

Religion

Rev. Kim Harvie: Minister to the Marginalized

by Lee Russell

On October 17, the Rev. Kim Crawford Harvie, the first open lesbian to become Senior Minister at a Unitarian-Universalist church, spoke at Middlebury College. The following day she gave a similar talk at the University of Vermont. What follows are some of the thoughts she shared with her audiences.

On Coming Out:

Kim has lived her whole life openly, never hiding or apologizing for who she is, and she projects the ease and confidence that self-acceptance brings. She encouraged her audience to come out ("If every gay, lesbian and bisexual came out tomorrow, the world would turn upside down.") and not to keep secrets. Secrets are destructive, Harvie said, adding, "You are only as sick as your secrets."

Harvie encourages young people who are questioning their sexual orientation to take their time and not label themselves too soon. "Coming out isn't throwing open one closet door. It's a whole hallway full of doors." She feels that if you can't tell someone who you are because you're afraid you'll lose them, "you've already lost them." She strongly commended the work done by Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-FLAG). "Not everyone at a PFLAG meeting feels strong," Harvie observed. "It's a great place for parents to go and be miserable together."

When asked about advice she might have for college communities, Harvie responded that she is "very strong on teaching and encouraging leadership, which draws people together," adding that it is extremely important to have a few people willing to come out for the cause.

heterosexuals as giving them a sense of that kind of community.

On Life At the Margins:

Harvie talked about life in the margins, and the contributions that marginalized people make. As in a book, she explained, the margins give shape and a way in to the text; they offer space where those that are separate can be bound together. The margins help move the text off-center; there is a dynamic tension between the margins and the text. "We embark on our journey as isolated, but we arrive at the end only if we link up with others. Work on the margins is holy work, with its own rewards."

On AIDS:

"Having something to suffer together helps bind people together." Harvie's work with people with AIDS is both pastoral and political. Her pastoral work includes working with PWA's to make sure they have their lives in order and can deal with death. She encourages people to do what they can about AIDS and not try to force themselves beyond their limits. "If all you can do in the face of AIDS is stand there and throw money at it, that's OK," she said.

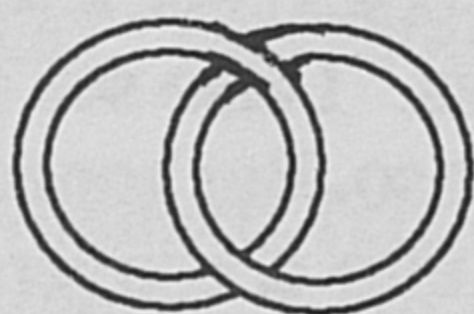
On What She's Proudest Of:

Harvie is proud of the work she did in Provincetown MA, where she revitalized the Unitarian-Universalist Meeting House. When she arrived in 1985 she went everywhere, telling everyone that the meeting house was a place where they could come and feel welcome. She started with a weekly congregation of about 50 and built it up to 400 by the time she left in 1989.

People would travel up to 2 1/2 hours to attend services. In her congregation, there were not just gays, lesbians and bisexuals, but others on the edges of society, including African-Americans, the disabled, the lonely, recovering alcoholics and other addicts, recovering and otherwise.

Through her ministry, Harvie discovered that almost everyone feels marginalized in some way. She's proud of her willingness to speak out about who she is and what she believes in, and in so doing help those who find themselves on the margin to realize what a vital place it is that they occupy in the world.

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On Being a Lesbian Minister:

Harvie feels that it is not necessary to be gay or lesbian to be a good minister, "but it helps. We who know exclusion are in a unique position to minister to others. We know what it's like to walk wounded, and the best healing comes from wounded healers. Heterosexuals often need lesbian and gay vulnerability because it gives them access to their own vulnerability."

Harvie believes that being a lesbian helps her in her work because lesbians and gays know what it's like to be on the outside and on the inside. We are on the outside, she explains, because of our marginalized status, and on the inside because of the communities we've created. Heterosexuals do not have the same experience of community that we do, and Harvie sees part of her pastoral work with