

discussion among older (*RCPC cont.*) congregational members with gay and lesbian family members.

After a year long process that included two Bible studies, a dinner meeting with Michael Adee of More Light Presbyterians, and meetings with individual members who expressed an interest in more personal conversations, the session of Rose City Park voted in April to affiliate with the Covenant Network of Presbyterians and the Community of Welcoming Congregations. "It was clearly time to profess publicly our beliefs and actions." Black said.

"I'm glad we took the time to do this right," Richens said. "Even though 97% of the congregation was already comfortable with the concept, we didn't want to lose the 3% that had doubts or opposition. If Christ the Shepherd goes out to look for the one lost sheep, why wouldn't we want to make sure that our 3% is ready to come with us before we act?" In the end, only one family withdrew from membership at Rose City Park citing a number of theological and political differences.

Rose City Park Presbyterian Church's careful process has been noticed by neighboring congregations. "We hear that other Presbyterian Churches are starting to talk out loud about including gay and lesbian members. Before, they may have been afraid. Now, they see it can be done without splitting the church." ■

(USA). By our discussions, votes, and (*stories cont.*) exclusion of them, we have effectively banished them from their Christian home and silenced the voices. We hope their stories will help you to see them as children of God just as some of them may be your or our own children."

"I heard from three or four people how much they appreciated the letter and the booklet," Brown said. "I didn't hear any negative reactions, but that doesn't mean there weren't any, it just means they didn't call me. I hope that the pastor at all our presbytery's churches

left it out for others to read."

"It is hard to talk about this issue when the voices of the people most affected are absent," Brown noted. "In the civil rights movement, when a black person stood up to talk, the rest of us knew we were hearing about injustice from a real experience. Now, when we talk about the lives of gay and lesbian people, we're talking about another community without them. It's not safe for them to speak out if they are present and most are now absent. That's disappointing, Brown said. "That's why we sent out the booklet. We need to

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graciously toward one another, just as God lives toward you."

Should we stand up for justice and inclusion? Should we try to win the struggle about the Constitution? You bet your life we should; but we should not do it, we cannot do it Jesus' way, without love.

Frederick Buechner has written that "in the Christian sense, love is not primarily an emotion but an act of will. When Jesus tells us to love our neighbors, he is not telling us to love them in the sense of responding to them with a cozy emotional feeling. . . . and in his terms, we can love them without necessarily liking them. . . . And then there is love for the enemy -- love for the one who does not love you but mocks, threatens, and inflicts pain. The tortured's love for the torturer. This is God's love. It conquers the world." (*Wishful Thinking and The Me in Thee*)

You have heard it a hundred times before, but God-like love, agape love is the key to the Christian life and the Christian community. Without it we are noisy gongs or clanging cymbals.

What will it take to win? It will take love to win. I believe that the real goal of the Covenant Network must be far beyond the

redemption. It cannot be anything less than reconciliation.

I am encouraged in this direction by a worker for justice and preacher of the message of Jesus who spoke at the Holt Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama one night in December of 1956. He reminded his hearers of all that had been accomplished in recent months. The bus boycott's protest of Montgomery's segregation laws had been sustained in the U.S. Supreme Court.

"It seems that God has decided to use Montgomery as the proving ground for the struggle," Martin Luther King, Jr. said that evening. "The old order is passing away, and now we have before us the glorious opportunity to inject a new dimension of love into the veins of our civilization. There is still a voice crying out in terms that echo across the generations, saying, 'Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, pray for those who spitefully use you, that you might be children of your father which is in heaven.'" (quoted in Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community*)

King went on to urge the people in the movement to keep in mind that the boycott and its achievement did not represent the goal. The goal was reconciliation. The goal

goal was the creation of the beloved community. "If I respond to hate with reciprocal hate, I do nothing by intensify the cleavage in the broken community. I can only close the gap by meeting hate with love."

Christ-shaped love: That is what the church is all about and what this current struggle in our beloved church is all about. This is not about a decision on our part. It is about a decision on God's part. Knowing human beings as I do, I find it amazing that God would choose to be represented in the world by such dubious, inadequate, self-righteous characters as human beings, individually or in groups, but the church is God's idea. The church has nothing going for it on its own, but behind it stands nothing less than the power of Jesus Christ, who lived and died and rose again from the dead and makes all life-giving things possible.

By embodying divine love in Jesus Christ, God changed the world. We, in our lifetime, have the great privilege of being sustained by its power and living its reality in the church and in the world.

Thanks be to God! ■