

A Report on the Fourth

WORD AND WORLD SCHOOL

June 12-19, 2004

Rochester, NY



“What are the words you
do not yet have?
What do you need to say?”

...there are so many silences to
be broken.”

- Audre Lorde



GENDER AND SEXUALITY: THE STRUGGLE FOR INCLUSION AND JUSTICE...

As the fourth Word and World School convened at Nazareth College, faith-based activists and advocates from a variety of movements stepped into the stream of Rochester's history of women's leadership and wisdom. We invoked the memory of matriarchal societies led by Iroquois women. We remembered that nearby, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony had guided the long struggle for women's suffrage. And we stood in solidarity with the people of Rochester's Spiritus Christi Church, where an ordained woman serves as priest in the Catholic tradition to an open and welcoming community of believers....



There in the midst of this rich tradition of liberation, we

spoke, studied, danced, prayed,
worshipped, and sang



away the

silence

that cloaks issues of gender and sexuality in the
church today.



Web Photo

We repeated the ancient tales of scripture and proclaimed the Good News of Jesus, who demonstrated God's radical inclusive love of all peoples. We were inspired also by the writings of "Black/woman/lesbian/warrior/poet" Audre Lorde, who led us to celebrate the wisdom that comes from the "Sister/Brother Outsiders," the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and

transgender (LGBT) persons who name and speak the truth of who they are and invite others to do the same.

[Excerpts from Sister Outsider, Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984 appear on the bottom of each of the following pages]

"Perhaps for some of you here today, I am the face of one of your fears. Because I am a woman, because I am Black, because I am a lesbian, because I am myself—a Black woman warrior poet doing my work—come to ask, are you doing yours?"

COURSES –

Morning Bible Studies

- ❖ **The Prophetic Invocation of Justice and the Problematic of Sexism in Biblical Studies** - *Norman Gottwald, with Rose Berger*
- ❖ **The Politics of Sin: Unraveling the Controversy Around the Bible and Homosexuality** - *Melanie Morrison*
- ❖ **The Other Side of Exodus** - *Laurel Dykstra, with Robert Two Bulls and Charlie King*
- ❖ **Numbers 27: The Daughters of Zelophehad** - *Nontando Hadebe, with Carter Echols*
- ❖ **The Church as Movement 101: Core Biblical Narratives**– *Ched Myers and J. Herbert Nelson, with Laura Magnani*
- ❖ **The Acts of the Apostles and the Movement for Inclusive Community**– *Nelson Johnson, Janie Spahr, and Anthony J. Ricciuti*
- ❖ **Women in the Bible** - *Liz McAlister*
- ❖ **In Our Own Words: Giving Voice to Biblical Women’s Struggles, Stirrings, and Songs**– *Theresa Tensuan-Eli and Amanda Sapir*



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Afternoon Classes

- ❖ **Wading Through Uncomfortable Waters: Marginalization, Multiple Oppression, & Justice** - *Melanie Morrison and M. Carmen Lane*
- ❖ **Is a Matriarchal Society Feasible in Today’s Society? What Would it Look Like?** - *Virginia Fifield, with Laura Magnani as respondent*
- ❖ **Parenting and Activism**– *Laurel Dykstra, with Bruce Triggs, Deborah Compton-Holt and other guests*
- ❖ **Women, Empire, and Indigenous Power: Reclaiming All that the Locusts Have Eaten**– *S. Lily Mendoza, with Monica Medina as respondent*
- ❖ **Movement History as Biography**– *Ched Myers and Rose Berger, with various presenters*
- ❖ **Arts and Social Change** - *Thomas Warfield, with Robert Two Bulls and Rose Berger*
- ❖ **HIV/AIDS: The Domestic and International Crisis** - *Nontando Hadebe*
- ❖ **Men’s Work** - *Ralph Carter and Will Seals*

“For to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call America, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson—that we were never meant to survive. Not as human beings. And neither were most of you here today, Black or not. And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength. Because the machine will try to grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak. We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and ourselves are wasted....we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, and we will still be no less afraid.”

AROUND ROCHESTER-



Recognizing that the stories left untold in text books are often revealed in the texts of lives and the contexts of locations, Word and World planned site visits around Rochester. We became acquainted with the physical place—walked its streets, sat on its stone steps to listen to local historians, and visited its sanctuaries and sites of ministry. We became acquainted, too, with the stories of local women and the stories of individuals who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. Listening to their voices helped orient us to the larger questions of the Rochester School and helped create a space for experiential community building.

We traveled to **Jennifer House**, a residential program for women transitioning from incarceration. Visiting this site allowed Word and World to explore the effects of structural violence on women’s lives, and to take inspiration from the residents who struggle to rebuild their communities and relationships, and who advocate for the rights of women in prison.



A visit to **Sojourner House**, a transitional program for women in need of housing, counseling, and educational opportunities, provided another occasion to hear the stories of women who are marginalized by poverty, racism, and abuse.



Site visits included a trip to **MOCHA/ GAGV**. Originally started as the Men of Color Health Awareness Project to address the health and education needs of men of color in the LGBT community, this organization is now partnered with the Gay Alliance of Genesee Valley (GAGV). Here, School participants engaged in challenging discussions about the intersections of the oppressions of race and sexuality, a key topic of the Rochester School.

“Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change in our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama.”

SPIRITUS CHRISTI CHURCH



web photo: Fr. Jim Callan and Rev. Mary Rammerman

Sunday also included a visit to Spiritus Christi Church, a Catholic congregation where all are welcome.

Excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church for allowing a woman to celebrate communion and for blessing gay unions,



web photo

Spiritus continues to be a vibrant community which uses its own experience of injustice to advocate for the poor and marginalized.

During a rousing gospel-style worship service with Mary Rammerman as celebrant, Word and World honored the people of Spiritus Christi—for their struggle for inclusion, their courage of conviction, and their commitment to community outreach. Denise Donato

“When I dare to be powerful—to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.”

PLENARY SESSIONS -

We spent four of the week's mornings focused on the stories of particular struggles. Plenary panels explored personal testimony, which we then used as a lens through which to view the wider issues. Each plenary took to heart Audre Lorde's insistence that we tell the truth about our lives.



On **Monday** we heard Melanie Morrison, Bill Wylie- Kellermann and Carmen Lane and Amanda Sapir



Melanie Morrison and Bill Wylie-Kellermann

Carmen Lane speak on the topic of "Claiming Power, Seeking Justice: Intersections of Oppression." This plenary reflected on the broader themes woven throughout the week—of survival, triumph, and transformation among sisters and brothers engaged in the struggle for inclusion and justice. Panelists touched upon the redemptive power of this holy work, which is carried out

against a backdrop of a dominant culture that seeks to immobilize and destroy those who dare to claim their voice.

Tuesday focused on "Keeping the Faith: Ordination Stories." We heard from disciples who have remained committed to their worship communities despite rejection or public persecution. Janie Spahr, an ordained lesbian Presbyterian Minister, shared her story of faithfulness to her call. Mary Rammerman and Jim Callan, both priests at Spiritus Chrisiti Church,



Janie Spahr

testified to the pain and the freedom that come from speaking truth to power. Carmen Lane, a Black lesbian Catholic convert, spoke from the "margin of the margin," and at the same time invited us into "the center of her center" as she celebrated the gift of prophetic vision that comes with the experience of multiple oppressions.

"The future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference...For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."

Thursday's plenary, "Transforming Silence into Action: Sexuality in Church and Society" brought us testimonies from the lives of LGBT Christians. Kaye and Lisa Fox, Arlisha Massey, and Jacqueline Jones spoke with "Holy Ghost boldness" of their personal stories of lamentation and triumph, division and healing borne of the oppression of their sexuality in the church and society.

For my house shall be called
a house of prayer
for all peoples.
Thus says the Lord GOD,
Who gathers the outcasts of
Israel,
I will gather others to them
besides those already gathered.

Isaiah 56:7-8.

Friday's final plenary session, "Telling the Truth About Our Lives: Women and Violence," featured Deborah Chung from Jennifer House, Claudia Mauryschau, and Tamara Xavier. These brave women spoke about reclaiming their own power in their lives after suffering violence in its many forms—domestic abuse, sexual abuse, and the violence of patriarchy, racism, and poverty.



Thomas Warfield



Gail Nelson

"What I will take away with me is how important it has been to hear the stories of oppression among the LGBT community in order to deepen my commitment to inclusion and equip me better to be an ally on this path of justice and liberation"

—school participant

"Have they forgotten that my ministry is in obedience to the one who loved his enemies so fully that he died for them?... We are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for victims of our nation and for those it calls enemy, for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers."

In the beginning is the relation, not sameness.
In the beginning is tension and turbulence, not easy peace.
In the beginning, our erotic power moves us to touch,
not take over; transform, not subsume.
We are empowered by a longing not to blur
the contours of our differences, but rather to reach
through particularities of who we are toward our common strength,
our shared vulnerability, and our relational pleasure.

-Carter Heyward



Myra Brown



Nelson Johnson



Wednesday night worship

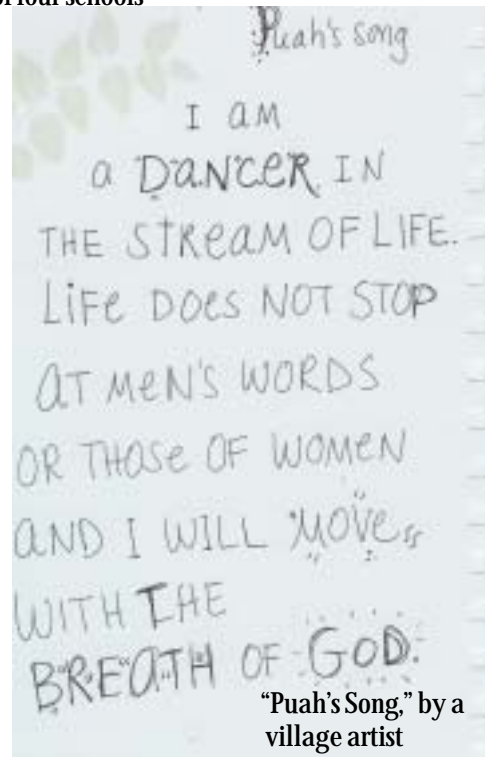


*“We have been raised to fear the **yes** within ourselves, our deepest cravings. But, once recognized, those which do not enhance our future lose their power and can be altered. The fear of our desires keeps them suspect and indiscriminately powerful, for to suppress any truth is to give it strength beyond endurance.”*

Wednesday was our Sabbath. Open space allowed people to rest and visit Healers for spiritual renewal and bodywork. Folks had the option of afternoon field trips to Ganondagan State Historic Site, the location of a vibrant matriarchal Iroquois society; Brockport Migrant Worker Camp, where participants heard from farmworker women seeking greater justice; and Downtown Rochester, with historic sites from the suffrage and abolition movements. In the evening the School re-gathered downtown at New Bethel CME Church for our public worship service. We witnessed the traditional passing of the Word and World “torch” from representatives of the original Detroit consultation to the Greensboro, Tucson, Philadelphia, and Rochester schools. Village Elder Liz McAlister offered a prayer (excerpts below). Choir director Myra Brown gave a stirring and personal benediction, inspiring everyone with her honesty and courage. And in an extemporaneous sermon which could only have been bestowed by the Holy Spirit, Nelson Johnson preached a strong and rousing Word on Jesus’ message of radical inclusion.



The light of four schools



“Puah’s Song,” by a village artist

Freedom. Justice. Mercy. Peace.
Compassion. Faith. The words make our hearts soar in longing.

But the question to all great nouns is how do we move to the verbs, to deeds, to acts. What are the verbs that will propel us out these doors able to respond to the enslavement, injustice, cruelty, war, and despair that scream at us from every nook and cranny of our battered earth?....



Liz McAlister

You O God, are the verb that propels and draws us. Your breath in each of us is the power to hallow life rather than subordinate it to profit. You, O God, are end and means. May it be so in each of us. Amen.

Liz McAlister

“But when we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense.”

PUBLIC MEETINGS -

The School assembled for proclamations of the Word, liturgy, and song, as well as for comedy routines and jam sessions. The Comedy Nun scandalized everyone on Monday night, local organizer Mike Boucher entertained with his guitar in the tradition of the last three Word and World Schools, and Charlie King and Ange Smith reprised their roles as Village songsters. We also heard poetry performances by Rose Berger and Carmen Lane and witnessed the extraordinary dance of Thomas Warfield. Friday night worship and communion, powerfully led by Snake Kunda and Gail Nelson, combined elements of all previous public meetings, with offerings of poetry, song, and the dance of Jacqueline Jones woven into liturgy. The night ended with drums beating and people singing and spontaneously dancing to the chorus of "Freedom is Coming, Oh Yes I Know."



"The People went to church and a party broke out!"

-Andre Johnson, Memphis TN,
on Friday's Worship



The Comedy Nun

"Morning prayer [was] varied, friendly, and 'deep.' A valuable option. Wow."

-a school participant



Mike Boucher

VILLAGE LIFE -

Beyond creating an atmosphere of analysis and intellectual engagement, the School also sought to become a community. We fostered a sense of Village through evening campfires, with snacks, songs, stories, and conversation at the outskirts of the Nazareth campus. Village Elders were available for processing what was often an emotional and spiritually challenging week, and Healers helped people remain grounded in their "bodyselves." Small groups provided a space for more intimate sharing and reflection with fellow villagers. Morning prayer sessions drew those seeking a contemplative start to the day. School participants also had time to call caucuses around issues important to them. A "Village Marketplace" offered space for School participants to sell their books, t-shirts, clothing, and other resources.



"your silence"

PARTICIPANTS & SUPPORTERS -

THE LIST BELOW INCLUDES SCHOOL PARTICIPANTS, RESOURCE PERSONS, ORGANIZERS, VOLUNTEERS, AND DONORS



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"The diversity of attendees helped me increase my understanding of people unlike myself. This conference was EXCELLENT. I am very grateful I had a chance to attend."

Gail Porter Nelson
 J. Herbert Nelson
 Rhonda Newby
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 Biff Weidman
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 Sally Whitbeck
 Alessandra Williams
 Bill Wylie-Kellermann
 Lydia Wylie-Kellermann



will not protect you. "

WORD AND WORLD

is an ecumenical popular school designed to nourish faith-based movements for social transformation by building capacity for social and cultural analysis, biblical reflection, action and service. It is a moveable institute organized by local/regional/national collaboratives. Our goal is to encourage and strengthen disciples to become "radically biblical and biblically radical" in their work for peace and justice in today's world.



Charlie King

ORGANIZATIONAL CIRCLE OF SUPPORT

Atlantic Life Community	Monroe Foundation
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Carpenter Foundation	The Other Side
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Downtown United Presbyterian Church	Park Avenue Christian Church, New York
Detroit Catholic Worker	Seminary Consortium on Urban and Pastoral Education
Detroit Annual United Methodist Church	simple way community
Gadsen Fund	Sisters of the Precious Blood
Gay Alliance of the Genesee Valley	Sojourners
Lake Avenue Baptist Church	Spirithouse
Louisville Institute	Spiritus Christi Church
Memorial AME Zion	St. Mary's Church
	Third Presbyterian Church

NEXT WORD AND WORLD SCHOOL:

MEMPHIS, TN

Faith and Labor

Dates to be announced

"Bible study; course; worship; faculty; topics; plenaries—all excellent. Authentic, sincere, powerful, imaginative, creative, stimulating, inspiring—unforgettable"

-a school participant



CONTACT WORD AND WORLD:

www.wordandworld.org

❖ **For more information on future Schools, Scholarships, Applications, and Donations, contact:** Kate Foran and Steve Borla—P.O. Box 1623 Greensboro, North Carolina 27202-1623—Phone: 336-230-0330 interns@wordandworld.org

❖ **Contributions are welcome and appreciated!** *Make checks payable to "Word and World." All donations are tax-deductible.*

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