

A Reflection on the 10 X '10 Affirming Congregations Workshop in Marmora

Roy Huntly

A third Workshop and one more step along the road to sensitivity, knowledge and change. Fifty five people in a smallish room increased the sense of family as new and old friends joined in animated conversation and laughter.

In the welcoming remarks I likened us to pilgrims on a journey, and linked that to the pilgrimage chronicled by Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales*. They were a varied company travelling away from a place where the plague has ravaged the whole population, and with their eyes fixed on the shrine of Canterbury, where they hoped to experience renewal, healing and peace.

We had come as part of a church and society plagued with discrimination, prejudice and ignorance, and our hearts were set on the goal of a network of congregations in which the “welcome “ will embrace each of us.

We were reminded of the resolution of the recent General Council which stated “The United Church of Canada is opposed to discrimination against any person on the basis of age, colour, disability, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, language, marital status, or any other basis by which a person is devalued”.

Our Church is committed to the journey of non discrimination, and social justice, and we, as a part of Bay of Quinte Conference, have dared to take up that banner and carry it into 2010, with 10 ministries planning to be Affirming.

Like the Canterbury pilgrims we have tales to tell and our day was full of stories – sad, provocative and funny. As we remember the anniversary of the toppling of the Berlin wall so we celebrate the breakdown of some of the walls in church and society that separate the people of God. With one hammer blow at a time the grip of prejudice is being broken; with each shared story, compassion widens the cracks and the light shines through.

It is hard to convey the powerful impact of the day’s programme. You just had to be there! But I must comment on two outstanding components. Lyn Miller and Robin Sherman shared a segment that addressed the language and misconceptions surrounding sexual diversity – or GLBT LINGO. That is, words that describe the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender members of our society (Robin has an excellent glossary of terms and descriptions that you might want to access – but you would miss the delight of Robin’s presentation.)

Elizabeth Macdonald brought her wisdom and scholarship to her session on Homosexuality and the Bible. She quoted the seven guidelines for “Interpreting the Bible in Times of Controversy” found in Jack Rogers’ *Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality*, the most important of which may be “Let all interpretations be in accord with the rule of love”. The sign of the Affirm rainbow is of course the covenant sign of God’s love.

Elizabeth also set out helpful sign posts in “Things to Remember as You Approach the Bible”, ending with “Jesus never condemned homosexuality, but he did challenge divorce, wealth, spiritual pride and exclusion.”

We were welcomed, well fed and cared for in Marmora and people are asking when and where the next workshop will be held. Thanks to Judy Amsbury, Lyn Miller and all the committee members for another excellent event. The momentum builds and we are taking our mandate seriously.