

From Rev. Bob Brashear  
4/8/2015

***Rock Stars and Prophets: Generations of Justice and Love*** was the name of the gathering at Stony Point April 8-11. And that's exactly who showed up. Under the auspices of That All May Freely Serve (<http://tamfs.org/home-2/>), it was a homecoming gathering and celebration for around 85 saints who had been involved in the decades long struggle for LGBTQ inclusion the PC(USA). And was also an opportunity to gather those stories while we still can, to do documentation and preservation of a history while it is still with us.

Looking around the room, I realized how important that was. While there was a contingent of the second and third wave of leadership, most of us were in our 60's, 70's, even 80's. Our stories need to be recorded now. When the leadership group from the 70's got up to report, someone noted that there was only one male clergy in a group that had been devastated by the AIDS pandemic. Looking around the room, I also noted the decades of stolen ministry, lost ministry. Well, not exactly, because many had been in constant faithful ministry, only denied official denominational recognition by the church they loved leaving them in a state of ecclesiastical house arrest as internal exiles.

A life-size cardboard cut out of Howard Warren, *God's Glorious Gadfly* of beloved memory, greeted us as we entered the meeting hall reminding us of his witness. Howard was a rock star and prophet both. He was family, one of us. And never hesitant to call the church to task. Including us when *we* would hesitate in our witness.

I recalled some special Howard moments. Like his long walk in the opening worship service of the 1990 Baltimore General Assembly when he walked the whole length of the arena floor to stand silently in front of outgoing moderator Price Gwynn with a sign that read *Shame*. While nervous security guards stirred, Moderator Gwynn proceeded as if Howard were not even there.

When I wrote about this event later, I referenced the retired jerseys of Baltimore basketball greats hanging from the rafters. I wrote something like,

*In an arena that once was home to basketball greats like Wes Unseld and Earl (the Pearl) Monroe, no one ever moved across that arena floor with the grace shown by Howard Warren in his long walk last night...*

Later, Howard said to me, *In my whole life, I've never had anything about me described as athletic. I kind of like that...*

(Does anyone know who accompanied Howard on that walk?)

Or, in 1993 at the Albuquerque PHEWA Biennial Conference. In response to the shameful disinviting of Janie Spahr to preach at the national offices chapel in Louisville, Howard in his wonderful way, rose with a motion to accuse then Executive Director James Brown of the *sin of Sodom*, meaning of course, the failure to show hospitality. Of

course, the Layman reported that PHEWA had accused Brown of *sodomy*. Howard lived free of fear with righteous anger, humor gentle, ironic and fierce and love, big love.

Looking around the room, I see old friends like Janie Spahr, Lisa Larges, and Chris Glaser. Others whose stories I am just learning as we weave our individual memories into one fabric. I need to try and capture the ways PHEWA contributed to this journey.

How many knew that long-time PHEWA executive director Rodney Martin was a commissioner to that 1978 Assembly that made explicit the judging and exclusion of *avowed and practicing homosexuals* from ordained ministry, even while making a hypocritical expression of welcome. And that Rod was the first commissioner to sign and file a dissent to that action.

Following that G.A., Rod made PHEWA a safe place, a place of welcome, of home, for all, especially those who had been excluded. Not in pursuit of what *The Layman* called the *homosexual agenda*, (I always loved that phrase) but because their ministries were *our* ministries. That's all. Chris Glaser and West Hollywood's Lazarus project, Janie Spahr's ministries lived under our tent at G.A.

In that infamous 1993 PHEWA Biennial Conference, PHEWA members passed a *statement of inclusion* which PC(USA) news service director Jerry Van Marter's headline had us *joining the front lines* of the ordination struggle. (If only...) <sup>i</sup> This would lead to PHEWA being made to pass through a G.A. gauntlet that included investigations and the PHEWA Director (Mark Wendorf) being left naked of support and hung out to dry before the G.A. plenary. (Now PHEWA board member Doug Mitchell would help turn the G.A. committee from censure to additional financial support...) However, the aftershocks continued into recent times.

Again in 1993, the New Orleans Biennial Conference made waves when John Park Lee Award winner Matt English, soon to die from AIDS-related complications, took the opportunity to deliver a jeremiad to the denomination. <sup>ii</sup> A COMANO (then PHEWA network- Community Ministries And Neighborhood Organizations) statement ended by ironically comparing the welcoming response of a secular blues club, House of Blues, to that of the denomination.

When PHEWA narrowly escaped the death penalty at the 1995 G.A., the *Presbyterian Layman* had this to say:

*PHEWA has been criticized for its activism, lack of accountability, and disagreement (what it calls "responsible dissent") with denominational policy. In response to these criticisms, the 1995 General Assembly called on the GAC to review PHEWA's activities since 1992, monitor PHEWA in light of its Memo of Understanding with the PCUSA, and report the findings to the 1996 GA. That GA adopted two resolutions. One instructed the moderator to appoint a committee to address concerns critics have had about PHEWA's exclusive membership and to clarify definitions of terms like "responsible dissent." A separate action dealt with PHEWA finances and accounting standards and called on NMD to review*

*the Memo of Understanding to “consider revisions to address the concerns of inclusiveness and political advocacy. ...” Among PHEWA member organizations are Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Options, Presbyterian Association of Specialized Pastoral Ministries, Presbyterian Child Advocacy Network, Presbyterians for Disabilities Concerns, and Presbyterian AIDS Network. “One of the things we have to celebrate with PHEWA is its ministry with people in the trenches,” NMD Committee Chairperson Sandra Hawley of Bloomington, Minn., said. Trust “Trust” was a word used frequently at the NMD Committee meeting as members discussed the covenant draft. Referring to the draft’s first paragraph, which calls on the two parties to build a relationship of trust in the denomination, Steve Grace of Midland, Mich., asked, “How are you intending to do that?”*

In the 1999 PHEWA Biennial Conference in San Diego, it was PHEWA’s display of the Shower of Stoles (<http://www.welcomingresources.org/sosp.htm>) that once again put us in the spotlight and drew a vitriolic attack from the *Layman*.<sup>iii</sup>

That would be the last public venting related to PHEWA and the LGBTQ inclusion struggle. Our insider/outsider reality always carried its inherent tensions. Yet we had our role, our place, and our story belongs there along with Presbyterians for Lesbian and Gay Concerns, the More Light Church movement (later to merge), That All May Freely Serve (formed in response to the blocking of Janie’s call to ministry in Rochester, NY) and finally the Covenant Network who with the diligent organizing skills of Tricia Dykers Koenig brought the liberal tall steeples into the political struggle.

In my 15-minute interview regarding the future, I pointed out how white the gathering was, a reality that has to be confronted moving forward. Now that inclusion is no longer the defining fault line between liberal and conservative churches, the issues of race and class will now have to be faced. (Thankfully, thanks to those like Janie and Lisa, there has always been at least a voice, even if crying from the wilderness, seeing the connection in these issues.)

Then there is this...yes, our polity has now been changed. But there can be no reconciliation without a process of amends. Around the circle were those who lived it out in the PC(USA) out of devotion and love, their gracious gift to us. But there were also those whose pain led them to leave the PC(USA). No one has to accept abuse forever. And others left the church entirely. How many cumulative years of ministry were stolen, that can never be given back? How do you repair broken hearts, wounded spirits? What kind of overture would open that conversation? What would Howard do?

Many thanks to Ray Bagnuolo and TAMFS for pulling this all together and to Rick and Kitty Ufford-Chase for hosting. (See endnotes that follow... )

# **PHEWA continues to protest constitutional standards**

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An analysis by Terry Schlossberg Layman Correspondent, The Presbyterian Layman, February 22, 1999



## **A stole from the "Stoles Project"**

Entering the worship area created under a tent at a Sheraton Hotel in San Diego on January 28-31, participants at the 1999 biennial conference of The Presbyterian Health, Education, and Welfare Association (PHEWA) found themselves surrounded by stoles from the "Stoles Project" sponsored by More Light Presbyterians (formerly Presbyterians for Lesbian and Gay Concerns and the More Light Churches network). The worship leader's podium was draped with stoles. Others hung from the poles and posts that encircled and supported the tent in which each morning worship service took place.

In case anyone missed the significance of the colorful strips, Helen Locklear, Louisville staff member, pointed them out the first evening, saying that they hung there representing gay, lesbian, and bisexual people.

## **PCUSA funding for the homosexual agenda**

PHEWA has brought attention to itself repeatedly in recent years as a group, financed by denomination funds, that promotes the homosexual agenda. General Assemblies have called for investigations of the organization on several occasions, including a special Moderator-appointed task force. Appointees to the investigating groups have come largely from PHEWA supporters and members.

PHEWA has a "Covenant of Agreement" with the National Ministries Division (NMD) of the PCUSA. The division is thus vested with the responsibility of holding the organization accountable. However, since many staff and committee members in that division are PHEWA supporters, their oversight has often been characterized by inaction.

## **Emily Wigger**

GAC member

For example, during their last committee meeting, PHEWA representative Lois Rifner, told the committee, as required by their "Covenant of Agreement," of their plans to use the "Stoles Project" to decorate the worship space at the biennial. The committee debated the plan, some defending PHEWA, some expressing objections. But the discussion ended without a vote being taken, and PHEWA proceeded to hang the stoles. Later, elected GAC member Emily Wigger, who was assigned as a representative of NMD to the biennial, declared it a "wonderful" conference.

In spite of the clear message from presbyteries and General Assemblies that have affirmed the denomination's constitutional opposition to homosexual behavior and placed the ordination requirement of "fidelity and

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## **PHEWA Joins Front Lines in Struggle for Gay & Lesbian Ordination**

-- Jerry L. Van Marter, \*News\*, Presbyterian Church  
(U.S.A.), News Briefs - 9307, February 12, 1993.

Albuquerque, NM. -- With virtually no one in opposition, members of the Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA) voted Feb. 6 to join the front lines in the battle for ordination rights for gay and lesbian Presbyterians.

In giving near unanimous approval (less than 10 of the 500 persons voting abstained) to four resolutions related to the prolonged struggle for gay and lesbian ordination in the Presbyterian Church, the association brushed aside concerns that taking such actions might jeopardize the association's structural relationship with its parent Social Justice and Peacemaking Ministry Unit (SJP).

A memo of understanding between the two groups gives the association the right to "responsible dissent" while working within the framework of General Assembly policy. The executive director of the association is an employee of the General Assembly. The association receives about \$80,000 from the ministry unit's budget.

Under an agreement worked out between the association's board of directors and SJP officials, no money from the unit or staff time by PHEWA executive director the Rev. Mark Wendorf will be committed to the association's effort to change the denomination's ordination policy.

The actions taken by the association included:

- Adoption of a "Statement of Inclusion" (see below);
- Adoption of a statement that reads: "We celebrate the gifts of lesbian, bisexual and gay persons and support their ordination rights";
- Endorsement of a "Declaration of Conscience," a statement that has been circulating widely in the Presbyterian Church protesting the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission's decisions setting aside the call of the Rev. Jane Spahr, an avowed lesbian, to Downtown Presbyterian Church in Rochester, N.Y., and revoking the certification of avowed lesbian Lisa Larges by Twin Cities Area Presbytery as ready to receive a call;
- Adoption of a statement condemning homophobia and calling for the church to be inclusive of gay men, bisexuals, and lesbians.

Prior to the vote on the resolutions, former PHEWA interim executive director the Rev. John Scotland sketched the history of the relationship between PHEWA and the denomination and outlined the dangers of taking actions that run counter to current General Assembly policy. "There are those in the church who are waiting

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for us to make a mistake. If we choose to give up our life on this, let's know it going in."

During floor debate, Spahr, director of a ministry with gay and lesbian persons and their families in San Rafael, Calif., rose and said, "The cost to PHEWA may be money, but the cost to gay and lesbian people is death."

Laurene Lafontaine of Denver, Colo., added, "If we kowtow on this issue, then our commitment to justice is empty. If we act out of fear, then we are standing on sand; if we stand on the rock of justice, God will take care of us."

In a related action, the association approved a resolution urging the overturning of Amendment 2 in Colorado, a measure passed by voters in that state Nov. 3 prohibiting the extension of civil rights to gay and lesbian persons. The association also asked its board of directors to monitor the introduction of similar legislation in other states and to alert synods and presbyteries in those states where such legislation is introduced.

The group also approved a resolution supporting President Clinton's decision to end the ban on gay and lesbian persons in the military. -- Jerry L. Van Marter, \*News\*, Presbyterian Church(U.S.A.), News Briefs - 9307, February 12, 1993.

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### **PHEWA Statement of Inclusion**

(adopted Feb. 6, 1993)

In an era when the world is bent on warring factions,  
seeking 'ethnic cleansing',  
fueled by segregation and divisiveness,  
built upon casting out the different,  
and working for disharmony;  
In an age when the church is caught up in the evil and sin of  
persecution, unrighteous name calling, trial and judgment, and  
sectarian division;

The Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), led by the Holy Spirit, and informed by the ministry of Jesus the Christ, proclaims itself to be an inclusive community, accepting those who are cast out by society, welcoming those who are dispossessed, and including those who are oppressed.

PHEWA tries to be a community where  
people are accepted for who they are,  
free under the grace and salvation of God,  
free from persecution and attack,

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free from fear of reprisal,  
and protected by the mercy of Christ.

PHEWA will continue to be a community of diverse opinions,  
where different ideas may be proclaimed without fear of attack,  
where honest discussion overcomes angry rhetoric,  
where diversity is proclaimed over segregation,  
acceptance over judgment.

PHEWA will continue to proclaim the message of justice and mercy,  
crying out for those with no voice,  
joining with those who are seeking a voice within the church,  
serving sisters and brothers in the ministries of health,  
education and welfare.

Entering the PHEWA community, individuals and networks agree to abide by these  
gospel standards, accepting each other in love, disagreeing with mercy, uniting for  
justice, and serving with compassion.

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### **PHEWA AWARD WINNER CASTIGATES CHURCH, GOVERNMENT**

by Jerry L. Van Marter

Editor's note: This story contains some language that may be offensive to some. --  
Jerry L. Van Marter

NEW ORLEANS--Ravaged by the AIDS virus that one day soon will kill him, the Rev.  
Matt English seized the last opportunity he will probably have to speak publicly to  
lash out at those in the Presbyterian Church and society he said have made him feel  
like he "has been tossed in the trash and discarded like a leper."

Barely able to walk or catch his breath, English spoke to the Presbyterian Health,  
Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA) Jan. 14 during its 1995 biennial  
conference after receiving its 1995 John Park Lee Award for outstanding social  
welfare ministry. He was honored for his work as executive director of North Dallas  
Shared Ministries, an ecumenical social service agency supported by 41  
congregations in that city.

After struggling to the podium to accept his award, English drew guffaws when he  
wisecracked, "You have just witnessed `creeping socialism.'"

There was little laughter after that. In his acceptance speech, English excoriated  
"fascists and fundamentalists in the Presbyterian Church who believe only they

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know who belongs. ...They want to exclude, but according to Jesus, as soon as they exclude, they are out and everyone else is in -- the God of exclusion is not the God we know in Jesus."

He then criticized groups such as Presbyterians for Biblical Sexuality, describing them as "penis-pushers who would stick a penis on God so they can protect male dominance of the church and society."

English questioned whether such groups have read the Bible. "Do they want a biblical sexuality in which polygamy is the norm, not to mention harems and concubines and temple prostitutes? Do they want a biblical sexuality in which rape and incest are commonplace and accepted behavior? Do they want a biblical sexuality in which Paul frowns on marriage? I don't think they've read the Bible at all," he thundered.

English leveled some of his bitterest criticism at the Board of Pensions. "I've worked all my career to feed the hungry and now I'm being starved by the Board of Pensions," he complained. English said that after he was forced onto disability by his illness, his income declined by 75 percent. He lost his house and car and now moves from friend's house to friend's house in California.

Board of Pensions representatives who were in attendance at the PHEWA conference said English's income could only have dropped so precipitously if he had opted out of Social Security (a choice given to ministers on the grounds of separation of church and state). Pension and disability benefits are calculated on the presumption of participation in Social Security.

In a subsequent interview with the Presbyterian News Service, Board of Pensions president John Detterick confirmed that the Board had paid the maximum benefit allowed to English "given the circumstances of his participation in the plan." He added that the details of each plan member's participation in the pension and health plan is confidential information.

Nevertheless, Board of Pensions staff member the Rev. Jack McAnlis told the PHEWA gathering, "The church should find ways to insure that no one falls through the cracks the way Matt has."

English also claimed that Dallas-based Grace Presbytery has neglected him. "It feels like the Presbyterian Church has tossed me in the trash, discarded me like a leper."

But Christa Dixon, a member of Grace Presbytery, said that English's AIDS-induced memory loss caused him to forget assistance the presbytery has tried to provide. She said the presbytery has also had great difficulty locating English since he moved from Dallas to northern California last summer.



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English said he left Dallas after losing his house "because the Presbyterian mayor made destitution a crime in order to get the homeless people off the streets before the World Cup soccer matches arrived." He also criticized government policies he charged make medicine and nutritional supplements for AIDS sufferers either impossible to attain or prohibitively expensive.

"It's funny, though," English continued, "I find that while the church has screwed me, God is good to me and I find Jesus all the time in strangers."

English also praised PHEWA. "You keep me going from day to day and I want to encourage you to keep on because out there on the margins, among the marginalized, is where God's commonwealth in Jesus is being created."

He concluded by dedicating his award "to all the marginal people of the world."

A spontaneous offering -- breadbaskets passed around the luncheon tables -- collected \$1,000 and was given to English.

### **Another Award Winner Responds**

Later in the day, at the PHEWA business meeting, the association was praised by the Rev. David Cockroft for giving English a time and place to speak.

"PHEWA was at its finest as it presented the John Park Lee Award to the Rev. Matt English at lunchtime today," said Cockroft, pastor emeritus at Riverdale Presbyterian Church in the Bronx, N.Y. He made his remarks after receiving PHEWA's Rodney T. Martin Award for sustained service to the organization.

"This is one of the few places in this church," Cockroft said, "where someone who is dying, someone who is angry -- an anger which is not pleasant even without the language, which might have offended some people -- can have a place."

Cockroft, who said he "junked" his previously prepared acceptance speech after hearing English, continued, "Sometimes things cannot be done 'decently and in order,' but who knows where the Spirit is at work? Maybe we saw the face of Christ today. I don't know. All I know is that this beloved church of ours needs to be shaken up. We need to get beyond the petty squabbles that seem to consume so much of our energy. We need to learn, without glossing over or covering up anything, how to live together."

### **One PHEWA Network Responds with Statement**

Also at the business meeting, Community Ministries and Neighborhood Organizations (COMANO), the PHEWA-related network with which English is

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affiliated, issued a statement intended primarily for the press. Read into the record by the Rev. Robert Brashear of Pittsburgh, it said:

"Everything we do we do out of the daily living out of our ministries, ministries to which we have been called by God, ministries for which we offer no apology.

"Know that although only one of our networking groups bears the name 'community ministries,' each and every one of our networks is a community ministry. And we, together, constitute a community.

"Know that if some of us are concerned about mental illness, it is because there are those in our midst who wrestle daily with those demons and we are called for Jesus' sake to wrestle with them.

"Know that if some of us are concerned about alcohol and other drug abuse it is because there are those in our midst who wrestle daily with those demons and we are called for Jesus' sake to wrestle with them.

"Know that if there are those among us who are concerned about disabilities, it is because there are those in our midst who struggle daily with barriers, some physical and others only in the human heart, and we are called for Jesus' sake to struggle with them.

"And know that if there are those among us who are concerned about AIDS, it is not because of any agenda to ordain anyone, but because there are those in our midst who live and die daily with AIDS -- gay and straight, male and female, adult and child. And we are called for Jesus' sake to live and die with them.

"And know that if there are any of our elected officers who are gay and lesbian, it is not because of any issue that we went looking for them but because they were already here, in our midst, endowed by God with ministries that we cannot give up or refuse to recognize.

"So when you write about us, we call upon you to understand what it means to live and speak within community, and if you cannot understand, then, for Jesus' sake, respect the integrity of our community and the dignity of each and every member of our community.

"For we are not here because of issues, nor are we here to argue about doctrine or theology, as much as they undergird all that we do.

"But we are here to encourage and expand the living out of our ministries -- literally ministries of life and death, whether that death be the subtle death of exclusion by community or church, or whether that death be the literal slow agonizing living death of AIDS, or the sudden death of children shot dead on our doorsteps.

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"And so, for Jesus' sake, we invite you, we call on you and those you report to, to join with us in these ministries, either through your direct participation or through prayers of solidarity.

"And if you do not so choose, then, for Jesus' sake, remain silent and harass not. Is it a witness to us Presbyterians that a secular blues bar here in New Orleans has as its slogan: `Heal Ever, Hurt Never'?"

### **A Note About PHEWA**

PHEWA is a voluntary membership organization of Presbyterians dedicated to the social welfare and justice ministries of the church. It is related to the National Ministries Division of the General Assembly Council and is organized into 10 networks that focus on particular types of social ministry.

The 10 PHEWA networks are Community Ministries and Neighborhood Organizations (COMANO); Presbyterian AIDS Network (PAN); Presbyterians Reaffirming Reproductive Options (PARO); Presbyterian Association of Specialized Pastoral Ministries (PASPM); Presbyterian Child Advocacy Network (PCAN); Presbyterians for Disabilities Concerns (PDC); Presbyterian Health Network (PHN); Presbyterian Network on Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (PNAODA); Presbyterian Mental Illness Network (PMIN); and Urban Presbyterian Pastors Association (UPPA).