



CLOUT
CHRISTIAN
LESBIANS
• O U T •
TOGETHER

CLOUT has a new logo! The new mark builds on our previous logo – with numerous additional influences including Christian flame/Spirit imagery, Venus of Willendorf, and various circular themes. But most prominently we hope the mark will continue to emphasize the "together" part of CLOUT.

Special thanks to honorary lesbian, Jim Gerhard, of Philadelphia, PA, who generously donated his time in designing the logo for us.

CLOUTreach

The Quarterly Newsletter for Christian Lesbians OUT Together
Summer, 2008
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**Together we are proudly progressive,
actively anti-racist, creatively spiritual, milagro bound!**

Editor's Note: The Theme for this Issue of CLOUTreach is
"Together"

CLOUT Co-Moderator, Chris Paige, writes the following:

At our retreat in March, the Council spent some time reviewing where CLOUT has been. In that conversation, we re-membered the original meaning of CLOUT – Christian Lesbians Out **Together**. The "Together" part of the name is something that got set aside along the way, but we are committed to reclaiming it for the journey ahead.

It is "Together" that is CLOUT's real strength. "Together" is our gift to one another. And it is "Together" that will carry us on the journey that is before us. So, let me tell you what "Together" has meant to me...

CLOUT is something special. I remember my first CLOUT event (Rochester, NY) and what it meant for me, as a 23-year-old just out of the closet, to sit in that circle with elders and sisters. I knew that these women saw themselves in me – and I in them. Being together with them that weekend helped me to imagine the possibilities for my life. And I hear from my elder sisters that my presence as a younger sister helps to give them perspectives that they value as well.

CLOUT is something special. Over the years, I have had the privilege of knowing many insightful and amazing people, who have challenged me to grow as a person as I deepen my commitment to justice. So many of those relationships have begun in and been nurtured by CLOUT – women who have wrestled with me in moments of anger, held me in times of tears, and shared much joyous laughter in the process.

CLOUT is something special. When my partner and I were preparing for her trial (and eventual defrocking) in the United Methodist Church, we turned to CLOUT sisters for advice and support. Because of CLOUT, we knew there were women we could call on who had been through similar ordeals and lived to tell about it. These relationships teach me how to survive in a world where, as Audre Lorde said, "we were never meant to survive."

“Together, Together”

by Hannah M. Johnson

The chatter of the young kids hit my ears and the smell of cafeteria food accosted my nose as I walked into the lunchroom, surrounded by a group of my friends. As fifth graders we were a year away from the top of the world as we knew it. We ambled over to “our table,” laughing and talking, and sat down.

I had heard the word tossed around a few times. I didn’t know what it meant. It sounded like any other slang word to me. Even though I wanted to seem “in the know,” I didn’t want to use it incorrectly. That day, I finally (surreptitiously) asked a friend what “gay” actually meant. She told me that it “technically” referred to two men or two women being “together, together” – because saying it twice meant “dating” or “in a relationship” – but as slang was synonymous with “stupid.” That’s when another girl, who had been listening to our conversation, interrupted with “ewwww. Two girls or guys together, together? That’s gross. And creepy.”

I don’t remember how I reacted to that. My mind flashed to my aunts, but they couldn’t be... could they?

My family is just like anyone else’s—a mother, a father, a younger brother, aunts, uncles, cousins. I thought maybe it was just her. *Her* family was “different.” *Mine* couldn’t be. My confusion turned to shock as several others chimed in their agreement with her comment.

As I followed the others to recess, I could not keep my thoughts still. They flashed in and out of my mind like lightning, each one further crushing my previously held assumptions of my family and normalcy.

My aunts were gay.

My aunts were gay. I couldn’t believe it. There were clues, of course (although, at 11, I can’t say I was tuned into lesbian symbols), but they were just like any other couple – albeit a couple with subscriptions to the *Advocate* and *Out Traveler*, an autographed picture of k.d. lang in their office, and a rainbow sticker on their car bumper. My biological aunt Deb (my mom’s sister) and her partner of almost 25 years, Sue, had been together my whole life and I had grown up around them. Plus, they were honestly the coolest aunts ever. They were the aunts that gave the greatest gifts, had the greatest friends and the greatest toys. I couldn’t comprehend why or how people could dislike, even hate, them just because they were together, together.

**My family is just like
anyone else’s—a mother,
a father, a younger
brother, aunts, uncles,**

(Continued on page 3.)

PENPALS NEEDED

Virginia Ramey Mollenkott tells of meeting a lesbian Manhattan actress who exclaimed that she “does not know one lesbian Christian.” We know at least 700, and we ask that our members volunteer to write to a Christian lesbian who is feeling the need for support. Just let Nadean know that you are willing to be a pen pal and she will connect you with someone like these recent correspondents.

* * * * *

"I wish to find other organizations and civic groups that do not just identify as Gay/Lesbian-friendly, but whose overall goal and objective is to promote healthy living on all fronts. After all, I am of the opinion that one's sexuality--be they heterosexual or not, is but a small microcosm of a larger macrocosm of their life's summation. I have met many persons who admit that they have 'wrestled' at some point in his/her lives with the reality of who he/she was/is. They were/are, many times, unable to live life to its fullest because they were/are afraid of how he/she will be viewed by the 'normal active society.' I wager, however, that their expressed fear has less to do with the assessment of society, and more to do with the assessment of self. . . . I am a 31-year-old well-educated African American young woman. I am an educator by profession. I am very interested in hearing more thought-provoking discourse about sexuality, gender, religion, politics, and economics in the Black Church."

J.D. from Atlanta

PENPALS NEEDED

(continued)

"I would love for someone to be in correspondence with me. I'm going through some changes and I need strength to leave an abusive relationship. I need strength. It feels like God is punishing me. I'm almost hopeless but not there yet. I'm holding on, hoping it gets better. I feel like I'm destined to become something great. I want to help the kids of Detroit, who are only graduating at 25%. I want young Black lgbt kids to have a church home that feels like what they were raised in except without the hate. Part of the reason AIDS is running so rampant in the gay Black community is because we feel left out of faith, and when we're faithless, we're ruthless. ya know. There is so much I want to do. I feel frustrated with my failures. . . ."

Sharonda, Michigan

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CLOUT Council Retreat Pics



Co-Moderator, Chris Paige leads Council in strategy session at the CLOUT Council retreat.

So I didn't understand how it was "gross" and "deviant." Almost every time we visited, Deb and Sue would make a big bonfire in their backyard and we would sit around it telling stories, laughing, roasting marshmallows, and singing camp songs. Is that what they meant by deviant? Every Halloween my brother and I would show up and they would pretend to be really surprised and scared. And then invite us in for hot chocolate and handfuls of candy. Is that what they meant by deviant? They built a great wood fort at our lake cabin, even mistakenly building it a little higher than the directions said, making the slide the fastest (and steepest) ever. They even took care of us for a week when my parents were on vacation in Puerto Vallarta. Is that what they meant by deviant? Because I really didn't understand. They seemed very normal to me. My family seemed very normal to me. How could these people judge them like that?

This was my fifth-grade revelation. Of course, I didn't fully understand what it meant that my aunts were a lesbian couple until several years later, but I understood enough at 11 to realize that my world was not as homogeneous and small as I had once assumed. It was my first taste of intolerance – although, to fifth graders even boys and girls kissing is gross. But this was different. They thought it was "wrong" because they had been taught it was wrong which, I realize now, is what breeds the intolerance and hate. The sad thing is that my aunts have to deal with this intolerance and discrimination every day. That sort of intolerance seems more deviant to me than my aunts ever could be.

This is why the debates surrounding homosexuality become so personal for me. I couldn't find fault with my aunts just because of the person they love. Love, to me, isn't something you choose to have happen, but something that happens to you. Deb and Sue have been in a committed relationship longer than any other couple on my mom's side of the family. With our divorce rate as high as it is, I would think our country would *want* to encourage people to stay in the loving, committed kind of relationship they have. I love Deb and Sue and I can't picture my family without them.

Hannah Johnson has finished her first year at Macalester College in St. Paul, MN. She has yet to decide what she will do with the rest of her life, but currently enjoys playing rugby, writing, reading, surfing the web, and drinking entirely too much Dr. Pepper.



“All in the Same Boat: Justice for Reproductive Health and Same-Sex Love”

Excerpts from the presentation by Mary E. Hunt
on April 14, 2007 for the Indiana RCRC conference
in Lafayette, Indiana

Let me say by way of introduction that I am a Catholic feminist liberation theologian, pro-choice, living happily with my longtime partner (who graduated from St. Mary-of-the-Woods in Terre Haute, IN) and our 6-year-old daughter adopted from China. We are, depending on your lights, a nightmare scenario or the Catholic Family of the Year. I say this simply to contextualize my remarks and to point out that these are not areas simply of academic interest to me but of existential concern. . . .

So, fasten your seat belt and let's look at how efforts to achieve reproductive justice and to bring dignity to same-sex love intersect, how such efforts diverge, and what those of us from religious communities might contribute that would be helpful. . . .

(M)ost of the opposition to abortion rights ... and to same-sex marriage and domestic partnership laws is religiously based. Whether Catholic, Mormon, or Muslim, the arguments differ but the bottom line is that God does not approve. It is not simply that some human beings do not approve, but the Divine is trotted out as standing in judgment over such choices. One has only to observe the anti-choice movement to see its Catholic and conservative Christian roots. One has only to follow the money to see how much religious groups like the Catholic Church and others of the religious right are putting into efforts to prevent same-sex marriage, to fuel the dubious ex-gay groups, and to stop same-sex couples from adopting children....

The opposition to same-sex marriage is almost entirely religiously based. It would upset the anthropological apple cart of male-female pair bonding; it would defeat the order of creation as God intended it. Ministers would be forced by the state—fat chance—to perform ceremonies they do not think ought to happen. All of these fatuous religious arguments miss the real point, namely, that most religions teach love as the greatest human endeavor. Few of them can demonstrate textually that love is only for men with women and women with children. Rather, most religious traditions prioritize the care of children and others who are vulnerable, the importance of family and community, and the value of committed love, all of which are supported by same-sex marriage.... It is important that religious values influence public policy, but they need to be weighed on their own merits in the public sphere, not foisted upon us as the so-called culture wars have been....

CLOUT Council Retreat Pics



Co-Moderator Dawn Sorensen and CLOUT Coordinator Nadean Bishop relax on the pier during recreation time



CLOUT Council members, Roberta Robles and Clarice Martin are energized by discussion during the March, 2008, Council Retreat.



Judith Hoch Wray with Elina Snyder, who served as our chef
Note: The food was GRREAT!

(Mary Hunt's "All in the Same Boat" continued)**Who needs CLOUT?**

Letters from those who have contacted Nadean, our Coordinator.

Thank you for the warm welcome. This is my first same-sex relationship and it's been a little rough. I have been heavily involved in a Pentecostal church for most of my adult life. I started drawing away from the church a little about 4 years ago when I started searching/questioning.

Needless to say, I haven't been in church since I started my relationship. What "friends" I once had are, at the least, uncomfortable around me and, at the worst, very forthright about their opinions, what I "know" to be right, and my eventual hellish demise.

My immediate family, surprisingly, have been very good--Mom & Dad don't like it, but know that pushing me away won't do any good and my brothers and sisters have been wonderful! It's amazing how much more Christ-like I have been treated by co-workers, those outside the church, and the gay community, in comparison to my long-time Christian friends and family. . . . I miss them—my friends, but am more concerned about figuring out what I believe and why--if I'm going to hell because I've fallen in love with a woman or not; if I'm just twisting the Bible for my own benefit or not; if I'm only in this relationship because I'm mad at God or something;--what the truth is according to God, not man or religion.

So, yes, I'd love the newsletter and any information you have that might help in my search for the truth. I'd love to hear your story, more about CLOUT, how I can help if I choose to delve further.

Wendy, Colorado

Practically speaking, who cares with whom one has sexual relations as long as they are safe and consensual? Whose business is it after all? What harm is done? Since such unions are not procreative by nature, why are they so threatening? . . .

I suggest that while abortion threatens the power of men to control women's fertility, same-sex love threatens the sexual equation even more foundationally. Two men and two women represent something quite other than the top-down model with men in charge and women subservient. A hetero-patriarchal society reads two men as one taking the place of a woman, and two women as the refusal to have one dominate the other. This means while everyone is not gay or lesbian, ALL men and ALL women can potentially break out of the molds that have been so constraining to ALL of us. That is a foundational challenge to society. . . .

But the challenge of the day is how to get new people appreciating and entering into one another's struggle from both sides. Abortion rights folks need to see that the same bogus religious arguments that will keep women from being moral agents apply to keeping same-sex lovers from being moral agents. The limits on who can have sex with whom come from the same partial reading of human love that inform restraints on women making hard decisions that affect their own well being and that of their families. The same top-down, authoritarian, bedroom snooping that would outlaw same-sex sex will outlaw women's reproductive health options. That all of these constricting social moves have a deeper and more pernicious impact on young people, people of color, and those who are poor is reason enough to work together.

Practically speaking, who cares with whom one has sexual relations as long as they are safe and consensual? Whose business is it after all?



Mary Hunt, distinguished Roman Catholic scholar and co-founder of WATER (Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual) in Silver Spring, Maryland, recently represented CLOUT at the meeting of the Council of Governors of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice in Washington, DC. CLOUT has been a member of

Trans Issues Are Women's Issues

There are a very few stipulations which I consider essential for someone to be a "good" feminist, and if these criteria are not met, well, that person can consider themselves a feminist all they want, but that doesn't mean I'll respect their opinions. One the things I think is unacceptable in a "real" feminist is transphobia.

A feminist should never reject the experience or identity of a transwoman as being invalid, of being lesser than cisgendered women, of not being "real" — in general, or until she takes hormones, or until she undergoes SRS, or whatever predefined criteria said feminist happens to have. A feminist should never insist that transwomen are actually men and thus, that they have no place in feminism and no protection under it (or that transmen are women who are "betraying the cause" in order to "gain" male privilege, as the case may be). I understand that this attitude casts a number of prominent and influential feminist thinkers of the past and present as "bad" feminists, and that's unfortunate but, I think, also necessary. Transphobia should never be tolerated from a self-proclaimed feminist.

Let me explain why. It's not merely an issue of respect for marginalized people, and it's not merely because those who hold this attitude are dismissing the perfectly valid experiences of different kinds of women (as mainstream feminism has famously done not only with transwomen, but also lesbians, poor women, women of color, and so on). These side-effects are horrible and inexcusable, but the real issue is that, at the root of transphobia are all the beliefs that feminism is supposed to be fighting.

The insistence that transwomen are not "real" women, is, at its heart, fueled by the idea that biology equals destiny: the idea that one's body parts define that person completely, that there is no individual room for change or variation, that a woman is only as good as her ability to give birth (therefore, as good as her uterus), or to serve as a sex object (therefore, as good as her vagina, as good as her breasts), or as a caretaker, a mother, a housewife, a passive decoration (therefore, as good as her ability to conform to "acceptable" gender roles).

And that, no matter how you disguise it or dress it up, no matter what excuses you might give about male privilege or socialization or experience in a transwoman's history, **is not feminism**.

This is why transphobia is so deeply harmful to feminism as a whole. It hurts not only the statistically small minority of transgendered people within the movement, but also anyone else who believes in the idea that a woman is more than her vagina, more than her womb, more than her own victimization and oppression. Transphobia reduces everyone to a collection of parts, to be examined and scrutinized in order to see if they stand up to the test of being "good" or "real" enough — to see if they "deserve" rights and recognition.

Anyone can call themselves a feminist. Anyone can say they are whatever they want to say they are. But if they espouse ideals and opinions which run directly contrary to the ideology they claim to support and represent, they are no ally of mine.

CLOUT COUNCIL

note on its commitment to trans-friendly feminism

The CLOUT Council has made trans-friendly feminism a policy and it is an area that is ripe for us to take more leadership. We have heard from some younger folks about how "lesbian" doesn't make sense to them due to gender differences, if they identify as butch, gender-queer, or gender-exploring.

We recognize that definitions, including self-definitions, are always evolving. CLOUT has long expected each womyn to define for (her)self what it means, as a part of CLOUT, to be "Christian," "lesbian" and "OUT."

Being Christian Lesbians OUT "Together" includes finding ways to be trans-affirming.

The article on this page is excerpted from a blog by

Earlbecke found at

<http://www.meltdreams.net/definition/2006/03/07/trans-issues-are-womens-issues/>

CLOUT continues to celebrate the leadership of Virginia Ramey Mollenkott who has led many to an appreciation of Omnigender dynamics and to affirming of trans-persons among us.

**Please make a donation to CLOUT
at www.cloutsisters.org/donate. Thank you!**

NEWS NOTES

Ordained Lesbian Leadership in the South!!

The Rev. April Baker, an ordained lesbian American Baptist minister, will co-pastor Glendale Baptist Church in Nashville, TN, and will lead an all-female staff, which is a bit unique in the South.

Women's Ordination Conference Statement on Vatican Decree of Immediate Excommunication of Ordained Women

Aisha Taylor, executive director of the Women's Ordination Conference, issued the following statement about the Vatican's decree that ordained Roman Catholic women and the bishops who ordained them incur excommunication, immediate and self-imposed.

The Women's Ordination Conference is outraged by yesterday's Vatican decree, which reminds Catholic women once again of the animosity they face from the hierarchy, despite being the backbone of most Catholic parishes throughout the world.

Out of fear of the growing numbers of ordained women and the overwhelming support they are receiving, the Vatican is trying to preserve what little power they have left by attempting to extinguish the widespread call for women's equality in the church. It will not work. In the face of one closed door after another, Catholic women will continue to make a way when there is none.

We reject the notion of excommunication. In our efforts to ordain women into an inclusive and accountable Roman Catholic Church, we see it as contrary to the gospel itself to excommunicate people who are doing good works and responding to injustice and the needs of their communities. While the hierarchy prattles on about excommunication, Catholic women are working for justice and making a positive difference in the world.

This unreasonable excommunication and the Vatican's stance on ordination are based on arguments that have been refuted time and again. In 1976, the Vatican's own Pontifical Biblical Commission determined that there is no scriptural reason to prohibit women's ordination. Jesus

included women as full and equal partners in his ministry, and so should the hierarchy.

The call for women's equality in the Catholic Church is reverberating loudly in the public consciousness. Around the world, over sixty women have been ordained as priests, deacons or bishops by the group called Roman Catholic Womenpriests (RCWP), and there are nearly 100 women in the RCWP preparation program. There are 16 national organizations from 11 different countries that advocate women's ordination, and a vast majority of US Catholics support the ordination of women.

The refusal to ordain women is nothing more than a blatant manifestation of sexism in the church. It is time for the Vatican to listen to its own research, its own theologians and its own people who say that women are equally created in the image of God and are called to serve as priests in a renewed and inclusive Catholic Church.

Founded in 1975, the Women's Ordination Conference is the oldest and largest national organization that works to ordain women as priests, deacons and bishops into an inclusive and accountable Roman Catholic Church. WOC represents the 63-70 percent of US Catholics that support the ordination of women as priests. WOC also promotes new perspectives on ordination that call for more accountability and less separation between the clergy and laity.



Shawn, Ringo, Dawn and Roberta at play between work sessions at the CLOUT Retreat

Calling all Christian Lesbians OUT Together on-line and off!

The Rev. Dr. Nadean Bishop, our National Coordinator offers this invitation:

As the National Coordinator of CLOUT, I extend a warm welcome to the online network of Christian lesbians. We are both a support organization and an advocacy group, trying to make the world better through our concern for peace and justice and an end to racism, sexism, classism, ageism, and bigotry of all kinds. The more we are together, the more ways we find to communicate, the more we can support each other in our personal lives and in our justice action (which are frequently the same thing).

Please send your address and phone number so that we can send other valuable information to you from time to time through the mail.

CLOUT members who are not yet on-line, please sign up at www.cloutsisters.org so that you can be included in email information that we send to the on-line network from time to time.

Why we love being with CLOUT sisters:

- It's a place you don't have to explain yourself.
- I imagine CLOUT women standing behind me when I get up to speak in public.
- It's a deep spiritual source.
- Being in lesbian-only space is terrific.
- It's ecumenical—we can share our stories across denominational boundaries.
- It's so isolating in the closet; often there are no Christian lesbians anywhere near where I live.
- Being with sisters who are OUT and hard at work in the struggle for justice is very empowering.
- Singing feminist songs loudly and proudly.
- CLOUT is a place to meet the people I need to meet to become the woman I want to become!
- The lesbian/Christian/Justice connection matched my own priorities.
- I get to know the mothers of our movement and the young ones who will see our goals realized.

CLOUT

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