

## REFLECTION, June 3, 2018

### 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of UCC 1988 Decision

*This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.* Winston Churchill

A story from *Iridesce*, entitled Victim- Survivor- Warrior

#### General Council 1988 details:

- 388 Commissioners
- Study document: *Toward a Christian Understanding of Sexual Orientation, Lifestyles & Ministry* – released 6 months prior for 4,112 congregations and 850,000 members could consider it.
- Petitions sent: 1800 – most opposed to the proposal
- Sessional Committee #8 met to consider the petitions a week prior to General Council meeting. Consisted of 24 persons from different theological perspectives & from all across Canada. Chaired by Marion Best (and educator for Naramata) who insisted that lesbians & gays must be represented. These were: Tim Stevenson (graduate of VST) and Allison Rennie (involved with Affirm).
- At outset only 2 members supported the report, 5 opposed. By end there was *complete consensus* on support.

Tim Stevenson:

*You hear in religious terms about people **converting**; that's exactly what these people did. They went through a total conversion themselves and came to believe they were being called by the Spirit to move away and move to 'yes'.*

- Usual Ordination process:

*Normally, the national church never gets involved in ordination issues. People are ordained at the Conference level. They are the ones who say you can become a minister. And normally, they are autonomous there, and they don't want the national church interfering in their business. But the conservatives pushed this so hard & thought they could get enough opposition to stop it.*

- Question arose in 1981 when Sue Mabey (lesbian) requested ordination

- Results of 1988 decision:  
25 congregations and 25,000 people – about 3 % - left the UCC .  
No stats have ever been know re: the number of l/g/b/t people and their loved ones who left prior to 1988!

### My Remembrances:

- Due to demonstrations outside the facility where General Council was being held guards were brought in to protect the delegates.
- During floor debate, Tim Stevenson was sitting in the gallery pleading to be heard. Suddenly there was a very loud bang. He immediately dropped down to the floor – we all thought it was a gun that had gone off.
- During deliberations hurtful and hostile remarks made at mics. One day descending stairs to lunch I overheard a man (behind me) say to his wife: *I know what we should do with those people. We should line them up and shoot them!*
- Some *Community of Concern* members wanted to meet over breakfast with some members of *Affirm* – supposedly for a friendly meeting. Almost all members of *Affirm* were closeted - so anxious. The meeting happened and later it was discovered that names of *Affirm* members had been taken down.
- Though celebration when the motion passed, still there was disappointment when the original motion was split allowing congregations to determine whether they would hire a lesbian or gay minister.

### My Story into Ministry

- After 1988 I felt the “call” to ministry. I went into “Discernment” with my home congregation – Mount Royal United. Gordon Taylor interviewed me.
- 1990 I applied to St. Andrew’s College & was accepted. Throughout the 4 years it was not know whether I would be accepted for ordination. The `88 decision had not been tested in Sask. But Tim Stevenson’s Call to a Manitoba charge was cancelled. I thank Dr. Charlotte Caron & Lara Balas in particular for their constant support. I served my internship at *Northern Lakes* Pastoral charge where Rev. Nobuko Iwai was the clergy.

- While my rural internship was supposed to serve the 3 pastoral points (Paradise Hill, Loon Lake & St. Walburg) I was only able to conduct services or any pastoral work at Paradise Hill. The other 2 congregations prevented my doing my work there. I was welcomed at Paradise Hill and supported by a faithful supervisor & team.
- I successfully passed all the interviews at all levels of Sask. Conference and was ordained at Conference at Melfort in 1994.
- Whereas newly ordained persons used to be "settled" on chosen pastoral charges, because I was 50 years old, I had the freedom to be "Called". That means that I could seek and apply for my own placement. In the spring of 1994 I was interviewed by 13 congregants of Balcarres Pastoral Charge and was invited to join them in ministry.
- The business of ministry got off to a busy start but by early September there was trouble.
- An brief article appeared in the conservative magazine *Alberta Report*. Entitled "*Fear and skullduggery in the Manse*". It was written by a Community of Concern person who knew of my sexual orientation and secretly interviewed a few homophobic congregants. Not long after a meeting was called in the church seeking names for a petition to cancel my call. I will always be grateful to Rev. Linsel Hurd who arrived from Sask. Conf. office to address the gathering & told them this was illegal under UCC policies. I continued my ministry.
- Not long after this one morning I received a call from a congregant who said, "Have you seen today's *Globe & Mail*?" As there was no delivery of this paper in this small town I had to drive to Fort Qu'Appelle to pick one up. I was stunned when I saw it, There on the cover was a picture my photo standing on the manse steps. The attached article stated that I was lesbian and that this was dividing the church and community. The author interviewed several people who wanted me out and one who supported me.
- I continued my work there conducting services, doing pastoral visits and funerals and some baptisms. I learned one day that there was a baptism request was taken up by the neighboring pastoral charge because the couple would not allow a lesbian to

- baptize their child. Sadly a friend agreed to conduct it. I am grateful for the other clergy who refused these types of requests.
- One day I was invited for coffee to the home of a community matriarch who had left the church when I came. She had been a long-standing member of the church and a respected community member. A widow she had continued farming their land after her husband died and raised her 3 children alone. When we sat down, she demanded: "*Why didn't you tell us you were lesbian when we interviewed you!* While my orientation was quite widely known within the United Church due to my being partnered with an OUT clergy, I, with the advice of my college advisors chose not to mention it as we are called to ministry as *persons* who are trained and accepted by the UCC. This I told her and then asked her, "Would you have called me if you had known?" She answered "No." We continued to talk.
  - This woman who I came to like and admire returned to the church after a few months away - as what was important to her was her faith. I ended up baptizing her grandchildren, education them in the youth group. Later in my time there I provided pastoral care to her in hospital when she had cancer. We became friends. Just before I left Balcarres she called me up and asked if I'd like to go for a ride around her farm with her on her quad. There we were – this farm woman in her 80's and me hanging on for dear life as we spun around their land. I will never forget her and her faith that lead her through the struggles.
  - After I left Balcarres, I applied for many positions without success and saw friends and colleagues get them. There are always many invitations to do Sunday supply.

### Stories from Iridesce

1. Where were you? May 28, 2018
2. Presbytery asked Minister to leave for own safety May 18, 2018
3. From 1988, Fear and Anger at the Institution... May2, 2018
- 4.