

PRESS RELEASE: NEWARK AND SKYLINE UM CHURCHES SPONSOR SCREENING OF "FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO" FEBRUARY 29, 2008

SUMMARY: Two Newark area United Methodist Churches are jointly sponsoring a public screening of an award winning documentary that reconciles homosexuality and Biblical scripture on Feb. 29, 2008. The screening is a part of each congregation's struggle to welcome and love all of their neighbors, particularly those who have traditionally been condemned and discriminated in the Christian church because of their sexual identity. Newark (Delaware) and Skyline (Pike Creek, DE) United Methodist churches are engaged in a process of determining whether to join the Reconciling Ministries Network, a national grassroots organization that exists to enable full participation of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in the life of the United Methodist Church, both in policy and practice.

FULL TEXT

On Friday evening, February 29, 2008, at 7:30, Newark UMC and Skyline UMC will jointly present a public showing of the recently released documentary "For the Bible Tells Me So" at Skyline Church, 3100 Skyline Drive, at the corner of New Linden Hill and Skyline Drive in Pike Creek. The film is the second event Skyline Church has held as part of a process to determine whether to become a Reconciling Ministries Network congregation, and is free to the public.

On August 12, 2007, a News-Journal article titled: "These pews open for all who want to worship: Rehoboth church accepts gay, lesbian congregants" reported that Epworth United Methodist Church in Rehoboth, Delaware had voted to become a member of the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN). Reconciling Ministries Network is a national grassroots organization that exists to enable full participation of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in the life of the United Methodist Church, both in policy and practice. The News-Journal article went on to state that Epworth's RMN status made it "the only [Methodist] church among 460 in Delaware and Maryland's Eastern Shore to officially welcome gays and lesbians".

After reading the article, Skyline Church's Outreach Minister, Judie Riley, requested that Skyline Church explore the possibility of publicly stating our own policy of welcome and acceptance of GLBT persons by becoming a Reconciling Ministry Network congregation. Skyline Church does not presently discriminate against people because of sexual orientation or gender identity, except to observe the United Methodist prohibition against ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions.

On September 11, 2007, the Skyline Church Council reached a consensus to begin an all-congregation conversation about whether or not to identify Skyline Church as a Reconciling Ministry Network (RMN) congregation. The Church Council anticipates this conversation will involve home meetings as well as congregational studies and forums, and that it will take at least two years before the congregation is ready to vote.

Newark United Methodist Church has long sought to truly live the UMC tenet: "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors". Over the past several years, the idea of affiliating with the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) has been brought forward by members of the congregation. As a way of living Newark UMC's theme for the year, "Radiating God's Love", a number of NUMC members have felt the call to bring forward to the congregation the possibility of affiliating with RMN, to formally take a stand as a welcoming congregation. As a result, a team has formed to find ways to bring this idea forward in Christian love and commitment to everyone in the church family. Recognizing that there are myriad ways to hear and interpret God's call, the committee plans a number of meetings for all who wish to attend, in which all views will be heard and prayerfully considered in faith.

Newark UMC's RMN chairs, Paul Stazesky and Cyndi Brooks, joined Skyline UMC's first congregational forum to discuss RMN, on January 27, 2008. Over 70 members and friends gathered to express their opinions and to ask questions about the process. All of the 35 persons who spoke affirmed their understanding that Skyline's doors are open to all persons, though many voiced fears that the process of talking about becoming an RMN church might be painful for some, and that identifying ourselves as an RMN congregation might result in a congregational split or drop in attendance or financial support.

Attending the January 27 forum were several long-time members of Skyline Church, (formed in 1966), who remembered a time in the late 60's when Skyline Church members debated whether to publicly support Project Equality, an organization committed to equal opportunity racial hiring practices. The congregational debate occurred at the time the Methodist Church became the United Methodist Church in 1968, a union that brought the end of racially segregated Methodist Conferences.

As Skyline and Newark churches struggle with a present-day social issue, 992 clergy and lay delegates of the 11.5 million-member United Methodist Church prepare to gather for its quadrennial General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas from April 23 to May 2, 2008. The General Conference delegates revise the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, which regulates the organization and policies of local United Methodist churches. The assembly may modify most disciplinary paragraphs by majority vote.

Concerning homosexuality, the current (2004) United Methodist Book of Discipline states that: "Since the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church." It also states that: "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God's grace is available to all, and we will seek to live together in Christian community." (The *Book of Discipline*, ¶ 304.3)

FILM NOTES

“For the Bible Tells me So”, a film by Daniel Karlake, documents the lives of five Christian, American families, including those of former House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt and Episcopal Bishop Gene Robinson, and how they handled the realization of having a gay child. Karlake has been an award-winning producer for the highly acclaimed newsmagazine, “In the Life,” which airs nationally on PBS in over 120 markets and which has centered primarily on issues regarding religion and homosexuality. Robin and Bruce Voss enlisted Karlake to direct the project after Robin attended a seminar at the couple’s Orange County, CA church, St. Mark’s Presbyterian, called “What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality.”

The seminar, taught by Reverend Steven Kindle (who appears in the movie), “had a profoundly healing, transformative effect,” Voss says. “It opened hearts, opened minds. It got straight people like me to be open to hearing something different from what they’d been taught their entire life. That experience was so overwhelming that I believed in my heart that I had to do something, like make a movie, to perpetuate the ideas and the healing I’d experienced that day. If people in Orange County, California, were seeking this kind of message, then people everywhere would soon be ready to stop struggling and start understanding what the Bible really says about being gay.”

The need for a populist articulation of the argument was underscored to Karlake as he watched a February 24, 2004 edition of CNN’s “Larry King Live,” which had booked four people to talk about the news that President Bush had backed a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. When the group discussed whether or not gay people choose to be that way, and why it’s a sin, Karlake recalled, “all [a panel member who was a pastor] had to do was invoke the Bible [by saying “it’s unmistakably clear in the Bible”], and the whole discussion seemed to shut down.”

“I knew my film would not only have to move people,” Karlake explains, “but it would have to give them tools to counter this interpretation when it comes up with family or at a dinner party. People get so shut down when anyone mentions the Bible because people either know it, or they think they know it, or they don’t. And if you don’t know the Scripture, then how can you talk intelligently about the issues?”

By way of illustrating his point, Karlake notes that while it’s very hard to find any clergy who will say the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is about homosexuality, “if you stop people on the street, nine out of ten think the story is only about homosexuality.”

This provocative, entertaining film concisely reconciles homosexuality and a literal interpretation of Biblical scripture. Informed by such respected voices as Bishop Desmond Tutu, Harvard’s Peter Gomes, Orthodox Rabbi Steve Greenberg and Reverend Jimmy Creech, the film offers healing, clarity and understanding to anyone caught in the crosshairs of scripture and sexual identity.

After an opportunity to see the 97 minute film, organizers from Skyline and Newark Churches will host an opportunity to share reflections and light refreshments. For more information, call Newark Church at 302-368-8774 or Skyline Church at 302-737-9069, or see the sponsoring church websites: www.newark-umc.org or www.skylinechurch.net. Co-chairs for the Newark UMC team are Paul Stazesky (368-8422; pstasezky@comcast.net) and Cyndi Brooks (234-1354; cynbrooks@comcast.net). Senior Pastor David Palmer (368-8774; dmpalmernewark@verizon.net) is also part of this effort. Skyline UMC's Lay Leader is Ivan Turner, Jr. (235-1566; ivanmtturnerjr@aol.com). The Co-Pastors are Vicki and Bo Gordy-Stith (737-1772; pastors@skylinechurch.net).

The website for the film is www.forthetellmeso.org/indexb.htm.

To find out more about the Reconciling Ministry Network, see www.rmnetwork.org online.

The United Methodist Church website is www.umc.org.

END OF TEXT

BY BO GORDY-STITH

11 FEB 08

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