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# Christian Lesbians Out

CLOUTreach

*The Quarterly Newsletter for Christian Lesbians OUT*  
proudly progressive, actively anti-racist, creatively spiritual, milagro bound

## *New Energy, New Plans, New Directions Same Commitments*

### *New Council*

2008 CLOUT Council

The CLOUT Council was selected at our conference in Atlanta in July and is among the youngest and most ethnically diverse we have had in our sixteen-year history. Continuing as Moderator is the Rev. Dr. Judith Hoch Wray, biblical scholar and professor of preaching. Judith is also a noted workshop leader on sexuality, relationships and grace. A co-founder of CLOUT and of the Gay, Lesbian and Affirming Disciples Alliance, Judith is on the Advisory Editorial Board and writes for *Out in Scripture*, the online lectionary for the Religion and Faith Program of the Human Rights Campaign. She lives in New York City with her partner, Donna Prince. See page 3 for the biography of Council Member Angela Denise Davis.

The eight other Council members live in widely separated places from Chesapeake Bay to Northern California and Boston to Atlanta. Their ages span from 29 to 75. Denominational affiliations include Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Disciples, American Baptist, United Church of Christ, MCC and Independent. While half are coupled and half single, all are passionate about CLOUT and its ministry to Christian lesbians, and all have committed themselves to doing what they can to enrich and grow our sisterhood.



### *New Coordinator*

The Rev. Dr. Nadean Bishop, our new CLOUT Coordinator, was among the 68 brave lesbians who gathered at First Congregational Church of Minnesota in Minneapolis during the "Halloween Blizzard of 1991" when 32 inches of snow fell in two days. We gathered in this inaugural meeting of CLOUT to establish a sisterhood to support all lesbian Christians and provide a place to share our stories. We also had the clear purpose of bridging the multiple identities of lesbians from many varied classes and races, searching for spiritual foundations and a Christian lesbian community to share the search with. Many snowbound lesbian enthusiasts slept on the pew cushions, and Carter Heyward and Mary Hunt braved the drifts to speak to Twin Cities Episcopalians. On the last evening, amidst drumming

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**New Coordinator (continued)**

and dancing, Nadean and Janie Spahr were “sent forth” to candidate for church positions.

The next day Nadean was called to become the first woman and first lesbian senior pastor in the 124-year history of University Baptist Church in Minneapolis (and the first ordained American Baptist Pastor to be called in the entire American Baptist Churches, USA) as announced in Volume 1, Number 2 of CLOUTreach in Spring 1992.

Nadean has a 25-year history as a professor of English Literature, serving at Eastern Michigan University from 1968 to 1991, helping to found the Women’s Studies Program in 1972, and creating such courses as “Feminist Thought,” “Women in World Religions,” “Women in Native American Religion,” and “Women in Literature.” She contributed chapters in two women’s studies textbooks and published poetry and articles in many venues.

Her Ph.D. in Victorian Poetry was awarded by the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1972 following an M.A. from the University of Louisville and a B.A. from Baylor University. At age 50 she enrolled at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley and received her M.Div. in 1985, just months before becoming part-time pastor at Northside Community Church in Ann Arbor while continuing her teaching. She helped to found the first homeless shelter in Ann Arbor and became campus minister with graduate students at the First Baptist Church in Ann Arbor, where she ran the program that brought Hans Kung, Gustavo Gutierrez, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Harvey Cox for semester-long courses in theology for the campus and local clergy and laypeople.

Nadean recognized her lesbianism in 1975 and divorced her husband of 24 years. She has been active in lesbian politics, organizing the CLOUT presence at the Re-Imagining Conference in 1993 and recently giving a sequined party dress to the Shower of Stoles to indicate that being a lesbian pastor was often a great celebration. After her retirement from University Baptist Church in 2000, Nadean became Executive Director of the MN Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice for six years and she represents CLOUT on the national RCRC Council of Governors.

Nadean and her partner Sheryl Palmer celebrated their vows at UBC in 1996 (with communion served by Re-Imagining clergy) and have a blissful life on a ten-acre hobby farm outside Stillwater, Minnesota. Sheryl, an attorney who also runs a landscaping business, has three daughters and seven grandchildren (four local and three in California). Nadean has three daughters and a son and three granddaughters (one in graduate school in Nebraska and two little ones in California).

**PENPALS NEEDED**

In our grant proposals we describe our purpose as addressing the need of lesbian Christians to come out, to find support, and to become more visible and outspoken in religious, community, and political arenas. We hear regularly from women, especially rural and small town lesbian Christians, who find our web site and are very surprised to find that there is a lesbian Christian organization. All lesbian Christians express the dilemma of not feeling welcome in most churches and also being scoffed at by many secular LGBT people who wonder why they would want to be Christian at all. 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 lesbian Christian person who is feeling the need of support. Just let Nadean know that you are willing and she will connect you with someone like these three recent correspondents.

A prisoner wrote:

“I am White, black, Philippino, Samoan, and Spanish. I have dark curly hair, big brown eyes, and a smile that reaches Colorado. I am not picture perfect and popped out of VOGUE but I am not hard on the eyes. I am 5’10” and have a large build. I have a very big sense of humor but I’m a Cancer and can hit mean-o-pause at any given time. Or is that just a general trait of a woman? I have come to love the Lord while in prison and would love to correspond with another lesbian Christian.”

A Minnesota seminary student named Sarah shares her story:

“Presently I am reading *Omnigender* by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott and her website has a link to

CLOUT. Her book resonates strongly with things I have felt and known in my life. My personal desire for knowledge and understanding about who I am have been the main reason for my interest in organizations like CLOUT. I have been aligned with the Christian Church since I was a baby and I have personally been a Christian since about the age of 20. I have only been out as a lesbian for about two years. It has been difficult and I am still at the initial stages of divesting myself of all the masks I have worn over the years and allowing my true self out. Through this I am trying to find a place in the Christian world that is as accepting as, I believe, Jesus would want it to be.”

June in Anderson, Indiana, writes:

“I’m 77, spiritually, emotionally and financially secure and in excellent health (not even arthritis!) and long to share my life, caring, understanding, material comforts, but most importantly, spiritual enlightenment and encouragement with another who might not fear reaching out to someone with trust and mutual faith in being led by God’s inspiration and direction. In September, 2003, my beloved friend/partner of 22 years passed away due to colon cancer. As a Christian, I dealt with my grief supported by the Lord, dear friends who assured me that “she’s in a better Place,” and by the assurance that one day we’ll be reunited for eternity.

### ORDINATION!!

Jennifer Lea Nagel was ordained and installed as the lesbian pastor of the Salem English Lutheran Church in Minneapolis on January 19, 2008, in an impressive service after serving in Pastoral Ministry at the church for 4 ½ years. Salem Lutheran has gone through significant transformation since its founding in 1789, becoming a Reconciling in Christ congregation in 2004 under Jen’s leadership, fully welcoming people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. This welcome has become “a stepping-stone toward a wider welcome that tries to cross lines of race, mental health, and social economic status.” The church is now sharing a building with Lyndale United Church of Christ while dreaming of a major redevelopment of their old site to include low-cost housing.



The 28-page worship program describes a little of Jen’s amazing gifts: “Jen’s passions and callings include urban ministry, the transforming edge in the church, and partnerships of all kinds. Jen’s care for ecumenism began when she was a seminary student in Scotland, was nurtured when she served as a steward to the 8<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Harare,

Zimbabwe, and continued through many years on the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, and engagement with the US Board of the WCC. Through ELCA Global Missions, Jen served as a global volunteer, working for the Youth Department of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, and also the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zambia. She met her partner, the Rev. Jane McBride, at Chicago Divinity School, and they both love camping in the north woods.

Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries “provides candidacy, credentialing and rostering for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender pastors, works with congregations to call ELM roster members, and provides mission grants to ELM-led ministries. ELM is the merger of Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries and the Extraordinary Candidacy Project.”

The ordination sermon, “A Tale of Three Cities,” excerpted here was preached by CLOUT Council Member, the Rev. Angela Denise Davis. Angela is a theological educator interested in religious issues located at the intersection of class, race, gender and sexual orientation. Angela’s ministerial focus arose from her own social location as a blind, black, lesbian clergy person. Her ministry is to facilitate conversation and theological reflection at the fence line of various differences.

Angela was born and raised in Wichita, Kansas; but she has lived in various parts of the country, including Nashville, Tennessee, where she received her Master of Divinity Degree from Vanderbilt University Divinity School. After graduation, she directed continuing education programming at American Baptist College and admissions at Vanderbilt University Divinity School. She currently lives in Atlanta, Georgia, and is ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

**CLOUTreach plans to publish online on the CLOUT web site by the end of the year, so we need to have your email address. Please sign on as a CLOUT member at [www.CLOUTsisters.org](http://www.CLOUTsisters.org) and notice the enhanced graphics designed by our own Chris Paige.**

**A Tale of Three Cities (excerpts)**

An Ordination &amp; Installation Sermon for Jen Nagel

by Angela Denise Davis

Text: Acts 10: 34 - 43

My 10 year old niece, Alexandria, and I have been singing a song at bedtime. It is called "I am Willing" by Holly Near and the lyrics are:

*I am open and I am willing.  
For to be hopeless is so strange.  
It dishonors those who go before us.  
So lift me up to the light of change.*

It is such openness and willingness that makes it possible for a person to be extraordinary. Because you have to be open to change and willing to live a life of reformation and resistance. You have to know that when the spirit calls you into a situation that challenges the system you have to make a decision--either to help or to hinder the work of God....To paraphrase the writer and poet Audre Lorde, you could say that by having done their work, such extraordinary persons come in spirit to ask us if we are doing ours.

It is a fair question because we are living in an extraordinary time. And if we take the question seriously we must survey the things to which we have pledged our allegiance. We must move beyond the "see no evil, hear no evil, and do no evil" approach to living. For to ignore the vision of love, to refuse to listen to the drumbeat of justice, and to be indifferent to the work of righteousness dishonors all the work of those who have come before us. Yes, these are extraordinary times where the spirit is calling us into situations that challenge the system and we are forced to make a decision--either to help or to hinder the work of God.

As I was preparing this sermon someone asked me, "Why is what we are doing today so extraordinary?" I did not have to wrestle for an answer, for it lies close to my heart. As a lesbian clergyperson at best, I have often felt like Cornelius, the god fearer. In our text, Cornelius was a man who knew God but was not part of the church due to his being uncircumcised. At worst, I have felt like an estranged daughter. A few years ago I was very ill and went home to my parents in Kansas for a rest. The church elders from my mother's congregation came by to lay hands on me. They spent thirty minutes talking about the sin and shame of homosexuality before they prayed over my body. I was sure their words had left bruises where their hands had touched my flesh. These same elders who had blessed my life when I was a child, now burdened me with the jagged thrust of their offense. I suffered in silence because I would not pay the price to be free, to tell the truth, to be out. Today, because of the example of Jen, I am willing to pay that price, to be a person of integrity....

In these extraordinary times, I hear the spirit challenging us to be open and willing, for there is an extraordinary message to share. It is the same message Peter shared with the household of Cornelius. The good news has not changed, "God is not partial." God's love is for those who are circumcised and those who are uncircumcised. God is not partial.

God loves us all. We are not barred from God because of our nationality, our gender, our sexual orientation, our political affiliation, our occupation, our physical ability, or any other mark of identity. God is not partial. God loves us all....God has not called us to wait on "church folk", but to follow the spirit. This is exactly what makes extraordinary times so exceptional--the winds of the Spirit lifting us up to change. ...

Jen, don't worry about Jerusalem. Listen to the Spirit in Joppa and do the work of God in Caesarea. Salem, don't worry about Jerusalem. Listen to the spirit in Joppa and do the work of God in

Caesarea. And as Mary J. Blige would say, "Don't get it twisted." The Jerusalem to which I refer isn't just other "church folk." Sometimes the greatest Jerusalem we contend with is the voices of Jerusalem within ourselves: our own fears, our own negative outlook, our own idolatry of tradition. Do not allow yourself to miss the blessing at Caesarea because you are so frightened of Jerusalem. Be strong and remember the revelation you received in Joppa.

Finally, in these extraordinary times, let us choose to be extraordinary, to be part of a community of reformation and resistance so that we can truly sing:

*I am open and I am willing.  
For to be hopeless is so strange.  
It dishonors those who go before us.  
So lift me up to the light of change.*

Angela Denise Davis 01/19/2008

**MORE ORDINATIONS TO COME!!**

**LISA LARGES APPROVED FOR ORDINATION**

As CLOUT members Eily Marlow and Mary Rees, as Co-Moderators of TAMFS, announced on the web site: "We write to you with a jubilant heart and the news that our beloved Minister Coordinator, Lisa Larges, has been approved to move towards 'examination for ordination.' For twenty-two years Presbyterians have been moved by her spirited preaching, prophetic advocacy, and her generous heart. Many of us who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender could not be so patient with the church that has consistently turned us away. Lisa's devotion to the Presbyterian Church and trust in its ability to be faithful, has granted the Church yet another opportunity to do God's will." Both the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Los Angeles Times* ran long feature stories on the news of the action by the San Francisco Presbytery by a vote of 167-151.

The Co-Moderators went on to say, "This will not be the first time Lisa has been examined. In 1992 the Twin Cities Presbytery examined Lisa and found her ready to receive a call, though this decision was overturned by the very same General Assembly Judicial Committee that ruled that the Rev. Janie Spahr could not serve as co-pastor of the Downtown Presbyterian Church of Rochester, NY, as an out lesbian." They concluded their announcement with an avowal to continue their work in advocacy:

"TAMFS knows that love and tolerance should not be the exception for a few, but that God places love as the standing rule for all. God's ability to place a sincere call upon the heart and soul of all persons is not only regardless of sexual orientation but also regardless of geographic boundaries."

**CLOUTreach would like to publish news of publications and appearances by CLOUT members in each issue. Please send your news to National Coordinator Nadean Bishop at [PalBish@msn.com](mailto:PalBish@msn.com) or send mail to her at 10130 Manning Avenue N., Stillwater, MN 55082.**