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*Religious Archives Network*

*A resource center and information clearinghouse  
for the history of LGBT religious movements.*

## **“Emerging From Isolation” Floyd and Wilcox Raise Provocative Questions**

By James Waller

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Chicago Theological Seminary

"All of us were emerging from some sort of isolation in the late 1970s and early '80s, when coming out in church was, I think, even more dangerous than it is now"--recalled Morris Floyd, longtime spokesperson for the United Methodist lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender group Affirmation, in his presentation to guests attending the LGBT Religious Archives Network dinner on October 26.

The event, held at Chicago Theological Seminary, featured an after-dinner program entitled "Meeting a Nice Girl/Boy at Church or While Casting a Circle: Reflections on LGBT Issues and Experiences in Faith Communities in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s." Floyd's recollections were followed by remarks by Dr. Melissa Wilcox, a lecturer at the University of California in Santa Barbara and member of LGBTRAN's Advisory Committee.

Floyd began his presentation by remembering how he'd felt, 25 years before, when he first attended an Affirmation meeting. The thrill he experienced when walking into that early gathering of gay Methodists was, he said, both spiritual and sexual. "The question at the top of my head was, 'Am I going to get laid this weekend?' And that's the conversation I want to engage us in tonight," joked Floyd, whose talk explored the connections between the sexual and spiritual dimensions of gay male Christian activism during the movement's first years.

Although Floyd credited Affirmation members' sexual encounters with creating "a level of intimacy that informed and supported the activism," he cautioned his listeners that it would be "a mistake to think it was all positive." He concluded his remarks with some sobering reflections on the impact of that sexually charged atmosphere on those who, for whatever reason, felt excluded. "As liberal as we think we've become, all this stuff goes on and we don't talk about it," he said--an observation that made the perfect segue into Wilcox's presentation.

Concurring with Floyd that "there is a connection between sex and religion," Wilcox praised LGBT religious activists for "taking an unblinking focus on our naked bodies and what they do together and making it spiritual." But she quickly turned to asking her own set of provocative questions about the sometimes exclusionary gender, racial and class dynamics of the early LGBT religious groups. Saying that such groups were part of "a nexus of social movements in the U.S.," she briefly examined some points of connection and conflict between the LGBT religious movements and the era's other movements for social change.

"A lot of people who didn't identify as gay white male were moving from movement to movement, and it's important to ask how [the LGBT religious movement] was affected by this nexus," Wilcox said. She speculated that "the exodus of women" from gay male-oriented religious groups may, in part, have been responsible for the rise of feminist spirituality and, especially, neo-pagan movements such as Dianic Wicca.

One question that especially intrigues her, Wilcox said, has arisen from her own sociological research in southern California: Why is it that so many "national, autocephalous lesbian and gay religious movements," including MCC, Dignity, the first gay & lesbian synagogue (Beth Chayim Chadashim), Dianic Wicca and Unity Fellowship, all have their origins in the Los Angeles/San Diego area? "Is it just a fluke," she asked, or is region an important--though uninvestigated--factor in these groups' formation?

An extremely lively question and answer period followed the presentations.