

Out in Scripture

Online resource for homosexuals, bisexuals, transgenders advertises in *Presbyterians Today*

By Patrick Jean

Staff Writer

The Layman Online

Wednesday, August 1, 2007

An online, multid denominational resource for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community has seen an increase in interest since a recent advertising campaign, officials say.

The campaign included a full-page color ad in *Presbyterians Today*, the monthly magazine of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

[Out in Scripture](#) debuted June 4, 2006, as part of the Religion and Faith Program at the Human Rights Campaign, a Washington-based organization that bills itself as "America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender equality." The resource was the product of two goals of the Religion and Faith Program, said program director Sharon Groves:

1. Empower faith leaders to speak from whatever their religious perspective was about issues that affected the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.
2. Give resources and empowerment to ordinary people of faith to speak about issues of equality from their religious perspective.

"Out in Scripture falls somewhere in the middle of both," she said.

The resource drew a mixed response from Kristin Johnson, executive director of [OneByOne](#), an organization whose mission is "to educate and equip the church to minister the transforming grace and power of the Lord Jesus Christ to those who are in conflict with their sexuality."

Johnson praised Out in Scripture for "providing a devotional resource that attempts to point to Scripture, but their interpretation of Scripture affirms homosexuality as a gift from God. This interpretation can and should be disputed," she said.

"The fact that professors are 'listening for how God is connecting the world of the Bible and the world of LGBT people' (from the text of the *Presbyterians Today* ad) is

presumptuous at best, considering Scripture has already made this connection clear," Johnson said.

She said that, "Jesus said, 'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another' (John 13:34), and 'If you love me, you will obey my commands' (John 14:15), and 'Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin' (John 8:11)."

'Provide a perspective'

Groves said Out in Scripture started as a preaching and devotional tool that followed a three-year lectionary, a series of liturgical readings that usually are incorporated into church sermon planning. When the resource went weekly Sept. 3, 2006, she said, it began to follow a weekly version of the lectionary that uses four passages each week – two from the New Testament and two from the Hebrew Bible.

"We wanted to provide a perspective that was an LGBT perspective," she said, "so it's not just written by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people but it's written from a pro-LGBT perspective."

Out in Scripture aims to offer an alternative voice to the religious right, which Groves said has dominated the religious perspective on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues. "Because of that," she said, "there's been this kind of equation where if you're Christian, that means that you're against gay people."

"That's sort of been the stumbling block that we've had to run into over and over again – in the sense that it's un-Biblical to be supportive of gay folks," she said. "That's part of the reason why we even have this resource to begin with, is to begin to deconstruct that a bit."

Johnson disagreed.

"I agree with Groves that the Church has long avoided offering healing in place of condemnation for those who experience same-sex attraction," she said. "However, Groves fails to make a distinction between Christians who hatefully condemn gay-identified people vs. Christians who are offering hope and healing to those who desire to be healed from same-sex attraction.

"Being 'supportive of gay folks' does not mean a person must accept and celebrate homosexuality," Johnson said. "Ministries such as OneByOne and Exodus International are very 'supportive of gay folks' in that we offer them the love of Jesus Christ and the hope of emotional and sexual healing if that is what they are seeking."

'A resource that can help you'

Out in Scripture also strives to let people hear, see and decide for themselves about peer-reviewed resources that are argued from a different perspective, Groves said. In addition to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues, other multid denominational themes such

as liberation theology and Christian ethics are covered.

The site has about 30 writers, three of whom contribute each week. Groves said the writers are diverse in terms of race, sexual orientation and gender and come mostly from academic backgrounds such as seminaries, but some are preachers.

An 18-member editorial advisory board oversees the content, with a copy editor overseeing the Web site material and the Rev. Dr. Sidney D. Fowler serving as editor. He is an ordained United Church of Christ pastor in Washington.

Groves said Out in Scripture "was really trying to get preachers to begin to have a resource where they could feel that they would be able to preach from the pulpit about people in their congregations regularly – and also when people of faith are going to a particular church, that they can say to their minister, 'You know, I've been going here for a long time, but you never speak about issues that concern me. You speak about issues that concern the homeless and other communities in my church, but not me. And if you need help figuring out how to do that, here's a resource that can help you.'"

Johnson, however, feels that Out in Scripture is part of a larger agenda from the Human Rights Campaign. She cited her own experience with the group in the nation's capital this past spring:

"In May of this year," she said, "I was asked to go to Washington, D.C., to speak to the Congress and Senate about the impending hate-crimes legislation that could potentially limit the free speech of Christians who oppose homosexual practice and who desire to offer healing to those who struggle with unwanted same-sex attraction. As I walked the halls of the U.S. Congress, I saw many people from the Humans Rights Campaign, a national organization that credits itself as 'America's largest civil-rights organization working to achieve gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender equality.' I knew about the organization and I was expecting to see them in D.C., but I was not expecting to see so many men and women donning ecclesiastical stoles and Christian crosses.

"The Human Rights Watch is not a religious organization, and yet they have made a concerted effort to target the Church's mainline denominations," Johnson said. "This explains the ad posted in *Presbyterians Today*."

Why Presbyterians Today?

The Human Rights Campaign chose to advertise Out in Scripture in *Presbyterians Today*, Groves said, because "we were trying really hard to get denominational magazines that the people in the pews are reading. We wanted to get mainline Christian denominations covered."

The ad cost \$4,010, according to the advertising rate card for *Presbyterians Today*. The text of the ad also had to meet the magazine's advertising policies, which include:

- "Ads that challenge or denigrate Presbyterian Church (USA) policies, programs or

personnel are not accepted."

- "Ads that a majority of *Presbyterians Today* readers would find in poor taste are not accepted."

Don Cecil, advertising manager for *Presbyterians Today*, said advertisements with a potentially objectionable theme or text are presented to the magazine's editor, Eva Stimson, and others to make sure they pass muster. This was done with the Out in Scripture ad and no one opposed it, he said.

Stimson said she received one response to the Out in Scripture ad – from a pastor who thanked her for running it.

Cecil recalled receiving two responses:

- One from a man who wanted to promote resources that combat homosexuality. He was told he could advertise in the magazine, but has not yet submitted an ad, Cecil said.
- One from a man who said some people in his congregation had noticed the ad and were puzzled. Cecil said he explained the magazine's advertising policies, and the caller also went to the Out in Scripture Web site and realized it was a resource site for ministers, not an advocate of controversial stances such as violation of ordination vows or upheaval against the PCUSA Constitution.

"The strategy behind *Presbyterians Today* was that the lectionary is really used mostly by mainline Christian denominations," Groves said. "We wanted folks that are in mainline Christian denominations to know that it existed. The hope is that both preachers and lay people will see this and think, 'This is something I'm interested in' and go to it – either as a tool for their preaching or as a devotional tool."

Groves said the ad also appeared in print in the magazines *The Lutheran*, *The Christian Century*, *United Church News* and *The Progressive Christian* and online at [Beliefnet](#) and [The Text This Week](#). Out in Scripture hasn't tracked feedback from any particular ad, but overall interest has surged, she said.

'A strong devotional resource'

Groves estimated there are 10,000 "hits" per week on the Web site, up about one-third from before the ad campaign began. The hits are either from those who either are unregistered visitors or have signed up for the online resource, she said.

Fifty to 100 people are registering on the site each week, Groves said, "and that was clearly from the advertising that we did." She said she's also had some anecdotal feedback from people who heard of the site secondhand and hadn't known it existed.

Small groups have formed that use Out in Scripture in their Bible study, Groves said. The

groups range from lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders to heterosexual allies to parents, she said.

"What we've discovered since it's taken off is that it's also become a strong devotional resource," she said. "One example that I heard is there was a young guy who's a strong activist whose mother is really uncomfortable with his sexuality. What he's been doing is signing her up for Out in Scripture, and then they have a dialogue every week about the particular passages and the commentaries that came out. So, she can begin to see that there's an alternative way to think about Christian Scripture, that the only way to read it is not one that condemns gay folk. And that's the kind of thing that we've been seeing over and over again."

The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community also is spreading the word about Out in Scripture through annual "pride" celebrations in cities across the country that celebrate the gay community, but also offer resources, Groves said.

"Whenever we go to a conference or hear about events that are happening that seem like there might be an opening for Out in Scripture," she said, "we have a brochure that we send to those events as well. And those can vary from gay-specific events that have a religious theme to them to denominational meetings."

Groves is looking to get Out in Scripture into colleges and hospitals through chaplain programs. She said she's also talking to the American Psychological Association about having the resource available for counselors.

Out in Scripture also is considering an "advocacy guide" to counter the religious right's arguments, Groves said. "The religious right often uses what we call the 'clobber text' – they refer to the same text in Leviticus and Genesis and elsewhere over and over again," she said.

"We feel that it would be nice to have a useable answer to that perspective, as well as offering a different kind of framework for thinking about religion that basically takes the kind of stance of 'Love your neighbor' and 'Build an inclusive and welcoming community,'" she said. "That is really the message behind Christianity, so it's offering a different framework and also answering the kind of specific critiques that the right has put out."

Full text of ad

Here is the full text of the Out in Scripture ad that appeared in *Presbyterians Today*:

"Join the Conversation

"Have you been looking for prayerful resources about Scripture and the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people?

"Are you a minister searching for a Biblically grounded resource to preach about equality

for all God's people?

"Are you a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender person, family member or friend in need of a weekly devotional resource to help deepen your spiritual practice?

"The Human Rights Campaign's free online preaching and devotional resource, Out in Scripture, www.hrc.org/scripture is for you.

"Out in Scripture is the first major weekly preaching and devotional resource written from a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and straight-supportive perspective. Each week a diverse group of professors from leading theological schools listen for how God is connecting the world of the Bible and the world of LGBT people in church and society. The weekly commentary is a summary and celebration of their prayerful – at times comforting, often challenging – conversation.

"Out in Scripture: An Honest Encounter Between Our Lives and the Bible"

OneByOne alternative ad

Johnson is seeking funds for an alternative ad in *Presbyterians Today*. The text of the ad would be as follows:

"Are you confused about what the Bible says about homosexuality?

"Are you afraid of being considered a hateful bigot if you state that homosexuality is a sin, according to Scripture?

"Are you wanting to uphold the Biblical and Christ-centered view of marriage and sexuality between a man and a woman and yet still show love to those who are gay-identified?

"Do you have friends and family members (and people with whom you work) who are gay-identified and/or struggling with same-sex attraction and you want to know how to reach out to them?

"OneByOne is a ministry started 12 years ago by Presbyterians who wanted to educate and equip the church to minister Christ's truth and grace to those who struggle with same-sex attraction, sexual addiction and the effects of sexual abuse.

"We are here to help you answer these tough questions, questions that are affecting our society, churches and denomination. You can love the gay community without accepting homosexuality. You can love them by offering them the good news of Jesus Christ and by offering them your friendship and love.

"Visit our Web site at www.oneby1.org and learn more about our ministry. Join our growing network of OneByOne churches!"

However, Johnson said OneByOne cannot spare the \$4,010 that the ad would cost. Anyone interested in contributing to the ad can contact her at (407) 423-3441, Ext. 1489 or execdirector@oneby1.org.

Patrick Jean is a staff writer for The Layman and The Layman Online. He can be reached at pjean@layman.org.

[Respond to this article](#)

[Home](#) ▪ [Archives](#) ▪ [The Layman](#) ▪ [PLC Publications](#)
[Presbyterian Lay Committee](#) ▪ [Feedback](#) ▪ [Links](#)