



Reconciling United Methodists and Friends of North Carolina

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The Story of Reconciling United Methodists and Friends of North Carolina

RUM-NC and Friends had its beginning in 1994 with several informal meetings in the home of Eloise Vaughn, member of Edenton St United Methodist Church in Raleigh, NC. The initial focus of the group was getting funding from the North Carolina Annual Conference restored to the North Carolina Council of Churches. Funding from the NC Annual Conference had been withdrawn upon the inclusion of the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) to NC Council of Church's ecumenical membership ranks. Eight years of work at the local and conference level were required to restore the funding. The second program later that year was the 6-week study at the Edenton St. United Methodist Church Wednesday Evening Fellowship of "The Church Studies Homosexuality," which was led by Rev. Bob Wallace. An average of 50 participants attended this study each week. In 1995 the study was approved by the Raleigh District and presented at Highland United Methodist Church in Raleigh and Louisburg United Methodist Church at two educational events.

Eloise Vaughn and Sam Isley attended the 1996 Annual Conference in Fayetteville in support Edenton Street UMC's Administrative Board resolution to restore funding to the NC Council of Churches. John Brooks presented the resolution to the Annual Conference. It was opposed by the Edenton Street UMC Senior Minister, Roger Elliott. The resolution was voted down by the Annual Conference. Later that evening, Eloise and Sam met and had dinner with Boo Tyson and Rev. Laurie Hays Coffman at the cafeteria at Methodist College. Boo and Sam, who were both out as gay/lesbian persons in the United Methodist church, remained in conversation for the year between the 1996 and 1997 NC Annual Conferences.

Sam secured a table through the NC Conference Church and Society Committee and displayed materials related to the subject of Homosexuality and the UMC at the 1997 NC Annual Conference. Boo and Sam passed out materials to each delegate's dorm room at Methodist College. The materials included Welcome Mats (patterned after those distributed in Denver, Colorado at the 1996 UM General Conference) and an article by Walter Wink. Six weeks later they met with Bishop Edwards. RUM-NC and Friends had its first official meeting in 1997 at Duke Memorial United Methodist Church in Durham. The second meeting was held at Calvary United Methodist Church in Durham.

During 1998 RUM-NC met at Aldersgate UMC in Chapel Hill, Trinity UMC in Durham, Carr UMC in Durham, Duke Memorial UMC in Durham, The Methodist Bldg. in Raleigh, and Resurrection UMC in Durham. The group also held a meeting with Bishop Edwards after Rev. Jimmy Creech's first church trial in which he was not convicted. Approximately 50 people attended this meeting held at Trinity United Methodist Church in Durham. The group attended the 1998 Annual Conference and again set up an information table under the sponsorship of the Church and Society Committee. Their appearance was reported in the Fayetteville newspaper and later picked up by the Associated Press.

At the 1998 NC Annual Conference, three resolutions were presented to the delegates concerning the subject of homosexuality and the United Methodist Church. One resolution was brought forth to name the NC Annual Conference a Confessing Conference. Another resolution suggested that the NC Annual Conference be named a Transforming Conference. A third resolution was brought by RUM-NC and Friends simply suggested that the issue of homosexuality and the United Methodist Church be studied. The three resolutions were tabled and a fourth resolution emerged as a compromise encouraging our Annual Conference to be in dialogue concerning this subject.

As a follow-up to the conference, the Bishop appointed a Unity Dialogue Committee. The committee held a series of regional meetings in the spring of 1999 in Fayetteville, Graham, Wilson, and Greenville. The meetings consisted of a panel made up of Helen King, Boo Tyson, Vernon Tyson (Fayetteville only) and an individual who had been transformed from a "gay lifestyle." Bishop Edwards presented the official United Methodist position as stated in The Discipline and small group discussions were held.

In 1999 Gayle C. Felton was named chair of the national board of the Reconciling Congregation program. Lois Wright and Dean Blackburn were named co-leaders of RUM-NC and Friends. The group continued to hold monthly meetings throughout the Triangle in various churches, The United Methodist Building, and Duke Divinity School. In 1999 the NC Annual Conference moved from Methodist College to the larger convention center in Fayetteville. RUM-NC held its first

worship service at conference in an impromptu chapel set up in the dining room of the center. Rev. Coffman preached, and the first *Book of Witnesses* was distributed. When it appeared that Yancey Gulley was about to be elected as a delegate to General Conference, a delegate was recognized by Bishop Edwards for a moment of personal privilege. This delegate stated that the Annual Conference was about to elect a lay delegate who favored holy unions in the United Methodist Church. Bishop Edwards ruled the delegate "out-of-order." The damage had been done. Yancey was not elected as a delegate. Gayle and Sam were elected as alternates to the Southeast Jurisdictional Conference.

In 2000 the group simultaneously went online on the world-wide-web and also placed its first ad in the North Carolina Christian Advocate. In preparation for the quadrennial General Conference in Cleveland the group mailed letters to Southeastern delegates asking to remove all references to homosexuality from the Methodist Discipline.

A large contingent of RUM-NC and Friends attended the 2000 General Conference. Members of RUM-NC and Friends attended the noon-time worship/communion services outside the convention center sponsored by the Reconciling Congregation Program. The group volunteered with the AMAR Coalition activities that were held during the two weeks of General Conference. Reconciling United Methodists from all over the world participated in a rally held on the middle Saturday of General Conference and circled the convention center with a rainbow ribbon. That Saturday night during a break of the Faith and Order Committee Meeting, RUM-NC and Friends and other RUM's from the Southeastern Jurisdiction led an impromptu hymn singing just outside the committee meeting room door. On Sunday RUM-NC and Friends and other supporters participated in worship services that featured the Shower of Stoles.

On the final Thursday of General Conference RUM-NC and Friends participated in the protests that were held inside the convention center. The clergy stoles from the shower of stoles project were worn by the participants. Sue Laurie and Randy Miller were permitted to address the General Conference and dozens of protestors were arrested along with two United Methodist Bishops.

At the 2000 North Carolina Annual Conference RUM-NC and Friends had an information table (again through Church and Society) and held worship services. Sam spoke in favor of a resolution to encourage the study of the issue of homosexuality and the United Methodist Church. He also came out as a gay United Methodist. A small protest was conducted on the floor of Annual Conference at the conclusion of Sam's remarks with the singing of a hymn by RUM-NC and Friends and their supporters. The resolution passed but was appealed to the United Methodist Judicial Council. The Council later refused to hear the appeal of the resolution. The appeal was presented again the next year and again rejected, meaning that the Judicial Council refused to overturn the resolution. The group also attended the Southeast Jurisdictional Conference held at Lake Junaluska in July 2000.

RUM-NC and Friends continued to meet monthly at various churches in the Triangle and also held a weekend retreat at Ocean Isle Beach in which Deborah Morgan and Jeanie Aycock were called to lead the group. The group expanded its visibility at the 2001 Annual Conference to include three worship services at noon each day. The group presented a resolution "A Call to Evangelize Gay and Lesbian persons" that passed as amended. About a dozen members of the group attended the Reconciling Ministries Network Convocation in Tacoma, Washington and received the "Voice in the Wilderness" Award presented by the RMN national board. The group held a weekend retreat at Lake Junaluska, and Jeanie Aycock and Jenny Johnston were called to lead. The group joined with Calvary UMC to host resource tables at the NC Pride March in Durham in September, and Calvary UMC gave out bottled water to the marchers. RUM-NC and Friends marched in the parade. The tables and the march offered the opportunity for the group to reach out beyond the Triangle and to contact friends and supporters throughout the state who were searching for a resource that was not available in most local congregations. The group continued to meet monthly at various churches in the Triangle and at The United Methodist Building in Raleigh.

2002 began with RUM NC and Friends members travelling to Davidson United Methodist Church to join in a round table discussion, Shower of Stoles exhibit and worship service with APACT (A Place At Christ's Table). Beginning in January, University United Methodist Church in Chapel Hill conducted "The Church Studies Homosexuality" study over a 6-week period, and the sessions were videotaped. Several RUM-NC and Friends were invited to participate in this educational event. The study had a very large attendance at each session. In February the group hosted the Reconciling Ministries Network National Board winter meeting at Calvary UMC and provided food, housing, and transportation services for board members. In April, Calvary United Methodist Church became North Carolina's first reconciling congregation. In May, six members of the group attended the Virginia Reconciling United Methodist Educational (VRUM) Convocation in Richmond, VA which included a series of workshops as well as a worship service.

RUM-NC and Friends again hosted a resource table at the 2002 Annual Conference. A joint noon worship service was held with the NC Annual Conference Chapter of MFSA. Pizza was served for lunch. The NC Annual Conference voted to restore funding to the NC Council of Churches. The group continued to meet monthly in various churches in the Triangle and at the United Methodist Building. The annual retreat was held in the fall at Calvary United Methodist Church in Durham,

and Matt Connor and Jenny Johnston were called to lead the group. The group held one of its monthly meetings at the Wesley Center on the UNC-Chapel Hill Campus. RUM-NC and Friends and Calvary United Methodist Church co-sponsored an informational table at the 2002 NC Pride March held in Durham. Calvary church members passed out water to the parade marchers.

In 2003 RUM-NC and Friends continued to meet monthly in various churches in the triangle area. At the 2003 Annual Conference RUM-NC had an exhibit and a worship service which drew about 75 people, half of whom were clergy. The powerful messages from Rev. Bill Gattis and Rev. Dr. Gayle Felton moved the crowd, and about 20 signed up to receive RMN materials. An educational convocation: "Voices Crying out in the Wilderness" was held at Duke University on Saturday, September 27, 2003. This event was co-sponsored by RUM-NC and Friends and Sacred Worth. The workshops and plenary sessions drew about 125 people and included:

"Pastor, my grandson is gay..."

"What does the Bible say about this?"

"Didn't Wesley settle this 200 years ago?"

"How can we shape the Discipline?"

"What difference could I possibly make in Conference?"

"Where can I find out what my church believes?"

"What does a ministry of hospitality sound like?"

"The Kids are Alright"-video produced by Triangle teens.

"Has the United Methodist Church ever excluded any of God's children before?"

The second "Voices in the Wilderness: Saying Yes to the Spirit" was held at Dilworth UMC in Charlotte on June 5, 2004 the weekend preceding the NC Annual Conference. The Charlotte conference began with an address by Rev. Dr. Karen Oliveto, minister of Bethany UMC, San Francisco, and included five workshops that afternoon with an attendance of about 75 people. Several RUM-NC members also attended the 2004 General Conference in Pittsburgh, the Southeast Jurisdictional Conference at Lake Junaluska, and the North Carolina Annual Conference in Fayetteville so most of the year was spent in planning and preparing for the heavy schedule of conferences both in-state and nationally. We met at Calvary UMC bi-monthly. The year-end program was a worship service at University UMC in Chapel Hill with a sermon by Rev. Ruth Harper-Stevens and a social following the service.

In 2005 we changed back to monthly business meetings at Calvary UMC in Durham and focused our efforts to reach out to contacts in Greensboro, Davidson, and Wilmington. We had a temporary member of the group, George Bishop, who was on assignment to Duke University, who brought us a unique perspective of our issues as they are discussed in Singapore. Rev. Wallace Kirby gave the sermon at the RUM-NC worship service at the NC Annual Conference with about 80 people attending. We also previewed the new video "Coming Out - Coming In," which was co-produced by Laurie Hays Coffman and presented the story of several GLBT North Carolinians. The highlight of the year was the RUM Convocation at Lake Junaluska near Asheville on Sept. 1-4, Hearts on Fire. Over 20 people from RUM-NC attended and several led workshops.