



TRUTH IN PROGRESS

LETTERS IN MIXED COMPANY

TRUTH IN PROGRESS - A multimedia education project
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Truth in Progress: New project links gay rights and civil rights in dialogue **Nationwide project starts in Helena this Wednesday**

Can the equal rights movement for lesbians and gays be compared to the black civil rights movements? Helena writer and lesbian/gay rights activist Marilyn Bennett Alexander and black activist, minister, and writer Rev. Gil Caldwell, now of New Jersey, have launched a nationwide multimedia education project aimed at bringing those two movements closer together.

The pair will launch their project, called **Truth in Progress**, at a public reception **Wednesday, January 13, at the Myrna Loy Center from 5:00-7:00 pm**. Truth in Progress recently received a \$15,000 grant through the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation through the Montana Human Rights Network.

Alexander and Caldwell created Truth in Progress to engage people of different races and sexual orientations in a deeper dialogue about issues of race, sexual orientation, and religion. Working with Montana filmmaker Tonya Easeby, they will produce a series of interviews with activists and community leaders in places significant to the black civil rights and the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) rights movements. The project will include print, video, and an interactive website with filmed interviews of activists talking about their struggles for human rights. A feature-length documentary will be released in 2013.

The focus will be on stories from the two movements that are often compared, but that remain at odds with each other.

“Civil rights for African Americans and equal rights for lesbians and gays are not the same struggles,” Alexander said. “These are different histories. These are very different experiences. But the fight for civil rights, and acknowledging equal rights, is always the same story. Maybe there can be a conversation between them. Maybe our project will help diffuse some of the tension and bring people together.”

Alexander and Caldwell met at the 2000 General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in Cleveland, where both worked together to promote equality for lesbians and gays within the Methodist church. There—among other things—they participated in nonviolent civil disobedience and church officials had them arrested.

“You meet the nicest people in jail,” Alexander says. “But Gil had been arrested before—he participated in the 1963 March on Washington and in the Selma and Montgomery marches of 1965. He knew what denial and exclusion were about, and what it takes to get past them. And we both knew that the two movements had much to teach and share with each other.”

Then the two discovered they had the same birthday—38 years apart. A lifelong friendship began, based on their differentness (white/black; lesbian/straight; younger/older; female/male; without cane/with cane) and their shared passion for justice. In 2003 they began an extensive email correspondence. Through this frank and unusual exchange, they began to peel back layers of taboos and miscommunications between communities. The two came to see that defining and voicing their perspectives led to a larger truth, a “truth in progress.” This dialogue was published in 2007 in a limited edition entitled, *Selections from Truth in Progress: Letters in Mixed Company*.

Alexander is a writer, community organizer, and presently the development director at the Myrna Loy Center. She is also the official writer-in-residence at the Rodney Street Laundry. She is author of *What Happened in San Antonio* and co-author of *We Were Baptized Too: Claiming God’s Grace for Lesbians and Gays*.

Caldwell is a retired African American United Methodist clergyman, having served churches in a variety of settings including Boston, Harlem, Washington D.C, and Denver. He is the author of *Something Within, Race, Racism and Reconciliation*, and *Just the Right Word*. He is a regular contributor to the Reconciling Ministries Network blog. Gil was recently elected to the national board of PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays).

The Wednesday reception is free and open to the public; donations will be accepted to support the project, and can be made through the Montana Human Rights Network.