



November 2010

Dear Friend of Transforming Congregations,



Transforming Congregations (TC) is entering another new chapter in its history as we dissolve our 2009 organizational merger with Exodus International. Both organizations approved the separation, and both are committed to continue partnering together to build the Kingdom and equip the Church to minister effectively to those with unwanted homosexuality and other sexual purity issues.

TC has returned to being an independent ministry under the leadership of our reconstituted Board of Directors: Bequi Blanco Flores, Ron Dennis, Tom Lambrecht and Greg Wertemberger. We're reincorporated in Wisconsin, and we've regained our 501C3 non-profit status with the IRS. The Board has retained me as Executive Director.

I want to publicly thank the members who rotated off this fall for their faithful service to TC. Jan and Ted Schneider were relative "newbies" to TC, but both contributed a wealth of wisdom and ministry expertise. Bonnie Doebley served with TC for almost a decade, including as an executive officer. Her passion for ministry and for the spiritual health of The United Methodist Church will be hard to replace.

Please keep all of us – me, our current and future Board members, the Schneiders and Bonnie – in your prayers as we continue to discern God's direction for our lives and ministries.

Blessings ... *Karen*

MINISTRY UPDATE

Our *Forward into Ministry* workshop was presented to "standing room only" crowds at *Love Won Out* in San Diego and Irvine, California in March and June. Previously done at the *Exodus Freedom Conference*, other national and regional conferences, and local community and congregational gatherings, it's based on our systematic six-step model for starting ministry in the local church. It's an awesome introduction to the joys and challenges of sexual sanctification ministry.

We also have a new workshop this year called *How Far is Too Far?* More theological in nature, it explores the Biblical and pastoral difficulties that result when Third Way or "let's all agree to disagree" proposals are adopted to resolve church conflict over human sexuality. Many gay activists within The United Methodist Church and elsewhere in the Mainline have switched to using this strategy rather than advocating outright rejection of denominational teaching and policy. But it's making inroads into the evangelical Church as well, especially among younger believers and Emergents.

I'd love to come to your church or area to present either workshop. As an added bonus, the half-day version of *Forward into Ministry* has been awarded .6 Continuing Education Units by my Annual Conference Board of Ordained Ministry. Just call (608-325-5712) or email me (transcong@aol.com) for more information or to start the scheduling process.

Yes! I want to help Transforming Congregations equip the Church to effectively minister to the sexually confused, broken and sinful.

Enclosed is my gift of \$25 ___ \$50 ___ \$100 ___ Other ___
(Make checks payable to "Transforming Congregations" and mail to the address below.)

___ Send me ministry newsletters and alerts by email. My email address is below.
___ Call me to discuss booking a TC speaker or workshop.
___ I want to join TC's intercessory prayer team.

Name _____ Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____
Email _____ Phone _____
Local Church _____ Pastor _____

ENGAGING THE CULTURE

Polygamy: The New Cutting Edge

In spring 2008, one of the top national news stories was about the polygamous, fundamentalist Mormon families at Yearning for Zion Ranch in west central Texas. By fall of that year, cable TV's The Learning Channel (TLC) had capitalized on it by producing and airing a documentary called *Forbidden Love: Polygamy*. TLC upped the ante this fall with their hit reality show *Sister Wives*. It follows the day-to-day drama of the Brown family when Daddy makes plans to add Mommy #4 to the household.

Though *Sister Wives* is coming late to the polygamy line up (HBO's fictional *Big Love* will start its fifth season this January), its "reality" aspect gives it a more troubling spin. For one thing, the five adults aren't really "married," wife #1 is the only legally recognized spouse and the rest are "spiritual wives." Also, their cohabitation is a third degree felony offense in Utah. (The family is under investigation, but it's doubtful that they'll be prosecuted since there's apparently no underage sex.)

If anything, the legal complications have only fueled the unrelenting media attention. The Browns have been featured on *Oprah* and *The Morning Show* to show the world the (in their own words) "hum drum normalcy" of their family life. There's even a new word for our cultural lexicon - *plig*. (Shorthand for polygamist.) And watch out for more; TLC just announced the renewal of the show for March.

Many conservatives believe that the current Hollywood fixation with polygamy disguises a hidden agenda - to discredit traditional marriage and thereby advance gay rights. (Actor Tom Hanks, the Executive Producer of *Big Love*, has been an outspoken critic of Mormon support for California's Prop 8, for example.) As one online commentator observed, "*Sister Wives* makes gay marriage look tame in comparison." Exactly. Since the show's trailer invites viewers to "rethink marriage," it almost looks like "mission accomplished."

On the plus side, shows like *Sister Wives* and *Big Love* give Christian believers a golden opportunity to winsomely explain why traditional marriage is God's good creation and perfect will. In a culture that's quickly becoming jaded with all the "alternatives," someone's bound to pay attention. Check out our website - www.transcong.org/4booklist.htm - for some good teaching helps about marriage.

AROUND THE CHURCH

UNITED METHODIST

United Methodist News Service (UMNS) reports that the denomination's Judicial Council ruled during its October 27-30 meeting that a local church pastor "has the right to determine local church membership" and that Annual (regional) Conferences cannot limit that right or ask the denomination's top court to change the policy.

This was in response to activist efforts to overturn a previous Council decision - #1032 - that pertained to Rev. Ed Johnson, a Virginia pastor who denied membership to a sexually active, unrepentant gay man. Rev. Tom Lambrecht, a TC Board member, argued on behalf of denominational evangelicals for retention of local pastoral authority.

The full decision will be posted soon on the Judicial Council website:
http://archives.umc.org/interior_judicial.asp?mid=263

And www.methodistthinker.com has a good history and analysis of the entire controversy.

MAINLINE

In July, the 219th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA) voted once again to relax ordination standards by deleting the heterosexual marital fidelity or chastity requirement from their *Book of Order*. The action needs to be confirmed by a super majority of the 173 presbyteries. A similar effort in 2008 was only narrowly defeated.

Over a thousand Lutherans met in August to separate from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, launching a new denomination - the North American Lutheran Church (NALC). Organized largely in response to the ELCA's 2009 decision that permits homosexual people in committed relationships to serve as pastors, the NALC is positioning itself as centrist in theology and committed to a four-fold emphasis: Christ-centered, Mission-driven, Traditionally-grounded and Congregationally-focused.

We want to be better stewards!

Please consider changing your preference from postal mailings to email.
You'll receive *more* TC news, and *more* often – monthly instead of quarterly.
And you'll help us save a lot of time, money, labor – and paper!
Just fill out and return the form on the other side. Thanks!