

Yes!Coalition History

In August, 2000, eight members of Central Baptist Church, Wayne, PA, a member church of Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists, traveled to Illinois to attend the first international gathering of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender (GLBT) people of faith and straight allies from, primarily, Canada and the US.

The conference, *Witness Our Welcome 2000:God's Promise Is For You!* is referred to as **WOW** 2000. It was a transforming experience for these three gay, one lesbian, one bisexual, and three straight participants through celebrating their faith journeys with 1000 others, being challenged by a large selection of provocative workshops, worship services, speakers, Bible study, entertainment and informal sessions over a 4 day period. This WOW conference would not be available again until 2003 and a similar regional conference seemed timely,

So . . .

Central Baptist Church Concerned, the GLBT and Allies advocacy group from Central Baptist Church, sent an invitation to other official Welcoming Congregations in the greater Philadelphia area to plan a regional GLBT daylong conference for October 6, 2001, the day before OutFest (*no official connection to OutFest*). This coalition affirmed the idea of the conference and that day in December, 2000, the 24 people from GLBT advocacy groups from American Baptist, Roman Catholic, Episcopal, United Methodist, United Church of Christ, Unitarian, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Metropolitan Community Church and Mennonite congregations approved a mission statement for the conference and the coalition project was born: **Yes!Conference**.

At this first meeting all unanimously affirmed the idea of making every effort to widen the circle of the coalition and conference to include more of the religious and racial diversity in communities in the Philadelphia area. It was aimed at affirming the spiritual journey of each GLBT person.

Yes!Conference, with 130 attending, successfully featured leaders from diverse faith groups, including Faisal Alam, founder of the international gay Muslim group, al-Fatiha; and sexologist, clergy, professors in seminaries, PFLAG Jewish and Christian moms, and others working toward understanding among diverse peoples. Worship and plenary speaker, Rev. Irene Monroe, were inspiring.

Yes!Coalition Completed Projects

- **October, 2001, Yes! Conference** (see history)
- **August, 2003**, recruitment and coordination of over 100 volunteers for the second "WOW" conference, held in Philadelphia. We arranged for Blessings for the Saturday night meal from Jewish, Muslim, and Christian traditions and arranged for dinner entertainment.
- **April, 2004**, Yes! co-sponsored and participated in the interfaith New Freedom Seder organized by the Shalom Center and held at the Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia.
- **June, 2004**, created the first-ever Philly Pride Interfaith Celebration, "Freedom to Celebrate Our Faith," held on festival grounds. Jewish, Muslim, Catholic and Protestant Christian, Unitarian Universalist, and Earth Tradition Spirituality were represented among the celebration leaders.
- **January, 2006**, launched our website, www.yescoalitionphilly.org. A Guide to Welcoming Congregations in the greater Philadelphia area is there.
- **April, 2006**, printed for distribution in the gay community and for all listed groups, *the Guide to Welcoming Congregations*

Networking Takes Time

Building a lasting coalition takes time, interaction, commitment, and resources. Identifying the diverse communities, working together, socializing together, listening to and learning from each other, worshiping in ways that lift up different religious traditions, celebrating, and affirming one another's spiritual journey are ways to build a lasting coalition. This is a completely volunteer-run effort. Positive relationships have already been built and we are in a "no lose" situation. "God is good—always!" Are you interested? Do you want your spiritual group listed in the Guide? See the website to do that: www.yescoalitionphilly.org.

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