700 Club*, White maintained,

> This is not about marriage. It's about civil rights. Gary and I celebrated our 12th anniversary on Palm Sunday, 1996. We are a couple for life and yet we have no shared legal rights. If he goes to a hospital I can't even visit him because I am not officially his next of kin. We don't have the right to share

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[97] ____, ibid.
[98] M. White, (producer), (1996), p. 16.

> tax returns or government benefits or parental custody or joint property or health insurance, or automatic inheritance rights, or even the right to make medical decisions for our partners. We are real and our relationships are genuine. Thousands of gay and lesbian couples celebrated ten, twenty, thirty, and even fifty loving, committed years together and yet not one of those couples shares in any of the 170 legal rights gained automatically by heterosexuals who marry. In spite of our obvious commitment to each other, in spite of the homes and families we are building, in spite of our service to our communities, the rights and responsibilities of marriage have been withheld from us. You condemn us because you think we're promiscuous. Then you condemn us again, when we ask to share in the rights and responsibilities of marriage.[99]

White's stance on same-sex marriage has been demonstrated through the use of nonviolent protest. In 1996, White began a two-week "Fast for Justice" on the steps of the United States Senate, inviting people of faith to join in his prayer vigil in an attempt to change the minds of the Senators regarding the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA).[100] Through White's social justice ministry, a variety of informational sources for political mobilization for same-sex marriages are provided. The list of materials on the topic of same-sex marriage that are available to UFMCC congregations indicates the large amount of information the denomination provides the fellowship. White's compilation of resources included a brief description of the work of organizations and a list of material available from each source. His list included resources from the National Freedom to Marry Coalition.[101] The National Freedom to Marry Coalition includes every national lesbian and gay rights

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[99] ____, ibid.

[100] www.melwhite.org/resume.html. The Defense of Marriage Act grew out of House Resolution 3396. The bill, introduced by Georgia Republican, Representative Bob Barr was as he described, an effort to keep homosexual extremists from using the case of *Baehr v. Lewin* to force all other states to recognize same-sex marriages performed in Hawaii. The bill defined "Marriage" to mean "the union of one man and one woman." *Associated Press* online (1996, June 12). "House Panel Nixes Gay Marriage." Retrieved on January 10, 1998 from http://www.fc.net/~zarathus/doma/doma_passes_house_342_to_64.txt.gz. D. Richards, *Identity and the Case for Gay Rights: Race, Gender, Religion as Analogies*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), p. 129.

organization including UFMCC, numerous non-gay allies, and state and local partners in every state. The Coalition intends to help every UFMCC congregation to develop their own strategy to help win justice for gay men and lesbians through working to secure the freedom to marry free of sex discrimination according to White.[102] A second organization White suggests for gaining resource information is the Lambda Marriage Project, which is the Coalition's clearinghouse. A third resource for helping congregations to prepare and hold forums, engage in dialogue, shape the media, make contacts with reachable non-gay political supporters, and ask for discussion and support of the Marriage Resolution is through the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Funds Marriage Project. Street addresses, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses were provided for each suggested resource supplier. A list of the resources available through these contacts was also included in White's newsletter article as well as information packets, brochures, articles, and a press kit.[103] All of the resources suggested and actions that were encouraged in White's article required the utilization of civic skills that reach beyond the confines of the church walls. This is a clear depiction of the methods that churches employ to help develop civic skills and disseminate information among its congregants for social activism.

White has continued to speak at churches, seminaries, interfaith events, and pride festivals.[104] In 1998, White suggested that the "three-pronged gospel" that is preached and practiced by the church should reverse its order to read: "Christian

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[101] M. White, "The Marriage Battle Has Just Begun: Now Is Our Time To Act," in J. Birkitt, Jr., (Ed.), *Keeping in Touch*, (Santa Monica, CA: UFMCC Publishers, 1997, September) p. 5.
[102] ____, ibid.
[103] ____, ibid., p. 6.
[104] Making use of cyberspace technology, White has built an Internet website called "JusticeNet" which provides updates of his efforts on behalf of social justice. Strategies for confronting discrimination as well as current and upcoming events, fast, prayer-vigils, and court cases related to

Social Action, Community, and Salvation." He argued that salvation is more likely to happen to people who have seen Jesus in "our commitment to justice and have felt His presence in our active communities of faith."[105] Two months after suggesting this change, White was awarded the ACLU's National Civil Liberties Award for his efforts to apply the 'soul force' principles to the struggle for justice for sexual minorities.

Growth of UFMCC's Role in the Gay Rights Movement

UFMCC's prominence in gay rights activism has continued. In 1997, Reverend Perry was in Washington D.C. to participate in the White House Conference on Hate Crimes.[106] Perry provided President Clinton with a report containing a catalog of hate crimes committed against the ministers, members, and property of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. Two weeks after Perry's participation in the Hate Crimes Conference, he returned to the White House to have breakfast with the President along with 119 other American religious leaders who were being honored for their contributions to society. According to a news release by Jim Birkitt, Jr. of UFMCC Communications Department, Perry, in accepting the White House honor and invitation noted,

> This invitation is, in a wider sense, a recognition of the contributions of each of our churches, ministers and members

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discrimination against the gay community and its supporters are posted on White's website.

[105] J. Birkitt, Jr., "October Newsletter." *Leadership News from UFMCC.* (1998), pp. 4-5.

[106] According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation report of the *Criminal Justice Information Service (CJIS) Division:* Hate Crime Statistics 1997, a total of 8,049 bias-motivated criminal incidents were reported to the FBI by 11,211 law enforcement agencies in 48 states and the District of Columbia. Of the 8,049 incidents, 4,710 were motivated by racial bias; 1,385 by religious bias; 1,102 by sexual-orientation bias; 836 by ethnicity/national origin bias; 12 by disability bias; and 4 by multiple biases. The 8,049 incidents involved 9,861 separate offenses, 10,255 victims, and 8,474 know offenders. Sixty-nine percent of the incidents involved only one individual victim. Eight people were murdered in 1997 in hate-motivated incidents. Racial bias motivated 5 of the murders, and sexual orientation bias the remaining murders. Retrieved May 20, 1998 from http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/hc97all.pdf.

> to the worldwide work of building "spiritual outposts" for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities. I think it is also a recognition of the hard grassroots work our churches have done to build bridges of understanding throughout our society.[107]

Perry has persisted in pursuing legislation against hate crimes. In October 1998, Jesse Jackson and Rev. Perry held a hate crimes rally in Los Angeles. The rally was a response to the murder of a Wyoming college student, Matthew Shepard whose death is attributed to his being gay. Perry led the community memorial service in Wyoming.[108] Rev. Fred Phelps demonstrated at Shepard's funeral. Perry reports that members of the town formed a wall to block the family's view of Phelps' crusaders. Phelps and his followers' hoisted signs stating, "God Hates Fags" and "Matt is in Hell."[109] Perry viewed the protesters as sincere, but misinformed people who need to be re-educated to see sexual orientation as a gift from God.

During the Los Angles' hate crimes rally, Perry announced the formation of a national campaign for passage of federal hate crime laws. "200,000 By 2000" was the campaign theme. The goal was to gather signatures and endorsements from 200,000 American religious leaders calling for full enactment of federal hate crimes legislation by the Year 2000. MCC-LA senior pastor, Rev. Nancy Wilson, who hosted the rally commented, "Who would have dreamed that a predominantly gay organization would be helping to set the pace for passage of hate crimes protections

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[107] J. Birkett, Jr. News Release. "President Clinton Will Honor 120 American Religious Leaders for Their Contributions to Society." Retrieved on November 10, 1997 from www.ufmcc.com.
[108] "Jesse Jackson, Troy Perry Hold LA The Crimes Rally." (1998, October 23). Retrieved on December 2,1998 from http://www.ufmcc.com/rally.
[109] T. Perry, *A Personal Message from The Rev. Elder Troy Perry*, UfmccHq@aol.com, (1998, October 19).

by religious leaders from across a broad diversity of America's faith communities?"[110]

UFMCC's joint rally with veteran human rights activist Jesse Jackson proved to be more than a public statement against hate crimes, it helped to launch what was hoped would become a national movement. An effort to secure 200,000 by 2000 signatures of clergy supporting legislation addressing hate crimes was launched as a result of this rally. Rev. Perry contacted churches and leaders, calling on friends and members of UFMCC to go to the polls in November and vote. Perry notes that some politicians oppose hate crime legislation and have pledged to work against their enactment, while others have stated their support. Believing that this is a pivotal time for GLBT communities to make a difference he requested that the community make the effort to vote. Perry has seen the benefits of mobilizing the gay vote.[111] According to Perry, "We can make a major difference in the outcome of these important elections in the US Senate and House, Governors' races and state legislative campaigns."[112] The amount of impact on elections is limited. Research indicates that approximately 90 percent of incumbents are re-elected.[113] Nonetheless, Perry appeared to be making a call for UFMCC and the broader gay liberation movement to continue to increase their combined role in social justice and policy issues.

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[110] http://www.ufmcc.com/rally.

[111] The 1978 Briggs Initiative was soundly defeated, in part because of Perry's efforts.

[112] Joint Press Conference with Human Rights Activists: Rev. Jesse Jackson and Re. Troy Perry. Retrieved on May 11, 1999 from http://www.ufmcc.com/violence7.htm

[113] In the 1992 and 1994 elections, 88 percent and 92 percent, respectively, of the members of the House of Representatives were re-elected. In 1998 and 2000, incumbents success rate in the House was 98 percent in both elections and 90 and 79 percent, respectively, in the Senate. Calculations by Greenberg and Page were taken from various issues of the *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*. E. Greenberg and B. Page, *The Struggle for Democracy*, (5th edition). (New York: Longman, 2001), p.

Perry has continued to remind the broader gay and lesbian community that the radical Religious Right continues to take out national ads offering to "cure" the homosexual. The Christian Broadcast Network has frequently featured gay men and lesbians who claim they have been cured of their homosexual behaviors. Mel White has charged Robertson's *700 Club* of using "ex-gay" testimonials to support the anti-homosexual bias. An "ex-gay" testified that he had been delivered out of his sexual addictions. The testimonial included the claims that the young man had over 400 sexual partners and that the Lord took him out of the homosexual lifestyle. Robertson informed his viewing audience that over 200,000 people had come out of the gay lifestyle in the last 20 years with the help of Operation Exodus. White rebuked Robertson's program message by emphatically declaring.

> You ignore biblical scholarship. You ignore scientific evidence. You use data that can't be trusted and you use people whose lives are still in process to support a bias that can no longer be supported. This "ex-gay" leader admits there's been no follow-up. They don't know what has happened to the people they have counseled. But we do know because they end up, so many of them, *coming to our churches when they can't hold on any longer, feeling broken and despairing, angry at God and angry at the church, feeling misled and misused* (White's emphasis). I know because I spent 30 years trying to be an ex-gay myself, praying, fasting, getting married, raising children, being counseled, going through aversive therapies, exorcism, even electric shock. Finally, I discovered the hard way that you and the "ex-gay" movement are wrong about homosexuality and that your information, no matter how well-intended, can not be trusted.[114]

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319. For scholarly discussions regarding incumbency electoral advantage see D. Mayhew, "Congressional Elections: The Case of the Vanishing Marginals," *Polity*, 6 (1974): pp. 295-317; R. Erikson, "The Advantage of Incumbency in Congressional Elections," *Polity*, 3 (1971): pp. 395-405 and "Malapportionment, Gerrymandering, and Party Fortunes in Congressional Elections," op. cit., p. 1240; G. Jacobson, "The Marginals Never Vanished: Incumbency and Competition in Elections to the U.S. House of Representatives, 1952-1982," *American Journal of Political Science* 31 (1987): pp. 126-141; M. Krashinsky and W. Milne, "The Effects of Incumbency in U.S. Congressional Elections," pp. 1950-1988, *Legislative Studies Quarterly* XVIII, (1993, August 3), pp. 321-344.

[114] M.White, (producer), *The Rhetoric of Intolerance*, (1996), pp. 14-15. White spent three decades in counseling and "anti-gay" therapy including prayer, fasting, exorcism, electric shock, and attempted suicide before reconciling his Christian theology and his sexual orientation.

It should be noted that many other than those that view the *700 Club* believe gays can be cured of their homosexual tendencies. Numerous religious organizations claim to heal the homosexual and studies of secular treatment abound.[115] Despite support for ex-gay programs, Rev. Perry has maintained that sexual McCarthyism is back in full force and that hate crimes continue to plague the community. He posits that federal laws continue to deprive lesbians and gays of full equality in the areas of employment, marriage, family rights, and national service. Furthermore, members of MCC congregations have had to brave the hatred of protesters to achieve their constitutional rights to assembly and worship. For example, Rev. Fred Phelps, notorious antigay crusader picketed MCC San Francisco (MCC-SF) during the summer of 1998. MCC saw Phelps' behavior as an opportunity to use an ugly situation for a good purpose. According to Rev. Jim Mitulski and the Rev. Penny Nixon, co-pastors of MCC-SF, the extensive press coverage of the event provided an opportunity for the pastors to share the church's message of love and hope.[116]

Rev. Perry's vision for the twenty-first century includes learning from the successes of the Religious Right. Perry's call to develop the same networking techniques, leadership coordination, communication skills, accumulation of

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[115] J. Satinover, *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth.* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Books, 1996), pp. 269-271 and chapters 12-14. Examples of religious organizations offering a ministry to heal homosexuals include among others: (1) Courage—a Roman Catholic ministry led by Fr. John Harvey, (2) Evergreen International—a program developed by the Mormon Church (LDS); (3) The rabbinical Council of America—maintains a referral list of professionals who treat homosexuality from a perspective that is compatible with orthodox Jewish beliefs, and Regeneration—An Episcopal ministry to sexual minorities. For studies on secular treatment see W. Stekel, "Is Homosexuality Curable?" *Psychology Review 17* (1930): pp. 443-451; G. van den Aardweg, *Homosexuality and Hope: A Psychologist Talks about treatment and Change.* (Ann Arbor, Mich: Servant Books, 1985); J. Wolpe, *The Practice of Behavior Therapy.* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1969).

[116] Birkitt, Jr., UfmccHQ@aol.com., (1998, June 10), p. 2.

resources, and mobilization potential as the religious right[117] is also being sought by secular gay leaders pushing for more grassroots efforts.

TENSIONS WITHIN THE GAY RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Achieving a position of prominence in the gay rights movement has been an important goal of Perry. Perry and the UFMCC are political forces as demonstrated by Perry and the denomination's participation in all of the national marches for gay rights. However, not everyone involved in the pursuit of gay rights agrees that national marches serve the local gay communities' interests. Many gay men and lesbians argue that drawing attention at the national level does not always trickle down to impact discrimination faced daily by the gay communities. For instance, on February 10, 1998, in Maine, voters overturned the state law banning antigay discrimination. Part of the reason the law was overturned was because of the heavy campaigning by the local chapter of the Christian Coalition. Despite the Coalitions efforts, the gay community had to accept some of the responsibility for the overturning of the law. The lusterless grassroots organizing by gay groups and the lack of resolve to rebut the argument that gay rights are "special rights"[118] illustrates the legitimacy of the debate among gay activists regarding the relationship between grassroots and national politics.

Equality Begins at Home

As a result of strategic shortcomings in gay activists' efforts in battles such as Maine, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) called for marches on every state capitol. The Federation of Statewide Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and

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[117] Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. *For Our Next Generation*. (Los Angeles: California, 1996).

Transgender Political Organizations[119] organized the state level protests. Believing that the center of gravity is in the states, Lobel stated, "Every local community has been an island unto itself, and we need to find ways of bringing people together to share ideas and strategies.[120] The "Equality Begins at Home" (EBAH) campaign was supported by the organizers of the Millennium March according to Birch[121] and was carried out in all 50 states. State and local politicians joined with tens of thousands of activists.[122]

Organizers of the state level marches, which included MCC's clergy, hoped the effort would promote a more united front within the gay community. UFMCC's homepage provided information on how to participate in local marches and utilize the media, as well as transportation, room reservation guides, and the Millennium March itinerary for the national effort. Individual congregations within the denomination used their church bulletins and web pages to announce the upcoming marches on the state capitols and encouraged the congregants to participate in the national march. The denomination also utilizes the media and UFMCC's homepage to inform and mobilize its members for fighting issues at the local level. UFMCC's assistance in activism at the grassroots congregational level will be discussed later in this chapter.

Noting that the Religious Right has changed its tactics from a national focus to state and local agendas seems to be setting a precedent for gay activism. The marches on the states' capitols in the year 1999 were to provide a dress rehearsal for

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[118] ____. ibid.
[119] The Federation is an umbrella group coordinated by the NGLTF.
[120] C. Bull. (1998, June 23).
[121] "Equality Begins at Home Slated for March 21-27, 1999." Retrieved December 2, 1998 from http://www.ufmcc.com/dcmarch4.htm.

the Millennium March, when gay men and lesbians converged in their respective capitals to lobby the state legislatures on behalf of equal rights. Paula Ettelbrick, legislative director of the Empire State Pride Agenda was pleased with the addition of "The Equality Begins at Home" actions and stated, "these actions will fortify our strength at the statewide level and set the stage for the Millennium March."[123] Dianne Harde-Garcia, executive director of the Lesbian Gay Rights Lobby of Texas believed that the actions would help build the gay communities' grassroots movement. Harde-Garcia agreed, by "Working together these actions could strengthen the state and federal organizations that fight daily to end discrimination."[124] Encouraged by the state level initiative, Kerry Lobel, executive director of NGLTF claimed, "Our greatest hope as a movement lies in our commitment to work together for social change. Our passion for justice and our pledge to lift up every voice has the potential to transform town halls, state houses, and our nation's capitol."[125]

The level of activism at the state level varied. In California, thousands rallied at the state capitol to defend a safe schools bill banning discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. Along with Congressman Barney Frank, thousands attended a statewide organizing conference and rally at the state capitol in Tallahassee, Florida. The prevalence of national organizations and absence of laws protecting gays within the states and cities contributes to the level of the

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[122] GayToday, "Tens of Thousands activate for Equality in All 50 states," in Gay Today: A global site for daily gay news. Retrieved on April 25, 1999 on (http://gaytoday.badpuppy.com/garchive events/032399ev.htm).
[123] "Equality Begins at Home." Retrieved on December 2, 1998 from http://www.ufmcc.com/dcmarch4.
[124] ____, ibid.
[125] ____, ibid.

GLBT community's involvement in activism. The actual number of activists marching on state capitols and city halls tended to be smaller in cities where the GLBT community had limited access to national organizations such as HRC and GLAAD. For example, approximately 100 people gathered for a rally in Northhampton, Massachusetts, 200 gay, and lesbian activists assembled on the Utah capitol steps. The state level marches appear to have had only the minimal impact of calling temporary attention to the fact gay men and lesbians were attempting to organize across the nation. On the other hand, the grassroots activism generated more than 250 events in all 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.[126] Twenty-four states held lobby days; thirty-one held rallies or marches in the capitals; twelve held town meetings to discuss future statewide organizing; nine held statewide conferences; and nine states held stand-alone press conferences not related to other events. Each state determined its own agenda and legislative priorities, there were a number of consistent themes: hate crimes and non-discrimination legislation ranked as the highest priorities among the states.[127] In addition, the "Equality Begins at Home Campaign" rallied the manifestation of political infrastructures in states that had not been involved in the politics of gay rights.[128] Getting the GLBT communities throughout the country to begin a dialogue about issues concerning gay liberation was perhaps the most significant impact of the state level efforts.

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[126] L. Loisel, "Campaign Promotes Equal Rights," *Daily Hampshire Gazette*. Retrieved on March 24, 1999 from http://pflag.org/press/news/32499ebahMA.html; "Gay Activists Rally at Capitol in Campaign to See Equality." *Deseret News*. Retrieved on March 28, 1999 from http://nz.com NZ/Queer?OUT/news/1999_03/562.html.

[127] GLAAD's Special Edition: "Equality Begins at Home," in Gay Today: A global site for daily gay news. Retrieved on March 28, 1999 from http://gaytoday.badpuppy.com/ garchive events 031999ev.htm.

Although the gay community reported to be success in all 50 states' marches, the facts indicated varying levels of success in garnering the involvement of state level politicians and activists as a result of the state marches. For example, state representative Alvin Holmes, sponsor of a bill to add sexual orientation to Alabama's hate crimes bill, joined activists on the steps of the capitol building. In Nevada, former State Senator Lori Lipman Brown, author of the bill that repealed the state's sodomy law in 1993, joined Assemblyman David Parks, who introduced an employment non-discrimination bill, at the rally at the capitol. In addition, Mayor Richard Daly read a letter in honor of Equality Begins at Home at a pre-EBAH rally that drew more than 400 people. In Texas, more than 8,000 marched and rallied in support of GLBT families. Furthermore, Tom Amiano of San Francisco Board of Supervisors was the emcee at the capitol rally crowd of 500 in Sacramento, California and in New Jersey, Republican Governor Christine Todd Whitman issued a proclamation recognizing and commending the EBAH campaign as did the Cambridge, Massachusetts City Council.[129] Despite these examples, the gay community has been accused of awarding excessive gratitude for any amount of public support from the straight community and politicians in particular. Critics claim the gays should not be content with the infrequent crumbs from the table of tolerance that are offered to placate the community.[130] Instead, many gays argue the community must be content with nothing less than a recognized place at the table of

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[128] ____. ibid. North Carolina held its first-ever statewide lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender lobby day and activists in North Dakota announced the formation of that state's first lgbt political group-Equality North Dakota.

[129] ____. ibid.

[130] For a discussion of Washington politics to pacify gay rights activists see U. Vaid. "The Last Word: Sick of Being Pacified." *The Advocate*. (2001, June 5), p. 80.

equal rights.[131]

UFMCC's Controversial Leadership Role

In early 1998, UFMCC and the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) were asked to be co-sponsors of the "Millennium March on Washington for Equality" (MMOW) to be held in April of 2000. The year 2000 was chosen because it was a presidential election year and Rev. Perry believes progress for gay rights is contingent upon getting the ear and then the support of elected officials. The march, according to Perry was to serve as a "vital step in consolidating our gains, mobilizing our community, and taking the next step toward justice in the new millennium."[132] Elizabeth Birch, the executive director of the Human Rights Campaign, said that the event would put religion, the military, and family issues at center stage.[133]

The efforts of the march were dampened by numerous internal problems including the belief that the majority of activists and their potential contributions were ignored. Activist Robin Tyler, veteran march organizer had first solicited support for the fourth march at the 1997 National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Creating Change Conference. She had faced resistance at the time among activists who were planning a series of actions in all 50 states.[134] Openly gay Congressman, Barney Frank (D-

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[131] An example of the debate regarding the crumbs from the table versus the place at the table can be seen between Log Cabin Republicans and Stonewall Democrats. Log Cabin Republicans see President George W. Bush's appointment of Scott Evertz to serve as direct of the White House Office of National AIDS policy and the hiring of Stephen Herbits as a consultant by secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld as the start of something good. Bush administration may see the Evertz selection as a conciliatory effort towards gay activists. On the other hand, Stonewall Democrats are frustrated at the suggestion that these appointments signals GLBT community will be fine under the Bush White House. In reality, progressives argue, Bush is not throwing open the door and rolling out the welcome mat to queer America. See C. Bull, "A Question of Loyalty: Will gay Republicans' support for the party come at the expense of gay rights?," *The Advocate*, (2001, March 14), pp. 22-24; Editor, "A Quite thumbs-up," *The Advocate*, (2001 May 22), p. 15, and "Letters to the editor," (19 June 2001). Reader Forum, "Burning Bush," *The Advocate*, (2001 May 19), p. 4.

[132] *Dallas Voice*, (1998 March 13), p. 4.

[133] C. Bull, "March Madness," *The Advocate*, (1998 March 31), pp. 24, 26-27.

Mass.) had doubts about the benefit of a national march. He believed that by judging the success of the Religious Right's grassroots efforts, gay liberationists would better serve the movement by concentrating their efforts and the state and local levels. Congressman Frank counseled, "It is going to be a terrible waste of energy and resources. I don't even begin to understand how it helps...This march will come at the expense of state and national lobbying."[135]

Tyler and veteran march organizers Nicole Murray-Ramirez and Rev. Perry called for the millennium event. In February 1998, a press release issued by the Human Rights Campaign and UFMCC implied that HRC, UFMCC, and Tyler, who was named executive producer, had already set the march. The greatest point of contention was the self-appointed leadership of the Millenium March. In all of the previous marches for gay rights meetings had been held around the country to discuss the purpose and the right time to conduct each march. Controversy was nothing new to the national marches as demonstrated by 1987 activists who were concerned that the "March would pull much need funds away from the fledgling battle against HIV/AIDS."[136]

In an effort to pacify critics of the wisdom of the march's timing as well as the self-appointed leadership, march organizers held a press conference in late April of 1999 to detail the plans to hold town meetings and conduct Internet polling. They claimed this strategy would be the means to develop the "most democratic" march platform in the movement's history. They boasted that the 15-member organizing

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[134] This campaign eventually became the March's 1999 Equality Begins at Home (EBAH).
[135] The Advocate Report. "Politics: Frank Blasts Millennium March." *The Advocate*. (1998, May 26). p. 14. According to the literature addressing local movement centers, the civil rights movement did

board consisted of 60% women, 60% people of color, and only one gay White male—the Rev. Troy Perry. [137] This gesture did not pacify the march's critics. They considered the nominal action simply placing a Band-Aid on the march that had serious problems.

The methods used to determine the leadership were not the only areas of concerns. The leadership's organizational skills were questioned. The slate of speakers was too numerous for any speaker to have adequate time to be a voice for the movement. Representative Frank arrived near the end of the day to speak, only to learn there were at least a dozen speakers before him. Frank stated, "The speakers were so unfocused. No one really laid out a political strategy or how we are going to achieve our political goals in the election. A lot of people will be returning home without the information they needed.[138] The need for a march was a large part of the problem. In previous marches, large battles faced the gay community. In 1987, for example, the nomination of Robert Bork to the Supreme Court triggered protests, as did the Supreme Court decision in the *Bowers* case. In 1993, marchers were determine to convince President Clinton to make good on his campaign promise to lift the ban on gays and lesbian serving in the military. In 2000, there was no galvanizing crisis demanding the resource for a national march. The speakers appeared to lack focus in their message as was indicated by the fact that many delivered coming out stories.

Another concern of the MMOW was the financial problems that plagued the

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not emerge from the efforts of outside elites. The overwhelming majority of the local movements during that period were organized and financed by indigenous Blacks (Morris, 1984), p. 64.

[136] J. Neff, "Stonewall 30: Marching On." *The Advocate*, (1999 June 22), p. 42.

[137] ____, ibid.

march in the form of missing funds. According to Armentrout, "The community does not do business in the best way possible. It is just another example of not having the right kind of paid leadership to make sure the event does occur and does well financially."[139] Funds missing from the Millennium Festival, a separately run event providing a venue for food and souvenir vendors estimated a six-figure amount simply vanished from the festival. A percentage of the festival's profits were to have been turned over to the march.[140] Instead the festival posted a loss, which the FBI is investigating. The Millennium March closed its books with $330,000 in unpaid debt. The march held in April 2000 joins a long list of gay events that have finished in the red, including the three previous marches on Washington.[141]

Gay organizations are notorious for destroying their own leaders and thwarting their efforts. For example, outspoken activists such as Andrew Sullivan (*The New Republic*), Chastity Bono (GLAAD), Larry Kramer (ACT UP), and Torie Osborn (NGLTF) are no longer spokespersons or writers for these organizations because of burnout or being drummed out by the community for having voiced divergent views on gay issues. Infighting and burnout continue to hamper the efforts of gay activists. Perry calls for the GLBT community to stop "destroying our own and commit to work together."[142] Resistance to Perry and the prominent role of UFMCC in the marches on Washington persists. The tensions between radical activists who believe the gay community should strive to maintain a separate culture

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[138] C. Bull, "Wish you'd been here." *The Advocate*, (2000, June 5), p. 24.
[139] J. Gallagher, "At Issue: Past due, forever." *The Advocate*, (2001, July 17), p. 17.
[140] According to Gallagher, "The march had anticipated receiving $750,000 from the festival, which was contractually obligated to pay the MMOW 65% of its net revenue." J. Gallegher, "Finance: Where did all the money go?" In *The Advocate*, (2000, June 20). Retrieved on June 21, 2001 from http://www.advocate.com/html/sotires/814/814_festmoney.asp.
[141] ____, ibid.

and assimilationists who argue gay people should become just like everyone else divide the movement.[143] Additionally, the forced "marriage" of gay men and lesbians in the liberation movement has resulted in a family feud in which pride is divided. Gay men and lesbian were not known for working in tandem for their rights. Despite the fact, the AIDS epidemic brought together the infected gay men and the lesbian caretakers in many communities; the lack of unity among the activists for social justice has often led to apathy and ineffectual, poorly planned activism. A unified front is required to combat the well-organized efforts of the Religious Right and other antigay groups. Only when the majority of gay rights groups stop the internal power politics struggles will the movement find a single voice or at least united voices that a successful social movements requires. According to the literature, "Movement organizations with internal factionalization are less likely to succeed in producing change than those without such conflict."[144]

Notwithstanding UFMCC's position of prominence as a political force in the gay rights movement, Perry and the denomination repeatedly have faced external resistance. The skepticism toward any religious institution's involvement in the gay rights movement places MCC in a precarious position. Just as congregants of the UFMCC have members who want to keep religion and politics separate, many secular gays do not trust organized religion. It appears that gays fighting to maintain the

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[142] T. Perry, Retrieved on September 24, 1998 from http://www.ufmcc.com.

[143] Disagreement within social movements regarding the best tactics to bring about change is not a new phenomenon. In the late 1960s the tactics of the Black Panthers and other insurgents, shifted the efforts of the civil rights activists from a strict adherence to nonviolence, to the justification of violent insurrection as a viable tactic in the ongoing struggle (McAdam, 1984), p. 73. See G. Rotello, for a discussion regarding the similarities in the outcomes desired by the separatists and assimulationists. Last Word: "Inside the circle." *The Advocate*, (1998, January 20), p. 112.

[144] W. Gamson, *Strategy of Social Protest*. (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey, 1975). In Zald and McCarthy, (1979), p. 243.

separateness—their queerness, if you will, from traditional society, see religion as an impediment. A segment of the gay rights movement proclaims a message that requires pushing the edge of the conventional envelope regarding social norms. The rejection of the institution of marriage by the gay community because it is seen as a conventional social institution that limits gay people's freedom, serves as an example of the rejection of heterosexual norms. Addressing the gap between activists regarding the direction the movement should pursue, Rotella explains.

> Many leading lesbian and gay activists still have basic misgivings about marriage itself. The gay movement retains a powerful antipathy to "heterosexist norms," especially the straitjacket of enforced gender roles and partnerships, in favor of a more fluid vision of personal and sexual freedom. Indeed, many gay and lesbian idealists don't want to join mainstream culture so much as have mainstream culture join them.[145]

Division existed within the gay community over the role MCC was playing in the 2000 march. According to Bull, gay activists object to MCC's high-profile role in gay politics, and the march on Washington held April 30, 2000 was no exception.[146] Rev. Perry claims to have worked on every march and claims each time he has been told why the church should not participate. Perry explains the controversy within the community.

> There are some anti-religious sentiments in the community. Gay people have been told they are sinners, so it's no surprise they have a problem with religious folks. But I think even the most secular gay people search for spirituality, even if it doesn't always end up in the Christian or Jewish traditions.[147]

Tensions continued to mount over UFMCC's sponsorship and involvement in the Millennium March. The degree of dissatisfaction with UFMCC's participation in

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[145] G. Rotello, "To Have and To Hold: The Case for Gay Marriage." *The Nation*, (1996, June 24), 15.
[146] C. Bull, (23 June 1998), p. 7.
[147] ____, ibid.

the march was illustrated by a two-page ad in the September 18, 1998 issue of *The Washington Blade*. The ad blasted the Human Rights Campaign and the Metropolitan Community Churches' handling of the Millennium March. Nearly 300 people took out the advertisement, calling themselves the Ad Hoc Committee for an Open Process. The committee described the initial goals of the Millennium March on Washington as "Faith and Family." The ad also accused the March organizers of pushing an "increasingly conservative direction of [*sic*] the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender movement."[148] Perry issued a strong public statement in response to the Ad Hoc Committee advertisement by stating,

> . . .to the press and all people of goodwill, the release and the ad contain erroneous and misleading information . . .The reality is that there is significant hostility within our community toward spirituality. I have dealt with this for 30 years. I have a great sensitivity to the harm that has been done to gay men and lesbians in the name of God. I also know that a majority of our community professes deep spirituality. In a community that professes commitment to diversity, that commitment must also extend to gay and lesbian people of faith. I realize that some have attacked the Millennium March because of the participation of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Churches. Let me make myself clear: I paid the price to come out as a gay man and I'll be damned if I'm going back into the closet because I am religious. I mean that in the truest theological sense of the word.[149]

Perry's comments underscored his commitment to the movement and revealed the battle scars he has received from within his own religious organization and outside the church from the secular gay community.

The rejection of gay men and lesbians by religious organizations has served to shape the message UFMCC brings to the gay rights movement. The denomination's message was delivered at the Millennium March in April 2000. One estimate claimed an audience of 500,000 in attendance and more than 22 million people via live

[148]T. Perry, (1998, September 24). www.ufmcc.com

television on C-Span and "streaming video" on the Internet heard the remarks of Rev. Perry.[150] Perry continued to address the barriers between secular gays and gay Christians. Religion's rejection of gays and gays rejection of religion has ramification for the level of political leadership UFMCC can expect to obtain. Trying to avoid an internecine relationship. Perry acknowledged the damage done by religion to the gay and lesbian community. Perry proclaimed,

> We've gathered today on the National Mall with incredible diversity! We've gathered here today: Those ready to fight for justice, and those who are weary from the battle. I come here today as a person of faith. Many of us gathered here today are people of faith. Let me also quickly acknowledge that too many of us in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities have been hurt by organized religion....I think of the man who walked away from his spirituality because his faith community rejected him. In spite of that: *Many of us have found strength and hope in our spiritual faith* (his emphasis). So we gather here today: Jew and Christian, Islamic and Hindu, Pagan and Wiccan, as well as those who have rejected any faith system. I proclaim this message that I have preached during my 30 years of activism: Believe that God—the God of the Universe—loves you just the way you are! I believe every one of us can come to terms with our own spirituality without the control of any other person, church, temple, group or organization. Until the doors of all churches and temples and houses of faith open wide in welcome to all people: *We must not rest* (Perry's emphasis).[151]

Having tried to reassure his audience that Metropolitan Community Churches believed in freedom *from* religion as well as freedom *of* religion. Perry discussed the denomination's ongoing battle for social justice and growing concerns over hate

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[149] ____. ibid.

[150] The debate over the number attending the march offers several estimates. Feminist, Eleanor Smeal suggested from the podium during the march that there were at least 750,000 people gathered. Washington, D.C., mayor Anthony Williams told the crowd that district police estimated its size to be closer to 310,000. The Ad Hoc Committee for an Open Process claimed there was no more than 125,00 people attending the event. Nonetheless, March executive director Dianne Hardy-Garcia was confident that there were at least 700,000 to 800,000 based on the guidelines used to determine past marches by the National Park Service. The National Park service discontinued official counts after the controversy over the counts at the Million Man March and other events. (J. Barrett. "Making it Count." *The Advocate*, 2000, June 6), p. 28.

[151] Continuing an important tenet of MCC, Perry's speech was inclusive of multiple religious and spiritual groups. Although Wiccan may appear to be straining to be inclusive, a segment of the lesbian

crimes by reminding the crowd,

> When our gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities continue to suffer the oppression of hate crimes: It's hard to keep the faith. In my own church more than 21 of our congregations have been fire-bombed or arsoned. In New Orleans, 12 of our members died in a terrible fire. In California, Rev. Scott was murdered solely because he was gay. Our associate pastor in Sacramento, Rev. Sheriff, died after being stabbed 24 times. I see...too many highs school students taunted and branded as "fagots" and "dykes"...too many people who've attempted to end their lives too soon because society heaped shame and humiliation upon them. I see the mother in tears because the court took her baby. I think of the partner of 35 years denied access to his lover's hospital room because no laws protected their relationship. Listen. America: It's time to end the division! It's time to end the oppression! And it's time to stop the hate crimes against our people![152]

In an effort to energize the crowd Perry concluded his address by proclaiming,

> Until those who seek to oppress us have ceased from their ways. Until the government leaves our families alone and protects our children...Until we can marry those we love...Until hatred and prejudice are banished from our vocabularies...Until the Matt Shephards and the James Byrds and Billy Jack Gaithers[153] are no longer taken from us...*We must not rest* (Perry's emphasis). Until all our people are free from oppression; until this nation grants equality to all our people: until all our people experience the promise of our nation's ancient creeds; until that day for which we work and strive: *Keep the Faith! Keep the Faith! Keep the Faith!*[154] (Perry's emphasis).

On April 30, 2000, according to Perry, religious leaders presented the 200,000 signatures supporting hate crimes legislation to Congress as part of the Millennium

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population identifies as Wiccans. "The Millennium March on Washington for Equality: Remarks by Rev. Perry." Retrieved on May 4, 2000 from http://www.ufmcc.com/mmpic/mmrallytdp.htm

[152] ____, ibid.

[153] Matthew Shephard , James Byrd, Jr., and Billy Jack Gaither are all considered to have been murdered because of their race or sexual orientation, therefore the murders are considered crimes of hate. Shephard, a gay college student at the University of Wyoming was beaten, robbed, tied to a buck fence and left to die in October of 1998. Retrieved on June 22, 2000 from http://www.texasdude.com/matthew.htm. On February 19, 1999, Billy Jack Gaither was beaten to death. His throat was cut and his body was bludgeoned with an ax handle before being thrown on top program entitled "Assault on Gay America: The Life and Death of Billy Jack Gaither." Retrieved on June 22, 2000 from http://www.pbs.org/wgbh.org/wgbh/pages/frontlin/shows/assault/billyjack. James Byrd, Jr. was chained by his ankles to a pickup truck and dragged 3 miles down a country road until his body was literally torn apart because he was Black according to *U.S. News and World Report*. Retrieved on June 20, 2000 from http://www.usnews.com/usnews/issue/990308/8prns.htm.

[154] "The Millennium March On Washington." Retrieved on May 4, 2000 on http://www.ufmcc.com/mmpic/mmrallytdp.htm .

March on Washington for Equality.

Despite the Senate voting 57 to 42 in support of the Hate Crimes Prevention Act in June and the House voting 232-192 in September to pass a motion aimed at retaining the measure in the defense bill, the positive impact of the Millennium March conducted in April 2000 appeared to be limited. It was disappointing for those hoping to see the bill passed and signed into law by President Clinton when the Hate Crime Prevention Act was killed in a conference committee. According to Birch, executive director of Human Rights Campaign, the republican leadership, led by Speaker Dennis Hastert and Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, worked to thwart the bill.[155]

It was anticipated that one million gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons would gather in Washington to walk the halls of Congress, meet with their Congresspersons and Senators and then make a case for equality for all citizens. The purpose of the march was to build allies. According to Rev. Perry, "to accomplish the goal of equal human and civil rights, it is imperative that we strategically build allies and support throughout society."[156] Putting a face on same-gender sexual orientation is viewed as a means to garnering greater acceptance in society.[157] It has long been a basic tenet of faith for many gay activists that "coming out" helps to convince people of the need for gay rights.[158] The term "coming out" refers to an emotional,

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[155] E. Birch, "HRC Condemns GOP Leadership for Removing Hate Crimes Measure from Defense Bill. Human Rights Campaign." Retrieved on July 6, 2000 form http://hrc.org/newrealease 2000/001005hc.asp and J. Holland, "Defense Bill's Hate-Crime Clause Out. Human Rights Campaign." Retrieved on July 6, 2000 on http://hrc.org/newsrelease/2000/001006ap.asp.
[156] *Dallas Voice*, (1998, March 13), p. 4.
[157] See The Advocate Report Front Page. "With Visibility Comes Acceptance." *The Advocate*, (1997, December 9), pp. 13-14.
[158] D. Kirby, "Does Coming Out Matter?" *The Advocate*, (1998, October 13), pp. 67-70.

psychological, and sexual experience of naming oneself gay or lesbian.[159]

The usefulness of protest marches are debatable. Previous marches have not directly produced major change in legislation, executive orders, or court rulings in favor of the expansion of gay rights. Despite the undetermined significance of past marches, Perry argued that meeting with Congresspersons and Senators in face-to-face encounters is believed to assist in humanizing the gay person to many who view gay men and lesbians in the abstract or as stereotypical caricatures. A 1993 poll[160] supporting "coming out," reported that knowing someone gay was one of the top ranking influences on voters' attitude toward homosexuality. Sixty-six percent of those who knew someone gay men or lesbian supported full civil rights. However, offering support to those opposed to the march was a 1998 poll conducted by Louis Harris and Associates Inc. The poll found that despite the belief that knowing people who are gay increases support for gay rights, those having gay or lesbian close friends or relatives are no more supportive of anti-discrimination laws than those who do not.[161]

The benefits that the gay rights marches have on the nation's capitol and political responsiveness are questionable. Duplicating the impact of the civil rights march on Washington in the 1960's has been hard to accomplish. With the increase in the number of groups utilizing this tactic, marches appear to be losing their

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[159] Several stages in the process can be identified and include: (1) individual awareness that he or she is gay occurs; (2) the individual communicates his awareness of his or her homosexual feelings to others; (3) the individual makes friends with other gays and lesbians; (4) a positive attitude regarding self is developed by experiencing the first three stages; (5) eventually the individual integrates the recognition of being homosexual into outer aspect of the self (Cruikshank, 1992), 47. Also see Cass (1979) 4 and Coleman (1981-2), p. 7.

[160] *U.S. News & World Report*, (1993,July).

[161] 53%-42% compared to 51%-40% according to Humphrey Taylor, Louis Harris and Associates Inc., August 19, 1998 (Kirby, 1998, October 13), p. 67.

effectiveness. Congressman Barney Frank (D-Mass) claims, "Politicians don't pay attention to you unless you call them and say, 'If you don't vote for gay rights I'm not voting for you.' You don't see the NRA, the AARP, or the AFL-CIO holding national marches."[162] Like the boy who repeatedly cried wolf, periodically reoccurring demonstrations tend to result in decreased media attention and diminished political impact. Admittedly, cognitive liberation and group empowerment may come from such efforts, however, that alone does not translate into tangible social change in governmental policies. For example, not a single demand requested by the 100,000 demonstrators that gathered for the 1979 March on Washington has been accomplished which included the basic demands for equality included gays' right to serve their country, raise their children, and live without fear of violence.[163] Likewise, despite the fact that in the 1993 March on Washington, approximately one million marched, far fewer followed up the march with a commitment to gay rights. By 1997, membership in all national gay groups combined is less than 500,000.[164] Other concerns have begun to arise that reach beyond the questionable political benefit gained from national marches. Critics of the 2000 Millenium March on Washington for Equality cited numerous stumbling blocks, beginning with the claim

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[162] The Advocate Report, Politics. "Frank blasts Millennium March." *The Advocate*. (1998, May 26), 14. According to Congressman Barney Frank, the recent mass gatherings in the capital, such as the Million Man March in 1995 and the Promise Keepers' rally in1998 had no effect on national policy.

[163] L. Neff. (1999, June 22), p. 40. It should be noted that the 1979 march, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) found its voice during the press conference held on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial according to the group's executive director, Kirsten Kingdon. In the 20 years since, PFLAG has grown to have 435 affiliates, 11,00 chapter members, and a budget of close to $2 million. In the 1987 march brought gays and lesbians leaders to gathered to discuss the status of the movement. The consensus was that more people needed the support system to come out. The idea of National Coming Out day was hammer out and the anniversary of the 1987 march—October 11—was chosen to represent those efforts. In addition, the same desire for visibility brought about the formation of the National Latina/o Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Organization (LLEGO) and its first gathering , S. Wildman,(2000, April 30). Lasting results. From *The Advocate* Retrieved on May 28, 2000 from http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/810m/810m_activistgrps.asp.

that the march would drain resources away from local organizing efforts. In addition, falling during a presidential election year with a lame-duck president and Congress makes the march poorly timed according to Brian Bond, executive director of the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund (GLVF).[165] Bond argues,

> The key to the success of the gay rights movement right now is local. Only ten states offer collective protections against discrimination, and there is a host of hate-filled legislation in almost every state legislature. We're obviously still trying to figure out the best mousetrap to fight these things.[166]

The problem was exacerbated by the fact that antigay political groups such as the Christian Coalition have shown skill at grassroots politics. Such finesse has allowed the Religious Right to capitalize on organizing in local evangelical churches.

The internal fighting among the March's constituency certainly hurt the delivery of any intended message, as did the lack of a clear united purpose. According to the Ad Hoc Committee, the failure by the MMOW organizers, including Perry, to "involve and mobilize the grassroots activists" and to "be accountable to the community it claimed to represent" resulted in a much lower than predicted attendance.[167] With fewer overarching political fights, mutually destructive squabbling abounded, even after the march was over. Dissention within a movement's ranks serves to diminish the organizational strength of the movement. With respect to the problem of decreasing strength in the later days of the civil rights movement, McAdam found that a "growing rift in a movement made cooperation more difficult" and such "internal dissension resulted in a portion of the insurgent resources and energies being expended on intermovement conflict instead of pursuit of substantive movement goals." The gay rights movement could learn much from

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[164] U. Vaid, (1997, June 10). Last Word. "Activism phobia." *The Advocate*, 88.
[165] The Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund (GLVF) is a Washington, D.C. based group that raises money for local candidates. The GLVF, founded in 1981, has a budget of $1.5 million (Bull, 1998, June 23), p. 68.
[166] ____, ibid.
[167] J. Barrett, (2000, June 6).

the how the Big Four[168] of the civil rights movement managed the considerable animosity that existed between the organizations even in the early 1960's but failed to inhibit cooperation.

The tension within the gay community over the participation and message of the UFMCC remains a persistent obstacle to the denomination's involvement in the gay rights movement on the national level and in major metropolitan areas. However, in the less sophisticated environs of non-metropolitan and rural areas of the country, MCC may be the dominant or the only organized voice in the gay rights struggle. In the next section of this chapter we will examine the role of a local congregation of the denomination that is culturally far away from the internal political quarrels faced by the leaders of the MMOW.

WFMCC'S SOCIAL JUSTICE: ENGAGING THE GRASSROOTS

The opportunity to participate in local gay pride marches is non-existent in most non-metropolitan communities. The town in which I conducted my ethnographic research is much smaller and more conservative when compared with major cities such as Los Angeles, Dallas, or Boston. No organizations such as HRC, GLAAD, or NGLTF exist in the community. The gay community supports one bar and the small congregation of WFMCC. Having spent many months as participant-as-observer at the local level, I discovered that the town's MCC was the first line of defense: the voice for the gay community. When I first began to interview members of a local MCC congregation, many insisted that they were not very political. Several

[168] The Big Four movement groups of the civil rights movement of the 1960s were the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). D. McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 167, 187-188.

stated that they did not believe in mixing religion and politics. Many members did not believe that the act of attending church services and social activities at MCC made a political statement. It is an interesting belief, because some members of the congregation are cautious about where they park their cars when attending worship service. In addition, few members openly discuss with their fellow workers or families where they attend church. I actually witnessed one person who was attending church services at MCC have another member check to make sure "the coast was clear" before exiting the building to go to their car. The repercussion of the possibility of being publicly associated with a predominately gay congregation does have political ramifications. Unlike most Blacks that do not have the option of hiding their skin color and physical characteristics, an individual can conceal their sexual orientation. However, heterosexuals attending MCC carry a somewhat different risk than that historically experienced by Whites working on behalf Blacks. Whites were accused of being "'N' lovers," whereas heterosexuals encounter the possibility of being not only perceived as allies of gays but presumed to be gay.

Deciding to assume the role of activists requires a congregation to feel secure not only in their faith, but also in their church community. This sharing of faith and fellowship implies an emotional or a transforming aspect. Community is a deeply felt emotional experience for many. The literature that addresses the culture of political engagement confirms this perception. An observer of the Farmer's Alliance Activists recorded,

> People commenced to think who had never thought before, and people talked who had seldom spoken ...Little by little they began to theorize upon their condition...It was a religious revival, a crusade, a Pentecost of politics in which a tongue of flame sat upon every man, and each spoke as the spirit gave

him utterance.[169]

The sense of security felt by the members of the Farmers Alliance was necessary before political engagement could transpire. The link between refuge and activism, though not direct, does exist. As discussed in chapter four, the church can provide a place of refuge for some congregants. We saw how feeling secure requires the development of a relatively high level of trust and once trust is established within the congregation a sense of community can evolve. Feeling secure, developing trust, and building community can lead to empowerment. Therefore, activism can find its origins coming out of the refuge that is being provided for the exiled.

Historically, it has been shown that the church as an indigenous organization can provide the refuge and community through which a leadership base, social interaction, and communication networks can develop. The literature supports the theory that leadership, social interaction, and a communication networks are required for collective action.[170] The southern Black urban churches had a propensity for social action. The institutional strength of the Black church is embodied in the Black protest activities of the civil rights movement.[171] The national leadership of the Black church inspired local efforts among civil rights activists. Similarly, UFMCC's leadership has inspired local efforts among the denomination's congregations. The Soul Force ministry of Mel White, the political activism of Rev. Perry and other clergy on numerous occasions stands as examples. Being mindful of the symbolic,

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[169] J. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: a History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1961), pp. 132, 159.

[170] McAdam, (1982); Morris (1984). It is worth noting that "the Christian Right movement grew up primarily among evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants" according to Fowler et al., (1999), p. 138. White fundamentalist churches produced the factors that encourage participation on behalf of conservative causes (S. Verba, K. Schlozman, and H. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 17-18.

political, and social activism of the civil rights movement[172] as well as the religiously based activities used during the protests,[173] I was prompted to inquire as to what might be seen as a symbolic act of social activism by gay Christians. Furthermore, the fact that they were gay Christians and discriminated against by numerous religions because of their sexual orientations caused me to question the gay man and lesbian's persistent desire to attended church. With many of the major Christian denominations and other religions condemning them, what prompted them to attend church? In an effort to explore this, I asked several members why they attend and discovered that some believed attending MCC was political. Several stated that their attendance was based on spiritual needs and that this denomination allowed them to be honest, gay, and Christian. The church organist voiced her opinion:

> I fight hard not to see my attending as a political statement. I want to keep that separate. I have a real problem with politics. I have a problem with marching in Gay Pride parades and other forms of participation. I will go and watch, but I will probably be heard making negative comments. For me personally, I don't like to mix the two. The church validates who you are...legitimates who you are as gay person without the politics[174]

The former WFMCC pastor, Rev. Walker and her spouse echoed the same sentiments in a dual interview. The pastor said, "Most people don't know what MCC is. For me

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[171] McAdam, (1982), pp. 99-100.

[172] Examples of such actions included drinking from the "Whites' only" water fountains, sit-ins, and freedom riders. Initiated by Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) on May 4, 1961, two small, integrated groups rode a Greyhound bus and a Trailways bus from Washington, D.C., to New Orleans to test whether buses and terminal facilities were desegregated. Only thirteen persons were on the original Freedom Ride. According to Morris (1984), the probability was high that such a ride would provoke dramatic responses (pp. 231-232).

[173] Frequently members of the protest movement practice the singing of hymns and holding prayer vigils to emphasis peaceful civil disobedience and for the spiritual empowerment of the protestors. The idea of singing hymns while imprisoned comes from the New Testament. According to Acts 17:2, "About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and the other prisoners were listening to them." The apostles Paul and Silas, Roman citizens were imprisoned in Philippi, which was a Roman colony. They had been accused of being Jews advocating customs unlawful for Romans to accept or practice (Acts 17:20-21).

[174] Personal communications, (1998, June 28).

it could become a political statement should we get into a discussion about it, but my attending MCC is not political, it is personal."[175] Walker's spouse added, "I think it (attending MCC) might be more political for "straights." A straight person has other choices. I don't really have other choices."[176]

The Personal is Political

Mixed messages are sent by government institutions and by the public's ambivalence regarding the establishment clause of the Bill of Rights. At least ten of the members of WFMCC that I had the opportunity to interview saw their attendance as political. For example, the children's Bible schoolteacher claimed,

> Although I don't think about it much because I don't tend to be paranoid, parking my car at the church makes a political statement. I don't worry that someone will drive around to see whose cars are parked and recognize my car, but it could happen. I have been inviting one of my co-workers to go with me ever since I started coming. She couldn't stand for anyone to see her at MCC. So, there are those who are afraid that they will be assumed to be gay even when they aren't, [and that can] make coming to MCC a political statement.[177]

MCC is identified by most denominations as a "gay" church and some members of MCC fear guilt by association if they attend this denomination. Those that are gay have to confront the possibility that they may be identified as being gay and "outed" by others who become aware of their attending MCC. Others worshiping at MCC, although for spiritual reasons, find that attending is important to them politically. The reasons given for why attending MCC makes a political statement varies. A mother of two school age children, emphatically stated,

> Because I am one of the few parents that go to this church I think I do make a political statement by attending. I am very vocal about the fact

[175] Personal communications, (1998, August).
[176] ____, ibid.
[177] Personal communications, (1998, December).

> that I am a lesbian. My children's school knows. So, I think for me it is a political statement. I can speak out where maybe another person can't speak out.[178]

During the same interview, the song leader, who was the newest member of the board of directors of WFMCC and a high school teacher in the town acknowledged,

> Yes, it makes a political statement (attending MCC) in the fact that I am a professional educator and that I deal with kids and deal with teachers and parents everyday. I still feel comfortable going to church here and telling my friends where I attend.[179]

Likewise, another member who viewed attending MCC as making a political statement is the church pianist who is in the military. In his explanation of how attending was political he asserted,

> Yes, attending MCC makes a political statement. We are saying, "listen folks, we are joining hands across America. We have been told that we can't be Christians, but let me tell you, we are here to say through this church that we can be and we are." The church is open to all.[180]

I followed up by asked the current pastor, Rev. Horvath, if she thought her speaking out on behalf of the church was political. I also asked her to surmise whether the members viewed attending MCC as political and why there were disparities in the answers that the members provided me. Her reply confirmed the perceptions and some of the fears the members have regarding religion and politics and the importance of the maintaining the church as a refuge. She explained,

> Yes, it is (political when she speaks on behalf of the church) and no, they don't realize it (that they are making a political statement by attending MCC). They are scared of the whole concept. But it is remembering that we have a three-pronged gospel: to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ: to build a community; and social Christian action. We were very much criticized for our stance on gays in the military when I was the pastor in Baton Rouge. Some members were saying, "Politics doesn't belong in church. We don't

[178] Personal communications, (1998, December 30).
[179] ____, ibid.
[180] Personal communications, (1998, May 27).

> need to hear about it during announcements or handing out postcards to mail to congressmen." Churches all over the Fellowship are doing things. I don't think it is about people thinking these issues don't belong in church, I think that they are afraid that we are going to get "outed" and they aren't going to have a refuge. It is a hard thing to balance social action and a refuge. That is some of the scariest things that happen with church growth. You want to grow but what happens if you walk in and someone is sitting in your pew? And you get more heterosexuals coming in. I have had to deal with heterosexuals saying I don't want to hear this gay stuff from the pulpit. With all do respect, they can worship anywhere in this town and be the person God created them to be, this is all we [have] got.[181]

The tenets of the denomination appear to be securely established among the congregants. Upon interviewing the Rev. Horvath and several members of the congregation, I find it significant they all specifically mentioned the three-prong gospel espoused by the denomination. Likewise, several interviewees echoed the use of the term "refuge." The banner stating "Our Refuge" hanging on the back wall of the auditorium appears to be more than simply religious ornamentation for many who attend this congregation.

Speaking at WFMCC, Rev. Troy Perry was cognizant of the difficulties associated with what much of society view as a "gay" church. In his opening remarks he recognized this fact by noting,

> I know that this is not *the* (his emphasis) place of gay liberation in America, but to see all of you hear tonight, to see your cars out here in this parking lot with those rainbow bumper stickers, I couldn't get over it. I can't image this is the easiest place in the world, but that you do that, amen. You don't know what it means. I tell people that I realize that sometimes they have to be in the closet, but the Church never can be, amen. When people ask you about your sexuality, there are three answers that I have, one, yes. Number two is, "Why do you ask?" Number three, "None of your business." That is an honest answer, amen.[182]

To illustrate his realization that attending MCC was a political act, Perry related the

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[181] Personal communications, (1998, May 26).
[182] Personal communications, (1996, March 22).

story of a young marine that attended the MCC in Palm Springs. Naval intelligence photographed him going in and standing outside the church building. When the marine was called into the office and asked if he was a homosexual, he informed the intelligence officers that he proudly did his job and would answer question concerning his job performance. They proceeded to inquire if he attended the "queer church." Stating that the church was a Christian church in which no one asked questions concerning your intimate life, the young man claimed all were welcomed to the church. At this point, the inquisitors began asking the marine if he was a homosexual or a heterosexual. The marine declared, "I told you I am not going to answer those kind of questions, it is none of your business." The young man reiterated that he would only answer questions concerning his job. The marine maintained that the questions regarding his sexuality were none of their business. After hours of questioning and taking a polygraph test, the colonel asked the polygraph operator if the marine was lying. The operator replied, "No, sir. It shows he is telling the truth. It is none of your business." As Perry finished this anecdotal tale, the congregants of WFMCC broke into applause in acknowledgement of the courage of the marine and the message that was being sent to anyone judging individuals who attend MCC congregations.[183]

The story of the young marine was significant to several members of the congregation. There were reasons why some members were hesitant to park their cars near the church. For example, one woman was photographed leaving the church by a private detective hired by her former husband. Moreover, several members,

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[183] ____, ibid. According to Rev. Perry, this marine still holds the record for the largest drug bust in American history for the military.

notably teachers and military personnel, made conscious efforts to avoided getting "caught" on camera when the local media attempted to interview members of the congregation following services on two occasions.

From the Refuge to the Activists

The third-prong of gospel mission of UFMCC puts some members in a difficult position. Deciding to become an activist is a risky decision that requires a great amount of courage for many gays. Activism requires an individual to publicly leave the closet. As we have learned, once a refuge is found within the denomination, a sense of community slowly begins to develop for many. For others, the refuge is as far as the trust level develops. For those that are able to actively participate in the church community, a major leap of faith is faced with the third-prong of Christian social action. An important step in personal, spiritual, and social maturity comes in the form of a "calling" to reach beyond the safe walls of the church. A sense of responsibility to the larger gay community begins to be encouraged by members of the church, especially for those who are concerned about social justice. Although the fear of losing one's only refuge outside the privacy of their homes is real for many in the congregation, others are "out" and anxious to move forward in "doing justice." The protective shield from the fires of condemnation can become for some within the denomination the weapon of those called to be firebrands for obtaining rights.

It is not unusual to have a politically active gay community in large cities. In metropolitan areas where congregations of MCC are located, numerous programs addressing social and political causes are common. Because many sexual minorities view themselves as an oppressed segment of society, political activism is seen as a

necessary and urgent aspect of being a gay Christian. For some, spiritual and political liberation is part of the same social gospel. Perry saw the need for activism from the inception of UFMCC. It is, therefore, part of the responsibility of the local pastor to inform, encourage, and inspire the congregational efforts toward involvement in the broader community's gay liberation. It can be argued that activism is much easier to accomplish in metropolitan areas than in more rural a suburban communities. It can be difficult to accomplish these goals in communities with limited resources and support for the gay community. When I asked Rev. Horvath how she perceived WFMCC's role in addressing the third-prong of the gospel, she replied,

> I think our social justice mission will be covert this first year, for the most part. I have been working to get us a place within the religion section of the paper. And have already met the religion editor. My hope, is that in the next year or so, we will be a featured church in the newspaper...For one thing, few people know we are here. My hope is to enter and be "known well" as opposed to jumping in and being "well known." We [need to] have our own "house" in order and that will take some time as we go through this transition of the first nine months or so of my working with the congregation...I am testing the waters in many areas of our church life. I am a strong supporter of justice issues and I believe the church CANNOT (her emphasis) be closeted, however, I'm probably being a bit on the cautious side.[184]

As will be discussed below, the transition Rev. Horvath mentioned would be put on the fast track and the nine months transition would be shorten to two months.

It can be a leap of faith and an act of courage to leave the safety of the refuge provided by MCC and to become actively involved in the struggle for gay rights. Showing appreciation for gay men and lesbians who are willing to fight discrimination and oppression in society is important for building and empowering a social or political movement. While attending the South Central District Conference for MCC (SCDC) in Austin, Texas, the members of WFMCC observed a

demonstration of appreciation for acts of courage. During the 1996 SCD conference, Margo Frasier was recognized as the Democrat party's candidate for sheriff of Travis County that includes the city of Austin. Frasier, an out lesbian, attended the conference's Sunday morning worship service with her female partner. The congregation considered her primary election victory a sign of progress in the fight against homophobia. The announcement of her candidacy brought a warm round of applause from the congregation.[185] A second example of the South Central District's appreciation of gay men and lesbians who are willing to take a stand for social justice issues came during the conference banquet. State representative, Glen Maxey,[186] was the recipient of the Justice Award for the use of his talents in fighting anti-homosexual legislation in Texas.[187] Such recognition serves to encourage others in the Fellowship to take up the cause of "doing justice." According to Rev. Wilson, the denominations is "called to address injustice wherever it may be found and to take a bold stand on behalf of those in need."[188] Examples of UFMCC's social justice efforts have included: (1) increasing the funds set aside for the Food Stamp Program to restore benefits to working low-income families; (2) promotion of women's human rights and gender parity through structural reform of the United Nations; (3) racial reconciliation through recognition and support of the Clinton White House's "Initiative on Race"; (4) Kosovo refugees; (5) independence for East Timor, and (6)

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[184] Personal communications, (1998, March 28).
[185] Frasier was elected Travis County Sheriff in the general election. Her life partner stood with her when she was sworn into office.
[186] Maxey was a three-term congressman at the time of the 1996 conference.
[187] Personal communications. Serving as justice minister, Mel White presented the award.
[188] Personal communications. N. Wilson. An Action Alert: To U.S. Residents and U.S.-based Activists (2001, July 25). E-mail correspondence.

nuclear disarmament.[189] Although the UFMCC does take stands on such issues, the denomination has a propensity to focus more energy on concerns relevant to the GLBT community.[190]

The Church as a Source of Political Information

Successful social and political activism requires well-informed participants. Churches have long been a source for political information and have attempted to educate its congregants on the issues. By contributing to a clearer understanding of the purposes and the strategies for activism, churches enable social movements and activists to become an intelligent voice who are capable of addressing the inequities faced by the oppressed and disenfranchised members of society. For example, the Black churches continue to provide information regarding civil rights. Evangelical Protestant denominations and the Catholic Diocese speak out on social-political

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[189] ____, ibid. Rev. Perry, on behalf of UFMCC's "deep and abiding commitment to social justice on behalf of all people" sent a letter of support, dated June 11, 1997, to Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations Secretariat encouraging the Secretary-General to implement the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action. The Beijing Platform goals included: 1. Strengthen the agency committed to the advancement of women within the Secretariat by increasing its resources and authority; 2. Provide a significant women's structure for each of the major operational units of the United Nations; 3. Increase the number of women who are appointed to be UN resident coordinators in order to implement the UN's commitment to gender parity at every level of operation. T. Perry, "Correspondence from Troy Perry to the UN Secretary-General." (1997, June 11). Retrieved on July 19, 2001 on http://www.ufmcc.com/united.htm. UFMCC encouraged the denomination's congregations to honor Pres. Clinton's request for an examination of the state of race relations. Rev. Perry encouraged the congregations to set aside the weekend of June 11-14, 1998 to offer prayers and sermons highlighting the important work yet to be done in healing our society through racial reconciliation. T. Perry, "Clinton, Perry Call for Prayer for Racial Reconciliation." (1997, June 4). Retrieved on July 19, 2001 from http://www.ufmcc.com/racial.htm. Similarly, Perry requested the UFMCC congregations to set aside Sunday April 11, 1999 as a Day of Prayer for the Albanian refugees and for an end to the war in Kosovo. T. Perry, "On the Human Tragedy of Kosovo." (1999, April 8). Retrieved July 19, 2001 from http://www.ufmcc.com/kosovo.htm. Regarding East Timor, Perry asked that the entire MCC join the Australian district of the denomination in prayer for justice and for the slaughter to stop. "A Message from Rev. Troy D. Perry." Retrieved on July 19, 2001 from http://www.ufmcc.com/timor.htm. In each of these messages to the congregations, Perry offered information on the actual efforts and/or atrocities that were occurring.

[190] Hate crime legislation, AIDS funding and research, same-gender marriage, adoption and child custody for gay parents, and gays being allowed to openly serve in the military are examples of issues that the denomination speaks out on and encourages its congregants to become involved in politically (Personal communications).

issues such as abortion and homosexuality. The Christian Coalition distributes voter guides rating candidates voting records and views on issues that are of importance to conservative denominations. The sermons offered by churches are an obvious source of disseminating politically relevant information. Although this is not the primary purpose of churches, the church as a common meeting house has served in this capacity throughout history. Congregants can also obtain political information through church bulletins, notice boards, announcements, and small group social interaction.[191] Djupe, Grant, and Anderson argue that we can expect three possible reactions to the exposure to political information through the church. First, political information could increase the probability of the participation of its membership based on existing desires to participate. Second, those with desire to participate will have their decisions to participate reinforced to the degree they find support among fellow members of the congregation. Third, the information disseminated by the church will cause congregants to seriously consider the mobilizing information provided. However, the congregant may find support among the membership for inaction, or the discouragement of particular actions.[192]

The ways that religious context might affect participation suggests an examination of the amount of encouragement, the degree of reinforcement, and importance of consideration. The 1996 SCD conference provided a forum for dissemination of information for the purpose of mobilization. During a plenary

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[191] K. Wald, D. Owen, and S. Hill, "Churches as Political Communities." *American Political Science Review* 82, (1988): p. 533; C. Gilbert, (1993) *The Impact of Churches on Political Behavior: An Empirical Study*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood; P. Djupe, (1997), "Church Involvement and Political Behavior." Ph.D. Dissertation. Washington University, St. Louis.

[192] P. Djupe, J. Grant and W. Anderson, *Churches and Political Participation: Mobilization Reinforcement, and Prophetic Challenge*. Paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association. Boston, (1998, September 3rd-6th), pp. 3-4.

session, members of WFMCC were among the congregations to which Rev. White issued an urgent call for social justice. He asked those in attendance to pre-view the video that he had prepared as a response to what he considered flagrant examples of intolerance broadcast to the public by Pat Robertson's *700 Club*. White informed the audience that he had started monitoring Robertson's *700 Club* in 1992 for examples of intolerance. Having video-tapped segments of what he considered Robertson's "most dangerous and misleading rhetoric," White produced a 29-minute video, *The Rhetoric of Intolerance: An Open Letter Video to Pat Robertson*. In the video, White provided 38 instances of what he considered Robertson's false and inflammatory rhetoric.

The video indicated the denomination's concerns of intolerance that reaches beyond the GLBT community including other religions, and Robertson's growing "enemies list" of women's rights, separation of church and state, pro-choice organizations, and other groups of the political left. A large portion of the "open letter" video addressed what White regarded as misinformation and biases reporting on the part of Robertson. Evidence to support UFMCC's commitment to social justice and mobilization of its congregants can be illustrated by providing exchanges captured by the video shown during the plenary at the South Central District Conference. The video contained a large segment in which Robertson voiced concerns about homosexuality. Robertson claimed,

> Terrible heartache is being visited upon homes by the spread of homosexuality...The motives behind the UN Conference for Women have lethal implications about the spread of homosexuality through the world...Did you see the article published by Planned Parenthood that we must encourage more homosexuality in order to cut down on population growth. I am absolutely persuaded that one of the reasons so many lesbians are in the

> forefront of the pro-choice movement is because being a mother is the unique characteristic of motherhood. These lesbians will never be mothers naturally; so they don't want anybody else to have that privilege either.[193]

White responded to Robertson's commentary by admonishing,

> Do you hear yourself? Trashing fellow Americans by distorting their positions and questioning their sincerity...The "soul force" principles of Jesus, Gandhi, and King say that I can't give up on you. So, here we go again, I'm hoping that this short video is helping you understand the issues I want desperately to discuss, especially those issues that concern my lesbian sisters and gay brothers, like homosexuality and the Bible.[194]

Pre-viewing the video at the conference allowed White to promote his "soul force" principles. Information regarding the White's Justice Ministry and the "soul force" principles were made available to those in attendance.

An important subject to this predominately homosexual denomination is providing an HIV and AIDS ministry for its members and the broader community. In a lead in to a segment of the *700 Club* dealing with AIDS, the Christian Broadcast Network reported the gay leaders were greeted at White House by guards wearing rubber gloves. The guards, according the report, were afraid of contracting the AIDS virus. An investigation was called for because the guests were offended. Robertson responded to the report by laughing and asserting, "Keep those rubber gloves on fellows. You don't have to get AIDS." Robertson began his commentary by stating,

> Tonight we take a personal look at homosexuals that are suffering the ultimate consequences of their behavior. The nightmare of AIDS." God doesn't hesitate to bring judgment lest it spread. And obviously with homosexuality it is bringing terrible disease on people. Not just AIDS but many other forms of intestinal disease. Various other types of so called sexually transmitted disease. This whole concept of safe sex is nonsense. There is no such thing as safe sex. This is promiscuity and I don't care how it's practiced, there's no such thing as safety. They [homosexuals] are killing themselves at a rapid rate. It's a terrible tragedy and we as a nation refuse to treat HIV and AIDS as

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[193] M. White, (producer), *The Rhetoric of Intolerance*, (transcript), (1996), pp. 13, 16.
[194] ____, ibid., p. 13.

a communicable disease. We treat it as a civil right and it is outrageous.[195]

In response to the Robertson's comments, White accused the program of passing on dangerous misinformation about HIV and AIDS that generated fear and hate of gay men and lesbians. Attempting to offer a correction, White admonished Robertson,

> Your little comment reinforces at least two tragic misunderstandings: first, that gay men and lesbians should be feared because they carry AIDS; and secondly, that the disease can be spread through casual contact. Both assumptions are untrue. If ever the world needed truth it is now. Instead, you are using your powerful voice to spread deadly untruth. And worse, you are creating fear, distrust, and intolerance when the world needs compassion and understanding.[196]

The video pre-view at the South Central District Conference was met with sustained applause. White announced that the pre-viewed video would be the actual copy sent to Pat Robertson's organization. The showing of the video solicited a discussion of the denomination's role in "doing justice." Several in attendance, including members of WFMCC, requested information on how to secure a copy of the video.[197] White's plenary session and the material which were made available to MCC members and guests exemplifies the Fellowship's determination to inform its membership and assist in developing the skills necessary to actively pursue social

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[195] ____, ibid., p. 16.

[196] ____, ibid.

[197] The video was free to congregations and individuals upon request. I ordered the video and upon receipt of the video, discovered a special edition of a journal, *The Justice Report*,[197] was included with the order. The journal provided a users guide that contained the following: (1) a list of suggestions for using the video more effectively; (2) a sample press release for local newspapers; (3) suggestions for sharing the video with others; (4) ideas on how to help radio and television reporters write about intolerance; (5) names, telephone numbers, and addresses of people to contact, and (6) sources to access more information on the issues raised by the video. More than 1,000 requests were received for the video from media and justice-seeking groups. In addition, the *Justice Report* stated that thousands of individuals signed the petition titled "To Condemn the False and Inflammatory Anti-Homosexual Campaign of Pat Robertson." Such indirect, grassroots action is frequently employed by social movements. C. Johnson, *Justice Report*. Special Edition, (1996), p. 10.

justice through individuals and the congregations.[198]

White has continued to organize social action efforts on behalf of UFMCC.[199] WFMCC along with all the congregations of the denomination are kept informed and are encouraged to participate in White's Justice ministry. The "JusticeNet" web site provides continual updates of his efforts to secure civil rights for all. Furthermore, other sources of information such as congregational newsletters keep members current on the social activism that is occurring throughout the denomination.

The local newsletters offered information concerning the struggles of other gay Christians around the country. To illustrate the denomination's appreciation for those assisting in the struggle of gay rights, the following excerpt from a WFMCC newsletter article is offered. White wrote,

> On May 5, 1998...another name was added to the growing list of heroic heterosexuals who have made great sacrifices on behalf of God's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered children...Rev. Jimmy Creech met with bishop Martinez and was informed that he will NOT be re-appointed to First United Methodist Church of Omaha, Nebraska.[200]

The article discussed Rev. Creech's violation of the United Methodist Church's ban on the performance of same sex-marriages. White attended the United Methodist Church trial of Creech and offered a copy of his videotaped interview with

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[198] In 1996, White asked Robertson to meet with him to view and discuss the video. Robertson again refused. White leased a hotel conference room in Virginia Beach and screened the tape for the public and the media. Robertson and other conservative leaders continued to ignore White's appeal for a meeting, ibid.

[199] White officially resigned as the volunteer Justice Minister for UFMCC in July 1999. White and his partner Gary Nixon launched Soulforce, Inc. to help mobilize and train people of faith to do justice by applying the principles of relentless nonviolent resistance to the liberation of sexual minorities. White states that he is not ending the relationship with UFMCC, but simply taking the message of nonviolent resistance to the larger ecumenical and interfaith communities. He is teaching Soulforce workshops and seminars, speaking in churches and synagogues, on college and university campuses, and at pride and justice events. Through the Soulforce, Inc. web site eight-week, seventeen email course, it has been reported that White has trained five thousand people in nonviolent resistance. "Dr. Mel White Resigns UFMCC Justice Ministry," *Soulforce*, (1999, July 19). Retrieved on July 19, 2001 from http://soulforce.org/resignation.html.

Creech conducted on the eve of the denominational trial. The video is part of UFMCC Soul Force ministry. The article described the video as a powerful tool for sharing the truth about gays with those "who are victims of untruth."[201] The article concluded by recommending that members share the video with friends and family, PFLAG groups, community centers, school and church libraries, other faith or activist groups, and with local cable access or independent television stations in the area. Such articles not only inform members of the problems facing social justice concerns, but also offer ideas on how to participate in social activism.

Politics from the Pulpit

Religion and politics are intertwined. Religious beliefs influence government policies and politics impact prayers offered, monies collected, and sermons preached. While observing the local congregation, I witnessed the pastor's presentation of a Gay Pride sermon. In the sermon, Rev. Horvath recounted the history of the gay rights movement. The service offered examples of the church's role in what appeared to be an effort to provide political information and spiritual motivation. The historical aspects of the sermon assisted the congregation in gaining a more in-depth understanding and appreciation for pioneers in the gay rights struggle. The service was intended, according to the pastor, to inspire and motivate the members to participate in Christian social action. A liturgical candle lighting and congregational reading ceremony was included in the service. Four candles were lit to commemorate the pain of the world in which gays live, the violence threatening the gay community, the suffering and loss in the community due to AIDS, and the internalized

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[200] M. White, *Voice of the Falls*, (1998, May), p. 3.
[201] ____, ibid.

homophobia that limits the efforts of sexual minorities. Candles were also lit to remind the members of the hope that abides in their loving relationships, the assistance by the gay communities' heterosexual heroes in fighting injustices, the courage of the leadership offered by gay heroes, and the gay men and lesbians of faith who made it possible for the congregation's members to realize that they could be both gay and also people of faith.

Such services reinforce my assertion that congregations of the UFMCC are providing a unique service to the gay community that other gay organizations neglect. A spiritual faith that enhances cognitive liberation, dignity, and self-respect through love has the potential to bring a heightened level of legitimacy and respectability to the movement. It is possible that a more disruptive radical gay rights political action groups such as the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP)[202] and Queer Nation[203] may not provide the level of respectability that some in the movement deem necessary for achieving liberation. Many within the denomination are conventional and are offended by the rowdy public protests conducted in the gay community, as was noted by the negative responses to Rev. Perry's activism early in the denomination's history. The tension between the more conservative members of the GLBT community at its radical elements has been accused of being the reason the movement's progress as been erratic. According to WFMCC's pastor, such

[202] ACT-UP is a direct action group that stages media-attracting demonstrations to raise public awareness about AIDS. (B. Berzon, "Acting Up." In M. Thompson, (Ed.), (1994), pp. 307-308.
[203]Queer Nation formed as a spin-off group of ACT-UP in spring of 1990. It has become known as a colorful and brash vehicle to create awareness through in-your-face tactics. Members of Queer Nation invaded bars and restaurants to hold kiss-ins, dressed in gay regalia and went into suburban shopping malls and dabbled in "outing" (M. Signorile, *Queer in America: Sex, the Media, and the Closets of Power*. New York: Random House, 1993), p. 88.

prejudices have affected her response to "drag queens" and "bull-dykes."[204] During the Gay Pride Sunday sermon, Rev. Horvath called on the congregation to offer respect and gratitude to the more radical members of the gay community. She argued that it was the more radical sexual minorities that inspired the birth of the modern day gay rights movement at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village of New York City.

Encouraging Voting and Participation

Attempting to raise awareness and stimulate involvement, sermons and discussions concerning public issues were presented by both the current and former pastor of WFMCC. In addition to the scheduled announcements, former pastor, Rev. Walker frequently used the pulpit to discuss the concept of a winning teamwork, statistics concerning gay and lesbian teen suicides, and AIDS funding and research efforts. On one occasion, the pastor informed the congregation of Oklahoma House Resolution 1045. Walker explained that it was a non-binding resolution that would prohibit homosexuality from being taught in public schools as an alternative lifestyle. She described the resolution sought to prohibit any adoptions or foster care possibilities for gay men or lesbians in Oklahoma.[205] Rev. Walker encouraged members to attend a scheduled protest rally in Oklahoma. She acknowledged that the legislation would not affect members of the WFMCC congregation specifically, but that such legislation could easily be introduced in Texas as well. She explained

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[204] Refers to gender-bending cross-dressing homosexuals (R. Mohr, *Gay Justice: A Study of Ethics, Society, and Law*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 24. The Stonewall rioters were not white-collar workers; they were Black and Puerto Rican drag queens and working-class lesbians. The rowdy, raucous outrageous, or cross-dressing members of the gay population are as central to the movement as those who are outwardly more conventional and thus more palatable to heterosexuals according to M. Cruikshank, (1992), p. 172.

[205] House Resolution 1045 by House Majority Leader Representative Lloyd Benson, opposed tolerance toward sexual minorities being taught in schools and allowing homosexuals to adopt

attending the Oklahoma rally offered an opportunity to gain experience in the use of techniques for political activism.

Additional efforts to encourage political participation were suggested from the pulpit by the current pastor. Rev. Horvath reminded the congregation although she would love to, she could not tell them who to vote for in an upcoming city council election. However, on a private level, she stated that she would be happy to discuss her opinions of the candidates. She reminded the congregation of the importance of the vote in light of several concerns relating to the GLBT community including access to materials for gay male and lesbian parents at the city library.

Information of a political nature was distributed through the resources of the church. I was able to observe the sharing of information and mobilization of the congregants. Acting on behalf of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), Lois Gallenberger,[206] chapter president of the local PFLAG, continually updates the congregation through her articles in WFMCC's monthly newsletter. Gallenberger forwards the e-mail updates of the national PFLAG organization[207] to WFMCC. Upon receipt of the PFLAG updates, Rev. Horvath forwards the information to members of the local congregation. In addition, Gallenberger secured the national president of PFLAG[208] to speak to the congregation on Mother's day in 1998. The message offered by PFLAG president, McDonald included a discussion of

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children. Resolutions are only positions and do not have the force of law (L Hix, "House to Vote on Resolution About Homosexuality," *The Oklahoma Daily*, 29 (1996, February 6), pp. 102, 1-2.

[206] Gallenberger attends the church along with her husband and gay son.

[207] Thomas Cornell is the Central Field Manger for Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays organization located in Washington, DC. E-mail correspondence from Rev. Horvath, (1999, April 28).

[208] The 1998 national president of PFLAG was Nancy McDonald. McDonald is a mother and grandmother and lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

the importance of loving and accepting children, parents, and friends who are gay or lesbian.

Members of WFMCC did engage in political and social activism. A member of the congregation was observed taking the initiative to encourage political activism. The member downloaded a hate crimes petition that was part of UFMCC's efforts in securing 200,000 signatures encouraging the U.S. Congress to pass hate crimes legislation. Having asked the pastor if she could make an announcement immediately following morning services, the purpose of the petition was explained and signatures were obtained from all attending the morning church service. The need for legislation offering protection for members of the gay community is part of the larger goal of the movement to gain rights based on the "equal protection under the law" clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. From the national to the local level of the UFMCC, the denomination contributes to the effort by stimulating dialogue among the congregants regarding the need to pursue equal rights. This member's effort to get the local level involved was linked directly to the national level of the UFMCC. The information regarding the signature campaign was gathered through the denomination's national web site. The technology that Rev. Perry desired to be used for political activism was being utilized at the grassroots level of the Fellowship.

Recognition of Committed Relationships

As discussed earlier, the UFMCC has placed as one of its top priority the legalization of same-sex marriages. The institution of marriages offers legitimacy to relationship regardless of the actual condition of that union. Although President Clinton's respect for the institution on a personal level has certainly been questioned,

he signed the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996. President Clinton stated, "I remain opposed to same-sex marriage. I believe that marriage is an institution for the union of a man and a woman."[209] To sexual minorities, society seems to discredit their relationships. By refusing to recognize such relationships through the civil and religious institution of marriage, same-gender relationships are not legitimized by the mainstream society. The literature supporting gay rights argues,

> Gay men and lesbians want the right to marry for the same reasons other Americans do: to gain moral, legal, social, and spiritual benefits conferred on the marrying couple and especially on their family unit. The material benefits of marriage are considerable, but it is the moral benefit that is especially attractive to many couples, including gay and lesbian ones. Marriage is, or can be, a moral commitment that two people make to one another. The marriage vow enshrines love, honor, respect, and mutual support and gives people access to resources and community acknowledgement that serve to strengthen their bond...Gay men and lesbians have intimate associations, but do not enjoy the same rights as other Americans to have those associations protected and rewarded by material benefits or moral sanctions.[210]

Marrying could be regarded as a political act, according to Sherman, who acknowledges society understands marriage to mean a greater level of commitment, and a greater level of love, between two people. "If lesbians and gay men cannot marry, then the myth that our relationships are not as meaningful as those of heterosexuals will persist."[211]

The right to marriage is being fought for through the refuge and community of MCC. The absence of the right to marry is at the forefront of the movement's concerns and continues to be addressed by Rev. Perry, Mel White, and the UFMCC

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[209] J. Moss, "Bill Clinton: The Advocate Interview." *The Advocate*, (1996, June 25), p. 50.
[210] M. Nava and R. Dawidoff, *Created Equal: Why Gay Rights Matter To America*, (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1994), pp. 147, 150.
[211] S. Sherman, *Lesbian and Gay Marriages: Private Commitments, Public Ceremonies*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), p. 2.

as a denomination. Over 170 rights are granted by the state at the time of marriage.[212] Gay and lesbian couples' fight for same-sex marriage rights is based on the argument that they are denied due process under the Fourteenth Amendment[213] and the "Full Faith and Credit Clause" of the U.S. Constitution.[214] Each state regulates the marriages of its domiciliaries and decides whether to uphold or invalidate marriages contracted elsewhere, according to the choice-of law theory adopted by the forum. Although states enjoy relative freedom in the choice-of-law realm, the Full Faith and Credit Clause of the United States Constitution[215] provides some constitutional

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[212] According to Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, Incorporated (1995, September), the denial of the right to marry serves to deny an array of legal, economic, and practical benefits enjoyed by married couples. Among these are the rights to: obtain benefits of social security and Medicare; file joint tax returns and receive marriage or family rates or exemptions; joint parenting, adoption, foster care, custody, and visitation; joint insurance policies for home, auto and family health coverage; inherit automatically in absence of a will; secure equitable division of property and determine child custody and support in case of divorce; obtain veteran's discounts on medical care, education, and housing loans; enter jointly into rental leases with automatic renewal rights' automatic right to make medical decisions on partner's behalf in the event of illness; choose a final resting place for a deceased partner; take bereavement or sick leave to care for partner or child; receive spousal exemptions to property tax increases upon the death of a partner; obtain wrongful death benefits for a surviving partner and children; apply for immigration and residency for partners from other countries; obtain domestic violence protection orders, and visit a partner or child in the hospital, and other public institutions. See Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc., "Marriage Project: legal and Economic Benefits." (New York, NY: Marriage Project); S. Sherman, (Ed.), *Lesbian and Gay Marriage: Private Commitments, Public Ceremonies*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), and J. Trosino, (1993), "American Wedding: Same-Sex Marriage and the Miscegenation Analogy. *Boston University Law Review*, 73, (1993): pp. 93-120.

[213] The Fourteenth Amendment states, "[N]or shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

[214] See U.S. Const. Art. IV, s 1. See E. Wolfson, (1994-1995), "Crossing the Threshold": Equal Marriage Rights for Lesbians and Gay Men and the Intra-Community Critique. *Review of Law and Social Change*. NY: New York University, pp. 567-615; S. Buchanan, (1985), "Same-sex Marriages. The Linchpin Issue." *University of Dayton Law Review, 10:3*, pp. 541-573; J. Heeb, "Homosexual Marriage, the Changing American Family, and the Heterosexual Right to Privacy." *Seton Hall Law Review, 24.1*,(1993): 347-393; K Lasson, "Civil Liberties for Homosexuals: The Law in Limbo." *University of Dayton Law Review, 10:3*, (1994-1995), pp. 645-679; D. Gray, "Marriage: Homosexual Couples Need Not Apply." *New England Law Review, 23*, (1988, Autumn), pp. 515-546; C. Lewis, "From This Day Forward: A Feminine Moral Discourse on Homosexual Marriage." *Yale Law Journal, 97:8*, (July 1988), pp. 1783-1803; A. Winer, "Hate Crimes, Homosexuals, and the Constitution." *Harvard Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Law Review, 29:* (1994, Summer), pp. 387-438, and A. Koppelman, "Miscegenation Analogy: Sodomy Law as Sex Discrimination." *The Yale Law Journal, 98:* (1988, November), pp. 145-164).

[215] "Full Faith and Credit shall be given in each State to the public Acts, records, and judicial Proceedings of every other State. And the Congress may by general laws prescribe the Manner in

limitation by requiring in most cases that the forum state honor sister states' acts, records, or judgments. Additionally, when a forum applies its own law instead of another state's law, it may deprive an individual of liberty or property rights, especially involving vested rights or justified expectations of certain economic spousal benefits, thereby violating the parties' due process guarantees. The mandates of the Full Faith and Credit Clause have renewed importance in the hypothetical situation of same-sex marriages becoming possible in one or more states in the near future. Similarly, the protections afforded by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment are more crucial than ever because the incidents of marital status involve tangible economic as well as symbolic benefits in our modern society. In spite of these constitutional reins on a forum's power to apply its own law instead of another state's law in a conflicts context, a trump card remains which, in some circumstances, may allow application of forum law: the public policy exception. In addition to being available in the choice-of-law context, the public policy exception also applies in the constitutional arena. The forum may not therefore, be required to apply the law of a sister state if such law offends a substantial public policy of the forum.[216]

WFMCC ceremonially recognizes the commitment of same-sex couples through holy unions[217] (Appendix J). I was fortunate to witness several holy unions

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which such Acts, records, and Proceedings shall be proved, and the Effect thereof" (U.S. Const., Art IV, §1).

[216]D. Henson, "Will Same-Sex Marriages be Recognized in Sister States?: Full Faith and Credit and Due Process Limitations on States' Choice of Law Regarding the Status and Incidents of Homosexual Marriages Following Hawaii's *Baehr v. Lewin*," *University of Louisville Journal of Family Law*, 32:3, (1994, Summer), pp. 551-600.

[217] At the 2000 Millennium March on Washington it was reported that over 3,000 couples took part in "The Wedding: Now More Than Ever" public demonstration and non-sectarian blessing in celebration of same sex marriage. Perry conducted the demonstration ceremony in front of the Lincoln Memorial

and review videos of additional holy union ceremonies while conducting my research. Having asked Rev. Walker how the church handled the concept of marriage, she informed,

> You know, legally, marriage is not recognized for homosexuals. If a homosexual couple comes to the church as a member or otherwise, seeking to marry, the church provides what is called a "Holy Union." This is the community's religious marriage ceremony. When you have certain moral principles, lacking the civil right to marry legally, the Holy Union is available. Part of the purpose of the ceremony is to illustrate to the gay community your commitment as a couple.[218]

Although holy unions are not legally recognized, the similarities to heterosexual marriage are apparent. Nonetheless, the differences between the two ceremonies are clear. The following overview of a holy union I observed is provided as evidence of the seriousness attached to the ceremony by same-sex couples, the uniqueness of same gender unions, and the level of support offered by the church community.[219] The first thing I observed was the fact that the small church was filled beyond capacity. Guests stood around the edge of the room and out the back door of the building. The size of the crowd was indicative of the support the couple had in engaging in the act of holy union.

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and proclaimed, "We stand here because we know that love makes a family, nothing more, nothing less. We will no longer be silent about the love that dares not speak its name." K. Snow, "Lobbying for Equal Rights and Hundreds of gays "marry" in Washington," CNN.com, (2000, April 30). Retrieved from http://www.ufmcc.com/postreports.htm on July 7, 2001.

[218] Personal communications, (1996, January 22). Rev. Walker and her partner of nine and a half years traveled to Vermont to have a Civil Union during the summer of 2001. Personal communications. (2001, July 17).

[219] Personal communications. (1996, March 7). The immediate difference was noted in the apparel chosen by the wedding party. It appeared, at least in apparel, that some of the female couples were assuming the "butch/fem" roles that have been associated with the gay community. According to Blumenfeld and Raymond the vast majority of women who wear "men's" clothes are not making a statement about their sexual orientation. And "dressing like a man" (whether it is said in reference to a lesbian or heterosexual women) may be less about "trying to be a man" and more about wanting to have the comfort and enhanced social mobility that traditional male clothing affords (Blumenfeld and Raymond, 1988), p. 379.

"Gay weddings" share practices with heterosexual traditions, however, there are some characteristics that are unique to lesbians and gays. Unlike heterosexual couples, it seems common for lesbians and gay men to celebrate their original anniversary--whether the date of first meeting, their first kiss, or moving in together – instead of the wedding anniversary according to the literature. A lesbian or gay wedding is rarely a celebration of a beginning; it is often a celebration of an existing commitment.[220] As the music began, the aunt and mother of "K.S". were escorted to their seats, just as with the groom's parents at traditional heterosexual weddings.[221] "K.S.'s" father followed behind. It appeared that the parents of "K.S." were accepting of the relationship as evidenced by their presence. The second major observation was the absence of the parent's of "C.B." This possibly indicated a rejection of their daughter's orientation or a failure to accept the concept of same-sex marriage. The literature points out that some gay people lose all contact with their families upon "coming out."[222] In addition, many heterosexuals who support equal pay, opportunity for housing and jobs continue to reject the idea of any form of recognition for same-sex couples on the basis of social, political, and religious beliefs.[223]

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[220] Ministers, priests, and rabbis claim the same-sex couples tend to have been together for a much longer time than the straight couples they marry. Because of that, and because there is not the traditional social pressure on the lesbian or gay couple to marry, the clergy feel that same-sex weddings are more often true celebrations of the love in the relationship. (S. Sherman, 1992), p. 4.

[221] In order to protect the anonymity of the individuals observed, initials will substitute for actual names. Actually names will be used only by permission.

[222] I learned that CB's father was a Baptist pastor in another city. He was the pastor in this town while CB was growing up. Blumenfeld and Raymond state that some same-gender families respond with anger or denial or guilt in that perhaps they themselves were somehow responsible. Family members may seek to find an explanation for a daughter or son's sexual orientation, but this is usually an attempt to ascribe blame. In some families, understanding grows over time; in others, reconciliation never occurs. In still others, the knowledge is never shared. (1988), p. 382.

[223] According to a poll conducted May 12-21, 2001, by the Gallup Poll Organization, 85% of the respondents thought homosexuals should have equal rights in terms of job opportunities. However, in a poll conducted January 13-16, 2000, only 34% believe marriage between homosexuals should be

According to Rev. Walker, despite traditional religious views that condemn same-sex marriage, the couple wanted Christ to be the center of the celebration.[224] Upon the entrance of "K.S.", a prayer was offered by Rev. Walker in which she asked God to be present, as the couple was joining together in love, led by the spirit, enriching their lives, and enduring the trial of life together as Christians. It is interesting that the couple desired such a Christ centered ceremony as part of the affirmation of their relation when so much legal and religious resistance exists. Religious organizations condemn same-gender sexual relations and are strongly opposed to same-sex marriages. Regarding religious condemnation, it is argued that the Bible nowhere affirms the moral rightness of same-sex marriage. No scriptural passage even approaches that position. The Bible, Buchanan declares, contains several explicit condemnations of same-gender sexual behavior. The literature states that the current pronouncements of the major branches and denominations of Judaism and Christianity are in accord with Scripture on the issue of same-sex marriage. Research reveals no pronouncements of major branches of Christianity or Judaism that affirms the moral rightness of same-gender sexual conduct or of same-sex marriage.[225] Nonetheless, the ceremony was designed with spirituality as the main focus and fully sanctioned by MCC as a ceremony to be performed by the denominations' pastors.

Outsiders can better grasp the significance of MCC to the GLBT Christian community by becoming aware of the role that the church plays through offering

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recognized by law with the same rights as traditional marriages and 62% felt homosexual marriages should not be recognized by law. (http://gallup.com/poll/indicators/indhomosexual.asp).

[224] The pastor announced that it was the desire of the couple for everyone to remain seated when K. S. entered so the focus could remain on Christ rather than the bride.

refuge and community to those who lack familial bonds with blood relatives. The fact that members of the congregation assumed the role of family in the absence of actual kin was an observed. Upon reaching the front of the church, Rev. Walker announced, "Witness the testimony of two in celebration of love. The Lord participated at the wedding at Galilee and blessed it. We believe the presence of Christ to be real today. Who brings "C.B?" A woman responded, "For all of us who love "C", her friends and I do." It appeared that gay friends substituted for actual kin. This supports the literatures' claim that the gay community creates its own families to compensate for the emotional lose of their blood kin because of rejection, being ostracized, and other factors.[226] The unity among the disenfranchised group appears to be seen as a normal response among minority groups. The literature claims, "gays who are often estranged from blood kin, are more prone to rely on current as well as former lovers, close friends, and neighbors as their social and emotional support system."[227]

The spiritual nature of the holy union ceremony, which I observed at WFMCC was accompanied by supportive symbolic gestures and statements. The minister declared that God was the third partner in the relationship. A scripture was read and then the couple prepared to exchange individual gifts to bless their union. "K.S."

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[225] S. Buchanan, "Same-Sex Marriages: The Linchpin Issue." *University of Dayton Law Review*, 10 no. 3, (1985, Spring): pp. 541-574.

[226] Continuing in the role of family, the holy union reception was held at the pool house of one of the bridesmaids. For a discussion of family of origin and created family see D. Richards, *Identity and the Case for Gay Rights: Race, Gender, Religion as* Analogies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 177, 190; Blumenfeld and Raymond (1988), pp. 382-386; V. Urvashi, *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation*. (New York: Doubleday, 1995), pp. 4-5,46,382; and C. Gingrich, *The Accidental Activist: A Personal and Political Memoir*. (New York: Scribner, 1996), pp. 109, 112-113, and 185-187.

[227] In W. Eskridge, Jr., *The Case for Same-Sex Marriage: From Sexual Liberty to Civilized Commitment*. (New York: The Free Press, 1996), p. 81, the phrases created by anthropologist Kath

offered "C.B." a picture of her family to symbolize the love and acceptance of "C.B." by the family of "K.S." as not only a friend, but also as a life partner. The significance of this gesture is important when we consider the majority of the congregation admitted their families were either unaware, refused to acknowledge, or rejected them because of their sexual orientation.[228] The exchange of symbolic gifts was followed by Rev. Walker offering a prayer of communion and declaring that the communion was the "love of God and you *are* (her emphasis) the people of God."[229] The emphasis appeared to be included to underscore MCC's message of inclusion and to offer a public statement of the legitimacy, integrity, and acceptance of the relationship before God. The pastor served the communion to the couple and prayed with her arms around both "K.S." and "C.B.".[230] After the couple kissed, Rev. Walker stated, "I present to you spouses in Holy Union by the authority vested in me as a pastor of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches." Following a closing prayer, the couple turned to guests' applause and exited.[231] The denomination and the couples' church family both offered their blessings and helped to empower the couple and provide a sense of legitimacy that secular gay organizations do not offer. The spiritual recognition of the union has no alternative in

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Weston, "families we choose" is used to describe fluid alliances independent of the ties imposed by blood and by law.

[228] The couple exchanged Bibles to symbolically serve as their weapons to fight off what would destroy their love of God or each other. The Bibles were also said to represent the saving knowledge of hope for all people through his word and the gift of Jesus Christ.

[229] This statement is a slight variation on the words used during communion each Sunday in which the pastor, in regards to the open invitation to take communion, states, "The love of God for the people of God. Come share the feast." (Personal communications.).

[230] The couple looked lovingly into each other eyes as the wedding party and all of the guests were served communion. According to the couple, the joining together in communion with each other and the congregation symbolized a deep commitment to Christianity and the church community in this couple life.

[231] Personal communications, (1996, March 7).

the secular community. However, judges, justices-of-the-peace, and clergy are permitted to perform civil unions under Vermont's civil union law[232] (Appendix K).

Dissolution of Holy Union

The legitimacy bestowed on holy unions is more than symbolic to many members of MCC. I inquired as to whether a holy union was more of a social ritual than a binding or religious commitment. Both marriage and holy union are societal means of acknowledging the relationship. While marriage may or may not have religious connotations, holy union, as its name implies does carry religious significance. The major difference is the absence of any legal rights or obligations for the holy union. Therefore, I thought since same-sex marriages are not legally recognized, perhaps couples simply went their separate ways if the relationship ended. Since the union is not legally binding, I was interested in learning if there was any symbolic means comparable to divorce for terminating a holy union. When asked if there was any action similar to "divorce" for a holy union, Rev. Walker replied, "Yes, there is a process that called a "Dissolution of Holy Union" (Appendix L). This process is in some ways more complicated than a divorce, unless the divorce involves children." I discovered that some couples do seek dissolution, while others do not. However, Rev. Walker insisted, "I will not conduct a Holy Union if either of the partners seeking the ceremony has been married and have not finalized a divorce

[232]Vermont's Civil Union Act took effect July 1, 2000. The bill was passed as a response to the "constitutional violation found by the Vermont Supreme Court in *Baker v. State*, and to provide eligible same-sex couples the opportunity to 'obtain the same benefits and protections afforded by Vermont law to married opposite-sex couples' as required by Chapter 1, Article 7th of the Vermont Constitution." State of Vermont. House of Representatives. Brief Summary of H.847 as Passed by the General Assembly. Retrieved on August 3, 2001 from http://www.leg.state.vt.us/baker h-847exsum.htm.; Personal communications. (2001, July 29).

or previously held a holy union and failed to go through the dissolution process."[233] Although not legally binding, the UFMCC perceives holy unions as church sanctioned ceremonies with a procedure for terminating the relationship. The dissolution is considered to bring more legitimacy to the holy union.

Legal Protections

The emotional and spiritual legitimacy that a holy union brings to a same-sex couple within the church and the GLBT community holds only symbolic meaning when it tested by the law. Despite signing the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996, President Clinton in 2000, addressed the question of whether he believed Americans will ever come to the point were they find same-sex marriage acceptable. Clinton remarked,

> Gay couples who have manifested a genuine commitment should have all the legal options that others do, whether it is how they leave their estates or cover their partners with health insurance on the job or such simple things as the right to visit hospital beds during family visiting hours. The main thing is that we recognize the integrity of commitments and the rights citizens have to leave their property and take care of the health of people they love. One of the things that may impact this debate in the future is the parallel debate that's going on in some places still over adoptions, because you see more and more gay couples adopting kids. Very often they're children who wouldn't be taken by other people. And I think that's going to have an impact on people. I've always felt that all those anti-adoption laws were wrong...My view is that people who have a relationship ought to be able to call it whatever they want. And insofar as it's sanctioned by a religious ceremony, that's up to the churches involved. I think that what happened in Congress was that a lot of people who didn't want to be antigay didn't fell that they should be saying that as a matter of law, without regard to what various churches or religions or others thought, that the United States policy was that all unions that call themselves marriages are, as a matter of law, marriages. I think that what we ought to do is to get the legal rights straightened out and let time take its course, and we'll see what happens.[234]

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[233] Personal communications., (2001, January 18).

[234] C. Bull, "Triumphs, Trials and Errors." *The Advocate*, (2000, November 7), p. 38.

The legal protections mentioned by Clinton are of vital importance to many members of WFMCC. Indeed, obtaining legal protections are often necessary to compensate for the lack of political and social rights granted gay and lesbian couples. Heterosexual marriages and the familial association created provide recognition and protections not afforded gay unions. Despite MCC's sanctioning of holy unions, no legal rights are granted by this ceremony. When addressing the concept of social justice, Rawls recognizes the fundamental importance of the family as a "major social institution" and reasons, "family institutions are just."[235] However, feminist theory argues,

> By ignoring alternative family structures, and the injustices within the gendered nuclear family, Rawls fails to distance himself from cultural heterosexism. In making such a claim about the family, and using it as an example of a justice institution, Rawls limits the historical and cultural knowledge to a heterosexist context...this failure to address heterosexism lessens the effectiveness of Rawls's theory as an appropriate reference for gay and lesbian activists demanding 'justice.'[236]

Gay men and lesbians are not opposed to the concept of family; in fact, the concerns over parental rights and recognition of same-sex partnerships have remained on the cutting edge of legislative and legal debate. Recognizing that the local gay and lesbian community shared these concerns, the board of directors scheduled a seminar for members and friends of WFMCC. The attorney led workshop provided an opportunity to address the third prong of the gospel message of the denomination. I

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[235] J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 7, 490.

[236] A. Wilson, "Their Justice: Heterosexism in A Theory of Justice," in A. Wilson, (Ed.), *A Simple Matter of Justice?: Theorizing Lesbian and Gay Politics*. (New York: Cassel, 1995), 152. For additional feminist theorists discussion of justice and gender see E. Fox-Genovese, *Feminism Without Illusions*, (Treble Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 238; S.M. Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family*, (New York: Basic Books, 1989), and C. Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988). For a defense of Rawls' inclusive theory of justice including sexual orientation, see M. Kapian, "Autonomy, equality, community: the question of lesbian and gay rights," *Praxis International*, (1991), p. 238.

attended the daylong workshop and offer a glimpse of the event to indicate the pertinence of the issues addressed by the church leadership. WFMCC utilized the resources available in the community to provide information to assist in protecting the relationships of its congregants. The workshop offers another example of how MCC contributes to the gay rights movement by providing legal advice on protecting and empowering GLBT people.

As mentioned in chapter three and again in this chapter, gaining the right to marry is currently a top priority of the UFMCC. Perry asserts, "We will fight every step of the way, even though for many gay people, including myself, legal marriage is not a top priority."[237] Knowing what procedures are necessary to protect same-sex relationships and acting on this knowledge is empowering. The lack of legal recognition for same-sex relationships takes a heavy toll on lesbians and gay men. The legitimacy of the relationship through which many gay and lesbian couples define themselves is denied and condemned. According to Rubenstein, the "search for legal recognition of same-sex relationships is in part a search for 'affirmation by the state,'[238] through which lesbians and gay men can become 'upstanding citizens, building blocks of society, and pillars of the community.'"[239] Marriage is not mere form. Society recognizes its importance not only rhetorically, but also with preferred legal benefits.[240] The rights that come automatically to a husband and wife with marriage are not available to gay male and lesbian couples without help of legal counsel. The absence of legal recognition has practical repercussions because gay

[237] Dart, (2000, March 21-28), p. 7.
[238] H. Dalton, "Reflections on the Lesbian and Gay Marriage Debate." *Law and Sexuality* 1 (1991), p. 7.
[239] W. Rubenstein, (Ed.), *Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Law*, (New York: The New Press, 1993), p. 377.

men and lesbians are usually treated as "single" for purposes of taxes, immigration, tort law, criminal law, government benefits, and housing restrictions. The struggle for the right to marry has ramifications beyond a romantic and religious confirmation of the relationship. Without the benefits that come with state sanctioned marriage, the gay community has to seek other remedies to protect their relationships. The board of directors of WFMCC had requested the congregation to submit questions for the attorney[241] prior to the seminar. Some of the questions addressing same-gender couples' concerns included: (1) critical care medical decisions, (2) funeral arrangements, and (3) guardianship and child custody.

A holy union provides no legal rights to hospital visitation, obtaining medical information, or making decision on behalf of an ill same-sex partner. During the workshop, a member of WFMCC recalled how when she was in "pre-op" prior to surgery, her partner of five years was not given the opportunity by the woman's parents to spend time with her immediately prior to the operation. Although, it was nice to have her parents near, the comforting and encouragement needed from her partner was missed. In order to rectify such situations, the decisions regarding medical treatment that are routinely granted to the person receiving the care, the spouse, or nearest relative if need arises, must be handled through legal channels for non-traditional couples. The following question is an example of the concerns facing same-gender couples. One of the congregants asked, "if she (read: partner) goes to the hospital and the things she requested not be done such as tube feeding etceteras

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[240] Nava and Dawidoff, (1994), p. 146.

[241] Personal communications, Seminar on Legal Protection (1996, June 8). The Attorney, Charlie O Farris, was the first African American attorney in the state of Texas. She was also the first single mother to adopt a child in the state.

are done, can I stop this medical treatment from being carried out?" The attorney replied, "You have to have a universal power of attorney document. If you have some one who is terminally ill or elderly, put the document in your purse or glove box. You aren't going to talk the doctor out of it."[242] The importance of having some legal rights in order to make possible life and death decisions for a same-sex partner is obvious. An alternative legal remedy to obtaining universal power of attorney is petitioning for guardianship.[243]

Death itself can become a legal issue for gay couples. Funeral arrangements and will probation protection raises additional concerns for same-sex couples. I was informed that it is not unusual for the MCC member's families to deny surviving same-sex partners any role in funeral arrangements. The church often resorts to a memorial service to accommodate the wishes of the surviving partner. Concerned about participating in decisions upon the death of one of the partners, a couple asked.

> One of the things that we are concerned about is how a person who is not in a legal marriage...will they let me specify what I want and if there are any other decisions to be made [can] my spouse makes them? Would that [our decisions] hold up if our families came in [making demands]? Recently, the funeral homes said we have to do what the nearest of kin wants. I know of a situation where the funeral was to be held up until they probated the will. Would power of attorney do any thing to expedite the funeral? How do we protect ourselves from that moment of death until the will is probated?[244]

Again the attorney had to inform the audience that legal remedy was the only means

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[242] Personal communications, ibid.

[243] *In Re Guardianship of Kowalski*, 478 N. W. 2d 790 (Minn. Ct. App. 1991). In 1983, Sharon Kowalski received brain injuries in an automobile accident, which left her in a wheelchair, impaired her ability to speak, and caused severe loss of short-term memory. The case of *In Re Guardianship of Kowalski*, Karen Thompson, Kowalski's lesbian partner of four years petitioned for guardianship. Kowalski's parents and later a family friend also petitioned for guardianship. The court battles faced by Thompson in her effort to receive legal guardianship of Kowalski were not resolved until 1991, when the court awarded Thompson guardianship of her lesbian partner on the grounds that they constituted a "family of affinity" (p. 797).

[244] Personal communications, (1996, June 8).

to secure that a couple's wishes would be observed upon death. Any arrangements made by the couple would need to be placed in the agreement. The lawyer warned,

> The unfortunate thing is that, generally you can't get a court interpretation in time for the funeral. You can do this in your will that your executor would have exclusive rights. It has to be filed and on record at least two weeks before the will can be probated. Power of attorney dies when you die. You do it by putting in all the verbiage with the funeral home. State what you want in your contract. If enough of you band together and go to some funeral home that wants to contract with you and if this doesn't happen with the first one, we will tell everyone else to pull that money out.[245]

Failure to plan ahead for the possibility of a legal battle with the family of a gay or lesbian partner can place an extra burden on the surviving spouse at a vulnerable time.

It has been estimated that approximately three million gay men and lesbians in the United States were parents in 1987.[246] The dissolution of heterosexual marriages is where the law first encountered lesbian and gay parents. In custody cases involving the biological parents, the court in rendering its opinion is guided by the "best interest of the child."[247] While conducting research, I observed a woman in a custody battle for her child with her ex-husband. The stress and stain took its toll on the mother as she often sat in church weeping and was visibly emotionally and physically exhausted. She continually requested the church's prayers for her legal battle. Unfortunately for her, the woman did not win her custody suit. During the question and answer session of the workshop, a parent put a slightly different twist on the parent custody. The young mother seeking information concerning her lesbian

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[245] Personal communications, ibid.

[246] Harvard Law Review, (Eds.), *Sexual Orientation and the Law*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 119.

[247] ____, ibid. See A. Haralambie, "Handling Child Custody Cases" § 3.06, at 24, § 7.07, at pp. 82-83 (1983).

partner's custodial rights inquired,

> I have two biological children with my former husband. He does not want custody of the kids, he tells them that, me also. I garnish his wages, which gives him still rights to them. He doesn't act on the rights but he still has them. If a car hits me tomorrow and he doesn't want them, do they automatically go to him or would they stay where they are unless he fought for them?[248]

The matter was not as simple as the mother had hoped. Most courts follow the "parent's rights doctrine" awarding custody to a non-parent only if the parent is shown to be unfit.[249] The attorney informed her,

> Even if the parent relinquishes custodial care, it still isn't official until it is made legal. Jurisdiction goes where the children are. Whoever you designate as their guardian. If you don't designate your partner, then your family or his family has the right. He could contest his family if wanted to get them.[250]

Guardianship gives rise to additional legal concerns for same-gender couples. The law governing disputes between a parent and a non-parent can vary depending on the state. Generally, a presumption exists in favor of granting custody to the birth parent.[251]

The availability of reproductive technologies has increased the number of single adults, male-female, and same-sex couples who are bearing and raising children. Gay male and lesbian couples are able to bring children into their relationships through *in vitro fertilization*, insemination, and surrogate motherhood. Several couples who attend WFMCC have one or more children conceived by artificial insemination. Lesbians have increasingly used alternative insemination, as a way to become mothers. Legal rights of the sperm donor, the birth mother, and the

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[248] Personal communications, (1996, June 8).
[249] *Harvard Law Review*, (Eds.), (1989), p. 124. See H. Clark, "The Law of Domestic Relations in the United States," *supra* note 4, § 19.6, at 823, (2d edition), (1988).
[250] Personal communications, (1996, June 8).

co-parent can result in a risk of litigation. Such non-traditional lesbian-centered families face the interpretation of the court. Because many in the GLBT community are choosing to have children or bring children from previous relationships into the partnership, the workshop provided an opportunity for members to seek advice. A couple attending the legal rights workshop asked the following question, "Is there some kind of document where we can share child custody in a same sex relationship...it is artificial insemination, no father. Can I show she also has custody, or would that take my rights away and give them to her?"[252] The attorney suggested, "What you could do... I believe it could be a joint custody."[253]

An area not discussed directly, perhaps because of the age of those in attendance, was the difficulties faced in the senior years of a gay or lesbian's life. Two-thirds of people over 65 in the United States live with a spouse or relative.

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[251] *Harvard Law Review*, (Eds.), p. 119. See H. Clark, "The Law of Domestic Relations in the United States," § 19.6, at 821 (2nd edition), (1988); *infra* (p. 124).

[252] Personal communications., (1996 June 8).

[253] *Harvard Law* Review, (Eds.), Ibid., Footnote 162, (p. 142). See J. Schulenburg, *supra* note 102, at p. 90. According to the literature, if the legal parent dies, or the couple separates, the co-parent can argue that he or she is a psychological parent of the child. The chance of obtaining legal custody if the biological parent dies depends on whether the other biological parent is a legal parent and petitions for custody. *Harvard Law Review* (Eds.), (1989), p. 148. The courts have addressed the legal concerns of reproductive technology in a variety of cases. For example, in the cases of *Jhordan C. v. Mary K.* (1986) and *Nancy S. v. Michele G.* (1991) questions concerning whether the donor is the father, family autonomy, procreative choice, dissolution of lesbian and gay families, and visitation rights reached the courts. *Jhordan c. v. Mary K.*, 224 Cal. Rptr. 539 (Ct. App. 1986); *Nancy S. v. Michele G.*,279 Cal. Rptr 212 (Ct App. 1991). See *Kulla v. McNultry*, 472 N. W.2d 175 (Minn. Ct. App. 1991) (co-parenting does not have standing to acquire custody or assert visitation rights); *In re Alison D. v. Virginia M.*, 572 N.E.2d 27, 28 (N.Y. 1991)(co-parent has no standing to bring visitation petition); *A.C. v. C. B.*, 829 P.2d 660 (n.W. Ct. App. 1992) (granting standing to non-biological lesbian mother to seek continued relationship with child she co-parented). See Rubenstein, (1993), footnote 1, (558). Because there have been relatively few cases addressing these issues, legal precedent is not thoroughly established. Additional concerns arise with foster care and adoption. Both are becoming additional legal means used by same-sex couples that wish to become parents as in the 1991 case of *Sporleder v. Hermes*. *Sporleder v. Hermes (In re Z.J.H.)*, 471 N.W.2d (W9s. 1991). The Supreme Court of Wisconsin held that a co-parent does not have standing to acquire custody or assert visitation rights. Rubenstein, (1993), footnote 3, (pp. 559-560). Because there have been relatively few cases addressing these issues, legal precedent is not thoroughly established. Additional concerns arise with foster care and adoption. Both are becoming additional legal means used by same-sex couples that wish to become parents as in the 1991 case of *Sporleder v. Hermes*.

According to studies in New York and Los Angeles, sixty-five to seventy-five percent of elderly gay and lesbian people live alone.[254] Because gays and lesbian do not receive survivors' benefits from Social Security or most pension plans when their partners die, they may be poorer than their heterosexual peers that are widowed. During my period of observation, I did hear several in the congregation raise concerns regarding the growing need for retirement and rest homes for the gay and lesbian community. The UFMCC has begun to include information regarding the development of gay retirement colonies in the denomination's newsletters.[255]

The issues raised during the workshop indicated the role of community that the church was playing in address concerns of the members beyond the spiritual needs and underscored for many of the congregants the need for political and legal remedies to protect same-sex relationships outside the refuge of the church. The preparation and conducting of the workshop as well as the knowledge gained helped to equip the members with skills and information necessary to advance their individual and organizational efforts toward obtaining legal protections. I am aware of at least two couples who contacted attorneys following the workshop to begin establishing legal protections for their relationships, children, and property. The cost and time involved to secure the legal protections as a couple or family for the GLTB community causes many to become frustrated with what they perceive as an inequity of civil protections under the law. The insights gained through church sponsored

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[254] D. Clendinen, "As Hard to Grow Old as It Was to Be Young." *The New York Times*. (2001, January 6), p. A1.

[255] A retirement community for gay men and lesbians has been opened in Bradenton, Florida. As with other retirement communities, will benefit those who are financially able to afford such accommodation. Poorer gays will likely live out their last years in elderly housing or nursing homes. This information was provided to congregations in the South Central District of UFMCC through the monthly newsletter. See SCDUFMCC@aol.com, Monthly newsletter. (2001, January 25).

workshops and the skills that members of a religious organization gain in the course of carrying on the work of the church frequently transfer to political activism.[256] It is, however, important for the church to be cognizant of the fact that tax-exempt religious institutions have to be careful not to cross the line between encouraging certain stands on issues and pushing a partisan agenda funded by the church. Nevertheless, if the church is supportive of an issue or cause, those actively involved in the church will likely be influenced by the church's position on the issue. If the church takes a public stand, members are more willing to get involved. The church's stance helps to solidify for the congregant the level of activism to pursue.

It should be noted that the UFMCC is not the only gay organization pushing for familial rights and protections. Secular gay rights organizations on the state and local levels continue pushing for legislation to address the lack of legal protections granted same-sex relationships and the GLBT community in general. The National Gay Lesbian Task Force has estimated that over thirty bills have been sponsored to obtain a special protected class status to sexual minorities in employment, housing, and public accommodations; establish sexual orientation hate crime laws; and repeal anti-sodomy statutes. The focus of the bills has included promoting parenting by gay men and lesbians. Only Florida currently bars adoption by gay people.[257] In addition, the county of Arlington, Virginia requested the state Supreme Court permit medical insurance benefits to unmarried same and opposite-sex domestic partners of county employees. However, Circuit Judge Benjamin Kendirick ruled that Virginia

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[256] Verba et al., (1995).

[257] "Gay-rights Activist Focus Efforts on the States." *Washington Times*, (1999, March 16). Retrieved on August 10, 2001 from http://washtimes.com/archives.htm.

law prohibited such coverage.[258]

Social Activism in Community

WFMCC began to achieve the organizational maturity needed to venture into concerns reaching beyond the walls of the church in May of 1998. All of the skills gained through involvement in the activities of the church assisted the congregants in sharpening the tools needed for participation in political issues impacting the gay and lesbian community. The development and enhancement of civic skills encouraged through conferences, sermons, workshops, and guest speakers, along with the national, regional, and local information provided by the denomination helped to prepare and move the congregation toward social activism.

Issue #1: Freedom of Speech and Expression

While continuing my observations, I noticed that many in the congregation, despite their earlier low profiles politically and otherwise, were willing to provide an active voice in a controversy that arose in the community. The civic skills they had been developing through service to the congregation found a new avenue in which to be exercised. A major controversy in the community challenged WFMCC's commitment to the third prong of the denomination's gospel: Christian social action. The church, under pastoral leadership of Rev. Horvath, provided the first line of defense for the gay and lesbian community when the congregants took on the minister and congregation of the First Baptist Church over the issue of banning two books located in the Kemp Public Library. A grandmother had taken her grandchild to the local library, but did not supervise the child's book selections. When the mother of

[258] "Billings Blows Top at Liberal Preacher." *Washington Times*. (1999. March 17). Retrieved on July 10, 2001 from http://washtimes.com/archives.htm

the child realized the subject of the books she presented the books to her pastor at the First Baptist Church. The books, *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy's Roommate*, address the lives of children in gay male and lesbian families. Upon receiving the books, the minister brought the issue of homosexuality and censorship to his congregation through a Sunday morning sermon. His televised sermon helped expand the debate over the books to the broader community. When the question of the fitness of the books to be housed in the library reached the public, WFMCC began to demonstrate for the first time their involvement in social justice activism.

The church's involvement in the library book issue illustrated how the members of this congregation were able to articulate their position and demonstrate the skills gained through involvement in the church. When the minister of the First Baptist Church refused to return the two children's books to the local library because of their portrayal of gay families, the media contacted a gay bar for a "community" response. The bar immediately referred the news media to the pastor of the local MCC. The church under the leadership of its first full-time pastor challenged the minister and congregation of the First Baptist Church. Dr. Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church launched his campaign against the library's possession of *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy's Roommate* from the pulpit. Jeffress preached that the books promoted homosexuality in violation of God's will and state law. Claiming his refusal to return the books to the library was an act of civil disobedience; Jeffress believed keeping the books was not stealing. He paid the $54 dollars to cover the cost of the books but asked that the money not be used to purchase additional copies of the books he considered pornography. His funds would

not be necessary for the replacement of the two books being held hostage. Within a few days, fifteen residents wrote the head librarian pledging to buy and donate copies of the two children's books under fire.[259]

The Use of the Media in Mobilization Efforts

The use of the press is important in mobilization activities within organized religious groups and political activism. We have already seen how the media has served a purpose in both Rev. Perry and White's social activism. The media would also be shown to play an important role at the local level. During the early days of the campaign by the First Baptist Church to remove the controversial children's books from the public library, the local television stations' lead stories continued to focus on the issue. Rev. Jeffress began his campaign for removal of the children's book in a broadcast on the local NBC affiliate (KFDX Channel 3) on Mother's day, May 12, 1998. The segments below include partial transcripts from the media's coverage over the next month. The excerpts from the coverage of the issue, includes interviews with WFMCC pastor Rev. Horvath and Rev. Jeffress of the First Baptist Church and statements by members of the community and national organizations including the ACLU and GLAAD that were pulled into the debate. The following illustrates how religious organizations utilized the local media to inform and mobilize the public on behalf of their positions on the issue. The 6:00 p.m. newscast on the evening following Jeffress' sermon began with the newsroom reporting that following the sermon, support had been building on both sides of the controversy as indicated by the large number of telephone calls concerning the issue that were received by the television station. The station reported many people voiced their concerns over

[259] L. Quinn. "Some residents angry over book flap." *Times and Record News*, (1998, May 19), p. 1A.

children being exposed to the two books. The statements aired by the network clearly indicated support on both sides of the controversy. Examples of opinions offered by citizens favoring removal of the books from the library included, "Children should be shown the right way"[260] and "They don't belong in society. It's the wrong lifestyle. I'm not a Christian or anything. It's against the law."[261] However, in an effort to offer balanced coverage, the anchor reported the opinions of those opposed to removal of the books from the library. One viewer stated, "I personally wouldn't want my children to read the books, but I don't have a problem with the books being in the library. Parents should be the ones to determine what their children read."[262]

The issue was red hot from the beginning. Fearing a nasty confrontation, KFDX decided to interview Rev. Jeffress and Rev. Horvath for the same day's broadcast. However, the television station decided it would be wise to make arrangements to prevent the two ministers from meeting face-to-face. According to Horvath, she never saw Jeffress during the time she was at the television station taping her interview. She claimed she waited outside in the parking lot in hopes of taking the opportunity to try to open a civil discussion with the Baptist minister. Parts of Rev. Jeffress' interview were broadcast on the *Live at Five* newscast and the remainder on the 6:00 and 10:00 p.m. news programs. The local news anchor began the segments by reporting that Jeffress and the deacons of the First Baptist Church voted to present a resolution to the city council to remove the books from the library. Claiming it was not a personal attack on the gay community, Jeffress explained,

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[260] Newscast, (1998, May 13) *KFDX Channel Three*. Wichita Falls, Texas.
[261] ____, ibid.
[262] ____, ibid.

> We do not hate homosexuals at First Baptist. This is not a "we hate homosexuals campaign." All of us are sinners. The message is Christ can forgive any sin, but the point is we cannot condone those sins that God condemned...I have had nothing but positive comments from my members over the stance our church is taking. I hope all other Chrisitians of Wichita Falls will take [a similar stand], not just First Baptist. Every Christian in Wichita Falls ought to speak out against this abomination.[263]

On the six o'clock newscast, the question of whether the request for removal of the books from the library was an issue of censorship or a community's right to determine what books belong in the public library was addressed. Rev. Horvath's interview was presented during this segment. Horvath's interview began with the program's anchor acknowledging that members of the gay community believe pulling the books from the library shelves was censorship. It was, according to the gay community, another attempt to sweep homosexuality under the rug. The reporter began the interview by stating "one lesbian couple says that the books have helped them teach their son about their atypical situation." The interview was as follows:

> *Reporter:* The two women you are about to hear from have been together for eleven years. They decided five years ago to bring a child into the picture and ever since they have had the books. The pictures and words have helped their son see how he is so special.
> *Rev. Horvath:* It is a book that many gay couples say has been nothing but a blessing. We purchased the book before our son was born. And we have seen it to be a wonderful resource for us.
> *"BZ" (spouse of Rev. Horvath):* It has been a good introduction to the fact that our family was not a typical family structure.
> *Reporter:* They don't deny that their situation in most people's eyes is unique. But they say it doesn't make it wrong and it doesn't make it sinful.
> *Rev. H:* I don't believe homosexuality is a sin, but I am not going to debate scripture.
> *Reporter:* Nor does Rev. Nancy Horvath plan on debating Dr. Jeffress' stand that the books need to be removed from the library. She feels that those who take that stand need to open their eyes.
> *Rev. H:* I think they are uneducated and need to put a face on homosexuals. It is even something our son has done and it hasn't hurt him a bit.
> *BZ:* Our son feels the same thing other six year olds feel, the fear of being hurt

[263] ____. ibid.

and needing his moms and needing to be loved.
Reporter: They say regardless of who their son loves when he grow up they won't judge his sexual orientation as others have judged theirs. Now Nancy and Barb say everyone is entitled to their opinion and feeling and the ones expressed here are uniquely theirs. They are views they share with fellow church members at the Metropolitan Community Church with a special outreach to the gay and lesbian community, a church where Nancy is the pastor.[264]

National civil rights organizations began to make statements early in the debate. The news anchor informed the viewing audience that GLAAD, a national gay rights organization claimed people were simply ignoring the realities of what constitutes families. Speaking on behalf of the organization, Kate Kendall, executive director of GLAAD stated,

> Part of the responsibility in a diverse American culture is to have children exposed to different ideas so that they can come to their own conclusions and their own sense of self. Lesbian and gay families exist and that is simply what these books depict.[265]

The situation escalated when the deacons of the First Baptist Church voted to approach the city council about removing all books, that "promote and/or sanction homosexual behavior."[266] The city council and Mayor Kay Yeager did not believe the council should be involved in picking library books. Nonetheless, Jeffress demanded the books be removed and compared them to other books he believed would be inappropriate in content by arguing, "There are pedophiles that would love to check out books on pedophilia and how to have sex with children. But we as a society recognize that is wrong."[267] Rev. Horvath objected to Jeffress' comparison of homosexuality to pedophilia. Horvath told reporters, "I was offended that he

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[264] ____, ibid.
[265] ____, ibid.
[266] L. Templar, "Minister Protest Content: Jeffress will pay for controversial books." *Times and Record News*, (1998 May 15), pp. 1A, 14A.
[267] ____, ibid., p. 14A.

(Jeffress) would use such a parallel. My companion and I have read *Heather Has Two Mommies* to our 6-year old son. We are a Christian church and we are Christians. I wish we could walk under the same umbrella."[268] Showing no sign of backing off of the issue, Jeffress predicted that the city council would have to address the library book issue. He proclaimed, "As much as the council wants to run from this issue and leave it in the hands of the library board, it will come before the council. If they choose not to [address this issue] we are prepared for a long battle and we will not let it go."[269]

Repercussions, Fears, and Positive Feedback

The first church service following the televised interview with Rev. Horvath regarding whether the public library should provide *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy's Roommate* for library patrons caused fear of repercussions from the broader community. One woman informed me that she did not attend on this particular Sunday, fearing a crowd might gather to see who attended WFMCC. Schoolteachers, airmen, and others were concerned that if they were identified as members of the congregation their jobs would be jeopardized. However, a fear that picketers might be present was not realized. There were 14 men, 34 women, and 6 children who did choose to attend the morning service. The city was now well aware of the church's existence because of the number of articles running in the local paper and the local affiliate of NBC's references to the WFMCC. Not everyone avoided media attention. One of the members of the congregation informed me that she had contacted GLAAD as well as the national gay and lesbian magazine the *Advocate*. Both organizations

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[268] ____, ibid.
[269] ____, ibid.

had returned her calls and perhaps wanted her to serve as a local watchdog in the area. GLAAD informed the member that their organization was fully aware of what was going on in the local community. The fear I saw in the congregation and the determination not to let it undermine their faith despite any misconception of the seriousness of their commitment to worship was evidenced by the number of members who attended.

The atmosphere inside the church building was tense. Rev. Horvath, fully aware of the concerns of the congregation encouraged the congregants,

> Do you know how brave you are coming through those doors this morning? I want to set the record correct with regards to the *Times*. I did not say that I was offended to be compared to a pedophile. I said I was outraged! I wish that we [could] all come together under the umbrella of Jesus Christ. The news said last night that I would be addressing this issue from the pulpit in my sermon today. I hate to disappoint anyone, but I have no intentions of saying anything more about it. I intend to preach the word of Jesus Christ this morning. Today's service will be held in honor of Brian's mother who went to be with Jesus at three o'clock this morning. It is very hard. We want to welcome everyone here this morning. Just by a raise of the hands let us know if this is your first time to visit with us. I want to share with you the contrast on Mother's day at this church. We heard the story of an eighty-one year old mother telling the story of raising her two gay sons and encouraging mothers to love their children.[270] We are very excited, our church has been asked to join three or four other churches for this vacation bible school. I will be teaching the adult class and "KP" the third graders. We aren't alone anymore![271]

Throughout her remarks applause and "Amens" were heard. When the announcements were completed, a member stood and thanked Rev. Horvath and her spouse for taking a stand by speaking on behalf of the church. The remarks were met with additional applause and a standing ovation. The pastor's interview had not been

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[270] The contrast is a reference to the fact that Rev. Jeffress of the First Baptist Church spoke on the two books in questions. He had removed them from the public library and refused to return them....the self-initiated censorship of the books.

[271] Personal communications, (1998, May 17).

broadcast without some repercussions being felt for taking a stand and outing herself and the church in such a public forum. Horvath informed the congregation, "I do request the prayers for the youngest member of our family who has felt the repercussions. The neighborhood kids won't play with him anymore because his mommies are gay. Now let's worship God."[272] The concerns of gay and lesbian parents are reflected in the fear they had for their children's physical safety and emotional well-being. After a prayer, which included asking God's blessing for the pastor, her family, and Rev. Jeffress, the children's service began. The children's teacher played a game in which the children were to respond with a word having the opposite meaning of the word the teacher uttered. When asked, "What is the opposite of love?" Rev. Horvath's son stated "unlove." Again the audience applauded. The child's response is offered as an example of the innocence of the child and the parenting skills of the lesbian couple. The children's refusal to play with the child was indicative of the prejudices often taught by parents. Hate appeared to be a word that the pastor's son does not see as a proper word for his vocabulary. In addition, the children's lesson addressed the need for God's safety and the peace to deal with the fear that had been generated during the past week's activities.

The fears felt by the congregation had some merit. During the service a reporter and cameraman tried to enter the building. Stopped by a male member of the congregation, they were informed that because they had not received prior permission to film that they would not be permitted to enter the auditorium. Following the service the pastor announced those wishing to avoid being "caught" on camera should stay away from the front steps of the church. She requested that her son be kept

[272] The reference was to the couple's son, who was conceived through *in vitro* fertilization.

away. Ten to fifteen members gather behind the camera as Rev. Horvath and her spouse was interviewed. Inadvertently during the interview, the pastor's son ran out the door of the church toward his mothers and was filmed by the cameraman. The photographer promised to edit out any scene that would show the child.[273] Although no one was willing to place them self before the camera with the pastor and her spouse, those who gathered to watch the interview talked openly to the reporter. The members did provide verbal support to the pastor's words by offering approving remarks as Rev. Horvath spoke.

I recalled my earlier interview with Rev. Horvath and her statement WFMCC's social justice mission would be covert during her first year as pastor. When I mentioned her prior statement she smiled and replied,

> I remember when I attended All God's Children in Indianapolis and it is a big church, (300-400 members) that one Sunday we had picketers. I was the student pastor and the senior pastor sent me out to deal with them. I was glad for that experience because I did fear picketers here and I would have know what to do. I basically invited them to lay their signs down and come in and worship with us. I watched our people hunkered down in their cars terrified. We had groups of us going out to the cars to get people and putting them in the center so they would not be seen. What a horrible way to do church. But the church cannot be closeted, how can we have an outreach to the community, we have got to let them know we are here. This incident with the books is the best thing that could have happen, now we have it over with. This episode made us overt rather than covert. I may look over my shoulder for a while, but now they all know, and I wonder what they are going to do with it?[274]

Rev. Horvath's prior experience with picketers served to prepare her for similar problems that might occur while shepherding this congregation.

The involvement of the church in the book controversy, beginning with the

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[273] The photographer hoped for an honest editing of the interview with the pastor and spouse, but feared a bias in the coverage in editing.

[274] Personal communications. (1998, May 27).

pastor's first interview, propelled the congregation into a more active role in the fight for social justice within the gay community. To some, this "outing" of the church to the broader community was seen as a threat to the refuge that the church provided. The paradox unique to gay Christians is the need for the church as a refuge from social discrimination and the call to activism to break the bonds of the exile. Activism requires engagement in the public debate, which threatens the separate space provided by the church.

It was immediately clear that Rev. Jeffress' warning was to be taken seriously. The issue of censorship is always of utmost important to the media. The local newspaper ran an editorial stating that Jeffress had over stepped his authority in seeking to oversee what materials are available at the library. Newspaper editor, Carol Wilson wrote, "The banning of books deals with symptoms not causes. Banning books does not right any wrongs or overcome evil and, in the long run, may do more harm than good."[275] This editorial set in motion what would become an organized media campaign regarding the books. Using his pulpit to fuel his cause, Jeffress asked his congregation to write letters to the *Times Record News* backing the book ban. In addition to targeting the paper and the editor, Jeffress claimed that the city council members were "chameleons" that would bow to public pressure. After getting a show of hands of members that would join his letter-writing blitz, Jeffress began his sermon by launching a $1.3 million dollar fund-raising campaign for a church project.[276] Many in the community and numerous members of WFMCC believed the library book publicity was politically motivated as a means to boost the

[275] C. Wilson, "Book Bans: Who has right to decide what other people read?" *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, (1998, May 16), p. 6B.

First Baptist Church's fund-raising campaign. When questioned about the book controversy's political ramifications, Rev. Horvath insisted,

> Oh, of course it is. It is political. He (Jeffress) has a $1.3 million dollar complex he is trying to raise funds for. Right now he needs a lot of backing. Not too long ago I understand, I wasn't here, but I understand he was attacking the Catholics and telling them they were going to hell. Then he didn't take a very active stand on the Disney boycott, I understand. So, I wonder if the books are a morality issue or what will get him the most attention. And of course it is about homosexuality, it is not about these books. I believe it should be about censorship.[277]

WFMCC's treasurer echoed the sentiments,

> What has really disturbed me about this whole situation is that I don't feel the issue was ever over the books. I feel those books have been in the library for a very long time. It struck me as very odd that this was brought to the forefront at the exact same time that First Baptist was getting ready to launch an $1.3 million campaign. The issue over the books is such a sensitive one because, to me the central issue is censorship, okay. The secondary issue is the gay and lesbian issue. Dr. Jeffress had a tendency to not even being able to express consistently what the issue was. I think it was a very poor ploy to push forward his doctrine--to be able to raise funds for his church. It was absolutely politically motivated. The books in question are very much part of the man's political agenda. I don't see how it can be perceived as being anything else.[278]

Members of WFMCC were not the only ones who believed Jeffress' motivation was political. Numerous letters to the editor of the local newspaper upheld this opinion. While defending Jeffress' right to exercise free speech the pastor's motives were questioned by a man who wrote,

> As a former journalist, I cannot help but suspect the Rev. Jeffress' motives when he lofts a flaming censorship campaign with the left hand and launches a $1.3 million fund-raising campaign for his church with his right. In the political world, that would be considered a cheap campaign trick.[279]

Following this same line of thought a letter concluded,

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[276] C. Zollo, "Pastor targets paper editor," *Times Record News*, (1998, May 18), pp. 1A, 7A.
[277] Personal communications, (1998, May 26).
[278] Personal communications, (1998, May 26).
[279] Letters to the editor, *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, (1998, May 27).

> It seems a real shame that this mock issue (even Dr. Jeffress stated he wanted to "get on with much more important things," specifically raising $1.3 millon for his new youth center), is getting headlines and other media attention. I have been reading all of the recent articles involving the First Baptist Church, and I keep noticing one recurring theme—the spending of an enormous amount of money on themselves.[280]

Additional letters were written to the paper questioning other possible political motives of Jeffress. A man penned,

> "It would seem as though Jeffress is on one of his crusades. He has stated on television that he will petition the city council to remove the books from the library or face defeat in the next election. He compares the city to Sodom and Gomorra. Maybe if we were to change the name to the First Baptist Library it would at least partially satisfy this man."[281]

Another subscriber wrote, "Could it be that Dr. Jeffress has a new book to push or a bigger church he wants to get?"[282]

The local newspaper was also inundated with letters supporting Jeffress' stance on the issue. One letter to the editor wrote,

> I stand firmly with my God and pastor on the issue of the books. Would you want your tax dollars to pay for a book on how to have sex with a child in our public library? This is not just a First Baptist issue, but [also] a world issue. Read what God said about homosexuals (Genesis 18-19).[283]

Another letter argued the removal of the books from the library was not a violation of the First Amendment. She wrote,

> I'm in complete agreement with Dr. Jeffress. I believe we should keep certain books off the children's shelves. I don't believe these two books need to be on the shelves for young children to pick up. That's not censorship—that's just using good, plain common sense! I don't worry about what my offspring are finding in the public library.[284]

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280 ____, ibid. (1998, May 19).
281 ____, ibid. (1998, May 17).
282 ____, ibid. (1998, May 21).
283 ____, ibid. (1998, May 23).
284 ____, ibid.

Referencing a ruling of the Supreme Court of Minnesota, an appeal to the city council was made through the newspaper via e-mail. The e-mail read in part,

> In my opinion the City Council has a compelling interest for our community to remove the pro-homosexual books from our library. The very idea of teaching pre-schoolers that a same sex relationship is a marriage is absurd since it lacks a basic ingredient—an entire sex. These two books are just the tip of the iceberg of the radical homosexual agenda. Traditional marriage is under attack. The goal of the attack is to lower traditional marriage to the level of a same sex relationship. The battleground is the hearts and minds of our children. The courts have given traditional marriage a premiere place in our culture. The Supreme Court of Minnesota defended traditional marriage in *Baker vs. Nelson* by saying "The institution of marriage as a union of man and woman uniquely involving the procreation and rearing of children within a family. In *Loving vs. Virginia* the U.S. Supreme Court said marriage was "fundamental to our very existence and survival." As the gatekeepers of our town, I call on the City Council to act in the compelling interest of our community and on the laws of the state of Texas and remove the books.[285]

This letter set off a flood of letters supporting the First Amendment and arguing that censorship was a dangerous and slippery slope for the church to find stable footing. Many of the letters were quite heated on both sides of the issue. Some writing to the editor began to simply complain about the continual barrage of letters on a single issue. At first, the newspaper tried to print all of the letters, but when the number of letters from not only the region but also other states were requiring multiple pages to print, the paper found it necessary to issue a statement. The newspaper declared,

> We will continue to run a representative sampling of letters relating to the removal of two books, *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy's Roommate*, from the Kemp Public Library by the Rev. Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church. These will be published along with letters to the editor addressing other topics. Space limitations prevent the publication of all the

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[285] ____, ibid. In *Baker v. Nelson*, 191 N.W.2d 185 (Minn. 1971) the court appeared to claim that there is some fundamental difference between a gay relationship and a heterosexual relationship, which justifies denying gay couples the right to marry. See J. Trosino, "American Wedding: Same-Sex Marriage and the Miscegenation Analogy," *Boston University Law Review* 73 (1993), p. 112. In *Loving vs. Virginia* 87 S. Ct. 1817; 388 U.S. 1 (1967) the Supreme Court declared state anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional under both the Equal Protection and Due Process Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment.

letters we have received.[286]

Notwithstanding the fact that the Rev. Horvath had informed me in an earlier interview that the congregation would take a low profile regarding issues of social justice during her first year as pastor, the library book controversy propelled WFMCC into the forefront of the debate over First Amendment freedoms. Those in the gay community and many other citizens in the town firmly believe that the issue of censorship of the two children's books was really about homophobia. Many made this concern known, through phone calls, e-mails, and letters to local television stations and newspapers.

Library Advisory Board Public Hearing

The library selection committee had reviewed the two books in question and voted to recommend to the library administrator that one of books was to be kept in the children's section. The books were voted on separately because *Heather Has Two Mommies* is classified as a storybook and *Daddy's Roommate* is considered to be a picture book. Regarding placement of *Heather Has Two Mommies*, three board members had voted to keep the book in the children's section, two voted to move the book to an older juvenile section and five voted to move the book to an adult section. The vote recommending the placement of *Daddy's Roommate* was distributed with six members voting to leave the book where it was, two wishing to move the book to the older juvenile section, and two desiring the book be placed in the adult section. However, because of the enormous outcry over the issue, the library advisory board decided to hold a public hearing. The purpose of the meeting was to allow the library patrons an opportunity to voice their concerns prior to the final decision being made

[286] C. Wilson, (Ed.). "Editor's note." *Times Record News*, (1998, May 27).

by Linda Hughes, library administrator, regarding placement. Several members of WFMCC, some of whom had earlier claimed to not be particularly political, spoke before the city's library board in defense of the books. The press covered the library advisory board meeting. Despite personal and professional concerns, five members of the congregation spoke before the lens of the television cameras to the library board. Strength and validation through community and cognitive liberation rose to the surface as others demonstrated public speaking skills on behalf of social activism in the congregation. A member acknowledged,

> You think, this isn't just me talking, I am talking for others too. Many say they aren't political. But those same ones spoke out on the library book controversy and against discrimination and that comes from the confidence you gain through the church...in the belief that I have worth in self.[287]

When the date of the library board's public forum for discussion of the children's books in question finally arrived, the atmosphere was charged. This was in part due to a full month of televised news reports and heated debate through letters to the editor of the local newspaper. The meeting was packed with citizens waiting to speak their minds. Supporters of removing the books addressed the library board. "You folks know what God wants you to do. It won't hurt the library to do without these two books."[288] Another Jeffress' supporter argued, "Leviticus calls homosexuality an abomination, we will end up a country of homosexuals if we allow this to continue."[289] Jeffress led the applause when members of his congregation spoke. Members of WFMCC who spoke on behalf of keeping the books remained quiet when Jeffress' followers spoke.

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[287] Personal communications. (1998, December 30).
[288] Television newscast, (1998, June 13) CBS affiliate, *KAUZ Channel Six*, Wichita Falls, Texas.
[289] ____, ibid.

The meeting took place in a standing room only crowd of approximately ninety people. Encouraged by Rev. Jeffress, numerous attempts were made to interrupt those speaking in opposition to the relocating of the books. The pastor paced along the back of the room leading his followers in boos, jeers, and sounds of disgust. In support of keeping the books in the children's section were members of WFMCC. They spoke as concerned citizens with one discussing the quality of the literature in question (award-winning children's books). The speaker suggested, "It is essential that the books be out where children can get them. This isn't about morals. This isn't about politics. It is about good children's literature."[290] The heckling by the crowd, led by Rev. Jeffress, interrupted the member of WFMCC voicing this opinion. A high school teacher and member of WFMCC informed the crowd, "We have a woman who shares a child with another woman. This type of family is here in Wichita Falls whether you like it or not. As a citizen, this public library should serve all the citizens of the community without discrimination."[291] The organist for WFMCC voiced her concerns as a grandmother over having witnessed parents dropping their children off at the library unsupervised. She argued that it is the parents' responsibility to monitor what their children read. Rev. Horvath added to the discussion, "I personally would not be opposed to the books being placed in an adult section. For my child, this is part of who our family is."[292] Upon making this statement one woman put her finger down her throat as if gagging at the concept of a lesbian family and another woman holding a Bible in the air stated, "I pray for

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[290] ___. ibid.
[291] ___. ibid.
[292] ___. ibid.

Wichita Falls, I pray for Texas."[293]

Tensions increased as citizens tried to explain what should be done about the books. Everyone who wanted to speak was to have notified the library board prior to the meeting. Those who did not register their desire to speak were not placed on the scheduled agenda. An unscheduled speaker arose and began moving toward the microphone shouting, "I left my college class to come here and speak and I am going to have my two minutes."[294] A board member signaled for a police officer to return the women to her seat. When this occurred, Rev. Jeffress shouted, "That's censorship!"[295] His remarks incited applause and more shouting erupted.

The political activism demonstrated by members of WFMCC at the library board meeting regarding the book controversy was not without limits and barriers. I observed two phenomena during the library advisory board meeting. First, there was no one representing the secular gay community in attendance. The church provided the only representation for gay people. Secondly, I was struck by the fact that members of WFMCC sat scattered throughout the room. The congregants did not identify themselves as members of WFMCC, nor did any of them acknowledge knowing each other. Members of the local MCC informed me that they did not sit together in order to avoid possibly being identified as gay men and lesbians. Two of the members speaking at the meeting were public school teachers and feared repercussions on their jobs. The only spokesperson at the board meeting that was identified as a member of WFMCC was its pastor. The pastors in the Fellowship are required to be "out" in the community. According to the founder of the UFMCC, the

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[293] ____, ibid

[294] ____, ibid.

gospel can never be in the closet and the denomination's pastors, serving as messengers of the gospel, cannot be closeted. Although the UFMCC adamantly espouses that the church is not a "gay church," the public, in general and some of the members associate attendance and membership in the denomination as an indication of one's sexual orientation. The concept of guilt by association or in this case, assumed gay by attending MCC remained a point of concern and continues to limit some congregants from proselytizing to heterosexuals. This fear of being "outed" or assumed to be a gay man or lesbian by attending MCC, likely contributes do the dominance of its GLBT membership. It should be noted that despite the unwillingness to publicly acknowledge their sexual orientation at the meeting, the act of attending and speaking before the television camera's was a bold step for many of the gay Christians in their long and often self-depreciating journey toward cognitive liberation.

The continual mantra that MCC is not a "gay church" raises questions. Although it is true that the denomination from its very first service included heterosexuals, the majority of those attending UFMCC congregations in the United States are members of the GLBT community. Some members strongly oppose the label "gay church" while others use the term when referring to the denomination. As mentioned above, Rev. Horvath acknowledged a need to continually promote the image of MCC as neither categorically gay nor straight by stating, "I tried hard to clarify that we were a Christian church with an outreach to the gay and lesbian community." This statement can be seen as somewhat disingenuous when compared to Horvath's defense of framing her sermons with the predominately GLBT audience.

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[295] ____, ibid.

In defense of the messages from the pulpit, she argued, "With all do respect, they (heterosexual Christians) can worship anywhere in this town and be the person God created them to be, this is all we (homosexual Christians)[have] got." Her remarks as well as statements made by other members of the congregation indicated the doctrine of the church as inclusive of anyone wanting to attend, but its focus remains an outreach to gays.

Library administrator, Linda Hughes, would make the final decision based on the committee's recommendation and the comments made during the library public forum. Rev. Jeffress called the forum and the vote a sham and told a city councilman who was present that he would see the councilmen at the next city council meeting. Jeffress warned, "I will take this to the city council and any member who doesn't say this is an abomination before God is not fit to serve in the office."[296] As the meeting adjourned and the crowd dispersed, Rev. Horvath was spit upon as she walked to her automobile.[297] The librarian decided to leave the books on the shelves. The decision was announced in the UFMCC headquarters' June newsletter, *Leadership News from UFMCC*[298] as a victory by Wichita Falls MCC for First Amendment rights.[299] It was likely that this issue would arise again as the community neared the local elections.

Despite the internal politics between the council members and the library advisory board, WFMCC continued to receive support for having taken a stand for the gay and lesbian community and for supporters of a liberal interpretation of the First Amendment. Interested in the response to WFMCC publicly taking a stand on

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[296] ____, ibid.
[297] Personal communications.
[298] Birkitt Jr., "Newsletter." *Leadership News from UFMCC.* (1998, October)

the issue, I asked Rev. Horvath, if there have been any sort of ramifications. other than what had been written in the op-ed pages in the paper over this controversy? The Reverend replied,

> Yes, in a very positive way. We had one phone call to our house from someone we didn't know. They called to say thank you. I had four phone calls here at the church to say thank you, three were from people I didn't know. Two of them were at church the next Sunday. People who just want to say "thank-you" have stopped me in Wal-Mart, Target, Office Max, and on the street. "What you did takes a lot of courage." A person who was checking out my things at Target, looked both ways and said, "How's it going? I just want you to know I agree with you about those books and my husband is Black and we will never go into the Baptist church again." A women at Wal-Mart, said, "I just want to say thank you, I really appreciate what you are doing out there." I sat at my son's hockey game and the coach from the opposing team came over between quarters and said, "Hi, I want to shake your hand." So, it has been that kind of thing. It is a miracle.[300]

Not all reactions to Rev. Horvath's televised interview were positive. Horvath offered clarification.

> The only negative thing that we have had happen is when neighborhood kids came up to our son and asked him if is mother was gay? He said, "yes." And they asked, "Then where did you come from, it takes a dad." Well, he said, "I don't have a dad." And they said, "Then you weren't even born." They got real icky and ran away. These were kids who [had been] knocking on the door to play with him. So, he was pretty broken hearted about that. And every night he would say, "and God bless" and say the kids names and cry. Another neighborhood kid came and said, "I have been away for a while and I don't know anything that is going on, can I play?"[301]

Jeffress' political tactics caused concern for many in the community. This explains, at least in part, the reason why WFMCC members were hesitant to publicly acknowledge their affiliation with the church. Likewise, the Board of Director's of WFMCC took precautionary actions. Rev. Horvath explained.

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[299] PBS interviewed the pastor for its program entitled "In the Life" which aired in the New York area on October 7, 1998.

[300] Personal communications, (1998, May 26).

[301] ____, ibid.

> The church has purchased me a cell phone I don't want one. And have no desire for one, but I have no choice. I was told by another pastor, keep it on you, you could be in a restroom and need it. So, that is kind of a scary thing because, it could have gotten real ugly. So, I want another person with me when I check the mailbox, because I don't know what I might find in the mailbox. There have been some precautions. I have probably been at the church office more in the mornings rather than in late afternoons.[302]

Additional limits and barriers developed after-the-fact from the secular gay community. Members from the secular gay community were indeed the ones who referred the local media to WFMCC as the spokespersons for the gay community. However, following the library board meeting, members in the broader gay community discussed organizing a non-religious voice for gay rights. Many felt that WFMCC should not be the only spokespersons for gay rights. The secular gay community scheduled a meeting at one of the local gay bars for all in the city interested in forming a gay and lesbian alliance.[303] Candidates running for local political office were invited to attend the Pride Vote '98 barbecue to be held at one of the local gay and lesbian bars. The owner of the bar said gay men and lesbians in the city were looking for ways to be more politically active. She noted, "It's a small community [gay men and lesbian], but it's here and they haven't had anybody to represent them as they should. They never have had a voice and they need one."[304] Unfortunately, for organizers, no one from the broader community attended the meeting, not even the person who tried to organize the event. Rumors had spread that the media would be there to cover the meeting and individuals were afraid they might be caught on camera and recognized when the newscast was aired. In addition, all of

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[302] ____, ibid.
[303] L. Templar, "Gay Group Wants Voice to be Heard: Alliance to provide focal point on issues," *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, (1998, October 28),p. A4.
[304] ____, ibid.

the political candidates cancelled, voicing concerns that attendance at a gay bar prior to an election was not in their best political interest. It is interesting to note that the only two people who went to the meeting were members of WFMCC. This incident serves to illustrate how vital MCC is in more rural conservative areas of the country. In a more metropolitan and progressive community the role of MCC is more likely to be secondary to the active gay and lesbian organizations. However, in rural areas, MCC may possibly provide the primary if not the only organized gay group in the community.[305] The social capital that the church could provide had been cultivated through the church's ministry. Information from the national, regional, and local level publications, workshops, and conferences served to enlighten the congregation on the political and legal options and opportunities available. The active participation of the members in carrying out the spiritual and social programs of the church increased the skills necessary for civic engagement.

As greater attention was called to the issue by the rising tensions within the city and the constant media coverage. Rev. Jeffress' campaign against city council members that were opposed to the removal of the books prompted a serious warning. Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AUSCS), a Washington, D.C. church watchdog group urged Rev. Jeffress to stop his campaigning against the council members. AUSCS Executive Director, Barry Lynn informed Jeffress in a letter that churches are not allowed to campaign for or against elected officials. Lynn

[305] Wichita Falls Coalition Against Censorship (WFCAC) formed in response to the library book controversy as a "watchdog" group in the city. The local MCC pastor believes she can take a back seat on the issue and allow the WFCAC and PFLAG to take the lead on the controversy. According to the MCC pastor, a woman from the "God is Love Ministry" is trying to gather 300 signatures to get the books moved to the adult section of the library. The CAC was ready to file a lawsuit if this occurs. The pastor of MCC is listed as one of the plaintiffs in the suit. E-mails are sent around the group of

wrote,

> Your comments about how your congregation should vote in the next election raise serious legal questions. As I'm sure you know, federal tax law prohibits tax-exempt religious institutions from engaging in partisan politics and forbids these institutions to work for or against candidates for public office. Churches that fail to comply with this law risk the loss of their tax-exempt status by the federal government.[306]

Because of the media coverage of this First Amendment struggle, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)[307] and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) were drawn into the discussion. The campaign to remove the books was viewed by some groups as censorship and therefore, an affront to First Amendment freedoms. *KFDX Channel Three* contacted Jay Jacobson, executive director of the Civil Liberties Union of Texas for comment. Warning removal of the books from the library not only was a form of censorship, but also if the city council took the actions demanded by Rev. Jeffress, the ACLU would immediately file suit, Jacobson explained.

> Anytime someone seeks to impose their own viewpoint on others in terms of what they should see or hear or read or communicate is wrong. It is not just wrong, it is undemocratic and it violates all sense of freedom and it ought not to be tolerated in America.[308]

WFCAC, PFLAG, and the local MCC on a regular basis in an effort to coordinate actions taken and disseminate information. E-mail from local MCC pastor, (1999, June 2).

[306] L. Templar, "Jeffress Told to Back Off—Group: Church Could Lose Tax-exempt Status." *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, (1998, July 11), p. 1A.

[307] ACLU did not establish lesbian and gay rights as an official concern of the organization until 1967. Now, ACLU is one of the most active legal organizations on behalf of lesbian and gay rights. Chapter affiliates of ACLU are located in each state. The affiliates cannot breach national office policy, however, the affiliates have a good deal of autonomy in deciding which cases to pursue. In 1986 the ACLU founded the Lesbian and Gay Rights Project that indicated the organizations' commitment to lesbian and gay civil liberties (Cain, 2000), pp. 68-69.

[308] ____, ibid. (1998, May 14).

Rev. Jeffress responded to the threat of a lawsuit by the ACLU and the earlier editorial in the local newspaper by stating to the media and to his congregation during Sunday morning services,

> I just have a word today for Carol Wilson the editor of our local newspaper, a word for our city council members and the library board. If you think this issue is a Robert Jeffress or a "First Baptist" issues you are in for a rude awakening. Thousands of Christians across this community are standing behind us. I hope our governing authorities here in Wichita Falls will not allow themselves to be bullied by the ACLU. Frankly, the fact that the ACLU is against removing the books is the greatest endorsement I have had...I say to Jay Jacobson of the ACLU, I would consider it a badge of honor to be sued by you and the ACLU. Censorship is a part of American life. The government is working to censor tobacco companies for promoting literature and exposing children to literature that would encourage smoking. They [the government] deem that to be immoral and hurtful to the health of our children. What is the difference between that and the banning books that also promote a lifestyle. Homosexuality has killed tens of thousands of people every year. What is the difference? I am saying to you, censorship is a part of American life and there are some things that ought to be censored from our children and that's what this fight is about.[309]

The First Baptist Church did not stand alone in the community. Four members of the "God is Love Ministry" from a neighboring town appeared before the city council to protest the presence of the two children's books about homosexual parenting in the city library. Carrying large signs reading, "God is Love" on one side and "Jesus Saves" on the other, the group passed out booklets of Bible passages prior to the city council meeting. Ministry founder, Janie Hill spoke during the public-comment period. Claiming homosexuals prey on the weak, the innocent, and the young, Hill stated,

> Homosexuals are aggressive and militant when they take over a city. It (homosexual behavior) destroys them in mind, body, and soul. By leaving those books in the library, we will be opening a crack in the dike to the flood

[309] R. Jeffress, (1998, June 17), Sermon presented at the First Baptist Church broadcast on *KFDX Channel Three*.

of homosexuality and lesbianism into our city and our state.[310]

In accordance with council policy[311] no members responded and no discussion concerning the books followed. Interestingly, Rev. Jeffress was not present for the council meeting. Jeffress had previously implied that he would not address the council until the books actually appeared on the council's agenda.

There were some religious organizations, other than WFMCC, that did not support Jeffress call to the religious communities to unite in fighting for the removal of the books. Former associate minister of the First United Methodist Church, Rev. Daniel Humbert joined with current pastor, Rev. Robert Allen in concern regarding the petition to remove the books from the library. Humbert in a letter to the editor wrote,

> I am not surprised by the action of the First Baptist Church, but I am appalled at both the motivation and the purpose behind the petition. First, the cessation from censorship in America is the bedrock of our First Amendment rights as citizens. Secondly, to deny or ignore that homosexuality exists in our society is to negate the dignity, humanity and productivity of a rather large population of people. Third, if we deny the citizenry of any community of the opportunity to educate themselves on any given topic, we remove from them the opportunity to promote more humanitarian solutions for reconciliation among one another. Information and education are two of the best formats for removing fear levels, which often times leads to various forms of oppression in the world. Fourth, the books specifically identified for censorship are listed among the American Library Associations' recommended reading list for children. These books help children understand a sometimes-confusing issue in clear, concise, compassionate, and comprehensible ways. As a Christian, I find it reprehensible that any other Christian would want to suppress the information found in books that validate the *imago dei* (image of God) into which all people were created. I do hope the City Council will oppose the petition to censor the books.[312]

The ongoing debate over the two children's books continued to attract

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[310] L. Templar, "Ministry Protests Gay Books," *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, (1998, July 8), 1A.
[311] The city council's policy limited discussions to issues that had been requested formally and placed on the agenda prior to the council meeting.

national media attention. Readers were first informed nationally about the book controversy through a *New York Times* wire story.[313] The Public Broadcasting Network (PBS) highlighted the library book debate on "In the Life," a program devoted to gay and lesbian issues. The program profiled the debate over the future of the books during the show's season premier. Although the program was not broadcast in Wichita Falls, Texas, it was shown on 120 public broadcast stations across the country. A producer came to Wichita Falls to interview Rev. Jeffress, Rev. Horvath, Library Administrator Linda Hughes, and others for an 8-minute segment

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[312] Letter to the editor, *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, (1998, May 24).

[313] *APNews*, "After Protest by Pastor, Interest in Gay Books at Library Grows," *The New York Times*, (1998, May 24), A21. For additional media coverage of the debate regarding access to the two books *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy's Roommate* at the public library see "Books Still on Shelves: No Action Slated on Council Agenda," (1998, October 6), *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. Retrieved on February 1, 2001 from http://www.fwst.com/news/doc/1047/1:STATE27/1:STATE27100698.html; A. Brumley, "Books Fuel Fight for Free Speech: Children's Reading Stokes Church Ire," (1999, February 28), *Dallas Morning News*. Retrieved on February 1, 2001 from http://www.youth.org/loco PERSONProject/Alerts/States/Texas/censorhsip5.html; L. Rice, "Homophobic Hatred and Bigotry Backfire in Book Banning Attempt," *The Skeptic Tank*, (1998, May 21). Retrieved on February 1, 2001 from http://www.skeptictank.org/hs/booksgay.htm; Editor, (1998, May 22), "Pastor's Protest Against Library Books on Gays Prompts Donations," *Abilene Reporter News On-line*, (1998 July 9). Retrieved on February 1, 2001 from http://www.reporternews.com/texas/gay0522.html; "Gospel Group Protests Gay-themed Books in Public Library" *Abilene Reporter News On-line*, (1999, July 18). Retrieved on February 2, 2001 from http://reporternews.com/texas/gay0709.html; "Books on Homosexuality Will Stay in Children's Section Until Court's Final Ruling," *Abilene Reporter-News* (1999, August 21). Retrieved on February 1, 2001 from http://www.reporternews.com/1999/texas/books0821.html; "ACLU Challenges Books' Relocation," *San Antonio Express-News* (1999, July 18). Retrieved on February 1, 2001 from http://www.youth.org/loco/PERSONProject/Alerts/States/Texas/lawsuit.html; "Lawsuit Challenges Removal of Disputed Library Books From Kids' Section," *Free!: The Freedom ForumOn-line*, (1999, July 19). Retrieved on February 1, 2001 from http://www.freedomforum.org/speech/1999/7/19/gaybooks.asp; "Texas City Council Approves Plan to Move Disputed Library Books to Adult Section," *Free!: The Freedom Forum Online*, (1999 February 17). Retrieved on February 1, 2001 from http://www.freedomforum.org/speech/1999/7/19/gaybooks.asp; "Court Battle Looms For Children's Books on Homosexuality," *Maranatha Christian Journal: News and Views for Today's Online Christian* (27 July 1999). Retrieved on February 1, 2001 from http://www.mcjonline.com/news/news3275.htm.; "Homosexual Books Stay in Library Children's Area," *Maranatha Christian Journal*, (1999, August 23). Retrieved on February 1, 2001 from.http://www.mcjonline.com/news/news3352.htm; Editorial: "Books Can't Replace Parents," *Amarillo Globe-News*, (1999, August 24). Retrieved on February 1, 2001 from http://amarillonet.com/stories/082499/opi_books.shtml; V. Holbrook, "Library Folks Did Right Thing," *Idaho Press-Tribune*, (1999, August 22). Retrieved on February 1, 2001 from http://nz.com/NZ

for the program. The entire debate, including Hughes' decision to move the books from the young children's area to the juvenile section and the protesters' appeal to the City Council was included in the report. In addition, the program interviewed the authors of both children's books. Leslea Newman, author of *Heather Has Two Mommies*, was disappointed by the public debate generated by the book. Newman claimed her intention was to write a book that helped children of gay and lesbian parents live a happy life. She insisted there was no political agenda behind her penning the children's book.[314]

The PBS program provoked a large response from the viewing audience. John Cantania, director of communication and a contributing producer for "In the Life," stated, "this story touches a nerve. It's a real frontier. A real line in the sand has been drawn on what information will be allowed to reach young people." The supervising producer of the program, Desireena Almoradic said, "This was the one segment in the last show that has engendered the most discussion from viewers. It goes beyond gay-lesbian issues to issues of censorship and access to media."[315]

ROUND TWO: The Altman Resolution

The library book dispute arose again when the City Council was required to address the controversy. A city councilman, who is member of the First Baptist Church, brought a proposal to the council. Councilman Bill Altman proposed that the city approve and the library enforce the following: If 300 library cardholders petition to move a children's book to a restricted area, where only those 13 or older could

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Queer/OUT/news_1999908/messages/1011.html; and *Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE)NetNews #7*, News Flash (1998, June). Retrieved on February 1, 2001 from http://www.colage.org/net_news/7.html.

request it, the book can be placed in a restricted area. Rev. Horvath, responded to the first council meeting by e-mailing members of her congregation, supplying the e-mail address of the city council members, and encouraging parishioners to e-mail council members concerning the censorship of the children's books. The pastor and several members e-mailed each council member and the mayor to voice their concerns regarding the books in question. In a letter to the city council, Horvath invited the council members to get to know the members of MCC—the gay Christians, whose children benefit from access to such books in the library. The pastor encouraged the council to attend any church service offered by the local MCC. Members of the congregation, who e-mailed the mayor, received responses from the mayor within the hour. The mayor informed the congregants that the e-mails would be forwarded to the council members. The city's mayor telephoned Rev. Horvath of WFMCC and requested her presence at the council meeting. Several members of the congregation attended the meeting along with the pastor. The proposal was discussed and defeated.

Once again the local newspaper printed an editorial questioning the idea of allowing a small group of citizens to determine for the rest of the city, what children should have available to read.[316] The editor, by describing Councilmen Altman's proposal as minority tyranny, prompted Janie Hill, director of the God is Love Evangelistic Ministry to call on the voters to replace Councilman Shine for his stance on the children's book controversy. Shine was among four council members who voted to reject the creation of a restricted-access area for *Heather Has Two Mommies*

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[314] Templar, "Show Focuses on Library Decision." *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, (1998, December 11), p. 1A.
[315] ____, ibid.
[316] Editorial opinion. "Same Old Story." *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, (1999, February 4).

and *Daddy's Roommate*. Hill made her appeal for Shine's removal from the city council in a packet titled "Petitioner's Instruction Sheet and Advised Plan for Christians Against Gay Agenda." The packet was mailed to various local churches, the *Times Record News*, and Mayor Kay Yeager. Hill wrote that she wanted "morally strong Christian men to run for open City Council seats" and asked for support for council members Bill Beaty and Bill Altman.[317]

Not willing to face defeat, the same councilman, Altman, two weeks later, brought an alternative proposal before the city council which would allow 300 library card-holders to petition to have a children's books moved to the adult section, rather than to a restricted area. Despite the question of possible legal action against the city by the ACLU and the newly formed Wichita Falls Coalition Against Censorship[318] (WFCAC), four of seven City Council members approved an unprecedented approach to library management.[319] Adopted by a 4-3 vote the Altman resolution allowing library cardholders to petition for individual books to be moved from the children's section to an adult area. City Manager, Jim Berzina decided rather than appeal the issue, he believed it would likely come to an end, if the two books were simply moved to the adult area of the library. He reasoned, "Given the library's limited resources, it would [be] better if the staff wasn't forced to spend a great deal of time

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[317] Templar, "Organization to Push Council Candidate," *Times Record News*, (1999, February 13), p. 1B.

[318] A woman named Stormy Nicholas began WFCAC. She wrote several letters to the editor regarding the library controversy being an issue of censorship. In addition, she established a web site containing articles by members of WFCAC, the local newspaper and from other publication's addressing the issue of First and Fourteenth Amendments. The mission statement of WFCAC read, "While we abhor the idea of censorship coming at us and our children from numerous outside sources whose views we do not understand but often tolerate, we know that all responsible people or censors...and it this very right of self censorship that we uphold to be the greatest value in this quest. WFCAC: Wichita Falls Coalition Against Censorship. Home Page. Retrieved on February 1, 2001 from http://www.geocities.com/anticensorship.

validating petitions and relocating children's books."[320]

Members of the library advisory board[321] were not asked to share their thoughts on the resolution. The advisory board previously had heard arguments on both sides of the book controversy and voted to recommend the books be moved to the juvenile area. Library administrator, Linda Hughes had moved the books to the juvenile shelves, but many residents believed more should be done. This prompted Councilman Altman's suggestion to change the library policy. Councilman Altman took his changes directly to the city council. This exclusion of the library advisory board offended its members. The board questioned their future after the city council bypassed them to change a city policy related to controversial children's books. In a letter to the council, the library board stated, "It is now apparent that the board's action is viewed as worthless by some members of the council. If the Library Advisory Board is to serve no useful purpose, why does it continue to exist?"[322] Altman claimed he intentionally did not involve the library board in his resolution because, clearly, they were uncomfortable with the emotional debate sparked by the book controversy. Following the vote, the head librarian stated that many library patrons were already filling out petitions. To the library board and others in the community it highlighted councilman Altman's ties to the First Baptist Church.

The children's library books at the center of the controversy were a visible symbol of the division in America regarding acceptability of gay men and lesbians.

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[319] Templar, "Council Move Upsets Library Advisory Board." *Wichita Falls Times and Record News.* (1999, February 17), p. 1.
[320] Templar, "Berzina won't appeal books: City manager to let petitions talk." *Wichita Falls Times Record News, vol.92, no. 277,* (1999, February 18), pp. 1A, 8A.
[321] ____, ibid. The advisory board was created by city ordinance and is composed of residents appointed by the council to review trends and consider policy questions.
[322] ____, ibid.

The differing beliefs regarding same-gender sexual orientation, manifested through the book controversy, exposed a rift in the community. On one side stood the Rev. Jeffress and like-minded people who contended a pro-homosexual agenda was sweeping across the nation. Both conservative and Christian groups such as the American Family Association and the Christian Coalition have been fighting a well-publicized battle against gay rights. Rev. Jeffress believed, as a Christian, he had a responsibility to help stop society from rushing to destruction.[323] On the other side of the argument, the local PFLAG, the ACLU, WFMCC, and the gay community contended any destruction that had occurred was targeted at the homosexual community through hate-crimes and "gay-bashing" encouraged by the rhetoric of condemnation proclaimed from the pulpits. Neither side of the argument could understand the views of the other.

One month after the City Council adopted the new policy allowing the location of the children's books to be challenged the controversial books remained in the children's section. Collecting the needed signatures to change the location of the books required those signing the petition to read the books, have a valid library card, and live in the city for at least six months. A minimum of three hundred valid signatures on the petition was needed to set the new policy in motion. Awaiting the arrival of the petition and the verification of the petitioners' signatures did not prevent both sides of the debate from positioning themselves for an expected legal battle over the council policy.[324] Letters both supporting the removal of the books and

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[323] S. Clements, (1999 March 14), "Oceans Apart: Beliefs Clash in Debate Over Homosexuality." *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, (1999, March 14), p. 1A.

[324] Templar, "Critics Collecting Petitions on Books: Controversial Books are Still in Children's Section." *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, (1999, March 12), p. 7A.

condemning the policy as censorship continued to inundate the local newspaper's letters to the editor section as the city council election approached.

Janie Hill's campaigning against Councilman Shine would prove to be a moot point, as he ran unopposed for District 1. Although city council candidates tried to steer clear of the fate of the two children's books, at-large candidate and former justice of the peace, Arthur Bea Williams appeared at two council meetings to oppose the Altman sponsored resolution. Likewise, James Esther, a retired Air Force master sergeant and candidate for District 2, disliked the new library policy.[325] In fact, the election made local history, when Williams and Esther, both Black, were elected to the council at the same time. Their victories were of special interest, as both Williams and Esther opposed the council's policy for challenging the children's books. Both had serious concerns about the council taking authority away from library staff. The new council members replaced Angus Thompson and Don Johnston, both of whom were "key votes in the passage of the library policy sparked by the controversy over *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy's Roommate*."[326] At the time of the city council election, no petition had been submitted to the library. On the Sunday following the election, with great joy, Rev. Horvath announced to the congregation that Williams and Esther had won seats on the council.

ROUND THREE: Reaction to the Filing of the Petition

The controversy was far from over. A petition signed by 570 people arrived by mail at the public library. The two books were challenged because they talk about

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[325] ____. "Candidates: Just Go Vote. Council Hopefuls Want big Turnout." *Times Record News*. (1999, May 1), p. 1A.

[326] ____. "Council Election Makes History: Arthur Bea Williams, James Esther Jr. Each Win Big." *Wichita Falls Times Record News*.(1999, May 22), p. 1A.

children happily living with same-gender couples as parents, which according to the opposition promotes homosexuality and the "gay agenda." Upon receipt of the petition, the books were immediately removed from the shelves. Most copies of the books were checked out at the time the petitions arrived at the library. The reference versions of the books were taken to the city attorney's office. The petition complied with the new city council policy adopted in February 1999.[327] According to the Library Administrator Hughes, children would still be able to check out the books, but the books were to be placed in the adult sex education shelves. Regarding the relocation of the children's books Ms. Hughes stated, "(that) bothers me, because that's where you have information such as the Kinsey report and some very graphic sex education books."[328] Supporters of the change believe parents will have better control of whether their children actually see the books. This did not settle the issue. Hughes had to verify the signatures[329] and petitioned the city manager in hopes that he would send the policy decision back to the city council to consider reversal.[330]

Two days after the petition was delivered to the library forcing the removal of *Daddy's Roommate* and *Heather Has Two Mommies* from the children's section, the Texas Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union went to federal court. The

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[327] Petitions were gathered by "God Is Love" Ministry's director Janie Hill. Hill made public appeals for people to sign the petitions. Members of the ministry sought signatures at Christian bookstores, so the library cardholders could read the books before signing their names. Members of the First Baptist Church asked for signatures from members of the congregation and other churches. See Templar, "Book Petition Organizers Took Different Routes to Same Goal," *Times Record News*, (1999, July 16).

[328] ____, (1999, July 15), "Controversial Books Removed from Library's Children's Section," *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, (1999, July 15), p. 16A.

[329] ____, ibid. As the verification of signatures began, Hughes rejected some of the signers because they didn't have current library cards or haven't lived in the city limits for six months, as the policy requires.

[330] The media reports that two newly elected city council persons could potentially play a role in reversing the policy, as they have both voiced opposition to the policy. With the opposition to the policy by the newly elected council members along with those on the council who already oppose the policy, which includes the mayor, the prospects of throwing the policy out is a possibility.

ACLU asked a judge to strike down the city policy that allowed 300 library cardholders to have irrevocable say regarding the placement of the children's books at the city library. The lawsuit challenged the policy as a violation of the First Amendment."[331] A request for a temporary injunction was the "first legal challenge by nineteen local citizens who claim that their First Amendment rights were violated when the two books were taken off the children's shelves" according to a front page story in the local newspaper. Plaintiffs included college educators, grade school children, doctors, and ministers including Rev. Horvath.[332] Despite WFCAC's threat to be a plaintiff in the lawsuit, the organization's founder did not join in the suit. Named as defendants in the lawsuit were the city of Wichita Falls, Texas; Jim Berzina, in his official capacity as City Manger; and Linda Hughes, in her official capacity as Library Administrator of the city's public library.[333]

No sooner had the two children's books been moved than a federal judge blocked the petition from cardholders that challenged the books. An agreement was reached between the ACLU and city attorney following the lawsuit filed in federal court against the city by the nineteen Wichitans, including several members of WFMCC and the ACLU.[334] Under a temporary order, library policy was suspended

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[331] Templar, "ACLU Asks Judge to Reject Library Book Policy as Censorship," *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, (1999, July 17), p. 1A.

[332] ____, ibid. The plaintiffs were: Emiley Sund, 12-year old eighth-grader; Andrea Sund, 8 year-old third-grader; Pamela Sund, Mother of Emiley and Andrea and part-time merchandiser; Dr. Richard N. Sutton, physician; Joseph C. "Jace" Shelton, auto mechanic; Lois Gallenberger, president of the Wichita Falls chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays; Tom Fairclough, retired; Rev. Nancy Horvath, pastor of Metropolitan Community Church; Michael Land, educator at Midwestern State University; Rev. Vernon Raschke, Episcopal minister, Dr. Emory J. Sobiesk, psychiatrist; Blair P. Coleman, Ann R. Coleman, Mildred Gore Lancaster, MSU educator; Robert G. Baggott, retired Army colonel; Dan Lewandowski, free-lance technician; Michael Bauman, 8-year-old forth-grader and Mitch Bauman, Michael's father. (p. 16A).

[333] Civil Action No. 7:9-CV-155-R.

[334] Templar, "Library Books On Gay Parents Back in Children's Section," *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, (1999, July 20).

and the books were returned to the children's section awaiting a second hearing on the books' fate. As the legal maneuvering continued, newly elected council members, Williams and Esther were concerned that the book controversy was putting the city on the map for the wrong reasons and taking energy away from more worthwhile projects. Both council members vowed to vote down the Altman resolution if Mayor Yeager chose to put the issue back on the City Council's agenda.[335] Letters to the editor as well as another editorial from the newspaper echoed Williams' and Esther's sentiment. I am unaware of any letters written by members of WFMCC other than local PFLAG president Lois Gallenberger. There were several letters printed that requested the authors remain anonymous. It is possible that members of WFMCC penned some of these letters. The fear of being "outed" to family, friends, and employers would be a logical explanation for why no members seemingly addressed the controversy through a letters to the editor.

U.S. District Judge Jerry Buchmeyer heard testimony from plaintiffs in the ACLU lawsuit against the city. The purpose of the hearing was to decide whether the temporary restraining order that left the books in the children's section of the library would remain in effect until the case was completed, or the books would be placed in a restricted area in the adult section.[336] Following the tense testimony, in which tears flowed and short retorts were uttered, Judge Buchmeyer ordered the two controversial books to remain in the juvenile section. Buchmeyer engaged in extensive questioning of the witnesses and chastised City Council Members Altman, Beaty, and former

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[335] C. Zollo, "Two Council Members: Book Controversy Tainting City's Image," *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, (2000, July 22), p. 1A.

[336] ____, "Judge Hears Argument on Where to Put Children's Books on Homosexuality," *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, (1999, August 18), p. 1A.

Council Member Thompson for the problems he had with the resolution. The council members maintained that the specific books addressing children with gay parents did not figure into their decision. Judge Buchmeyer did not believe their answer and advised both sides to continue the agreement until further court orders were issued. Both sides were required to prepare written arguments citing existing law and connecting it to testimony and evidence in the case for presentation to the judge.[337] The judge had the options of deeming the resolution constitutional or striking it down and granting a permanent injunction against the city from administering the policy.[338]

The extended wait for Judge Buchmeyer's ruling did not cause the controversy to subside. Letters continued to be written to the local newspaper. Efforts to keep *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy's Roommate* in the children's section of the library, won Hughes the Intellectual Freedom Award from the Texas Library Association and the North Texas Regional Library Association in 1999. National recognition would come to Hughes in June of 2001 when she received the John Phillip Immroth Intellectual Freedom Award from the American Library Association (ALA) at the national conference in San Francisco.[339] It is worth noting that Hughes was not the only one to receive an award related to the book controversy. In January 1999, statewide attention to the city and the library book controversy was noted in *Texas Monthly Magazine* when Rev. Jeffress was awarded two "Bum

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[337] ____. "Controversial Books to Stay in Children's Section." *Wichita Falls Times Record News*. (1999, August 19), p. 1A.

[338] M. Wolfson. "Residents Will Have to Wait a While Longer for U.S. District Judge to Deliver Ruling on Controversial Library Books Decisions." *Wichita Falls Times Record News*. (2000, December 8), p. 1A.

[339] A. Work. "Librarian Lauded for Fight: Hughes to receive national library award." *Times Record News*. (2001 April 26), p. 1A.

Steer"[340] awards by the magazine. Executive editor and co-writer of the Bum Steer award poked fun at Jeffress' crusade because of its unintended consequences of raising interest in reading the books and the donation by residents of 23 new copies of each book to the library. A long waiting list to read the book was created by Jeffress' actions according to the magazine.[341]

Taking a stand against the majority of the City Council took its toll on Mayor Yeager. Letters to the editor claimed it was time for the mayor to leave office. The writer noted their dissatisfaction with the mayor's decision to allow "children's pornography" in the children's section of the library. [342] She was defeated for re-election. One year after the case went to federal court the city waited for the judge's decision. Regardless of the judge's ruling, the issue had taken an enormous exaction on the city. National media attention from New York to Utah to California had praised and criticized the city's behavior during the controversy. Locally, the spirited debate had resulted in greater public awareness of the importance free exchange of thought in the marketplace of ideas can manifest. Members of the community on both sides of the issue were mobilized, many for the first time, behind a cause they believed important.

During the long drawn out controversy, WFMCC took its social justice from the covert status Rev. Horvath had cautiously hoped for the first year of her ministry to the public sphere. Members of the congregation, who had never considered taking

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[340] The "Bum Steer" awards is a "dubious" honor the magazine bestows each year on what it terms incompetent crooks, tongue-tied politicians and ordinary Texans whose comments and actions were judged by the magazine to be "bum" in nature. (S. Clements, "Magazine Gives Jefress Bum Steer," *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, (1999, December 29), p. 1A.

[341] P. Burka, (Ed.), "The 1999 Bum Steer Awards," *Texas Monthly*, (1999, January), p. 91.

[342] Letter to the editor, "Yeager Looked Ahead," *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, (2000, May 30), p. 6B.

a public stance on any political issue, especially not one addressing sexual orientation, squared off before the television cameras and spoke out against what they perceived as censorship and homophobia. The skills developed and enhanced in activities within the church were utilized in the public arena. The basic assumption of participatory democracy was realized.[343] The participation in the activities and leadership roles within the church led to political interest and involvement. Alliances were formed with other religious and civil rights organizations. For many in the congregation, fear was overcome through courageous acts and pride replaced feelings of inadequacy. Participation enhances efficacy.[344] The gay community had the opportunity to discover they were not alone in their struggle for civil rights. The church would be able to find refuge and community beyond the walls of the church building. Among allies in the debate, members of WFMCC built a broader community and realized greater acceptance, thus extending the place of refuge. Support demonstrated on behalf of First Amendment freedoms also encompassed a call for social justice for the gay men and lesbians in the city.

The Court Ruling

U.S. District Judge Jerry Buchmeyer rendered a decision September 19, 2000.[345] In bold letters with a large colored photograph of the new library building

[343] For an in-depth discussion on participatory democracy see C. Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); J. Dryzek, *Discursive Democracy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Postpositivist social science calls for participatory democracy. See H. Lasswell, "The Policy Science Orientation," in Daniel Lerner and Harold Lasswell, (Ed.), *The Policy Science*, (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1951), pp. 3-15.

[344] The relationship of participation and capability to have power is often taken for granted. See S. E. Finkel, "Reciprocal Effects of Participation and Political Efficacy," *American Journal of Political Science 29* (1985): pp. 891-913, and W. Mibrath and M.L.Goel, *Political Participation: How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics*, (2nd edition), (Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing Co., 1977).

[345] *Sund, et al. v. City of Wichita Falls, Texas, et al.*, Civil Action No. 7:99-CV-155-R

the newspaper headlines read: "'Unconstitutional': Federal judge strips authority from laws targeting library books."[346] Buchmeyer's ruling struck down the petition system enacted by the Wichita Falls City Council. Judge Buchmeyer ruled that allowing a petition signed by 300 library-card holders to remove a book because they did not like the contents was a clear violation of the First Amendment. In his 44-page decision Buchmeyer wrote,

> Not only does this language allow any special interest group to suppress library materials on the basis of their content, it actually facilitates an infinite number of content-and viewpoint-based speech restrictions...It would be absurd to conclude that the Altman Resolution imposed no additional burdens on targeted materials-for if this were true, then the Resolution would do absolutely nothing to advance the purported interest in having children read these books with parental approval and/or supervision.[347]

Quoting from *Forsyth County vs. Nationalist Movement*. Buchmeyer continued, "Speech cannot be...burdened, any more than it can be punished or banned, simply because it might offend a hostile mob."[348] The federal district judge argued the main intent of the petition system was to suppress the two books at the center of the controversy. Buchmeyer described the local library administrator, Linda Hughes as "the real heroine of this unfortunate story of the censorship of two children's books."[349] Hughes praised the judge's decision: "It puts the responsibility for censoring children's books on the parents, where it should be. And I do believe parents should be the ones who determine what books their children read."[350]

The day following the court ruling, the local paper printed an editorial

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[346] J. Hall, "'Unconstitutional': Federal judge strips authority from laws targeting library books, sexually oriented businesses," *Wichita Falls Times Record News, vol.94, No. 121,* (2000, September 19), p. 1A.

[347] ____, ibid., "Federal Judge Strikes Down Library Resolution." *Wichita Falls Times Record News,* (2000, September 20), p. 1A.

[348] ____, ibid.

[349] ____, ibid.

supporting the judge's decision. According to the newspaper, it was never a secret that the targets of the Altman Resolution were two books that portrayed gay lifestyles in a positive light that had incurred the wrath of the Rev. Robert Jeffress of First Baptist Church in the spring of 1998, the editorial stated,

> Buchmeyer correctly observed that punishing speech - and the books are a form of speech – was the equivalent of censorship. We believe Council Member Bill Altman acted in "good faith" in pushing for the resolution, but it was clearly unconstitutional and will be at the appellate level. Therefore, we believe the City Council should not appeal the library books decision. So what of the moral issues? What about the argument that we should not be exposing children to lifestyles [that] many regard as sinful? Doesn't government have a role to play in legislating morality? The answer to that question is: Yes, it does – to an extent. Laws against murder, rape, embezzling and stealing all have a moral component. But there's a problem when that moral component comes head-to-head with free speech. The problem is in determining what speech is moral, and also in determining who gets to decide what is moral.[351]

Wichita Falls city council member, Altman for whom the resolutions was named claimed he was not surprised by the court ruling against the city, but he still believed that the petition process was valid. Altman continued to argue that the petition was constitutional because "it doesn't censor anything, it doesn't unduly restrain anybody."[352] Similarly, Jeffress was not shocked by Buchmeyer's ruling, but contended the judge erred in calling the issue a freedom of speech matter. Jeffress said, "This resolution had nothing to do with banning books or moving books out of the library...it can hardly be described as a First Amendment issue."[353] Jeffress, in reference to the involvement of the ACLU in the lawsuit, claimed the organization specifically targets issues raised by religious people and groups. Jeffress asserted,

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[350] ____, ibid.
[351] C. Wilson, (Ed.),"Free Speech Ruling: Judge Rules Correctly on Books and Babe's," *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, (2000, September 21).
[352] ____, ibid.

"Part of the ACLU's objection is that the resolution originated with people of faith."[354]

The city council decided one month after Judge Buchmeyer's ruling on the constitutionality of the controversial library book resolution, not to appeal. The city's failed library-book resolution cost the taxpayers $26,557 for the ACLU lawyer's fees and expenses.[355] In exchange for promising not to appeal the ACLU agreed to reduce by 30% the amount billed to the city. The 30 percent reduction in the attorneys' fees charged by the Dallas and Washington, D.C. offices saved the city $10,000. Had the city won, the ACLU would have absorbed the cost of the case rather than billing the plaintiffs.

The American Civil Liberties Union would indeed take a role in another case in the city. The ACLU would file in defense of freedom of religion. The fear of personal repercussions for taking a public stand, as members of WFMCC did in the library book controversy, can include excommunication by family, friends, churches, and the potential for losing one's job, income, social standing, and custody of children. Such concerns unquestionably drive the decision of whether or not to be involved in social and political activism.

Issue #2: The Freedom of Religion Case

A second controversy directly jolted the congregants when a child custody case arose over the right to worship at WFMCC. The custody case illustrates the political and social activism engaged in by WFMCC at the grassroots level. The fear

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[353] ____, ibid.
[354] ____, ibid.
[355] The city paid $20,000 for attorney fees and $6,557 for court costs and expenses. See M. Wolfson, "City, ACLU Settle Books Case." *Wichita Falls Times Record News*. (2000, October 19), 1A.

of personal and professional repercussions as well as the desire to protect the privacy of one's child surfaced in this small congregation. Two of the members of the local congregation had the experience of facing the possibility of being exposed as a lesbian couple because of the child custody suit involving one of the women. The woman's divorce decree had appointed joint managing conservatorship of the child to both parents. Although the woman would be allowed to see the daughter daily and would be heavily involved in decisions about her life, the divorce decree declared her former husband to have primary custody of the couple's daughter. According to the divorce decree, the mother did have the right to expose her five-year old daughter to Christian principles at home through reading Christian stories, praying, and meditating with the child. The father would provide their daughter with training in the Jewish faith and take the child to Temple for formal Jewish training. According to court records, "The parents together will decide what other formal religious ceremonies the child should attend with extended family. These decisions will be based upon the child's maturity and ability to understand the service, which is to be attended."[356] However, during the summer of 1998, the little girl's mother took her daughter to vacation bible school at one of the Lutheran churches in the community. WFMCC, along with three other congregations from various denominations, had joined together for their vacation Bible school program. WFMCC was thrilled to be included in the joint effort.[357] In fact, the pastor of WFMCC taught the adult class and one of its board members taught the fifth grade Bible class. Each congregation

[356] Cause No. 148, 100-B, p.4.

[357] The pride in being included in the vacation bible school and the opportunity to teach in the program was evidenced by the announcements from the pulpit, comments made by the pastor to me in an

was responsible for providing a meal during the week of activities. Members of WFMCC saw their participation as a sign that the congregation was making inroads into the boarder Christian community of the city. The inclusion in teaching and providing meals helped to legitimize the primarily gay and lesbian congregation's spiritual acceptance among other denominations. Such public inclusion can serve as a reaffirmation on a personal level, that is, a reconciliatory and tangible indication that one can be both a Christian and a sexual minority. The significance of this inclusion should not be understated. It has been noted previously that a large segment of the Christian community believes gay men and lesbians should be excluded from full participation in church life. With many ministers preaching that homosexuality and Christianity are incompatible identities, the invitation to be included gave the local congregation cause to rejoice.

Acting out of desire to be involved as WFMCC's participated in the joint vacation bible school and in an effort to include Christian teachings in her daughter's training, the lesbian mother took her daughter to the vacation Bible school. When the father learned his daughter had attended the vacation Bible school he took his former wife back to court, claiming she had violated the divorce decree. The mother informed the court she had a First Amendment right to take her daughter to any church she wished. She insisted that she did not fight the original decree out of the fear that to do so might limit her opportunities to see her daughter.[358]

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interview as well as notations in the church bulletins and newsletter prior to and following the week of Bible school.

[358] According to Kate Kendell of the National Center for Lesbian Rights, "Like many lesbian and gay parents, this mother felt intimidated, that the very custody of her child may be at stake." See L. Templar, "Ruling Causes Ruckus," *Wichita Falls Times Record News On-line*, (1999, April 20). Retrieved on April 21, 1999 from http://www.TRNonline.com/today/local/ruling_causes_ruckus.

A Mother's Legal Battle: Religious Training of a Child

As a sign of support from her church family, several members of WFMCC accompanied the mother to court. During the tense day in court, I had the opportunity to interview the mother's partner, who was awaiting the results of the court hearing at the home of a WFMCC board member. Because of the fear of prejudices against same-gender couples, she felt her attendance at the hearing might harm her partner's case. While conducting the interview several members of the congregation dropped by or called the waiting spouse to offer prayers and support on behalf of the lesbian couple. This "pulling together" in a time of need appeared to suggest a place of refuge and a sense of community shared by the members of this unique denomination.

An effort to portray WFMCC as a traditional Christian house of worship was made by the woman's attorney. In addition, the defense indicated that the woman's daughter was emotionally healthy and attending activities in which WFMCC was involved caused no harm. A video taped Sunday service held at WFMCC was submitted to the judge in the case, as was a psychologist's professional analysis of the little girl's emotional health. The child's artwork, which depicted the conceptualization of her family was introduced and explained by the psychologist.[350]

Outwardly unconvinced by WFMCC's video taped service, or the testimony and interpretation by the psychologist of the child's drawings, the ex-husband argued WFMCC was an unfit environment for his daughter. During the hearing, the father, who is Jewish, stated under oath that he was a member of the Methodist church. It is true that while married the couple attended the Methodist church with their daughter.

To the father, the issue for legal purposes was not the sexual orientation of his ex-wife but rather his objections to her taking their daughter to WFMCC with its policy of welcoming lesbian and gay people. Judge Nelson asked the father if he desired his ex-wife to be fined or jailed for violation of the divorce decree. The father responded that he did not want her formally punished, but did seek legal assurance that she would not expose the child to worship services at WFMCC. No decision was rendered until March of 1999. The lawyer for the child's father offered to drop the contempt charges if the mother would agree to take the child to Catholic churches, "mainline" denomination Protestant churches, or a Jewish synagogue.[360] The decree from Judge Keith Nelson of the 78th Judicial District Court of Texas claiming that WFMCC was not a mainline denomination church stated,

> The primary issue is where the child would attend Sunday school and church...the intent was for mainline churches to be utilized in the religious training of the daughter. This would include the Catholic Church, and church in the Protestant faith such as Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Episcopalian, which are considered to be the standard religious institutions in the Protestant field. The Metropolitan Community Church does not fall with in this category.[361]

The lesbian mother contacted Rev. Horvath at WFMCC and members of the congregation to ask for prayers regarding the wisdom of the decision to pursue the issue further. She feared losing her job, endangering her partner's job, and problems for her school-age daughter if the media gained knowledge of the suit.[362] This concern underscores the genuine vulnerability of being a sexual minority. The lesbian

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[359] The child's drawing's portrayed her mother's home as a happy place and included the mother, her partner, and the little girl in which all were smiling. The images of the father's home included the child's father with a frown on his face, his girlfriend, and the child.

[360] Personal communications, (1999, March 26).

[361] T. Perry, "GLBT ACTION ALERT: UFMCC Defends Lesbian Mother's Rights; Fights Court Ruling 'Notice of Intent to Appeal Filed.'" (1999, May 11).

mother's fear proved to be warranted. When the local news media discovered that the mother had decided to appeal the ruling, they contacted WFMCC's pastor asking for a statement on whether the mother attended the church. Rev. Horvath offered, "no comment" and begged the media to please respect the privacy of the mother and the child. The pastor feared her refusal to provide the media with details was of little consequence as she stated, "They already know and have the court documents in their hands."[363]

Religious institutions have been able to provide the resource to mobilize its congregation when a crisis arises. It is typical of evangelical faiths to turn to prayer in times of distress and congregant needs. The pastor called an "emergency" prayer time at the church. The message of the meeting went out through an e-mail from the pastor and phone calls from board members of the church. The phone tree established by the board was utilized to mobilize the congregation. According to the pastor, twenty-seven people gathered to pray over the women at the church and for the child.[364] The lesbian couple was anointed with oil. Those gathered for prayer took what is called the "Christ candle"[365] and walked around the church building in prayer and song.[366] The gathering of members, offering of prayer, and anointing illustrates the role the church plays as a place of refuge and community for it parishioners. It also demonstrates the mobilization techniques instituted by the church leadership. The following morning the front page of the local newspaper

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[362] I received an e-mail copy of the letter the woman sent to the pastor of WFMCC. Personal communications, (1999, March 26).
[363] Personal communications. I received a phone call from board member (1999, April 28).
[364] The child was not present.
[365] The "Christ candle" is lit at the beginning of any service at the church and is not extinguished until the end of services. The flame from the candle is carried outside the church following the service to symbolize Christ lighting the way for the world.

carried the story of the court ruling.[367] The article reported Judge Nelson claimed his ruling simply enforced the agreement between the woman and her husband regarding the child's religious up-bring and had nothing to do with sexual orientation. The reporter stated, "The *Times Record News* will not divulge their names [the parents] to protect their child's privacy."[368] WFMCC's pastor credited the congregation's prayers and the integrity of the reporter for not disclosing the names of the parents, the woman's partner, or the child in the article.

National Organizations' Involvement

Upon filing the appeal, two national gay and lesbian organizations offered their support to the woman fighting Judge Nelson's ruling. The case brought together the religious organizations of the local MCC and the national UFMCC with the secular lesbian rights organization of the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR). This case had implications beyond the immediate concerns. The case demonstrated how a religious organization participated in the broader issues of gay rights when the personal and political combine on several levels of activism. First, the case provided the opportunity for me to observe the national level of UFMCC assistance in social justice activities at the local level. It is worth noting that such national to local coordination is indicative of political and social organizations. The involvement of UFMCC with the local congregation came with the mother's decision to contact the executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NLCR) in San

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[366] Personal communications, (1999, April 29).
[367] Templar, "Ruling Causes Ruckus," *Wichita Falls Times Record News*, (1999, April 29), pp. A1, A10.
[368] ____, ibid.

Francisco.[369] Executive Director, Kate Kendell[370] immediately requested that the lesbian mother use priority mailing and faxing to send the pleadings, the letter from Judge Nelson, and a draft of the order to the NCLR. Kendell stated,

> It is unprecedented in our experience of representing lesbian and gay parents for a court to direct a parent that she or he may not take a child to the religious services of their choice. Our First Amendment and our legal traditions of religious freedom do not tolerate any government attempts to determine what religious training is appropriate for our families and our children. We intend to have this unconstitutional ruling overturned on appeal.[371]

Showing a strong interest in the case, NCLR promptly notified Rev. Troy Perry at UFMCC Headquarters. Upon receiving the information from Kendell, Perry contacted WFMCC's pastor to obtain the lesbian mother's telephone number. The mother informed the UFMCC that she tried to comply with the judge's ruling by attending the types of churches listed in his order. However, the mother reported that she and her daughter did not feel comfortable attending other churches and her daughter asked to return to MCC to worship.[372] During the telephone call to the WFMCC parent, Perry pledged that UFMCC would take on all the legal expenses of the appeal as well as reimburse the woman for her current court costs.[373] He took the

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[369] The NLCR is the nation's legal center with a primary commitment to advancing the rights and safety of lesbians and their families through a program of litigation, public policy advocacy, free legal advice and counseling, and public education. NCLR also provides representation and resources to gay men, and bisexual and transgendered individuals on key issues that also significantly advance lesbian rights. Web page. http://www.nclrights.org.

[370] Kendell joined the staff of NCLR as Legal Director in 1994 and has become a national spokesperson for lesbian and gay civil rights. National Center for Lesbian Rights. Timeline. http://www.nclrights.org/timeline.html. Founder and previous NCLR executive director, Roberta Achtenberg, former Assistant Secretary of HUD in the Clinton Administration resigned to run for the mayor of San Francisco. "Buchanan Anti-gay Statements Appeal to Conservative Fears." GLAAD Press, (19996, February 19). Retrieved on February 23, 2000 from http://www.glaad.org/glaad press/960219html.

[371] T. Perry, "GLBT Action Alert: UFMCC Defends Lesbian Mother's Rights; Fights Court Ruling," *News Service of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches*.(1999, May 11). Retrieved on February 1, 2001 from http://www.ufmcc.com/texcourt2.

[372] C. Zollo, "Mother Appealing Judge's Church Ruling," *Wichita Falls Times Record News*. (1999, May 18), pp. 1A, 7A.

[373] Personal communications.

judge's opinion personally. Upon receiving permission to be actively involved in the case Perry issued the following statement:

> We're under attack by the courts. And I'm furious...I spoke this week with an MCC member who is a lesbian mother in a town in Texas...I am holding the judges' order in my hand and reading and re-reading his words. I can hardly believe what I am seeing. And *I'm furious!* (Perry's emphasis)...This is not only shocking; it is an attack on GLBT families and people of faith. For the first time in the 30-year history of UFMCC, a judge has overstepped boundaries provided by the US Constitution and has ruled that UFMCC is not a suitable church for our children. This is appalling and patently illegal. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution specifically requires government to stay out of religion...What in God's name will it take to get the government out of our lives—or from attempting to control our GLBT families? We must not let a Texas judge decide what churches or synagogues gay and lesbian parents and their children may attend![374]

UFMCC and NCLR Take on the Courts

Perry demonstrated his commitment along with the National Center for Lesbian Rights to help fight the legal battle for the lesbian mother and her daughter's rights when he claimed to have hired the best possible lawyers. A legal appeal was filed with the Second District Court of Appeals in Ft Worth, Texas.[375] UFMCC established a website link from its official web page addressing the concerns of this case. Along with the link, UFMCC sent special Action Alert memos and the monthly Internet newsletters with updates on the case. Perry requested that those receiving the

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[374] T. Perry," GLBT Action Alert: Lesbian Mother's Rights Under Attack by Texas Court," *News Service of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.* (1999 April, 27). Retrieved on February 1, 2001 from http://www.ufmcc.com/texcourt.

[375] The Second District Court of Appeals in Fort Worth hears civil and criminal appeals from district and county courts in 12 counties. The court is composed of one chief justice and six justices. The Fort Worth court is one of 14 Court of Appeals that handle cases throughout Texas. Attorneys appeal their cases to the court through briefs or motions. Initial briefs must be less than 50 pages, unless the court allows for additional pages. Once the briefs are filed, the justices can ask to hear oral arguments from attorneys representing both sides in the case. Unless granted additional time, each side gets 15 minutes to argue. The court has a light system to let attorneys know how much time they have. A green light means an attorney may start. The yellow light is a two minute warning and a red light mean time has expired. After oral argument, the court can take several weeks or longer to make a decision and contact attorneys. Second District Court of Appeals. (1999, May 14). Retrieved on May 15, 1999 from http://

case information to forward the message to others in order to inform them of what he perceived as a threat to the gay and lesbian community. In addition, Perry asked for prayers on behalf of the mother and child and requested e-mails of encouragement and support was to be sent to his e-mail address. Perry estimated the court costs at $10,000. A special UFMCC Religious Freedom Fund was established to collect donations. In asking for donations to help fight the case, the UFMCC organization utilized an Internet secure website for credit card donation to be made by those who prefer not to mail their donations.[376] The use of the Internet to directly contribute to the court costs, and inform the Fellowship of political and legal affront to the church and its members illustrates UFMCC's commitment to utilize all the available resources to further the church's message and mobilize social justice efforts.

Responding to Judge Nelson's opinion that MCC was not a mainline church, Rev. Perry stated,

> There are at least two issues for us. First, the government has no legal right telling any family which churches are acceptable and which are not. Moreover, the U.S. Constitution, the Internal Revenue Service, and the Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches compiled and published by the National Council of churches all recognize Metropolitan Community Church as a church. UFMCC holds observer status with the World Council of Churches. And our denominational Statement of Faith clearly falls within the theology of mainline Protestant denominations.[377]

Perry claimed that UFMCC headquarters received hundreds of letters of support from individuals, organizations, and a broad cross section of religious leaders. Perry also stated that he had been in contact with other civil rights organizations and that numerous religious and human rights organizations were exploring options for

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www.TRNonline.com/today/regional/appeals_court, (1999, May 14), p. 1.

[376]http:// www.ufmcc.com/textcourt; http://www.ufmcc.com/texcourt2

[377] ____, ibid.

filing *amicus curiae* briefs on behalf of the mother and child.[378] This case presented the potential for making strange bedfellows of some of the very denominations condemning same-gender sexual orientation and UFMCC with its outreach to the gay male and lesbian community. The ramifications of a judge being allowed to determine what churches were acceptable or unacceptable for individuals to attend could be interpreted as a genuine threat to the freedom of religion for all people.

The alliances between religious and secular organizations for political mobilization enhanced the political and social capital of sexual minority citizens. The "free exercise" and "establishment of religion" clauses of the First Amendment provided the opportunity for building a bridge to link the gay and lesbian religious community with secular gay and lesbian organizations. The cooperative efforts of UFMCC and the National Center for Lesbian Rights working with the lesbian couple at the local MCC illustrated how religious institutions and secular organizations can ally themselves in the battle for social justice. In light of this legally contested restriction on a member of WFMCC right to worship, a major contributor to the NCLR hosted a birthday party for her life partner in combination with a fundraiser for the appeal of the case. The mother, partner, daughter, friend, and I attended the party/fundraiser in Dallas a few weeks prior to the argument before the appellate court. Along with the birthday celebration, Kate Kendell provided literature on NCLR accomplishments and on going cases. Kendell discussed the upcoming WFMCC case. I observed a number of those in attendance literally gasping and shaking their heads in what appeared to be disbelief when informed that the courts had forbidden the lesbian and her partner to take the child to activities associated with

[378] ____. ibid.

MCC. In an effort to protect the child's privacy, the couple involved in the case was not overtly identified.

The media once again drew national attention to WFMCC's social justice battles. The *Salt Lake City Tribune* picked up the story noting the danger of letting courts decide religious questions that arise around child custody. While acknowledging that divorce pulls the government into the personal lives of families, in most instances the courts refrain from getting entangled in decisions concerning the rights of parents to practice their religion and share that belief with their children. Accusing Judge Nelson of unduly entangling the state in religion, the article claimed,

> Of course, Nelson's religious judgement that MCC is not a mainline church has less to do with the church's theology than its congregation. Nelson may claim to be interpreting the agreement between the parties, but what he's really doing is substituting his own religious and moral values for those of a parent.[379]

The question of separation of church and state and the appearance of what some considered "blatant anti-homosexual bias for the ruling"[380] attracted the support of a large number of groups.

Several secular and religious organizations indicated their support for the lesbian couple by filing friends-of-the court briefs. An *amici curiae* brief was filed

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[379] R. Blumner, "When It Comes to Religious Upbringing, Courts Should Just Butt Out," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, (1999, October 29). Retrieved on January 19, 2001 from http://www.sltrib.com/1999/oct/oct/10291999/commenta/42267.htm.

[380] ____, ibid. Other media organizations pick up the story. See "Judge Forbids Divorced Mother From Taking Child to Gay Outreach Church." *Abilene Reporter-News*, (1999, April 29). Retrieved on February 2, 2001 from http://www.texnews.com/1998/1999/texas/gay0429.html; J. Leaming, "First Amendment Center, Civil Rights Group Urge Reversal of Judge's Definition of 'Main Line' Church." *Free!: The Freedom Forum Online*, (1999, September 3). Retrieved on February 2, 2001 from (http://www.freedomforum.org/religion/1999/9/3texaschurch.asp; R. Blumner, "Keep Child's Religion Out of Court." *St. Petersburg Times*,(1999, October 24). Retrieved on February 1, 2001from http://www.stpetersburgtimes.com/News/1024999/Perspective/Keep_child_s_religionshtml; K. Ivers, "Log Cabin Condemns Texas Court Ruling Against Church: District Court Ruling Against Gay Parent is 'Appalling and Unconstitutional.'" *Georgia Log Cabin Republicans*,(1999, April 26). Retrieved on February 1, 2001 from http://www.lcrga.com/archive/1999904261755.shtml.

on behalf of the lesbian mother by civil rights organizations including: Americans United for Separation of Church and State; People for the American Way Foundation; Southern Poverty Law Center; and the American Civil Liberties Union. A second *amici curiae* brief was filed by religious organizations. Those filing included: National Council of Churches; American Jewish Congress; American Friends Service Committee (Quakers); and UFMCC. This case clearly provided an example of how secular and religious organizations can unite and work together on behalf of perceived violations of basic constitutional rights. I find it interesting that despite the ex-husband's Jewish faith, the American Jewish Congress joined with the other religious groups by offering their support to the mother. To the American Jewish Congress, the issue was protecting the Free Exercise clause. The brief emphasized that a variety of religions once thought of as peripheral have become mainline, including Baptists, Methodists, Catholics, Mormons, as well as Judaism. The *amici* brief reasoned the constitutional defect in Judge Nelson's decision.

> A loosely worded divorce agreement has led to an improper judicial intrusion into the sacred domain of religious beliefs...It is not that it enforced an agreement dealing with the religious upbringing of the child, but that the trial court usurped to itself the right to decide which religion was mainline, or orthodox enough to be acceptable. This the Constitution barred it from doing...The courts may not substitute their religious judgement for those of the family...The decision of the court—arrogating to itself the power to decide what churches are theologically acceptable—is untenable.[381]

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[381] "Texas Court Violated Church/State separation by Determining that Church Ministering to a gay Congregation was not 'Mainline.'" *American Jewish Congress*. (1999, August 30). Retrieved on December 13, 2000 from http://www.prnewsire.com. The brief was prepared by Marc Stern, Co-Director of the AJCongress Commission on Law and Social Action. Professor Douglas Laycock of Austin Texas, Counsel of Record and Oliver S. Thomas of the National Council of Churches were Of Counsel on the case. Tracy Jordan of UFMCC and Joyce Miller of the American Friends Service Committee also assisted in preparation of the brief.

The brief argued four points. First, Texas courts may not make child custody determinations on religious grounds.[382] Second, there is no proof that attendance at MCC would be "illegal, immoral or harmful."[383] Third, there is no agreed upon meaning to the term "mainline."[384] Fourth, state and federal law forbid judicial favoritism toward a particular church.[385] The non-preference principle in the Texas Freedom of Worship Clause states, "No human authority ought, in any case whatsoever, to control or interfere with the rights of conscience in matters of religion, and no preference shall ever be given by law to any religious society or mode of worship."[386]

The *amici curiae* brief of the civil rights organizations argued two main points and several sub-points. First, the trial court's order violated the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause when it evaluated churches to determine which were "mainline." This was evidenced according to the brief, when the trial court failed to

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[382] This section of the brief supported its argument by citing *Zummo v. Zummo*, 754 A2d 1130, 1143-48 (Pa. Super. 1990), (collecting authorities); *Reynolds v. Rayborn*, 116 S.W.2d. 863 (Tex. Civ. App.-Amarillo 1938, no writ which decided custody based on religious beliefs. The decision in *Reynolds* was reversed by the appellate court citing the First Amendment and Texas Freedom of Worship Clause (Tex. Const., art. 1, §6). *Gould v. Gould*, 342 N.W.2d 426,432 (Wis. 1984) states, "courts should not purport to pass upon the comparative merits of various religion" and in *Burrows v. Brady*, 605 A.2d 1312, 1315 (R.I. 1992) the court said, "trial justice may not make judgements on the comparative merits of the religions practiced by the parents."

[383] *Alaniz v. Alaniz*, 867 S.W.2d. at pp. 56-57. This case made use of the term "mainstream in its opinion. The brief argued nothing in the opinion of the trial judge suggested that he relied on the "illegal, immoral, or harmful to the child" and citing *Knighton*, 723 S.W.2d. at 278, emphasized that specific evidence indicating the religious practices of MCC would threaten the physical health or mental well-being of the child.

[384] According to the court, *In Re Will of Johnston*, 629 N.Y.S.2d 949, 951 n.4 (Sur.Ct.1995), the phrase mainline church has more sociological than religious content. For a discussion on marginalized faith moving to the center see S. E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (Yale University Press; 1972); M. E. Marty, *Pilgrims In Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion In America* (Little Brown 1984) and W.C. Roof and W. McKinney, *American Mainline Religion* 35 (Rutgers University Press 1987).

[385] Arguing discrimination against religion or among religions was the core of recent decisions, the brief cited *Larson v. Valente*, 456 U.S. 228, 244 (1982); *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye, Inc. v. City of Hialeah*, 508 U.S. 520 (1993) and *Employment Division v. Smith*, 494 U.S. 872 (1990) as judicious interpretations of the federal Free Exercise Clause.

[386] Tex. Const. Art. I, §6.

respect the requirement of government neutrality towards religion; violated the Establishment Clause by evaluating religious denominations, and violated the Free Exercise Clause because it constituted a governmental evaluation of the mother's religious beliefs. Second, the parties' agreement concerning the religious upbringing of their child should be construed to avoid constitutional problems. This was indicated according to the brief when: (1) the court decided a constitutional question where the case could have been resolved on other grounds;[387] (2) a construction of the parents' agreement that prevented the mother from taking the daughter to MCC burdened the mother's constitutional interest in the religious upbringing of her child and unnecessarily raised constitutional concerns;[388] (3) the constitutionality of enforcing parental agreements that limit one parent's right to provide religious training to her child was in doubt;[389] and (4) a construction of the agreement that allowed the mother to take the child to church was consistent with the language of the agreement and avoided constitutional problems.[390]

The case was appealed to the Second Supreme Judicial District of Texas in Fort Worth, Texas in September of 1999. Two attorneys from the National Center for

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[387] See *Burns v. Hodge*, 334 U.S. 24, 30 n.6 (1948).

[388] See *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205, 213-214 (1972).

[389] The court in *Hornung v. Hornung*, declared, "It is not impermissible for a court to become involved in the religious upbringing of the children of a divorce...it must be recognized that there is a sensitive interplay between consideration of the child's best interests and the constitutional requirement that government maintain religious impartiality and avoid regulating religious beliefs" (485 N.W. 2d 335 (Neb. App. 1992)).

[390] The courts have protected the non-custodial parent's rights to provide religious training, including taking the child to religious services of the parent's choice, even in cases where there is conflict between the primary physical custodian and the other parent (*amici curiae* of the ACLU of Texas, ACLU, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, People for the American Way Foundation, and Southern Poverty Law Center, August 30, 1999), 23. See *Munoz v. Munoz*, 489 P.2d 1133, 1135 (Wash. 1971).

Lesbian Rights and the woman's local attorney offered argument in the case.[391] The case was appealed on thirteen points of error.[392] The argument held that the trial court denied the mother's motion for modification, demeaned her chosen faith, and imposed severe restrictions on her ability to share that faith with her daughter.

The appellate court[393] was asked to decide whether the trial court abused its discretion in denying a motion to modify a divorce decree. Despite the support of both religious and secular organizations and a basic understanding of the separation of church and state, the woman lost on appeal. The court placed the burden of proof upon the appellant to provide evidence to convince them that a modification of the decree would be justified. The appellate court stated the trial court had broad

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[391] Court Decision-No. 02-99-001430CV-In the Court of Appeals for the Second Supreme Judicial District of Texas in Fort Worth, Texas: Appellant's Brief: Appealed from Cause No. 148, 100-B. Counsel for Appellant: National Center for Lesbian Rights: Shannon Minter, Esq.; Chris Hwang, Esq. and Maggie McBride, TSB.

[392] The points of error were: 1. The trial court erred by basing its denial of mother's motion on her prior agreement with Father, rather than on the standard mandated by Texas Family Code §156.30. 2. The trial court abused its discretion by issuing an order that is contrary to the great weight and preponderance of the evidence, which overwhelmingly showed that the existing order is unworkable. 3. The trial court abused its discretion by issuing an order that is unreasonable and contrary to the best interests of the child. 4. The trial court erred by failing to interpret the Decree as written, where the court did not find that the Decree was ambiguous. 5. The Trial court's interpretation of the Decree would be erroneous even if the court had found the Decree to be ambiguous. 6. The trial court erred by making an agreement for the parties, where the Decree reflected only an "agreement to agree" on which Christian services the child would attend. 7. The trial court erred by violating the Federal Establishment Clause and Article 1, Section 6 of the State Constitution. 8. The Trial court erred by interpreting the Decree to require judicial evaluation of the parties' religious beliefs and judicial resolution of what constitutes a "mainline" church. 9. The trial court erred by interpreting the Decree to require ongoing judicial supervision of mother's religious upbringing of her child. 10. The trial court violated the constitutional requirement of religious neutrality by purporting to determine that the MCC is not a "mainline" church. 11. The Trial court erred by restricting Mother's fundamental constitutional rights to Free Exercise and parental autonomy where it was undisputed that Mother's religious practices and beliefs are not illegal, immoral or harmful to the child. 12. The trial court erred by excluding the tape recording of conversation between the parties, dated September 30, 1998. 13. The trial court erred by excluding testimony regarding the basis of Father's disapproval of the MCC.

[393] Tex. R. App.P. 47.3(a). The panel of judges included Justices Sam J. Day, J.J. Richards, and J. Tod Weaver (retired, sitting by assignment).

discretion in deciding the issue of modification.[394] Seeking to determine whether the trial court abused its discretion, the appellate court was to determine whether the trial court's act was arbitrary or unreasonable. To this point, the appellate court cautioned, "merely because a trial court may decide a matter within its discretion in a different manner than an appellate court would...does not demonstrate that an abuse of discretion occurred."[395] Because the woman's attorney had not asked the trial court to file findings of fact and conclusions of law, the appellate court held this to indicate a presumption that the trial judge found every fact necessary to sustain the judgement.[396] Stating the woman's dissatisfaction with her ex-husband's decision did not make the decree unworkable or not in the child's best interest, the appellate court overruled points of error one through six. Addressing the argument that the trial courts statements regarding "mainline" churches violated the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause by not allowing the mother to share her religious practice with her daughter was also denied. The appellate court held that the woman was not denied access rights in any way.[397] Finally, because the appellant's attorney failed to preserve error on the woman's evidentiary complaints concerning the exclusion of evidence, the appellate court overruled the last two points of error.[398] The three-judge panel delivered the courts opinion in March of 2000. The opinion

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[394] The court cited, *Eason v. Eason*, 860 S.W. 2d 187, 190 (Tex. App—Houston [14th Dist.] 1993, no writ); *Jeffers v. Wallace*, 615 S.W. 2d 252, 243 (Tex. Civ. App.—Dallas 1981, no writ); and *Wood v. O'Donnell*, 894 S.W.2d 555, 557 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 1995, no writ).

[395] Tex. R. App. P. 47.3 (a), 7. The court cited *Goode v. Shoukfeh*, 943 S.W.2d 441,446 (Tex. 1997); *Downer v. Aquamarine Operators, Inc.*, 701 S.W. 2d 238, 241-42 (Tex. 1985), *cert. denied*, 476 U.S. 1159 (1986); *Beaumont Bank v. Buller*, 806 S.W. 2d 223, 226 (Tex. 1991); *Texas Dep't of Health v. Buckner*, 950 S.W. 2d 216, 218 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 1997, no pet.).

[396] The court cited *Bishop v. Bishop*, 359 S.W. 2d 869, 871 (Tex. 1962).

[397] The court cited as examples *Hamilton v. Rice*, 15 Tex. 382, 384 (1855), and *Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. V. Garcia*, 974 S.W. 2d 83, 87-88 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 1998, no pet.).

[398] *See* Tex. R. App. P. 33.2, 33.1 (a).

written by Justice Day overruled all thirteen points and affirmed the trial court's order. Ironically, the court's decision was a moot point, as the woman had stopped attending WFMCC. She reasoned because she could only attend the church without her daughter while awaiting the appeal and the court's decision, it would be in the child's best interest to establish a church home elsewhere in the community. On principle, the decision was a major disappointment. The mother feared it would send a message to her ex-husband that total control of the religious training of their daughter was left to his discretion. To some extent, these fears were realized, when their daughter sought to be baptized into the Methodist Church and the father refused to allow the baptism to occur. Disillusioned, the mother began taking her daughter to a Lutheran church, but claimed her daughter lost interest in attending. According to the mother, this lack of interest on the child's part could be blamed on the father's refusal to allow the child to be baptized. In addition, the mother and her partner both acknowledged that they, as lesbian Christians, missed the refuge and community that was unique to the fellowship of WFMCC. The lesbian couple continues to attend "mainline" denominations, but remain frustrated by the court's decision. With a feeling of disappointment, they state, "We still miss the fellowship of worshiping honestly and openly as a lesbian couple. We miss the fellowship of attending church with other gay Christians."[399]

In this chapter I have attempted to illustrate UFMCC contributions to the gay rights movement's efforts to obtain their rights. Rev. Perry envisioned the denomination's role when he set down the three-pronged gospel message of the Fellowship. Despite early resistance from within the denomination, Perry persevered

[399] Personal communications.

in firmly establishing UFMCC's prominent, though controversial, position in the struggle for gay rights. Establishing a justice ministry, receiving awards from the ACLU, and invitations from presidents specifically related to the denomination's commitment to social justice underscores the significance the denomination has played in the gay liberation movement. Through the examples of protest, fasting, engaged public discourse, fund-raising, leadership in the marches, and civil demonstrations of performing holy unions, I have attempted to illustrate how a religious organization can successfully participate in tandem with secular organizations.

I have analyzed court citations, public statements, media coverage, interviews, and personal observations of how the national organization of UFMCC helped through its programs, financial assistance, and leadership to encourage Christian social activism at the grassroots level. I have attempted to take the focus from the broad national role of the denomination to the local grassroots involvement. The local congregation of WFMCC, through a variety of workshops, numerous informational forums, and hands-on opportunities to develop organizational fund-raising and leadership skills, enriched the social capital necessary for the congregation to lead the local gay community in political activism of national importance. Because of the efforts taken by the local MCC, state and national gay rights organizations joined in the small-town struggles. The broader gay and lesbian local community, depending on the leadership of WFMCC, found a degree of empowerment that was otherwise absent because of the lack of organization and coordination of viable resources. The public stance taken by WFMCC provided the

impetus for a more active involvement in liberation efforts in the community by secular gays. The desire to expand the voice of the GLBT community following the library book controversy has resulted in the birth of a local gay rights organization. People Like Us (PLUS), formed in 2001, includes on it board of directors, members of WFMCC, PFLAG and the secular GLBT community. They conduct monthly meetings at the local gay bar, provide fund-raising opportunities, distribute information, and participate in regional gay pride events. The unique role that the congregation played in the First Amendment cases, which were clearly motivated by prejudices against gay men and lesbians confirms my hypothesis that UFMCC provides an important and unique contribution at every level to the gay rights movement.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Many of us have been advised to abide by the tenets of social etiquette that discourage a discussion of religion and politics in polite company. Discourse revolving around either institution is capable of producing intense passions. In truth, religion and politics are intertwined in our culture. To explore the relation between religion and politics I have taken an unusual perspective by investigating the role religious organizations can play in advocating gay liberation. I did so with the view that a study of a seemingly unconventional religious denomination has something to tell us about the conventional relationship between religion and politics, social movements, civic culture, and gay rights activism in America.

We have an indisputable need, a mandate if you will, in the United States to resolve as many of life's uncertainties and societal problems as possible. A nation that claims to have been built by immigrants' pursuit of the "American Dream" in the "land of opportunity" could expect nothing less. Our "sacred documents," a term associated with the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, declare that all are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Thomas Jefferson fought to guarantee the protection of our religious liberties from governmental interference through the freedom to exercise and freedom from establishment clauses outlined in the Bill of Rights. Several theories have evolved in an attempt to explain the persistent relationship that exists between religion and politics.[1] Likewise, the arguments

[1] See R. Fowler, A. Hertzke, and L. Olson, *Religion and Politics in America: Faith, Culture, and Strategic Choices*, (2nd edition), (Boulder Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), 250-267 for a brief discussion of theories of religion. Also see J. Hunter, *Cultural Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, (New York: Basic Books, 1991); S. Bruce, *Religion and Modernization*, (New York: Oxford

continue to swirl around the importance of protecting the wall that separates the two institutions. The religion clauses attempt to address both concerns in a rather ambiguous manner. The separation does exist and is evidenced by Americans' freedom to worship through a multiplicity of faiths and the cautions taken to avoid government entanglement *in* or establishment *of* religion. It is also apparent that religion and politics breach the wall in public policy as demonstrated by the words of the pledge of Allegiance, "In God We Trust" engraved monies, patriotic songs, tax exempt status laws for churches, and the frequent request for God to bless America made by our Presidents.

Regardless of whether an individual or a society seeks answers for life's dilemmas from secular or spiritual sources, politics *and* religion frequently contribute to the debate regarding the appropriate solutions. President George W. Bush's policy agenda includes governmental financial aid for faith-based organizations' effort to addressing social problems. Bush's policy plan has been met with exuberant support and equally passionate opposition from religious groups and separation of church and state proponents.[2] Anti-abortion activists as well as those opposed to stem cell

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University Press, 1992); R. Inglehart, *Cultural Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); R. Richey and D. Jones, (Eds.), *American Civil Religion*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); R. Fowler,*Unconventional Partners: Religion and Liberal Culture in the United States*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989); A. Hertzke, *Echoes of Discontent: Jesse Jackson, Pat Robertson, and the Resurgence of Populism*, (Wahsington, DC: CQ Press, 1993); and R. Finke and R. Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

[2] Pat Robertson, head of the Christian Coalition and campaign supporter of President George W. Bush has joined with such liberal groups as the ACLU and the Americans United for Separation of Church and State in questioning Bush's faith-based services plan. See T. Edsall, "Robertson Joins Liberals in Faulting Bush's 'Faith-Based' Plan." *Washington Post*, (2001, February 22), p. A05. The part of the plan that is raising controversy includes giving religious groups more access to federal grants for delivering social services that have been the domain of the government. Opposition from the left, fear of employment discrimination and mixing church and state; and from the right, where religious conservatives fear government intervention according to the *Detroit Free Press*. (See "Bush pushes faith-based service plan: Senate hearing open on charitable giving." *Detroit Free Press News Services*,

research have held moral and religious values as justification for their position against these procedures. Opposition to Clinton's attempt to allow gays to openly serve in the military, the Hawaii Supreme Court's interpretation allowing for gay marriages, and Vermont's passage of a Civil Union law have all prompted backlash from those who see such social policies as violations of moral and religious convictions.

An increasing amount of scholarly literature has examined conservative religious institutions' resistance to granting certain rights, whether regarded as "special" or "civil" to sexual minorities. Although the area of religion and politics in the discipline is still evolving, the religious right's attempt to influence politics is receiving serious examination by a select group of political scientists. Most research has focused on the leaders, policy goals, and social activism of the conservative denominations. But the contributions of left-leaning denominations have received attention as well. For example, in the 1950's and 1960's the struggle to end discrimination and to pursue integration involved the efforts of liberal denominations. However, an examination of the efforts and impact of the religious left to influence politics has received considerably less attention since the Reagan Administration, when politicians began to align themselves with denominations promoting a conservative policy agenda. Nonetheless, I felt compelled to not only return to an examination of the more liberal religious political views, but also to take it one step further by studying the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches with its outreach to the GLBT community. Even the liberal National Council of Churches has experienced internal turmoil over whether to grant membership to the

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2001, March 15). Retrieved on August 14, 2001 from http://www.freep.com/news/nw/george15_20010315.htm.

UFMCC. With the religious right turning its focus from the national level to political activism at the local level, I, likewise, directed my research from a broad overview of the political activism of the Fellowship of MCC to the local grassroots efforts to protect and secure rights through an individual congregation.

It should be acknowledged in more than a footnote in chapter two that I was raised in a conservative religion that does not considered itself to be a denomination, but rather "The Church" established by Christ through his disciples on Pentecost. Therefore, the study of any denomination, whether liberal or conservative, brought a new theological and intellectual journey for me. Attempting to set aside the religious teachings of my faith and family was in and of itself a challenge. I realize that any attempt to provide academia with reliable, valid research demands that the scientist in the field be willing to examine the subject objectively. Thus, my religious background caused my fieldwork to include addressing numerous questions regarding the various ceremonial practices of the church. In addition, my limited exposure to different religious organizations required study to grasp a rudimental understanding of denominationalism and liberal religious views. In a fervent effort to remove my personal views from my participant observer status, there are times that I may have more than simply suspended my religious beliefs of childhood, but actually accommodated my subjects and their perspectives to the point of advocacy. Fenno acknowledges,

> The larger danger in the relationship of observer and observed is becoming so close to your respondents, so immersed in their world and so dependent on this close relationship that you lose all intellectual distance and scholarly objectivity...This is a problem to which there is no completely satisfactory solution...A less soluble part of the participant observer, [the] "going native" problem is that in doing the things that must be done to maintain desirable

> levels of access and rapport, the participant observer can slowly lose the ability and willingness to criticize. Some loss of objectivity comes inevitably, as increased contact brings sympathy, and sympathy in its turn dulls the edge of criticism.[3]

Therefore, the amount of time spent conducting the fieldwork not only contributed to the richness of my data, but also to the temptation of developing a vested interest in the subjects' cause. Borrowing Fenno's disclaimer, I admit that some blurring of the lines between participant observer and the observed is to be expected with this type of research. In order to maintain access and good rapport, a sympathetic understanding becomes necessary. Clearly, balancing the emic and the etic perspectives can be a tedious endeavor and my efforts have been only partially successful. With the acknowledgement of my theological struggles, ideological determination to present an unbiased representation of my research, and having stated the view that religion and politics undeniably intermingle, I offer my findings.

Research Findings

It appears that the more urban or more radical gays are often less needy of the succor provided by the church. Sophisticated metropolitan areas offer numerous opportunities to engage in political activism on behalf of gay rights. Organizations including the Human Rights Campaign, Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians, are prominent, well-established groups that continually seek members, host fund-raisers, sponsor events for the GLBT community, and actively participate in efforts to secure rights for

[3] R. Fenno, *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*. (Scott, Foresman and Company, 1978), pp. 275, 277.

sexual minorities.[4] The contacts established through involvement in GLBT organizations carry great value for those who desire a connection to the broader gay community both socially and politically. The added dimension of religion simply does not fit into the equation for many that are pursuing rights for gays. The failure of religion to be a viewed as a likely source for gay liberation is supported by several factors. For one thing, we have discovered that the belief that one is condemned to hell for not resisting their sexual orientation is frequently manifested in an attitude of "I might as well live like hell" as well as disassociating from any religion institutions. In addition, the perceived and admitted level of promiscuity associated with gays offers further indication of the rejection of Bible-based theologies of purity and faithfulness. Similarly, the thriving bars and clubs catering to the gay community in large cities attest to the rejection of religious institutions as a refuge for many sexual minorities. The connections made through the clubs and bars supply the needed social community and support system sought by many individuals. The secular world of gay rights organizations and bars provide an island for many of those exiled from the mainland of heterosexuality. Furthermore, data indicates a greater per capita problem of alcoholism among homosexuals than heterosexuals.[5] Alcohol and drugs can offer escape and temporary refuge from the battle with guilt and condemnation of one's sexuality. Likewise, we have offered statistics to demonstrate the fact that the

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[4] For a guide to GLBT organizations and useful and authoritative resources see on-line. www.gaypoliticsandlaw.com.

[5] Sandy Phillips wrote in 1971 in a report on the growing number of support groups for gay and lesbian alcoholic, "There is a fantastic amount of alcoholism and people with alcoholic problems in the gay world." Phillips contributed the problem of alcoholism to the fact that gays are forced to live a schizophrenic existence and alcoholism can be brought about by psychological problems. In February 1974, there were sixteen gay Alcoholic Anonymous groups in the United States and by year's end the gay AAs had won the right to be listed in the AA directory of groups. See M. Thompson, *Long Road to Freedom*. (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1994), pp. 60, 97.

self-loathing and depression experienced by many in the gay community results in a disproportionate number of suicide attempts among gay teenagers.[6] Others that fear stigmatization because of their sexual orientation remain closeted in an attempt to avoid rejection by family and friends, loss of jobs, and excommunication or dis-fellowship from their churches.

On the other hand, we have found that for some in the gay community, the bar scene, sexual promiscuity, or the closet could not provide what was needed for them to successfully function in a heterosexually dominated society. For many gay Christians who cannot relinquish their religious beliefs or their sexual orientation, the UFMCC provides a refuge. The church is, for many of the more timid or religious gay men and lesbians, a place to heal personally from the spiritual wounds, whether self-inflicted or delivered from conservative pulpits and sincere Christians, family, and friends. Repeatedly during personal interviews and church testimonials, members told of how MCC provided a refuge for their wounded spirits. Observation of individuals setting on the back pews weeping, leaving early, and falling to their knees in prayer informs us of the emotional need of a place of solace that sexual minorities were seeking through the church. Likewise, the open display of affection between partners, the unconventional talent show that included hymns sung by men dressed in drag, and the prayer and praise requests that were often intimate, illustrate the sense of security and freedom to be *both* gay and Christian without the concern of being judged or devalued.

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[6] According to a 1989 study commissioned by the Department of Health and Human Services, gay youth are two to three time more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual youth, and up to 30 percent of those teenagers who do commit suicide are gay or lesbian. See S. Maguen, "Gay Teen Suicide." In Thompson, (1994), p. 385.

An interesting phenomenon regarding the importance of faith, church attendance, and MCC was uncovered during my research. In the Bible Belt, the very heart of the most evangelical, Pentecostal, and religiously conservative section of the nation, pastors such as Rev. Jeffress routinely condemn homosexuality from their pulpits and over the airwaves. Religious leaders fervently avow that the destruction of America will occur if society does not rid itself of the depraved gay agenda spreading across the nation by advocates of "special rights." Church attendance and the importance of a possessing religious faith are part of the spiritual and social fabric of this area of the country. The fact that the UFMCC's founder came *from* the southern regions of the Bible Belt and *out of* the conservative theologies of the Pentecostal and Southern Baptists faiths highlights the importance of religion in our culture regardless of sexual orientation. Rev. Perry's anguished struggle and tenacious resolve to reconcile his sexuality and Christianity and provide a refuge for others facing the same difficulties offers some insight into the importance religion plays in American life. The fact that more congregations of the UFMCC are located in the Bible Belt than any other area of the nation also tells us something about the enduring value of religion in America. Despite the dominate message of condemnation coming from many churches, religion is valued by many sexual minorities and the overwhelming desire to participate in worship activities remains undeterred even when exiled by the faiths of their childhood. The need for a relationship with a higher power and the desire for the assurance of salvation are powerful and indelibly etched on the American culture. MCC serves society by bringing the message of "being right with God" and the promise of eternal life even if

you are gay. This message of salvation instills a degree of self-worth that no other experience can provide the gay Christian.

The fact sexual minorities remain not only in states located in the Bible Belt, but also in less socially and politically progressive communities is an interesting phenomena. We can question why any group so despised, chastised, ostracized, and condemned would remain in areas of the country where the difficult challenges of being a sexual minority are so evasive. Several factors contribute to the reluctance or refusal to relocate to a more tolerant less hostile environment. The findings have shown that the uniqueness of the religious fervor and commitment of the southern Evangelical Christian undoubtedly contributes to the disproportionate number of UFMCC congregations in the Bible Belt. The belief that you face the enemies of your faith protected by the "armor of God" and that you equate the resistance of others to your professed faith as a test of your commitment to God. underscores the deeply held beliefs and unswerving commitment of the evangelical. In addition. remaining steadfast in the faith by being anchored in the belief that God will not test an individual beyond what they can endure is a common tenet of evangelical religious teachings. Consequently. a gay Christian nurtured in Bible Belt evangelicalism seldom considers leaving the community because of outside pressures.

Family ties. obligations. and southern traditions of perseverance associated with an individualistic and traditional political culture also assist in explaining the unwillingness or perceived inability to move to more gay friendly environs. Both homosexual and heterosexual couples face many of the same reasons for not moving to another area of the country. Aging or ill parents requiring assistance and the reality

of the limits of job opportunities and relocation prospects because of financial and educational inadequacies cause many individuals to fail to entertain the idea of moving to a more progressive city. Many in the congregation I observed had secondary custody of their children with visitation contingent on former spouses who have primary custody. As is often the case for divorced heterosexual couples many gay men and lesbians face the reality that relocating would endanger or end the frequent contact with their children. I found that many sexual minorities had children actively engaged in school activities. Therefore, these parents did not desire to uproot or further complicate the lives of their children who were already living in a nontraditional setting. Many of the GLBT people observed, had lived all of their lives in the same community and could not comprehend living elsewhere. Having spent their entire lives being subjected to conservative political rhetoric and attitudes, many in the GLBT community interpreted the situation as simply "the way thing are" and as their accepted reality.

Beyond the spiritual comfort and refuge that religion offers the spiritually wounded in society, we have learned that the UFMCC provides more than just an opportunity for sexual minorities to worship. My observations tell us something about the role the denomination plays in providing community and social capital for GLBT people. When family, friends, traditional denominations, and secular society fail or refuse to provide community interaction and support, MCC congregants build their own communities. Within the church community members learn to trust themselves and then others. The wounded spirits of the gay Christian is most likely to find solace among others who have experience the same pain and anguish.

Likewise, being surrounded by fellow gay Christians who understand, share, and experience many of the same fears and trials, help many to realize the courage needed to develop trust. It is not unusual for bonds to be created among those in society that have experienced the same phenomenon. Veterans, holocaust survivors, victims of tornadoes, terrorist attacks, and other natural and man-made disasters relate and are drawn to those who have been through the same or similar calamities. Caucasians must bear the "White man's burden" because there is no way they can understand the world through the eyes of the Black American. Understandably, African Americans often have a sense of community, a "brotherhood" and "sisterhood" regardless of the economic and social stratification of their individual situations. Similarly, gays are cognizant of the fact that it is very difficult for heterosexuals to fully grasp their sexuality or to understand their reluctance to trust others. The MCC offers a place to develop trust among people who have hid in the same closet, heard homophobic jokes, feared rejection, and experienced prejudice, moral condemnation, and stereotyping.

In most religious institutions skills are learned through church activities. In this dissertation we watched the congregants acquire and enhance their skills through involvement in the numerous programs of the church. We noticed when individuals who were insecure or unsure of themselves and their talents found multiple opportunities to gain the knowledge and exchange ideas within the warmth of the church community's protective womb. Opportunities to speak came from prayers, songs, and biblical and philosophical debates. The daily business of running the church demanded collaborating, negotiating, developing, implementing, and

evaluating budgets, buildings, and ministerial searches. Numerous situations arose, which required problem solving and conflict resolution among members, as well as with district and denominational leaders. Events and emergencies necessitated developing and implementing a variety of communication techniques. Being comforted spiritually, developing trust, gaining knowledge, enhancing skills, and having an understanding that you are a valued member of the community helped many to find their own voice. In a sense, for some gays in the community of WFMCC, it was a rebirth.

The emotional refuge and spiritual healing offered by MCC that contributed to the level of trust and the cognitive liberation is important to our findings. As mentioned previously, the discrimination and liberation experienced by Blacks is not a perfect analogy for an analysis of the struggle for equality that is being pursued by sexual minorities. However, the journey has it points of comparison. What is perhaps unique to the gay Christian's liberation is the distance traveled or more precisely where the journey started. Blacks come into the world fully aware of their ethnicity and from early in life experience the prejudice and discrimination directed toward them. The family and the Black churches help to instill a sense of pride and cultural awareness among its children. The roots of their struggle are a point of pride and heroes such as Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglas, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X are honored by the African American community. A long history including a civil war and the civil rights movement clearly defines the fears and losses as well as the courageous acts and victories of the journey toward equality. When Blacks take up a cause in protest, their racial identity is a known fact. A

respected tradition of engagement in the struggle for equality is well established. Legislation have been adopted to protect racial minorities from being arbitrarily rejected when applying for a job or fired based solely on their race.

The circumstances surrounding securing equality are different for sexual minorities. Born into a world that assumes they are heterosexual, members of the gay community have been socialized as heterosexuals. Religious teaching seldom if ever celebrates homosexuality, but frequently condemns such orientation as a deviant and sinful self-choice. Families and educational institutions certainly do not provide examples or celebrations related to gay and lesbian heroes. If homosexuality is addressed it is generally done with disgust, hate, or at best in tolerant whispers and nervous laughter. Therefore, the journey starts for the member of the GLBT community with self. Self-actualization can be very hard to acknowledge and even more difficult to accept. For some gay men and lesbians, acceptance of one's homosexuality is simply impossible and denial, substance abuse, or suicide may result. Therefore, a different social, psychological, spiritual, and political measuring device than utilized for racial minorities calibrates the cognitive liberation achieved by the congregants of this study.

The political contest for gay liberation is still in its infancy when compared to the length of the struggle for civil rights for Blacks. Being Black is not considered a sin. Being a homosexual remains an abomination to most citizens regardless of their religious beliefs. As Black families embrace their ethnicity with pride, the heterosexual family often disowns their gay sons and daughters. Self-esteem is shattered, self-worth is questioned, and self-loathing often is the results. With the

religion of the gay's childhood offering a message of condemnation, repentance or dis-fellowship the belief that your soul has no value to God is an enormous burden to overcome. Ostracized by family and religion, the sexual minority has multiple messages to overcome within their psychological and spiritual self. In addition, the laws protecting gays are few, isolated, or nonexistent. Speaking out on behalf of gay liberation can cost the gay man or lesbian their job. It can also cost them their family and friends. Therefore, the members of the WFMCC who spoke before the library board were taking a very courageous stance, despite the fact that they did not publicly acknowledge their sexual orientation. Taking up the cause of gay rights makes others suspicious of your morality and sexual orientation. Trusting yourself and the gay community to be supportive of your efforts and to actually speak out on behalf of gay rights indicates that a great distance has been traveled. The findings suggest that many in the GLBT community begin their journey to cognitive liberation having been socialized with heterosexual values. The pilgrimage often leads the sexual minority through the emotions of self-denial, self-realization, and self-loathing, before self-acceptance is achieved. For members of WFMCC, a major milestone in cognitive liberation was reached with the bold selfless act of taking a stand on behalf of social justice.

It is common for the infant in the faith to be content inside the safety of the church home. The hesitancy to venture beyond the refuge of the church and declare membership in public was demonstrated by the congregation of WFMCC. However, as the gay Christians of this study began to gain a sense of spiritual maturity they found the confidence and courage in the church's message of liberation to utilize their

knowledge and skills outside the nurturing refuge and community of trust provided within the church.

My findings support the theory that the social capital accumulated through the building of community among the gay Christians in tandem with the maturation of their faith triggered the ability to venture outside the church to participate in the movement for gay liberation. We have recognized that for some gay Christians, the UFMCC provides a dimension to the gay rights movement that many gays feel is missing. The stereotypical images of gay men and lesbians are thought to be harmful to the movement. The flamboyant, in your face approach of the more vocal and radical members of the gay rights movement have been accused of detracting from the seriousness of the community's concerns. We learned that some of the more timid members of the gay community would never consider activism if there were not alternatives to the strident, outspoken tactics of the subculture of the leather men and drag queens. Just as MCC's ministry provides individuals with self-respect and dignity, the spiritual dimension of the Fellowship contributes to the credibility of the movement for the more conservative elements of the gay community. The interpretation of the Bible through "new eyes" brings empowerment to many of the congregants. The communication network, mobilization capabilities, fund-raising abilities, and charismatic leadership of MCC are of intrinsic value to the movement. For example, the denomination has contributed to the movement through participation in all the marches in Washington, mobilization at the local and state levels, challenging any interpretations of the scriptures that condemns homosexuality, gay non-violent civil disobedience, and the staging and utilization of media events on

behalf of gay rights. The denomination is a religious social movement working with the broader gay rights movement. Although the combination of the religious aspects brought by UFMCC and the more radical elements of the secular movement increases the social capital needed to pursue the goals of sexual minorities, the partnership contends with numerous problems.

Throughout this research I explored the tension between the "gay" church and the broader gay community and found it to be strong and persistent. I become aware of the anger directed toward UFMCC's efforts to include a gospel message in the struggle for gay liberation. The rejection of Rev. Wilson's efforts to distribute fliers announcing a series of sermons offering a message of hope to the gay community and the destruction of the fliers and vulgar remarks directed at the congregants speaks to the tensions within the gay community. The always-repetitive resistance to UFMCC participation in the marches on Washington carried out by the GLBT community signals the seemingly incompatible marriage between gay Christian and secular activists. Rev. Perry is the first to recognize the rejection, alienation, self-loathing, and stigmatization that is inflicted on the GLBT community in the name of religion. His strong response to the Ad Hoc Committee that organized around criticism of the Millennium March on Washington and his speech at the March illustrated his frustration with the continual battle to be included in the gay rights movement as well as his understanding of the resentment and skepticism directed toward any religious organization.

At the local level, we learned that the secular gay community was not organized and directed the news media to the WFMCC for a statement concerning the

library book controversy. As the controversy grew some gays wanted to organize as the secular voice of the gay community. The inability for members of the fledgling Wichita Falls Committee Against Censorship (WFCAC) to be placed in the public eye offers us some insight into the difficulty of getting gays to risk outing themselves in order to be politically active. The inability to gain the courage to conduct the "Meet the Candidate" night at the local gay bar or speak out before the library board on behalf of the children's books, makes clear that the secular gay community lacked the leadership, skills, and sense of empowerment necessary to mobilize. However, we did discover that the town's MCC was the first line of defense: the voice for the gay community. My findings suggest that MCC plays a unique role in rural areas where other gay groups are less evident. With no organized secular group, the gay community turned to the church for leadership. I discovered how the congregants struggled in their attempts to reconcile their sexuality and their Christian faiths. I became aware that those that found refuge in the church had the opportunity to heal their spiritual wounds. The healing came through the church's message that soul salvation included God's gay and lesbian children without having to reject their sexual orientations. The observations allowed me to see the church's efforts to build community. Understanding was gained regarding the reasons the process of community building came slowly. The early meetings in the local bar, the gatherings in the park to expand its outreach, and the setbacks faced with the loss of their first pastor to AIDS all illustrate the uncertainties and insecurities felt while wrestling with the concept of establishing an outreach to gay Christians. Hearing the stories of the slow, small, unsure steps taken by the congregation in the process of letting the town

know that there were gay Christians worshiping in their neighborhoods were exemplified by the refusal to place the name of the church on the sign in front of the building. The growing sense of community and empowerment was revealed in the pastor and her spouse's account of the rainbow balloon laden caravan to the new building purchased by the congregation. The emotional retelling of the pride experienced by the congregants as they had their pictures taken standing by the sign that not only gave the name of the congregation, but also the pastor's name, and the meeting times, speaks to the communal liberation that was occurring among the members of WFMCC. As the congregation grew numerically, I observed the individual members growing spiritually and using their talents to become actively involved in the programs of the church. The social capital of the community increased as I watched more and more members assume the routine responsibilities of serving communion, preparing the program and newsletters, leading the singing and prayers, participating in fundraisers, attending business meetings, and planning and serving on search committees for a new pastor and a building. The congregation's openness to developing new skills was demonstrated by the support and active participation in district conference and the congregation's conflict resolution workshop. Knowledge regarding protecting their relationships was sought through an attorney led seminar. The church related activities showed us how churches can be agents for the development of civic skills and a resource for civic engagement regardless of the congregation's size or the unconventional sexual orientation of its membership.

Despite its reluctance to actively begin implementing the third prong of social

justice espoused by the Fellowship, I was able to observe WFMCC working to provide a refuge and build community. The fear of being recognized as someone attending the predominately gay congregation caused many of the congregants to be incapable of seeing their actions of attending church as political. I was informed that the thought of being out and politically active was not in the plans of the congregation or Rev. Horvath. My extended time in the field provided the opportunity to watch WFMCC mature and take a stand in defense of gay rights, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion. Not only was I given the chance to learn about the refuge for healing, the message of salvation, the building of community, and development of skills that are part of the journey for gay Christians of MCC, but I also was present to see numerous individuals take each step in this pilgrimage. The spiritual and personal journeys of the individual congregants illustrate the fulfillment of the first two prongs of the gospel mission of the denomination. The significance of successfully implementing the first two prongs is the unexpected empowerment it brought to the congregants. This empowerment came to fruition in the wonderful story of the ghettoized, small, "gay" church's fight with the prominent First Baptist Church. It was fortunate and exciting to observe as all three prongs of UFMCC's mission as envisioned by Rev. Perry were realized in this unassuming congregation in a small, conservative city. This story of how refuge and community drew this congregation into political activism reiterates the abiding relationship between religion and politics and confirms the value of this connection in our culture.

A single case study, no matter how rich the data, cannot prove that a denomination that is primarily composed of sexual minorities is the voice of gay

liberation and the answer for grassroots mobilization. The political inputs made by the Fellowship and local congregation out numbered the political impacts their activism constructed. Nonetheless, the controversial issues of censorship and freedom of religion raised in the community were addressed by the congregation. The library book censorship dispute brought WFMCC out of the ghetto closet and resulted in public awareness of the mission of the denomination and the church's presents in the community. The "outing" of the church through the censorship and freedom of religion controversies caused a public dialogue to be started. Not only were the issues challenging First Amendment liberties debated, but the moral and political perceptions of gay men and lesbians filled the newspaper, television news reports, and water cooler conversations in the workplace.

Political activism often demands labor intense and long-term efforts with little or no tangible victory. The struggle for social justice requires patience and tenacity. Success is often measured in incremental steps forward hindered by setbacks and followed by a backlash. The fight and eventual victory in the library book controversy empowered the GLBT community and facilitated discussion among the congregants of WFMCC and the secular gay community. The gay community has begun to organize and gain a level of confidence from having been through the emotionally charged struggle over the gay affirming library books. Admittedly, the justice work of UFMCC and its congregations is not significant in the grand scheme of things, but its role in the gay rights struggle is important. What can be suggested from my research is the theory that the significance of UFMCC is the unique contribution it offers the gay rights movement. In the process of providing a refuge

and building community for the more conservative segments of the subculture. the church empowers those who would not otherwise participate to become political active. Therefore, the value of religion to participatory democracy is once again demonstrated. Although the theory of religion's contribution to participatory democracy has been tested and proven numerous times, what makes it of interest in this study is the unlikely source of its unexpected voice. This unanticipated voice for gay liberation may be the best source for fighting the oppression of gay rights championed by the opposition. Gay Christians wrapping themselves in the Word of God to fight those that cite biblical text as the source of their righteous condemnation of the gay community could possibly prove to be a better tactic than to confront the issue through political means. The use of the scriptures as a weapon powered by a new hermeneutical theology is precisely the means that MCC is attempting to employ to slay the "demons" of discrimination and homophobia.

Future Research Possibilities

Opportunities for future research abound. An examination of the political significance contributed by UFMCC to gay liberation in cities where there exist a politically vibrant secular GLBT community and a large congregation of MCC could refine my findings. On the other hand, such a study could indicate the unreliability of my finding that in more remote, less political active areas of the country the congregations of MCC play a more significant role in gay liberation than they would otherwise. The question needs to be addressed as to whether the members of larger congregations of the denomination in politically active cities maintain their prominence in gay activism through the church, or if the congregants' activism is

directed through secular organization. Another question could be raised regarding the uniqueness of UFMCC religious role in the gay community. Is the inclusion and activism contributed by other denominations on behalf of GLBT people inspired *by* or independent *of* UFMCC's message and efforts?

The major religious and moral concern of many that consider same-gender sexual behavior a sin, is the perceived negative impact such a lifestyle has on children. The library book controversy and the court battle over a mother's decision to take her child to WFMCC that has been examined clearly underscores these fears. In addition, the reaction that many traditionally conservative denominations have to the very idea of a "gay" church indicates the possible benefit of a longitudinal study to examine UFMCC's impact on the children being raised in the denomination. In combination with this study, an examination of the GLBT adults who were raised within the denomination might reveal something about the long-term consequences on the denomination's children and the level of interest they have in becoming engage in political activism on behalf of gay rights and other unpopular causes. Will they, as adults have a more liberal ideological perspective? Will they be tolerant of other views regarding biblical interpretation and sexual orientation? Could there be a backlash by which they become more conservative religiously and politically?

Politics and religion have never been separated completely in America. Beginning with the colonial period, through the founding of this nation, and right up to the present day, it is unlikely that either institution has functioned entirely independent despite Jefferson's and Madison's call for a "wall of separation." Likewise, to the political scientist everything can be examined with a political lens

regardless of whether we are discussing male-female roles, worker-employer relationships, or the debate regarding the impact of pop culture on the moral fiber of a nation. Therefore, the politics *within* and *between* religious organizations has received deserved inquiry.[7] Certainly, the Southern Baptist Conference (SBC) has caused political problems and power struggles by making its views clear regarding the role women are to play within the denomination.[8] Their position has caused Texas' Southern Baptist to break away from the conference and longtime member of the SBC, former President Jimmy Carter, to renounce his membership in the conference.[9] During my time in the field, I observed small instances of the internal political confrontations within the UFMCC. Remarks alluding to the denomination and it ministers regarding the significance of leadership positions and dominance and/or the political and financial clout within the districts and the overall fellowship were heard. Therefore, an examination of the political struggles, compromises, strategies, and spiritual concerns faced within UFMCC bureaucracy seem worthy of further investigation.

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[7] See T. Reese, *Inside the Vatican: The Politics and Organization of the Catholic Church*, (Harvard University: Harvard University Press, 1996).

[8] See B. Greenwood, "Southern Baptists Disallow Female Pastors: Condemn Homosexuality." Retrieved on August 8, 2001 from http://www.absnews.go.com/sections/us/DailyNews/baptistvote000641.html.

[9] According to R. Ostling, Texas 2.7 million Baptists withdrew $5 million in funding from the Southern Baptist Conference because the denomination was becoming too conservative. "Southern Baptists in Texas cut $5 million from denomination." *The Inquirer*, (2000 October 21). Retrieved on August 14, 2001 from http://cofaxweb.philly.com/content/inquirer/2000/10/31/...BAPTIST31.htm?template=aprint.ht; and "Biggest US Church Suffers Texan Snub." *BBC News* (2000 October 31). Retrieved on August 14, 2001 from http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/americas/newsid_999000/999301.stm. President Jimmy Carter said he was cutting his ties with the Southern Baptist Convention because he found it increasingly rigid in its views on the role of women according to CNN. See "Jimmy Carter Cutting ties with Southern Baptists." Retrieved on August 14, 2001 from http://www.cnn.com/2000/US/10/20/carter.baptists.ap.; "President Carter Cites 'Rigid' Stance on Women." *ABCNEWS.com*. Retrieved on August 14, 2001 from http://www.absnews.go.com/sections/us/DailyNews/carter001020.html; and G. Warner, "Jimmy Carter says he can 'no longer be associated' with the SBC." *Baptists Standard*, (2000, October 23). Retrieved on August 14, 2001 on http://ww.baptiststandard.com/2000/10_23/pages/carter.html.

The literatures of civic culture, social movements, gay politics and religion and politics all found voice in this exploration of the UFMCC and its three-pronged mission of salvation, community, and Christian social justice. The participant-as-observer fieldwork among the congregants of WFMCC helped to develop theory grounded in the rich milieu of stories, interviews, sermons, and moments of quiet observation and reflection. The realization that despite the often described wall of separation, religion and politics are part of the same foundation upon which this nation's democratic principles were built, was reaffirmed. Perhaps, having discovered that the conventional political roles attributed to religious institutions also were present in a denomination with an unconventional membership base will give us a reason to consider conducting the research of our discipline through "new eyes."

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Appendix A

Conceptual Net

I. What role does religion play in the homosexual community?

A. Is the homosexual culture seeking refuge from the broader society through religion?

1. To what lengths does the church go to in order to circumvent the legal limitations placed on it due to orientation?
2. Does the religious community transcend the secular world?
3. Is the church political?

B. Do members feel more "whole" spiritually, comfortable, "at home" by attending a gay church?

1. What factors brought members to M.C.C.? Do members attend regularly? Do members also attend "straight" congregations?
2. Do straight families and friends of homosexuals attend regularly or visit the church?
3. In what types of ministries is the church involved? Is Bible school offered? Do children attend and take part in the service?
4. Is the church service traditional? Does it practice religious rituals and follow specific denominational ceremonial procedures? Do members take communion? How is the song service conducted? Does the church perform baptisms?
5. Are the members restrained or illustrative in their worship?
6. What is the church's message? Does the church address controversial issues, such as, abortion, fidelity, promiscuity, alcoholism, and drug abuse? Is there a doctrine?
7. How do members react to the sermons? Do members discuss the "lesson" after the service?
7. Does the congregation offer support activities? What type? Who attends? What kind of interaction takes place among participants?
9. How are decisions within the church made? Who leads the board meetings?
10. Does the church have interaction with the Universal Fellowship or are they a self-contained congregation?
11. What role does the pastor play in how services are conducted?

II. What are the social and economic politics of the church? What is the church's role in society? Is the church included or excluded by larger civil society? Is the church isolated in the gay ghetto?

1. What is the physical environment and political economy of the church? (Location in community and economic contribution to the larger society)
2. Are there racial, economic, educational, or gender tensions within the congregation? (Discrimination within a subculture that is discriminated against by society).

B Is the church engaged in community involvement, advertising, participation in interdenominational programs?

1. Is the church service conducted with assistance of both genders?
2. Do members socialize outside the church setting? Do cliques exist within the congregation? Are the members "out" to more than just those attending the church?

Appendix B

Sample Field Notes

[O.N.] As we move to the offering, a hymn is selected and sung by the congregation in Spanish. Following the first offering the pastor announces that H.R. 1045 is in support of no "special rights", no right to adopt, be foster parents or for homosexuality life style as an alternative lifestyle is to be taught in schools. She informs the congregation that NEA's Pride Week is in March and that Oklahoma has drawn up a resolution to stop this week from being orchestrated in Oklahoma public schools. She informs the members that KSWO a local Texhoma radio station will be broadcasting a message to counter act the attempted ban on Pride Week. Rev. M. declares, "Since there are some of us, who can't come out and be open, I would like for us to take up a collection for those in Norman who are working against H.R. 1045."

[T.N.] This is an excellent example of drawing on the political resources of the congregation. The reference to the reality that some can not come out in the open, I assume is do to repercussions or discrimination.

[T.N.] All types of religious symbolism are woven throughout the service including a cappella singing, a song in Spanish, the option of immersion or sprinkling, prayer benches are being provided, the use of guitars, a piano, pray benches, communion, and a bible class. The church appears to be incorporating aspect of a number of faiths into their service. The literature I have read indicates this is an intentional effort to make those who attend have some aspect of their faith present in the services of M.C.C. A theme of inclusiveness is becoming quite prevalent.

[F.T.N.] Return here to insert notes regarding UFMCC position on denominational inclusiveness.

[F.Q.R] Is this possibly because many have been excluded by their traditional faiths?

[O.N.] "T.D." prepares communion and the table is described as not the table of MCC, but a table prepared by God through Jesus. It is pointed out that you do not have to be a member of the congregation or any congregation to partake of the sacraments. One of the acolytes is little "G." "G's" mother stands behind him as he holds the cup and the wafers. The Rev. M. and spouse (godparents) and the new moms all go up to take communion together. They feed each other the sacraments. "Baby A" is carried to the front with them.

[T.N.] Love and support appears to be ever present in this little congregation. Genuine spirituality is becoming very obvious. As the pastor pointed out last week at the baptisms, "it is not a social club" -- they appear to be striving to be Christ like in their actions.

[O.N.] A male couple comes forward, takes communion, goes to the prayer benches, and kneels in silent prayer. A female couple does the same as well as four or five individuals. The woman who had earlier told the story of her partner's daughter's confrontation with school gossip, kisses "G" on the head and says, "I am so proud of you." as she takes communion from him.

[T.N.] Encouragement of the youth is certainly present. It seems the entire congregation "mothers" the children.

[O.N.] I over hear the pastor introducing a teenage boy to a choir member. He sings in his high school a cappela choir and wants to join the church choir. I introduce myself to him only to discover that he is a former public school student of mine. I quickly inform him that I am doing research on the congregation.
[T.N.] The Lord moves in mysterious ways! I wonder if my explanation was a way of justifying my being attending MCC. Perhaps this is what it feels like to live in fear of discrimination. A need to explain oneself to those who are them selves ostracized is not a comfortable feeling.

Appendix C
Data Log

Date/Time	Location	Topics
Jan. 22, 1996 5:00 p.m. -6:00 p.m.	Telephone interview	Call to discuss research project with pastor of W.F.M.C.C. Discussed H.R. 1045
Feb. 5, 1996 7:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Telephone interview	Call discussed literature available through pastor/church library, discussed couple who were trying to adopt, founder of M.C.C. to speak in March, pastor's perspective of congregation (briefly)
Feb. 11, 1996 10:45 a.m. -12:45 p.m.	W.F.M.C.C.	Church service, members interactions, pre and post-service conversations on church grounds, couples, children during service.
Feb. 11, 1996 2:50 p..m. - 4:00 p.m.	Central Y.M.C.A.	Baptism of four women in "Y" swimming pool, conversations among members, children in attendance
Feb. 17, 1996 7:45 p.m. - 9:15 p.m.	W.F.M.C.C.	Chili cook-off at church, donations for general fund taken up, conversations with various members over child-rearing, NEA Pride Week
Feb. 18, 1996 10:45 a.m. - 12:45 p.m.	W.F.M.C.C.	Church service, informal conversation before and after services, offering to fight H.R. 1045, reaction to "Baby A" -- and hopeful adopting parents.
Feb. 25, 1996 10:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.	W.F.M.C.C.	Church service, pre-service prayer, communion, post-service meeting Society of Andrew, church library
Feb. 25, 1996 1:30 p.m. - 3:15 p.m.	Pinnochio's Pizza	Lunch with several members including pastor, couple with children, and pregnant woman

Date/Time	Location	Topics
Feb. 25, 1996 3:15 p.m. - 3: 35 p.m.	Kinko Kopies	Went with pastor. spouse and third woman to get copy of new church brochure.
Feb. 27, 1996 8:15 p.m. - 8:35 p.m.	Telephone conversation	The pastor returns a phone call to me regarding fliers for informing GLBA and PFLAG of the upcoming visit of UFMCC founder Troy Perry's upcoming visit to WFMCC.
Mar. 3, 1996 10:45 a.m. -3:00 p.m.	W.F.M.C.C.	Church service. conversations in sanctuary (listening primarily).board meeting in sanctuary.
Mar. 7. 1996 8:30 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.	Video of Holy Union	I watched a video of a holy union conducted 4/8/95 for female couple. One biracial one Caucasian. Both in thirties.
Mar. 7. 1996 10:00 p.m. - 12:00 a.m.	Video of Palm Sunday at W.F.M.C.C.	I viewed a special Sunday service conducted 4/9/95
Mar. 7. 1996 12:00 a.m. 1:00 a.m.	Video of Christmas Program at W.F.M.C.C.	I viewed the church's program conducted 12 15 91
Mar. 9. 1996 7:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.	D.K. Concert at W.F.M.C.C.	Attended gospel concert and social following.
Mar. 10,1996 11:00 p.m. - 2:00 a.m.	Talent Show and Fund Raiser at WFMCC on 7/10/93 video	Watching a Saturday night show to raise money to help pay for a Clavinova
Mar. 17. 1996 10:30 a.m. 12:30 p.m.	Service at W.F.M.C.C.	Service conducted without regular pastor present (on spring break)

Date/Time	Location	Topics
Mar. 21, 1996 9:00 p.m. 9:30 p.m.	Telephone conversation	Call to pastor to request video and other documents
Mar. 22, 1996 7:15 p.m. –10:35 p.m.	Special Service at WFMCC with Rev. Elder Troy Perry	Founder of UFMCC peaking for Capital Campaign Fund Raising Tour
Mar. 23,1996 8:00 a.m. 10:00 a.m.	Breakfast at IHOP	Breakfast and conversation with four members of WFMCC (females)
Mar. 24, 1996 11:00 a.m. 12:30 p.m.	Interview at home of member of WFMCC	Interview with PJ (African-American)
Mar. 24, 1996 1:00 p.m. 3:00 p.m.	"Bachelor" Party, Holy Union on video from 5/16/94 and 5/22/94	Watched video of pastor's pre-nuptial party and Holy Union.
Mar. 24, 1996 3:00 p.m. 4:00 p.m.	Telephone conversation with member of WFMCC	Interview with GM (Asian)- background information on church.
Mar. 31, 1996 10:45 a.m. - 1:45 p.m.	WFMCC	Attended regular worship. Observed special Palm Sunday drama production during service.
Mar. 31, 1996 6:15 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.	WFMCC	Congregational Meeting. Tallied votes for MCC Lay Representative position
April 7, 1996 7:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.	WFMCC	Sunrise Service and breakfast
April 7, 1996 10:55 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.	WFMCC and China Star Restaurant	Easter Sunday Services and lunch

Date/Time	Location	Topics
April 21, 1996 10:45 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.	WFMCC	Budget Sunday Service
May 17-19, 1996	Southwestern District Conference Austin, Texas	Workshop challenges of church growth with Rev. Wendy Foxworth OPEN FORUM "The Future of Our District" with Bob Author. parliamentarian Business Meeting and election of new district coordinator by lay representatives and pastors Evening Worship Services Plenary with Rev. Dr. Mel White. Social Justice Minister. video to Rev. Pat Robertson (*700 Club*) District Business Meeting on approval of by-laws District Banquet/Dance Sunday Morning Worship
June 8. 1996 9:00a.m – 1:00 p.m.	WFMCC	Seminar on Legal protection pre-funeral. contracts. insurance. medical and durable need. guardianship. conservatorship. purchase of real estate. marriage with two local attorneys

Date/Time	Location	Topics
July 27-28, 1996	Cathedral of Hope 27th Anniversary in Dallas, TX	Luncheon and Tour. Discussion, evening party "Miracle Sunday" Fund Raising for new facilities and Sermon by Rev. Michael Piazza and Rev. Troy Perry
August 1-3, 1997	WFMCC Candidating Weekend	Refreshments at church. Sunday Services, Individual sessions with candidate: Rev. N (Tulsa Cookout. Selection of New Pastor and meeting for selection of replacement of Board member
May 13-17, 1998	News Coverage of Library Book Controversy	Televised News First Baptist Church WFCC
May 17, 1998 WFMCC 10:45 a.m. - 12:45 p.m.		Sunday morning service following televised interview with WFMCC pastor.
May 25, 1998 10:45 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.	WFMCC	Sunday service
May 26, 1998 10:00-11:00 a.m.	WFMCC	Interviews with WFMCC Pastor
May 27, 1998 10:00-11:45 a.m.	WFMCC Board member's home	Interview with church treasurer (female)
May 28, 1998 3:00 -5:00p.m.	WFMCC Board member's home (Neighboring town)	Interview with song leader/pianist (male)
May 29, 1998 4:30-5:15 p.m.	WFMCC Board member's home (Neighboring town)	Interview with long time (male) member

Date/Time	Location	Topics
June 9, 1998	Internet	Interview with former member of WFMCC Board of Directors treasurer (female) by e-mail questionnaire (Houston, Texas)
June 28, 1998 11:00 am.-12:30 p.m.	W.F.M.CC.	Interview with pianist and Founding member of congregation and with member (former Catholic nun) and through e-mail responses to questionnaire
July 1998 5:00-7:00 p.m.	Restaurant in Norman, Oklahoma	Interview and dinner with former WFMCC pastor and spouse
December 30, 1998 10:00 a.m.- 4:00 p.m.	Board member's home	Interviews an observations with Board member, their spouse and the member awaiting results of spouse's custody hearing (right to worship at WFMCC)
December 30, 1998 6:00-8:00 p.m. in custody dispute	Public School classroom	Interview with WFMCC member (mother of child

Appendix D

Formal Questionnaire

A: Personal Politics:

Q #1: What does MCC mean for you personally? Explain.

Q#2: What does MCC provide that other religions do not? Explain.

Q#3: What does MCC provide that other gay organizations do not? Explain.

Q#4: Are you interested in being part of other gay rights groups or do you already belong to other groups? Explain.

Q #5: What motivated you to attend MCC? Why do you stay? Explain.

B. Spiritual and Political Refuge:

Q#6: To a great degree, organized religion has been the most critical and condemning of gays. With this fact in mind, do you believe the church is a spiritual outpost for gays who are condemned in the name of religion? Has it offered a spiritual outpost to you? Explain

Q#7: Does the church contribute to cognitive liberation: a sense of self-worth, validation of self as a person, a Christian? If so, has it provided cognitive liberation for you? Explain.

Q#8: Do you think the church helps to develop trust among gays, within MCC, the broader gay community, and the straight community at large via joint efforts? Have you developed a sense of thrust through MCC? Did or do you lack trust of others because you were gay? Explain.

Q#9: Is oppression openly discussed at MCC? Are ways suggested to combat oppression? Have or do you feel oppressed as a gay person? Does the church provide a means to overcome such feeling? Has the church aided you in overcoming feelings of oppression, if you have felt any? Explain.

C. Politics and Religion:

Q #10: Acknowledging the norms associated with societal values, does the church legitimize your grievances, your faith as a gay person? Explain.

Q#11: What are the barriers and limitations the church faces regarding the social justice movement for gays in general? Explain.

Q#12: Do any other religious groups view MCC as a legitimate religious organization? Explain.

D. Politics and GLBT Rights:

Q# 13: Do you see your attendance and participation in the church's programs as a political statement? If so, in what way?

Q#14: What do you see as the role for the church in gay liberation politics? Explain.

Q#15: What is the role of the church in broader political issues? (e.g. child abuse, homelessness, drug/alcohol abuse, nuclear disarmament, etc). Explain.

Q#16: Can the church serve as an institution which recruits political activism for the gay rights movement? Explain.

Q#17: Does MCC offer something unique to the gay rights movement that would be lacking otherwise?

Q#18: Does the church represent the voiceless and dispossessed? Explain.

Q#19: Is there tensions between the secular gay community "pushing the edge" of social boundaries and members of MCC? Explain.

E. Politics of Social Activism:

Q#20: Does MCC help develop the resources to organize collective resistance? Does it give members civic skills such as leadership abilities, speaking, organizational skills, fund raising skills that would be useful to gay liberation actions? Explain how if so and how personally it has impacted you?

Q#21: Is the church an organizational hub in the local gay community for social justice and gay liberation activities? Explain.

Q#22: Does the church have the potential of providing an organized mass base for the gay rights movement? Explain.

Q#23: Can MCC provide a financial base for gay rights and social justice? Has MCC done so? Has WFMCC done so specifically? Explain.

Q#24: Can or does the church offer a base from which protest can be developed and social justice and gay rights issues can be addressed? Explain any occasions where this has occurred and the impact on you, the church, and the community.

Q#25: Does the church have the potential to provide a meeting place where the masses plan tactics and strategies and collectively commit themselves to the struggle? Has the church done so? Explain how, if so and the results for you and the community.

Q#26: Does the church desire to be isolated or involved with other denominations in the community and the gay community in social justice activities? Have you been involved? If so how? Explain the benefits and drawbacks you experience if any.

Q#27: What programs do or should MCC initiate or participate in (e.g. AIDS education and care, prison ministry, homeless, campus ministry)? Are or should such activities be coordinated with other institutions and organization in the gay community, in the straight community? Have you been involved in such activities? If so, explain.

Q#28: Do members of MCC deal with public education issues that impact the g/l/b/t community or the children of g/l/b/t parents? Have the children of g/l/b/t faced discrimination? Do g/l/b/t students face discrimination in school and/or society? If so, what if anything does MCC offer to address these issues? Have you personally been a part of such discrimination? Explain.

Appendix E

The Governmental Structure of UFMCC

GOD

The General Conference
(Consisting of all the Local Churches)

The Board of Elders
(Make Decisions when the General Conference is Not in Session)

Rev. Elder Troy D. Perry
(Founder and Moderator)

The General Council
(Moderator, Elders, District Coordinator, Specific Dept. Heads)

The District Conference

The District Committees
(Serves as a District Board and Makes Decisions When the District Conference Is Not in Session)

The District Coordinators
(Elected Official at the Helm of Each District)

The Local Church Congregation

The Local Church Board of Directors

The Local Church Pastor

All Programming and Leadership in the Local Church

(Source: *Wichita Falls Metropolitan Community Church: Discovery Class.* The Five Most Frequently Asked Questions About The UFMCC. Unpublished).

Appendix F

UFMCC Congregations in the USA

District	State	City	Status
Northwest	Alaska	Anchorage	Commissioned*
	California	Sacramento	Chartered**
		San Francisco (1)	Chartered
		San Francisco (2)	Chartered
		San Jose	Chartered
		San Lorenzo	New Work***
		Santa Cruz	Commissioned
		Santa Rosa	Commissioned
	Hawaii	Honolulu	----
	Idaho	Boise	Commissioned
	Oregon	Eugene	Commissioned
		Portland	Chartered
		SisterSpirit	Special Work[a]
		Salem	Commissioned
	Utah	Logan	New Work
		Ogden	New Work
		Salt Lake City	Commissioned
	Washington	Kennewick	Commissioned
		Seattle	Chartered
		Spokane	Commissioned
		Tacoma	Commissioned
		Tumwater	Commissioned
		Vancouver	Commissioned
		Yakima	Parish Extension
Southwest	Arizona	Flagstaff	New Work
		Phoenix	Chartered
		Tucson	Commissioned
	California	Bakersfield	Commissioned
		Berkeley	Commissioned
		Claremont	Special Work[b]
		Concord	Parish Extension
		Costa Mesa (1)	Special Work
		Costa Mesa (2)	New Work
		Frontera	Special Work[c]
		Glendale	Commissioned
		Guerneville	New Work
		Long Beach	Chartered
		Mira Loma	New Work
		North Hollywood	Chartered

District	State	City	Status
Southwest		Oakland	Special Ministry[d]
		Palmdale	Commissioned
		Palm Springs	New Work
		San Diego	Chartered
		San Luis Obispo (1)	New Work
		San Luis Obispo (2)	Special Work[e]
		San Marcos	Commissioned
		Santa Ana	Chartered
		Torrance	New Work
		Ventura	New Work
		West Hollywood	Chartered
		Whittier	Commissioned
	Nevada	Las Vegas	Chartered
		Reno	New Work
	New Mexico	Albuquerque (1)	Commissioned
		Albuquerque (2)	Chartered
South Central	Arkansas	Eureka Springs	Mission
		Fayetteville	Mission
		Little Rock (1)	Commissioned
		Little Rock (2)	Commissioned
	Louisiana	Baton Rouge	Chartered
		New Orleans	Commissioned
	Oklahoma	Lawton	Mission
		Tulsa (1)	Commissioned
		Tulsa (2)	Commissioned
	Texas	Abilene	Mission
		Amarillo	Commissioned
		Arlington	Chartered
		Abilene	Commissioned
		Austin	Chartered
		Corpus Christi	Commissioned
		Dallas	Chartered
		Denton	Chartered
		El Paso	Commissioned
		Ft Worth	Chartered
		Houston (1)	Chartered
		Houston (2)	Chartered
		Longview	Mission
		Lubbock	Chartered
		San Antonio	Chartered
		Waco	Commissioned
		Wichita Falls	Commissioned
Gulf Lower Atlantic	Alabama	Birmingham	Chartered

District	State	City	Status
Gulf Lower Atlantic	Alabama	Gadsden	Parish Extension
		Huntsville	Chartered
		Mobile	Commissioned
		Montgomery	Commissioned
		Tuscaloosa	New Work
	Georgia	Atlanta (1)	Chartered
		Atlanta (2)	Chartered
		Augusta	Mission
		Columbus	Mission
		Decatur	Chartered
		Macon	New Work
		Savannah	Mission
		Valdosta	New Work
	Mississippi	Biloxi	Commissioned
		Jackson	Mission
	North Carolina	Asheville	Commissioned
		Boone	New Work
		Charlotte (1)	Chartered
		Charlotte (2)	Chartered
		Durham	New Work
		Greensboro	Chartered
		Hendersonville	New Work
		Hickory	Commissioned
		Raleigh	Chartered
		Wilmington	Commissioned
		Winston-Salem	Mission
	South Carolina	Charleston	Chartered
		Columbia	Commissioned
		Florence	New Work
		Greenville	Commissioned
		Myrtle Beach	New Work
	Tennessee	Chattanooga	Commissioned
		Johnson City	Commissioned
		Knoxville	Chartered
		Memphis	Mission
		Nashville	Commissioned
Mountain and Plains	Colorado	Boulder	New Work
		Colorado Springs	Chartered
		Denver	Chartered
		Ft. Collins	Commissioned
		Pueblo	Commissioned
	Iowa	Davenport	Chartered
		De Moines	Chartered

District	State	City	Status
Mountain and Plains	Kansas	Overland Park	Commissioned
		Topeka	Chartered
		Wichita	Chartered
	Minnesota	Minneapolis	Chartered
	Missouri	Cape Girardeau	New Work
		Clayton	New Work
		Joplin	New Work
		Kansas City (1)	Commissioned
		Kansas City (2)	Chartered
		St. Louis	Chartered
	Montana	Billings	New Work
		Great Falls	Commissioned
	Nebraska	Omaha	Chartered
	South Dakota	Sioux Falls	Commissioned
		Rapid City	New Work
Northeast	Connecticut	Hartford	Commissioned
	Maine	Augusta	Mission
		Portland	Mission
	Massachusetts	Boston	Commissioned
		Cherry Valley	Commissioned
	New York	Brooklyn	Special Work[f]
		Latham	Commissioned
		New York City (1)	Commissioned
		New York City (2)	Chartered
		Rochester	Commissioned
Great Lakes	Illinois	Chicago (1)	Chartered
		Chicago (2)	Commissioned
		Hinsdale	Chartered
		Oak Park	Commissioned
		Springfield (1)	Chartered
		Springfield (2)	Special Work[g]
		Waukegan	Commissioned
	Indiana	Evansville	Interested Group
		Indianapolis	Commissioned
		New Haven	Chartered
	Kentucky	Elizabethtown	New Work
		Lexington	Commissioned
		Louisville	Chartered
		Paducah	Commissioned
	Michigan	Battle Creek	New Work
		Detroit (1)	Commissioned
		Detroit (2)	Chartered
		Flint	Commissioned

District	State	City	Status
Great Lakes	Michigan	Grand Rapids	Chartered
		Saginaw	Interested Group
		Ypsilanti	Commissioned
	Ohio	Cincinnati	Commissioned
		Columbus	Commissioned
		Dayton	Chartered
		Toledo	Commissioned
	Wisconsin	Green Bay	Commissioned
		Milwaukee	Commissioned
Mid Atlantic	Delaware	Rehoboth Beach	Mission
	District of Columbia	Washington D.C.	Chartered
	Maryland	Annapolis	Parish Extension
		Baltimore	Commissioned
		Boyds	Chartered
		Gaithersburg	Special Work[h]
		Hagerstown	Mission
		Silver Spring	Parish Extension of Washington
	New Jersey	New Brunswick	Commissioned
	Pennsylvania	Bethlehem	Commissioned
		Harrisburg	Chartered
		Lancaster	Special Work[i]
		Mountville	Commissioned
		Philadelphia	Mission
		Pittsburgh	Chartered
	Virginia	Charlottesville	Mission
		Fairfax	Chartered
		Norfolk	Chartered
		Richmond	Chartered
		Roanoke	Commissioned
	West Virginia	Charleston (1)	Mission
		Charleston (2)	Special Ministry
Southeast	Florida	Boynton Beach	Chartered
		Cocoa	Commissioned
		Daytona Beach	New Work
		Ft. Lauderdale	Chartered
		Ft. Myers	Chartered
		Gainsville	Chartered
		Jacksonville	Chartered
		Key West	Chartered
		Lakeland	
		Satellite of Orlando	
		Miami	Chartered

District	State	City	Status
Southeast	Florida	Miami Beach	Commissioned
		New Port Richey	Chartered
		Orlando	Chartered
		Pensacola	Chartered
		Sarasota	Chartered
		St. Augustine	New Work
		St. Petersburg	Chartered
		Tallahassee	Commissioned
		Tampa	Chartered
		Venice	Commissioned
		West Palm Beach	Chartered

[a] at lesbian commune
[b] Children's Ministry
[c] at California Institute for Women
[d] BALM Ministries
[e] at California Men's Colony
[f] AIDS Ministry of Brooklyn
[g] Selah Ministries
[h] Chi Rho Press
[i] Deloris Berry Evangelistic Ministry
[j] Appalachian Ministries

*a "commissioned" church is able to support a part-time pastor and a part-time program and limited participation in church politics.

**a "chartered" church has a full-time pastor, full-time program and full participation in church politics.

***a "new work" church's finances are handled by the district and has no input into church politics.

(Source: On-line. Available: www.ufmcc.com/postal4. www.ufmcc.com/postal5. www.ufmcc.com/postal6).

Appendix G

UFMCC International Directory

District	Country	City	Status
Australian/	New South Wales	Sydney	Commissioned
Aotearoa/		Sydney	Chartered
New Zealand	Queensland	Brisbane	Commissioned
		Rockhampton	Outreach of Brisbane
	South Australia	Adelaide	Commissioned
	Victoria	Melbourne	Commissioned
	New Zealand	Christchurch	New Work
		Auckland	New Work
		Waikato	New Work
Mountain and Plains	Canada Alberta	Edmonton	Commissioned
	British Columbia	Vancouver	New Work
	Manitoba	Winnipeg	Commissioned
East Canadian	Nova Scotia	Halifax	Commissioned
	Ontario	Barrie	Commissioned
		Belleville	Commissioned
		Guelph	Commissioned
		London	Commissioned
		Toronto (1)	Chartered
		Toronto (2)	Chartered
		Windsor	Commissioned
European	Denmark	Copenhagen	Commissioned
	England	Bath	Commissioned
		Birmingham	Commissioned
		Bournemouth	Chartered
		Brixton-London	New Work
		East London	Commissioned
		North London	Chartered
		Manchester	Commissioned
		Newcastle	Commissioned
		Nottingham	Continuing Work
		Oxford	Commissioned
		Portsmouth	New Work
		Southampton	Commissioned
	Scotland	Edinburgh	New Work
	France	Paris	Commissioned
	Germany	Hamburg	Chartered
		Cologne	New Work

District	Country	City	Status
European		Avonside	New Work
Global Outreach	Argentina	Buenos Aires	New Work
Mexico	Distrito Federal	Mexico City	Commissioned
	Jalisco	Guadalajara	New Work
	Morelos	Cuernavaca	New Work
	Nuevo Leon	Monterey	Feasibility
	Nigeria	Okigwe	New Work
	Philippines	Manila	New Work
	Puerto Rico	San Juan	New Work
	Republic of South Africa	Bloemfontein	New Work
		Durban	Commissioned
		Pretoria	Commissioned
		Pretoria	Chartered
	Feasibility groups:	East Rand Deo Gloria Family	
		Klerkdorp	

(Source: On-line. Available: www.ufmcc.com/postal3a).

Appendix H

UFMCC South Central District: Procedures and Guidelines for Governing Positions

Position	Term Length	Number of Positions
District Coordinator[a]	4 yr term	One position
District Clerk[b]	2 yr term	One Position
District Lay Rep.[c]	2 yr term	One Position
Asst. Dist. Lay Rep. (Chair D.C.O.L.)[d]	2 yr term	One Position
District Committee	2 yr term 1 yr term	Two Positions One Unexpired
B.O.M.[e]		
Clergy	3 yr term	Two Positions
Clergy	2 yr term	One Position
Laity	3 yr term	One Position
Laity	2 yr term	One Position
FFO[f]		
Clergy[g]	4 yr term	One Position
Alt. Clergy[h]	4 yr term	One Position
Laity[i]	4 yr term	One Position
FFO		
Alt. Laity[j]	4 yr term	One Position
Nominating Committee		
Clergy[k]	2 yr term	One Position
Laity[l]	2 yr term	Two Positions

D. The District Nominating Committee "Shall review and screen all applications and make recommendations for elective positions to be filled by District Conference."

E. 1993 District Conference Motion: All Elections shall be won by a simple majority vote of the valid votes cast in each the Lay House and the Clergy House.

F. 1993 District Conference Motion: Moved that all candidates for elective positions must participate in the interview process prior to the second business session of the District Conference.

G. 1994 District Conference Motion: Moved to be allowed to vote on all positions rather than electing by acclamation for uncontested positions.

H. 1994 District Conference Motion: Moved to waive the typing requirement for positions nominated from the floor for which there are no nominees.

I. 1994 District Conference Motion: Move to define a valid ballot as:

1. A valid ballot (sections of a ballot sheet) is a ballot in which a vote(s) has been cast where the number of votes cast is equal to or less than the number of vacant positions.

2. Ballots (sections of a ballot sheet) returned which are blank or have abstention written on them will be counted in the total number of ballots cast.

3. Conditions which render a section of the ballot sheet invalid are:
   a. Any section(s) in which more votes were cast than vacant positions
   b. Sections(s) in which write-in names are present

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[a] Election by both the House of Clergy and the House of Laity (1996 South Central District Business Meeting Agenda . May 16-19, 1996)

[b] Election by both the House of Clergy and the House of Laity.

[c] Election by the House of Clergy **ONLY**. In accordance with District By-laws Five: B 5.a., clergy Candidates previously registered with the CCCC as "In-Care" and who have filed their Experiential Training Form are not eligible to vote in the election of the District Lay Representative or the election of the Assistant District Lay representative.

[d] D.C.O.L. is the acronym for District Chair of Laity.

[e] B.O.M. is an acronym for Board of Ordained Ministry. Beginning at the 1996 District Conference the Board of Ordained Ministry (B.O.M.) shall consist of 7 positions: a chair and vice chair appointed by the District committee and 5 positions elected by the District Conference. (3 clergy and 2 lay persons). All terms will be 4 years and staggered. These positions shall be elected by a majority vote in both houses of the conference. Implementation of the staggered terms will be as follows: 1996: (1) district Committee appoints a chair to a 4 year term and a vice chair to a 2 year term: (2) conference will elect 1 clergy and 1 lay person to a 2 year term: (3) Conference will elect 2 clergy and 1 lay person to a 4 year term: 1998: (1) Conference will elect 1 clergy and 1 lay person to a 4 year term: (2) District Committee appoint the vice chair to a 4 year term: 2000: Cycle will begin again: district committee will appoint the chair to a 4 year term and the Conference elects 2 clergy and 1 layperson to a 4 year term. Election by both the House of Clergy and the House of Laity [f] FFO is the acronym for Faith, Fellowship, and Order Commission. **ONLY.**

[g] Election by the House of Clergy **ONLY**.

[h] Election by the House of Clergy **ONLY.**

[i] Election by the House of Laity.

[j] Election by the House of Laity **ONLY**.

[k] Election by the House of Clergy **ONLY.**

[l] Election by the House of Laity **ONLY**.

(Source: South Central District Business Meeting Agenda. (1996, May 16-19).

Appendix I

UFMCC South Central District: 1996 Conference Agenda

(1) Establishing a Quorum[a]
(2) Approval of meeting agenda[b]
(3) Nominations for Elective office[c]
- A. Issues which may affect elections
- B. Report from the Nominating Committee
- C. Nominations from the floor
  (Only if required in accordance with District by-laws)
- D. Nominations for the UFMCC Board of Elders
- E. Forum for candidates for the office of District Coordinator

(4) Minutes of the 1995 District Business Meeting
(5) District Committee
- A. Minutes of 9-10 June 1995
- B. Minutes of 29 August 1995
- C. Minutes of 5-8 October 1995
- D. Minutes of 1-3 March 1996

(6) District Officers'/District Committee at Large Reports
- A. District Coordinator
- B. Assistant District Coordinator
- C. District Treasurer
- D. District Clerk
- E. District Lay Representative
- F. District Board of trustees
- G. At Large Committee Member
- H. At Large Committee Member
- I. At Large Committee Member

(7) Reports from the District Program Units[c]
- A. District Health Ministries
- B. District by-laws Committee
- C. District Commission on the Laity
- D. District Deaf/Hearing Impaired Ministries
- E. District Faith. Fellowship and Order Representatives
- F. District Nominating Committee
- G. Ministry of Diversity in Spiritual Community
- H. Weaving Inter-cultural Network of Diversity
- I. District Women's Secretariat
- J. District Board of Ordained Ministry

(8) Finances
- A. Budget proposal
- B. Annual Financial Report
- C. Auditor's Report

(9) Old Business

(10) New Business

A. Elections
B. Proposed District by-laws Revisions
C. Strategic Planning Report
D. UFMCC Ministry Priority Survey
E. Binding Resolutions[e]
F. Non-Binding Resolutions
G. Any other business

(11) Adjournment with prayer

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[a] In accordance with the bylaws of the UFMCC and the bylaws of the South Central District-UFMCC, only the following voting delegates will be seated: House of Clergy: those Credentialed as Clergy by the UFMCC AND holding a license to practice within the South Central District-UFMCC, Retired UFMCC Clergy residing in the south Central district. House of Laity: Duly elected Lay Delegates of Commissioned and Chartered Churches of the South Central District, elected lay members of the South Central District Committee, and Pastors of Commissioned and Chartered churches of the South Central District who do not hold UFMCC Clergy Credentials. Those who are seated as "Observers" with voice but no vote are: 1) Liaison Elder to the South Central District-UFMCC; 2) Pastoral Leaders of New Works Mission Churches: 3) Transfer Clergy (not otherwise seated) who are officially in process with the UFMCC Clergy Credentials and Concerns Committee: 4) Persons who are officially in the UFMCC credentialing process: 5) Chairs of South Central District Program Units; and 6) Chairs of UFMCC Program Units who hold membership in a congregation within the South Central District

[b] Unless otherwise provided for, all issues must be approved/passed by a separate majority vote in both the House of Laity and the House of Clergy.

[c] Positions to be filled by election by the District Conference (Refer to Appendix H)

[d] All reports in Category 7 will be received by a consent agenda with one motion.

[e] In accordance with District Conference policy, all resolutions that will be considered as binding must be submitted to the District Clerk PRIOR to the recess of the first day of business meeting for distribution prior to the opening of the second day of business meeting.

(Source: 1996 South Central District Business Meeting Agenda 1996, May 16-19).

Appendix J

UFMCC Certificate of Holy Union

CERTIFICATE OF HOLY UNION

I, Margaret C. Walker, having the authority as a clergy of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, do hereby certify that I have this day duly solemnized the Holy Union in accordance and practices of the Church of Jesus Christ, according to the Rites of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Church Bylaws.

Between

And

Al Exodus Metropolitan Community Church

Abilene, Texas

The Reverend _____ Celebrant

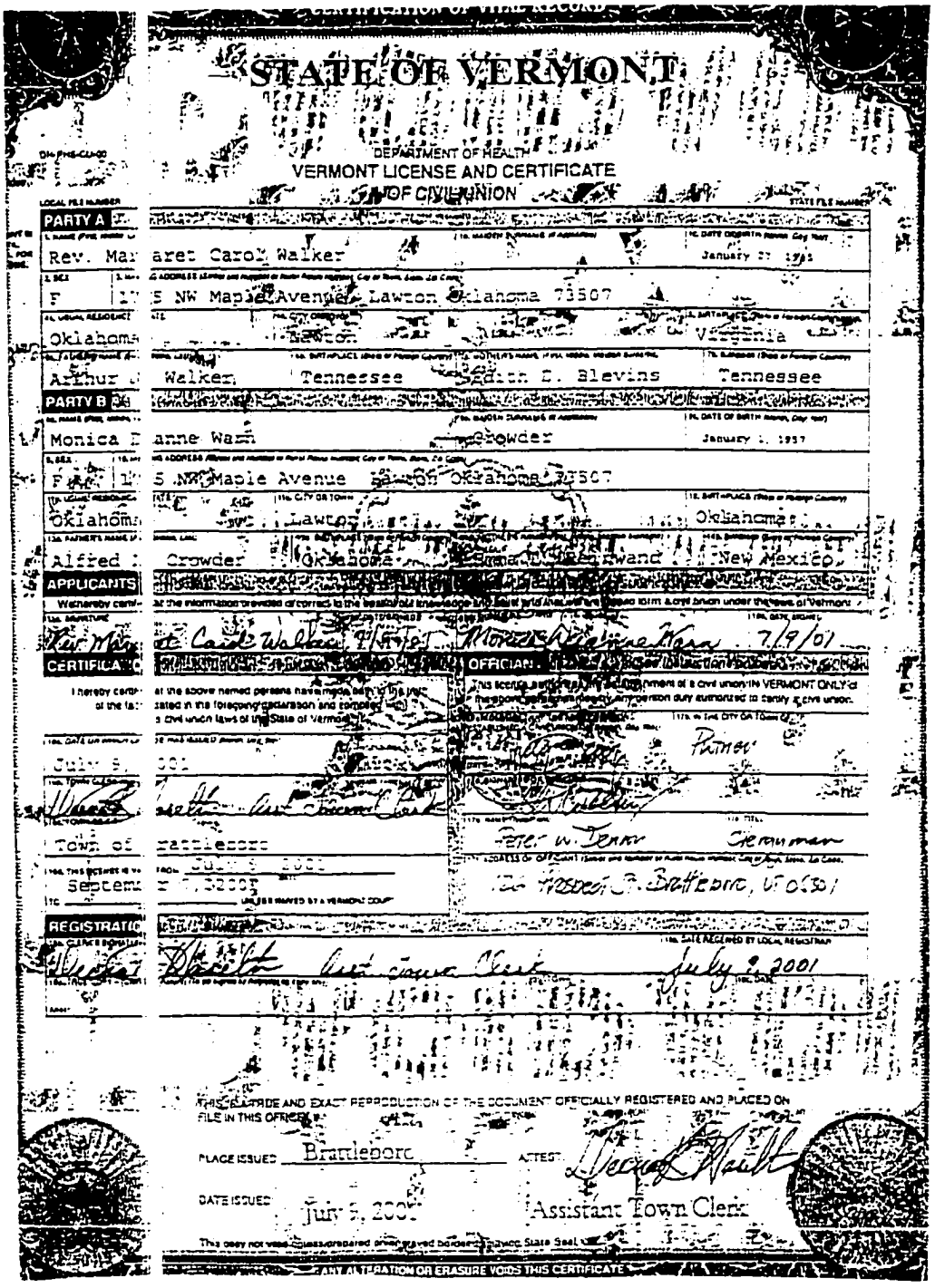
_____ Witnesses

_____

THE UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP OF METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES

Appendix K

State of Vermont
Certificate of Civil Union



STATE OF VERMONT

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

VERMONT LICENSE AND CERTIFICATE OF CIVIL UNION

PARTY A

Rev. Mar aret Carol Walker — January 31 1943

F — 5 NW Maple Avenue Lawton Oklahoma 73507

Oklahoma — Lawton — Virginia

Arthur J Walker — Tennessee — Edith E. Blevins — Tennessee

PARTY B

Monica E anne Warn Crowder — January 1, 1957

F — 5 NW Maple Avenue Lawton Oklahoma 73507

Oklahoma — Lawton — Oklahoma

Alfred J Crowder — Oklahoma — Sara Maryland — New Mexico

APPLICANTS

Rev Mary Carol Walker 7/9/01 — Monica Elaine Mara 7/9/01

CERTIFICATE

OFFICIANT

July 9 2001

Town of Brattleboro — Peter W. Jenne Chairman

Septem — 7, 2001

REGISTRATION

July 9 2001

THIS IS A TRUE AND EXACT REPRODUCTION OF THE DOCUMENT OFFICIALLY REGISTERED AND PLACED ON FILE IN THIS OFFICE

PLACE ISSUED Brattleboro ATTEST Assistant Town Clerk

DATE ISSUED July 9, 2001

ANY ALTERATION OR ERASURE VOIDS THIS CERTIFICATE

Appendix L

UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP OF METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES
DISSOLUTION OF HOLY UNION

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This is to certify that we, the undersigned, after much prayer, personal effort, and counseling, have determined that we are unable to resolve the extensive differences within our relationship. We affirm that we will be unable to reconcile these differences and that they are having an adverse effect on our Christian growth due to the attitudes that have developed. We further affirm that we now part in Christian Love and without rancor or animosity, resolving to speak well of each other and to cherish the love we shared as a gift of God.

Therefore, be it know that we do hereby request a dissolution of our Holy Union performed by a Professional Clergy in the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches on the _____day of _____, 19_____, in the City of _____ and the State/Province of _____, by the Reverend _____.
Signed this _____day of _____, 19_____, in the City/Town of _____ and the State/Province of _____.

1)_____

2)_____

I, the undersigned Professional Clergy in the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, after prayer and consultation with the above individuals, have determined to the best of my ability that the foregoing statements and conditions are true and do affirm that the Holy Union described above is hereby dissolved and the records of the Church are to be so marked.

[ ] I personally officiated at the Holy Union.

[ ] I act as an agent for the Clergy who officiated at the Holy Union.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

INSTRUCTIONS: For clarity, except for signatures, all information is to be typed and names are to be typed below the signature lines. Three (3) copies are to be distributed as follows: One to each of the two individuals involved, and one to the Church where the Holy Union is recorded. If one member of the Holy Union is not able to be located after a search, type "In Absentia" on the signature line. If one member refuses to sign but does not protest the action, type "Non-Contested" on the signature line. If one member objects to the action and refuses to sign, but the Clergy determines the action should be taken for the spiritual and emotional welfare of the individuals, type "In Protest" on the signature line. In any of the above cases, a concerted effort must be made to deliver a copy of this document to the non-signing party.

(Source: UFMCC: Wichita Falls Metropolitan Community Church).