

A Report on the Legislation put forward by the PNW-RMN
by Shannon Buzard

The PNW-RMN council started planning the legislation for this year's Annual Conference in the Fall of 2006. We knew it was going to be a big year, both because the legislation if properly written would be passed up to General Conference, as well as the general mood of the church had seemed to have changed since 2004 after the egregious decision 1032 by the Judicial Council. But it still takes people to actually sit down and do the work. Thankfully a team made up of primarily lay members from Ravenna UMC, Wallingford UMC, Longview UMC, and Tacoma First UMC stepped forward and said "Here I am Lord."

They first started by as a group, sitting down and examining each of the suggested petitions from RMN national in Chicago, the legislation passed last year by the California-Nevada Conference, and the legislation passed last year by the Minnesota Conference, and tailoring them and their wording to what we in the Pacific Northwest felt needed to be changed, as well as putting the material into the format used for petitions by our own conference. A big part of the differences that we included that were not included in the material cited above was the inclusion of gender and gender identity in the non-discrimination petitions, both for society as well as membership in the Methodist Church. In other words, we felt it important specifically to include the "T" in the LGBT inclusion this year. We have a number of transgender members scattered throughout the churches in our conference, and it was time to acknowledge that inclusion and codify it.

Secondly, each of the petitions were divided up between the various lay members, who were then set off to write the individual explanations for each of the petitions. A series of meetings were set to accomplish this in the first quarter of this year, with the plan and timeline to have the petitions reviewed by a number of people, edited by the team, and finally submitted to the Bishop's office in advance of the April 15th deadline for being included in the pre-conference packets and committee assignments. Again Praise the Lord for all the hard work done by these members on our behalf, because the team met the schedule all the way along the plan and submitted a total of twelve petitions in the name of the PNW-RMN.

Before I get to the specifics of the petitions submitted, I want to say Praise the Lord that all of the petitions passed, with the majority even making it onto the consent calendar. Petitions were of course presented on the floor, so that they were removed from the consent calendar before the respective consent calendars were voted upon, but all still passed by simple voice votes on the floor of the conference. It was an overwhelming show of support from our conference for Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors; that all may come to the Lord's Table, and are welcome in our sanctuaries. This was my first Annual Conference, and while determined to support our legislation as God called me to, the members of the team attending AC found it unnecessary to even once defend in committee or on the floor of the conference the work of the team. There was instead a tremendous sense of all this being in God's hands, and there are none more capable. Moreover, to those of you that feel you have waited so long, too long, for real change in the BoD and the policies of the church, I wish you could have been there to witness the vast swell of aye's as petition after petition was passed without debate.

So, on to the petitions, here is what the PNW-RMN submitted and were passed by the AC:
GC #2-1 – Adds to Article IV of the Constitution, age, gender, gender identity, marital status, sexual orientation, or physical or mental ability to the list of race, color, national origin, status, economic condition, for which people cannot be excluded from membership in the Methodist Church.
GC #2-2 – Defines marriage as between two adult persons, strikes defining marriage as between one man and one woman.
GC #2-3 – Changes marriage bond to bonds of marriage or covenant relationship; adds gender identity to the list of those who have their human and civil rights insured; adds encouraging civil authorities to enact laws supportive of civil unions and marriages without regard to the gender of the partners; strikes "Homosexual persons no less than heterosexual persons" and replaces it with "All persons" and adds "regardless of age, gender, gender identity, marital status, or sexual orientation" to the definition of individuals of sacred worth; strikes "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We" and replaces it with "While Christians of good faith differ on what Christian teaching reveals regarding homosexuality; strikes "lesbian and gay" from not rejecting of

members and friends, and adds not rejecting members and friends based on "sexual orientation or gender identity."

GC #2-4 – strikes "homosexual" to supporting rights and liberties and adds "regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity;" strikes "they" and "their"(referring to homosexual persons in protecting rights to shared material resources, pensions, guardian relationships, powers of attorney) and replaces it with two people; strikes "gays and lesbians" and replaces it with stopping violence and coercion against "all people;" strikes "former homosexuals" and replaces it with "any persons" in committing ourselves to social witness against coercion and marginalization.

GC #2-5 – Strikes prohibition against clergy performing homosexual unions and against allowing them to be performed in our churches.

AC #2-3 – Directs the Secretary of the PNW to write a letter to the President of the Council of Bishops and the members of the Judicial Council expressing sadness and anger with Judicial Council Decision 1032[allowing pastors to exclude based on sexual orientation those seeking membership in a local UM church].

GC #2-6 – Make the Book of Discipline available on the Internet for a fee.

GC #3-5 – Inserts "No person shall be excluded from the United Methodist Church for any reason that includes race, color, national origin, status, economic condition, gender, gender identity, marital status, sexual orientation or ability."

GC #3-6 – Strikes prohibition against ordination in "The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals¹ are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church."

GC #3-7 – removes financial restriction clause that no part of the church can spend money on or in combination with any group that group that advocates in favor of homosexuality or inclusion.

GC #3-8 – Strikes from chargeable offences for the clergy, being homosexual, performing homosexual unions, or marriage ceremonies.

GC #4-1 – That the PNW reaffirm its proclamation that diversity of opinion exists that we will continue to discuss those issues, that the BoD be amended to say that those we differ on such important matters, we as a church will no separate from one another and will continue to seek to discern God's will, honor the sacred worth of all persons, and to tell the truth about our divisions.

As to General Conference, Ret. Bishop Tuell who spoke at the PNW-RMN dinner on Friday evening of the conference noted that in the history of GC counted votes on the subject of Petition GC #2-3(on removing the reference of homosexuality being incompatible with Christian teaching first put into the BoD in 1972), the votes against removal were at about 69% in 1988, had declined to 60% in 2000, and to 55% in 2004. With that rate of decline, and the highlighting of the incompatibility of exclusion with Christian teaching highlighted by Judicial Decision 1032, the opportunity decidedly exists for this legislation to pass at General Conference 2008.

So this article comes to you this year with the message of Rejoice! God is moving for change within the walls of our churches, and within the very structure of the Book of Discipline. Expect a miracle at General Conference 2008 in April and pray with us for that long overdue change.