



First Friday News & Views

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*The Monthly Newsletter
of the First Friday
Breakfast Club, Inc.*

Off-Putting Churches Despite Good Intentions

By Jonathan Wilson

To say that the church, in the universal sense, is making progress with respect to issue of LGBT children of God would be a blessed understatement. Among recent developments comes a remarkably enlightened open letter from the presiding Bishop of the United Methodist Church in Florida, making a gentle but compelling case for inclusion. Add to that the Pope himself, the official representative of Jesus Christ on earth, saying that he declines to condemn LGBT people of good will -- mighty nice of him. And add to that the statement of Bishop Tutu of South Africa who said recently that he would not worship a homophobic God and would prefer Hell to a homophobic Heaven. These are positive developments as the church universal is dragged kicking and screaming into the 21st Century -- a phenomenon that's by no means unprecedented in the history of the church and civil rights.

That said, and despite not wanting to seem unappreciative, I have to say that the very fact there's continuing dialogue within the church on the subject of gay and lesbian children of God is extremely off-putting to us as gay people, or should be. The premise that homosexuality is incompatible with Christianity, which remains the official stance of the United Methodist Church and countless others: (1) defines a Christianity that is anathema to gays and lesbians and (2) implicitly teaches this as a "moral lesson:" if gay people are in committed same-sex relationships for a lifetime or utterly promiscuous with persons of the same sex until they drop dead from exhaustion or worse, it's a moral equivalent -- it's the same thing, sinful, incompatible with Christianity, and you go to hell in either case. Preposterous, of course, but that's the implicit "moral lesson" coming from such a church (the supposed repository of moral teaching).

Why is the dialogue itself off-putting? Think about how it feels to be expected to be "in" the church while your fellow worshipers debate about your sinfulness as if you weren't in the room. That might be most easily understood if we imagined a church where there was continuing, "loving" dialogue over the equal worth of women as if it were a legitimate, Christian-based matter of differing opinions. Imagine such a church having sermons and sponsoring seminars and adult Sunday School lessons designed to enlighten congregants about the supposed equality of women, and taking comments from those who read the Bible and easily draw a contrary conclusion. How would that make self-respecting women (or those struggling to be self-

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▼ The next FFBC Meeting is 7:00am,
Friday, September 6, 2013, at Hoyt
Sherman Place, 15th & Woodland,
Des Moines, IA

▼ RSVP by September 2 to
JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com,
or phone 515-288-2500

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respecting) feel? Not good, I'd venture to say. It would be, or should be, off-putting to them without exception.

Or, as another example of clinging to a First Century view of things that we KNOW today to be untrue, suppose that the church today were having a lively, "continuing dialogue" (as if it were a legitimate difference of opinion within the Christian faith) over whether or not the earth is flat or the center of the created Universe (as obviously believed by the Biblical writers no matter how God-inspired their writing). How long does any post-1492 enlightened person, in touch with reality, feel comfortable in that church environment? Are you kidding me?! Not long.

As far as I'm concerned, the debate is over. My Bible says that God so loved the world that He gave his son that whosoever believes shall not perish but have everlasting life. I'm a "whosoever" – debate over. Paul says to the Galatians that the fruits of the spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If one has these, according to Paul's correct understanding of the faith, we can disregard

every supposed religious rule or law. Period. End of sentence. Drop voice.

I am a follower of Jesus, but no longer a "Christian" – not in the present day, not as that label has been besmirched and distorted by unapologetic hostility toward gay and lesbian children of God, or even by Christians who want to have a "loving" continuing dialogue over whether Christians should or shouldn't be hostile toward LGBTs. There are legitimate topics for continuing, compassionate debate within the church (i.e., whether to baptize by emersion or sprinkling, or whether it matters; whether or not Jesus was literally and physically raised from the dead; whether or not Jesus was actually God; whether God is merciful or just, or selectively so; how many angels can stand on the head of a pin; that-sort-of-thing). On the subject of LGBT, however, for my money (and church participation) there's no legitimate, continuing dialogue any more than I'd tolerate a continuing dialogue in the church I attend over whether or not women are mere chattel as the Biblical writers undoubtedly believed. Or whether the earth is flat.

No matter what your faith tradition, up is not down; in is not out, black is not white; and hot is not cold. Cold is the church that continues to debate such things, even with the best of intentions.

Briefs & Shorts

• Be sure to RSVP for the September 6 meeting no later than September 4. Email to [Jonathan/Wilson@davisbrownlaw.com](mailto:Jonathan.Wilson@davisbrownlaw.com) or call him at 288-2500. Our speaker will be Zachary Mannheim, Executive Director of The Des Moines Social Club.

• Thanks to Byron Huff for his introduction of our August speaker, Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn of the World Food Prize Foundation.

• **Consider a tax-deductible contribution to the FFBC Scholarship Fund.** You can designate FFBC as a targeted recipient in your United Way pledge; FFBC is an approved designee. You'll get credit at work for your participation and help FFBC at the same time.

Be sure to peruse the front table for a book you might like to read. Book donations are always welcome. Thanks to Barry McGriff for coordinating the book exchange.



From the Pastor's Pen

By Rev. Jonathan Page

The Virtues of Gay Community

I have to admit that I was a bit apprehensive about the Iowa gay scene when I moved here. At the time I was living outside Boston and dating a guy who lived in New York City. I had a great group of gay friends in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Chicago, Boston, New York, D.C., Philadelphia. I had spent time in all of those gay scenes and loved them. But Iowa? Ames, Iowa? Suffice it to say that I came to Iowa for many reasons, and the gay scene was not one of them. But I have to admit, after two years of living in Ames, I have come to appreciate the virtues of the gay scene in ways I never thought I would.

In major East Coast cities, the concept of a gay community has all but disappeared. People usually hang out with their own small group of friends. If you go to a gay bar, you tend to chat with the people you came with. Perhaps you might leave with a plus one, but more often than not, going out does not expand your circle of friends or acquaintances. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, gays and straights mix without regard to sexual orientation. While that might seem charmingly post-gay, it also undermines the chance at any real gay community and, in fact, the gay life is quite fragmented. I remember once several years ago being invited to a party in Boston thrown by a couple of Bain Capital gays. I began chatting with one or two of the guests and as soon as they found out that I was not in finance, I received a not-so-subtle cold shoulder. It was as if I were a parasite, potentially only there to mooch off those with mid-six-figure salaries. Never mind that I had once worked as an investment banker or interned as a strategy consultant. I was an outsider and most certainly unwelcome.

Ames, Iowa, could not be more different. There is a monthly gay potluck at the Unitarian Church. Coming from Boston where I had never been to a church potluck in my life, the concept of an explicitly gay church potluck was a culture shock. Ames has its own gay Friday night movie group, and, since there is no gay bar in town, some of the residents host monthly house parties with an open invitation to any gay man over 21. (As a side note, starting a gay bar in Ames is probably the best business opportunity in central Iowa.) The online gay community is so small that a mobile app like Grindr is more like a gay chat room than anything else. "Hey, honey, LOVE your new picture!! Is that from the State Fair? Was it fun? Sorry I missed it. I was busy. LOL."

While the Ames gay scene would seem downright provincial by the standards of any major city, it does have the virtue of being a true community. Not long ago I was hanging out at a house party, and I thought to myself, "Look at the diversity of this crowd."

Ages ranged from 21 to 65 with people falling in every age group in between. I counted seven different nationalities and more than a dozen areas of academic interest. While Iowa State University dominated the group, there were also those who worked in hospitals, hospitality, non-profits, business, and government. There were lawyers, doctors, researchers, teachers, students, hair stylists, computer programmers, ministers, those with multiple doctorates, and others with only a high school education. The best part was that people were talking with one another and meeting all sorts of new people. A college junior from rural Iowa was talking with a former musical theater guy who had lived on three continents and had a dog who understood Korean.

But the most remarkable aspect of the Ames gay scene is the care that people show for one another, a level of concern that would be unthinkable in a place like New York. When someone comes out, he finds support, people to help him talk with his parents, new ways of thinking about religion and sexuality, relationship advice, help with budgeting, and lessons on safe sex. When a student ends up in a serious life crisis, he has a half dozen people looking after his welfare. I have seen it firsthand, and it can be deeply moving. If only the straight students at ISU had half the support of the gays, they would be lucky! The hard part is that someone has to come out to know how caring the Ames gays can be.

In the religious world, we extol the benefits of community. Community is the basis for religious observance and education, and it provides mutual support and accountability. For many people in congregations, it is the community more than the religious doctrines that keep people coming back week after week. There is something holy and sacred about the bonds that develop. Those connections are a powerful statement on the goodness of humanity, and you can see the same thing with the Ames gays.

Now, I don't want to get too carried away. A small community means that you know everyone else and everyone else's business. That can lead to cattiness and drama that puts most reality TV shows to shame. Also, if you are over twenty-five, you have about as much chance of meeting a boyfriend in Ames as you do in Antarctica. You would have more luck at a GOP convention. Nevertheless, I must say that I have come to appreciate the virtues of Ames in ways that have surprised me. Of course, the vast majority of the younger set will leave Iowa when they graduate ISU and will not return. I do hope, however, that they can bring some of the positives of the Ames gay scene to the big cities where they settle. Most of those places could use a little Midwestern influence.

Quinn and Food for Thought

By Bruce Carr



The First Friday Breakfast Club guest speaker on August 2, the First Friday of August, was Dr. Kenneth M. Quinn, President since 2000 of the World Food Prize Foundation, headquartered at the former Main Library building on the riverfront in downtown Des Moines. Dr. Quinn provided a concise but thorough, and most engaging, account of the development of the Foundation under his leadership, which he assumed following his retirement from the US State Department after an impressive 32-year career in the Foreign Service.

Inspired by the vision of Iowa native Dr. Norman E. Borlaug, who used his 1970 Nobel Peace Prize award to found the World Food Prize, Ambassador Quinn (who served as US Ambassador to the Kingdom of Cambodia from 1995 to 1999) has endeavored to build this annual \$250,000 award into “the Nobel Prize for Food and Agriculture.” Held here each October on or around World Food Day (October 16), the World Food Prize Laureate Award Ceremony, “Borlaug Dialogue” international symposium, and Global Youth Institute have grown in size and stature under his direction.

With the support of the John Ruan family, Dr. Quinn has led the campaign which successfully raised \$29.8 million to restore the historic Des Moines Public Library and transform it into the World Food Prize Dr. Norman E. Borlaug Hall of Laureates. He provided the personal leadership to have the building designed to achieve LEED Platinum certification, the highest possible level of energy efficiency and resource conservation.

Dr. Quinn’s diplomatic talents came to the fore in the Q&A after his presentation to us, when he dealt forthrightly and convincingly with such issues as the involvement of the Monsanto Corporation and the labeling of foods produced with genetically modified organisms.

During his diplomatic career, Ken Quinn served: as a Rural Development advisor in the Mekong Delta; on the National Security Council staff at the White House; as Narcotics Counselor at the U.S. mission to the United Nations in Vienna; for four years as Chairman of the U.S. Inter-agency Task Force on POW/MIAs; and as Director of Iowa SHARES, the humanitarian campaign that sent Iowa doctors, nurses, medical supplies, and food to starving Cambodian refugees. Dr. Quinn emerged from these experiences as one of the US government’s foremost experts on Indochina. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on the origins of the radical Pol Pot regime and is widely acknowledged as the first person anywhere to report, in 1974, on the genocidal policies of the Khmer Rouge. Twenty years later, while serving as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, his plan of agricultural enhancements and rural roads led to the final eradication of the Khmer Rouge.

Ambassador Quinn rose to become one of the most decorated Foreign Service officers of his generation, recognized for the important role he played in humanitarian endeavors, as well as for his actions in dangerous and violent situations. A graduate of Loras College in Dubuque, Quinn has an M.A. in Political Science from Marquette University and a Ph.D. in International Relations from the University of Maryland. He and his wife Le Son have three adult children. The World Food Prize can be contacted at (515) 245-3783 and <wfp@worldfoodprize.org>.



You know it's going to be a bad day when you look at the bathroom mirror and there's nobody there.

A SURE WAY TO LEARN IS BY IGNORING GOOD ADVICE.



Old age is when you still have something on the ball but you are just too tired to bounce it.

After 50, the best thing about a birthday is having it.

Pain doesn't enjoy us, either, but it's got a job to do.

My M.O. by Steve Person (*Continued from Page 6*)

She kept her theatre career going from the 1880s until 1903 when she finally retired from the stage, unable to achieve the accolades for her acting that she so longed for. While in France, she and Bessie Marbury purchased the Villa Trianon in Versailles and began refurbishing and decorating it in the eighteenth century style that Elsie would ultimately define as the emblem of the well-decorated home.

Never a snob but always particular in her dress and personal grooming, Elsie helped the American housewife discover the joys of making a beautiful yet affordable home with the 1911 publication of her book, **The House in Good Taste**. She made a lot of money decorating the homes of the rich and famous but also kept in mind that not everybody could afford the French antiques that she was so good at discovering in junk shops in Paris and beyond.

Elsie was known not to prefer the company of men, but at the age of 60, she married Sir Charles Mendl, an attaché to the British

Embassy in Paris. Her reason for marrying Sir Charles was that she had never been married before (but the lure of acquiring a title didn't hurt her prestige, either)! Although a sexless match, the couple remained married until Elsie's death.

Surprisingly, when World War I broke out, Elsie devoted herself for four years as a nurse in France and encountered many harrowing situations. She was awarded a Knight of the Legion of Honor by the French government in 1922.

Elsie became friends with Wallis Simpson in the 1930s and Wallis's lover, King Edward VIII. Edward asked her to redecorate Buckingham Palace but, alas, abdicated in December 1936 to marry Mrs. Simpson. It would have been interesting to see what Elsie would have done to that venerable building! She educated Wallis, duchess of Windsor, in the fine art of home decoration, and her influence can be seen in photographs of the Windsors' consequent homes in France.

I am happy to welcome Elsie back to her home in my bookcase.



"Tired Gay succumbs to Dix in 200 meters"

Headline on a July 3 Reuters article about **Walter Dix beating Tyson Gay** in the 200 meters at the Prefontaine Classic Diamond League track meet.

History is kept exciting by humanity's continuous influx of fresh ignorance.

THE BAD NEWS IS THAT YOU ARE THE SLAVE OF YOUR PAST. THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT YOU ARE THE MASTER OF YOUR FUTURE.

"In terms of a leading man, a heterosexual, playing a homosexual ... do you worry about your image as a leading man and a heterosexual?"

Talk show host **David Letterman**, stammering as he questioned actor Jim Carrey about his new film "I Love You, Phillip Morris," in which Carrey plays a likable gay con artist. (ABC, Nov. 19)

"Boy, we haven't grown at all, have we? We are still children in the schoolyard. For god's sake, Dave, have you ever seen a gay man?"



FFBC

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."Made on a Mac"

MY M.O. (MONTHLY OBSERVATIONS)

by Steve Person

The Return of an Old "Friend"

I met her about thirty years ago, introduced to me by one Jane Smith. She was a fascinating character even though she had been dead since 1950. Her name was Elsie de Wolfe, Lady Mendl. Elsie was the kind of person one wishes to have met during her lifetime but, alas, I had to meet her through the fine biography written by Ms. Smith in 1982. I originally borrowed the book from a friend and enjoyed reading it. A few years later, I found a copy at the Planned Parenthood Book Sale and promptly bought it and read it again.

I am the kind of person who loves to read books and also loves to lend them to friends so they can enjoy them, too. That is just one reason why I would never own a Kindle or any of its imitators. I believe people who read on those instruments hate books and magazines. They ultimately will kill the publishing industry as we know it, but such is the price of progress. Sometimes a book is so good like **Elsie de Wolfe: A Life in the High Style** that I am reluctant to part with it, but I lent **Elsie** to an out-of-town friend in 1998. It was just returned to me a few weeks ago after I'd long given up hope of ever seeing it again. It was like welcoming back an old friend who had moved away a long time ago. I finished reading it a few days ago for the third time. Elsie was just as fresh and vital as she had been when I first met her!

Elsie de Wolfe will be remembered for many things, the most prominent being her invention of the job of interior decorator in 1905. Prior to that time, interior decoration, such as it was, was left in the hands of department stores wishing to peddle their wares and publications by society mavens who were more interested in impressing their peers than in creating beauty for beauty's sake. Elsie sort of stumbled into the profession by accident.

Born into a middle class New York family in 1865, Elsie was a rather plain and petite girl who would never turn heads but who had an unequalled eye for creating the unique. Her unorthodox relationship with Elizabeth Marbury, a New York socialite, and later with Anne Morgan (daughter of financier J.P. Morgan), raised a few eyebrows here and there, but the three women kept up an on-again, off-again housekeeping arrangement in both the United States and France for three decades.

After a rather lackluster career as a Broadway actress, Elsie became famous more for her Paris gowns onstage than for her acting ability. (*Cont'd on Page 5*)