

## MORE LIGHT SUNDAY

June 5, 2016

### REFLECTIONS

#### ETHEL HORNBECK

Its hard to know where to begin...I mean, if we are going to talk about “More Light” that begs the question--for me anyway—more than what? And: where is this light coming from in the first place?

**More Light Presbyterians**, the national organization within the PCUSA dedicated to the work of inclusion in church, society and the world, began just about 20 years ago. It was when language got slipped into our constitution that was meant specifically to exclude gay and lesbian members from serving in leadership and ministry. That was also when my personal “more light” passion was fired back into life—I remember, in fact, the exact moment. We were on vacation with extended family—very Presbyterian extended family—and someone casually walking the beach came by and said: “it passed. That despicable Amendment B is going to become church law.”

I wasn't just shocked, and outraged on behalf of all my gay and lesbian friends and family; I also felt deep personal betrayal. My church—the church that had nurtured me from birth, and *fired up my passion for inclusion in the first place*, was, it seemed to me, betraying the very gospel it claimed to represent. That moment stands out because it has everything to do with me being here at SPC, and everything to with me being here in ministry.

Those events also initiated a new passion here at SPC; although we didn't join forces with More Light officially until much more recently with the marriage equality fight (when our “church ladies” – and a few dudes!--started cranking out rainbow scarves by the dozens—always a clue!) we did embark almost immediately on our own journey toward more light in the way that we journey best—through study, prayer and conversation.

And, like good Presbyterians, we began with science; a former member who was a professor of genetics helped us clarify the simple fact that being gay is not a choice. So now we have a theological problem—how do we humans justify excluding what God has created? So, we also engaged experts in theology, scripture and polity, and over the next several years held numerous forums, book studies, and seminars. We shared personal stories about our experiences, our dreams and our suffering; we listened to one another and to the Spirit.

In 2001, a long-time faithful member of the church, who also happened to be in a committed relationship with another woman, was nominated to the office of deacon. Our session, after more study, listening, and prayer, unanimously approved her ordination in what they clearly understood to be an act of faithfulness not one of defiance. Still, we were reported to the authorities and rebuked by our presbytery. And...we began to get a certain reputation. We also began reaching out to the larger community in a series of events, meant to

lament the continued brokenness in the church and to celebrate the astonishing diversity of God's good creation. All the while, we continued to grow in size, diversity and vitality.

We have travelled a long way in the last 20 years. Just yesterday this community had the marvelous privilege of celebrating the marriage of our two beautiful friends Judy and Sheila. The work of inclusion, the journey toward more light, goes on.

As we've engaged recently in our Congregational Assessment, hours and hours of study and conversation, it has occurred to me that *inclusion* is very much a core value in this community. We are, as a practice, regularly engaged in seeking out and welcoming "the other" -- not just the LGBT community, but also racial and ethnic minorities, people from different religious backgrounds (including none), refugees of all kinds, our neighbors without homes, people from all different ages and stages of life. Inclusion describes both what we value and *how we seek to understand and interact with the world*, by welcoming diverse voices, stories, and wisdom.

It seems to me that this particular way of being in the world is what the rainbow symbol was always really about, what *more light* is always pointing us toward-- radical inclusion, welcoming all people, all creatures, all features, all sources of wisdom, in the pursuit of greater wholeness and freedom for all. After all, the phrase "more light" does predate our contemporary culture wars by just a tiny bit. According to the More Light website it comes from a sermon delivered in 1620 to the Pilgrims. As that band of religious outliers was departing for their new world, the Rev John Robinson assured them that; "the Lord has more truth and more light yet to break forth." In other words, God's light is always shining and always revealing something new, which is both a promise and a challenge. It suggests we must pay close attention in order to glimpse what we never really see in full. We are called to undertake work that we never really get to finish, to a journey that is never really meant to end. We just keep on, seeking the light, trusting that the light that brought us here will keep breaking forth, at least enough to show us where we need to be next.

And, of course, "more light" didn't begin with those pilgrims either. I don't know exactly where it began, but here's what the great ancestors had to say— from Genesis 1:

*In beginning (there is no article in the Hebrew, just beginning) God was creating... the earth was a formless void, darkness covered the face of the deep and a wind from God swept over the chaos. And God said: "Let there be **light**"; and there was **light**." And there is light, and there's always more of it to be discovered. Together. Amen*

### **ROB MAHAFFEY**

Good Morning. I'm honored to be asked to share a few thoughts of what impact More Light has had on my life personally and as a member of SPC. In particular, my experience in attending the 2014 General Assembly that considered, debated and voted to approve *Amendment 14-F of the Directory for Worship in the Book of*

*Order allowing Teaching Elders wider discretion in whose weddings they may conduct. In the keeping with the More Light Spirit, I would also mention this General Assembly affirmed our commitment to unity, reconciliation, and justice and voted to add the Confession of Belhar to the Book of Confessions authored in 1986, with its roots in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa—and racism in all its forms.*

*Even before SPC became, as Ethel [Hornbeck] recounted, a More Light church—from the moment I walked through the door more than eight years ago, I felt More Light.*

Here at SPC we often ponder the wisdom of Hafiz, the 14<sup>th</sup> century Persian mystic, and poet but also known for shedding great light and exposing religious hypocrisy in his own time and condition. He may have well been visioning our time when he wrote:

Even  
After  
All this time  
The sun never says to the Earth,  
"You owe me."  
Look  
What happens  
With a love like that,  
It lights the whole sky.

More Light leads our hearts to see more clearly that love is unconditional, authentic, joyful, honest, and respectful of all God's children.

Two years ago this month, June 14-21, 2014, a merry band of your fellow SPCers Rie Wilson, Elaine Hurd, George Jordan, and I took to the road traveling by car to Detroit to attend the 221<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA—quite the place for a former Mormon missionary. I had no idea what to expect. This was all new to me, and I was enthralled to be there. What a time we had! Attending workshops, committee hearings, the exhibit hall—and countless rainbow scarves.

Key remembrances:

- How sincere and serious people on the committee took their responsibility and many speakers from the audience, including Rie and George, made their feelings known both for and against 14-F.
- While wearing the rainbow scarf, I had total strangers embrace me, and others of all ages voice their opposition.
- Attending the ML meet-ups and worship service—feeling a deep bond of kinship.

To *really* see (C), listen to the words beginning with "C": compassion, companionship, caring, community, and charity to name a few. To see we must

have light. More Light aims to fulfill the promise of a human family in full communion with each other and the Beloved. Two other C words that give More Light to SPC—our Choir and our Children.

2014 was also the year that marriage equality reached our great state of WV and the love of my life, Richard Kendall, and I were married here at SPC. My deepest thanks to SPC, Shepherdstown, and Richard for the lightest moment of my life—our wedding. Peace and love.

### **MARLENE GALLO**

Good morning and thank you for letting me share with you today. I had no idea I was gay until I was 37 and a woman kissed me. It was then that I thought. “So that’s why I never felt like my skin fit properly!”

I was raised a Roman Catholic and that along with being of Italian ancestry, didn’t leave much room for questioning—not only my sexuality, but also the teachings of the church.

The one teaching that was the most important to me was that Jesus spoke of the importance of love. But that was the one thing missing from most of the churches I attended. Frequently I would tune out the sermons because they didn’t address the reality of today. My own church turned it’s back on me when I discovered I was gay and that hurt tremendously.

Being gay has been a challenge. My ex-husband took me to court to try and take our children away from me solely because I was gay. Amazingly, the judge knew me from my work with juvenile delinquents and he threw the case out of court.

At 42, I returned to college to get my Psychology degree and I was called unflattering names while walking down the street by myself. I had to make sure my landlord didn’t find out I was gay, because he could evict me for that reason alone. At college, I spoke to sociology and psychology classes about being gay and answered many questions both on and off campus.

When I moved to Shepherdstown, the only person I knew was Donna, the woman I love and have shared a life with for the past 21 years. I kept hearing about this Presbyterian Church with its *unorthodox* pastor so I decided to give it a try. As I drove up to it on my first day, I saw the gay [rainbow] flag on the sign and breathed a sigh of relief.

People said, “Hello” and Randy started the service. His sermon ended with the words “all you need is love” (thank you John Lennon). From that point on I was hooked. I was greeted by many people and invited back and everyone seemed sincere, so I returned. Many of you have become wonderful friends.

When I was invited to join the More Light group, it became clear that this church is very serious about being all-inclusive. The fact that gay marriage has been approved

is tremendous and I can now legally share my life with the person I love wholeheartedly. We will not be pushed out of hospital rooms because we are not family, nor will we be denied healthcare as the partner of the one who is employed. There are so many things this ruling has allowed for us that it is an honor to belong to a church that truly practices love.

July 2<sup>nd</sup>, I will marry Donna in the eyes of God and the state, thanks to the hard work of many Presbyterians. I have found a church that practices what it preaches.

### **CHRIS MOREHOUSE**

I was kind of a weird kid. But I didn't know it.

When my family went camping, I wowed them with my Carol Channing impression. I nailed it.

I remember arguing with my brother about the wit of Cole Porter's lyrics compared to, say, a Hanna Barbara jingle: "Yabba Dabba Doo?" Really?

On the school bus, I'd psych myself up thinking of Barbra Streisand's "Don't Rain on My Parade:" "Don't tell me not to fly..."

In art class, I thought my mermaid looked FINE with broad shoulders.

In science class, my project was a panel that would light up when you matched the show tune with the Broadway show that featured it.

In 4th grade, with my dad's help, I wrote a 60-page term paper on the music and lyrics of Broadway composer Stephen Sondheim. He's still my hero.

And in high school, I'd thrill to waking up early, before school, to roll my dough for Napoleons.

Oh, and by the way, in college, I would major in French, because, as a young person, I had decided it was the "most elegant" language.

Gym was terror.

Having spent my early elementary years under the impression that recess was for talking, by the time gym class was required for everyone, I didn't know any of the rules to any of the games. And I didn't care. Which didn't endear me to my teammates.

So, the first time I was told to "dribble" a ball, I thought I had to spit on it. Then, I saw everyone bouncing the ball. Why didn't they say that in the first place? But the coach told me to "dribble," so I tried to bounce while spitting on the ball. That is hard.

Thanks to my parents, I had no idea that any of this was at all unusual. At school, they noticed. I was voted "most prissy." I was called "fairy" and worse.

But I was really lucky in my choice of parents. When the time came to make the big disclosure, I think they knew. The trouble began when I told them I was going to church. Church for them had been very painful.

But, nonconformists themselves, and probably more importantly, theater people, they raised my brother and me to be "free to be" ourselves. My family's protective circle of love did not let the hurt get to my core. It got close, a time or two. One very humiliating day, my dad just sat with me, in silence. Years later, when it was clear my churchgoing was not going away, my mother gave me a fairy stone—a naturally cross-shaped mineral from southwest Virginia.

That's *more light* to me: a commitment to listen and grow in understanding, guided by boundless love and compassion for the stranger, the outcast, the refugee, the hungry, the homeless, the prisoner. God's ever-expanding, ever-unfolding circle of love for all, regardless of the differences human beings invest so much meaning in. Human beings love drawing distinctions for who's in and who's out, who's up, who's down, according to sex, race, disability, religion, and other characteristics. Jesus did not.

When Jesus finally gets around to talking about those with a sexual difference—one that made them unclean and outcast in that place and time—He was descriptive: "Some are born that way."

Those who believed they were following Jesus acted in radically inclusive ways. In Acts, Philip greets a traveler with that difference with these startling words: "I see no reason why you cannot be baptized," rejecting the purity code.

Maybe I'm a dreamer. But I believe that, with love and through love, we can all blossom into the person we were meant to be. And I pray that we all get the chance.

THANKS!

FYI, a picture of a fairy stone: [http://www.minerals.net/mineral-variety/mineral/fairy\\_stone.aspx](http://www.minerals.net/mineral-variety/mineral/fairy_stone.aspx)