



## MFSA Iowa Statewide Gathering IN THE MIDST OF NEW DIMENSIONS

The Revs. Sean McRoberts and Katie Dawson

**Saturday, April 27 – 9:45 AM**

St. Mark's UMC - 2675 E. Washington, Iowa City

### We Know Not What We Have Done...

by the Rev. Katie Dawson

*Lord, forgive us.*

We spent millions of dollars for a special general conference where we thought we were going to talk about the inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons and instead prioritized pensions, enhanced enforcement, and departures. We witnessed firsthand the brokenness and sinful nature of our denomination which has been complicit not only in homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism, but also institutional racism, colonialism, and ageism.

In these days since our conference, we have witnessed the church vacillating through a range of emotions: rage, despair, hope, pride, shock, and the resurrection faith that maybe, just maybe, God is birthing something new. I have to admit that in the midst of my grief and tears, I also feel the spark of a possibility in reimagining the Methodist movement as a fully inclusive and intersectional church. The reality is, in these first few days after the General Conference, we don't really know what we have done. We don't know what is constitutional or unconstitutional. We don't know how churches will respond - leaving, fighting, ignoring, splintering, persisting... these are all potential responses. We don't know how individuals will respond and it is not for any of us to tell anyone else what they should or shouldn't do. We don't know the depths of the harm that we have caused to our LGBTQ+ siblings or our witness in the world for the sake of Jesus Christ. We don't know the impact on our connectional church and the shared mission and ministry we share. We don't know what steps come next or what will be brought back to the table of conversation when we do this all over again in 2020. ...continued page 2

### General Conference Reflection

by the Rev. Sean McRoberts

We are still in the early days following General Conference. I have been deeply grieving the death of The United Methodist Church, even as I see an institution carrying that name attempting to move on. More, though, I mourn for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people who will lose their lives to suicide - believing that there is no place for them because the church has declared it so. I mourn for homeless youth driven from their homes because their United Methodist pastors counsel parents that "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching." I mourn for children who will be twisted to conform to bigoted social expectations through the application of "religious freedom" laws.

At the same time, I know that we are capable of better, of more, of beauty, of justice, of liberation. I know that the Spirit can work resurrection from the death of the church and that a river of life can flow through our relationships to nourish our siblings, our children, our selves. "I hear the clear, though far off hymn that hails a new creation." And today, when I don't feel able to take another step, I know that we carry each other and that as we cry out and as we dream and especially as we act for justice and compassion that God walks with us.

It is for this labor of justice-love that we gather on April 27th. In the early days of the Easter Season we will tell the truth of the harm done by The United Methodist Church. We will seek resources to ground our work in the wisdom of liberation movement leaders. We will identify concrete actions to be taken in our local communities, in our churches and denomination, and in our nation and world. And we will connect with strategies and coalitions for justice work.

There is good work to be done, and each person has a place. Come share your pain and your hope that together we can dream and work for God's new day.

### **Note Legislative Advocacy & Take Action**

- **Legislative Advocacy Team**  
Opposing SF296, bill to reinstate the death penalty  
Contact Brian Carter [briancar@dwx.com](mailto:briancar@dwx.com)

**We Know Not What We Have Done...**

by the Rev. Katie Dawson ...continued from page 1

***Lord, forgive us.***

But also, forgive us for our complacency and silence. Forgive us for believing that it would all work out in the end without any hard work or demands on our own lives. Forgive us for being innocent as doves without also being as wise as serpents. Forgive us for waiting for some institution to make a decision for us.

**In the Midst of New Dimensions**

By the Rev. David Shogren, SQB Editor

MFSA members and friends gather in Iowa City on April 27 to fellowship, understand our new reality, lick wounds and act to take back and/or birth something positive. Sean McRoberts & Katie Dawson will lead and guide us through the day. Post Conference spawned an avalanche of emotion on social media and from pulpits, but now we must act purposefully as we seek justice/full inclusion of LGBTQI+ community.

Our theme, *In the Midst of New Dimensions*, (TFWS #2238) is taken from a favorite justice hymn of that title. Also known as *Ours the Journey*, it was written by UM Rev. Julian B. Rush in 1979 and used at the 1985 Rocky Mountain Annual Conference under a theme of diversity, as the first Japanese-American Bishop, Rev. Roy I. Sano was installed. Although the hymn is affirming, hopeful and upbeat, Rev. Rush was persecuted for coming out as gay and separating from his wife. Many who had supported him over 17 years as a Youth Minister/Christian Educator in Texas and Colorado turned on him as his salary was withheld at First UMC, Boulder. Forced to take a job with Montgomery Ward to make ends meet, he longed for church ministry. An unpaid position opened at St. Paul's UMC, Denver, in 1981 and three years later it became one of the first three Reconciling Congregations nationally, "open and affirming" of the LGBTQ community. In 1997 his congregation at Boulder also became Reconciling, no doubt partially through his witness. Among his acts of service, Rush served as director of the Colorado AIDS Project for a decade. Published in various hymn collections, a 2010 article by Donna Hamilton, includes

Forgive us for failing to BE your church.

We may not fully understand what we have done, but God's grace is abundant and even we can be transformed. May we learn from this experience and march into the future with some deeper commitments. Rev. Sean McRoberts and I will be leading a discussion at the April gathering of MFSA and want to open up a conversation about how we might lead and love and work together in the midst of these new dimensions. Come and join us.

seven stanzas, two more than TFWS. In her article, Kelly Tennille Grooms, notes that the two stanzas omitted "contain... more controversial ideas. In them, Rush describes the "rainbow coalition" to include black, Asian, Indian, Hispanic, and white, who are "all of value in [God's] sight." He also includes "gays and lesbians together fighting to be realized." Whether listed specifically in stanzas or not, the refrain names all, everyone as "we your people."

Seen as prayer, some stanzas end with questions of God while others call for "wider dreams." Following Special Conference, our prayers may be raw, but "the prayers of many Christians include the sentiments of Rush's text, and God still guides all God's people..." Let us draw inspiration from Rush's personal struggle to be honest and open, even in the face of rejection. May we see and sing this hymn as a powerful prayer and lesson of what it means to love God and neighbor as self.

*Should the threats of dire predictions cause us to withdraw in pain, May your blazing phoenix spirit, resurrect the church again.*

*As we stand a world divided by our own self seeking schemes, Grant that we, your global village might envision wider dreams.*



[Refrain] *God of rainbow, fiery pillar, leading where the eagles soar, We your people, ours the journey now and ever, now and ever, now and ever more.*



## SQB – print & digital

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- MFSA Iowa Chapter Coordinator: Eloise Cranke [ecranke@mchsi.com](mailto:ecranke@mchsi.com)
- Visit [mfsaiowa.org](http://mfsaiowa.org) for SQB archives, monthly events memo and more.
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## Meet the SQB Editor, Dave Skogren

Greetings, Iowa MFSA members & friends... Cherry & I married my Senior year at UI. By the time I took my first appointment at Leon – High Point (1977), I had transitioned from Biblical literalist primarily focused on magic prayer evangelism to a more nuanced understanding of Scripture as containing the Word of God in historical context. Learning to take the Bible seriously, not literally, opened up new vistas of God's Realm with Jesus as prophetic model for justice, social equality and peace. Cherry became a Biblical feminist, my brother-in-law came out and I embraced mentoring; Dick Eis, Gene Koth, Gale Hawhee, Dick Pfaltzgraff and progressive giants on our Creston sub-district, clergy and lay. They encouraged my involvement in the IAC Board of Church & Society as well as MFSA, which helped my growth and journey.

Fostering peace, racial, economic and environmental justice, full inclusion; recognition of calls, gifts and graces of LGBTQ persons while eliminating hurtful judgments inserted in the 1972 Discipline... became passions. I now lament reactionary forces eviscerating the church I loved and served throughout my ordained ministry after leaving Baptistic roots.

A blog I consistently read and affirm is John Pavlovitz, Things That Need To Be Said. ([johnpavlovitz.com](http://johnpavlovitz.com)) John speaks truth to power with clarity, timeliness, pulling no punches whether focusing on a Christian Right selling out for Trump and political power, the character of the President, or the charade of churches outwardly affirming the sacred worth of LGBTQ persons while denying full participation in church life and ministry.

Whatever MFSA individuals decide to do with church memberships given St Louis fiascos, I pray we all continue to be fully engaged in advocacy and social justice. I believe MFSA should redouble efforts as a fully supportive Methodist fellowship and action arm of God's Realm whatever ultimately happens to the United Methodist Church. I hope the SQB will continue to be worthy of your time and be blessed by the God of justice and peace.

## Save the Date: Annual Awards

MFSA Annual Awards Event – Sunday, June 9  
“For Such a Time as This”  
Keynote by the Rev. Abraham Fuchness

### MFSA Iowa Membership and Support:

Membership includes National MFSA membership & SQB newsletter subscription. To join, contact membership secretary Mike Biklen. Please support MFSA Iowa through any or all of these three funds:

- **Organizer Fund:** Supports the work of our coordinator.
- **General Fund:** operating budget expenses.
- **Memorial Fund:** Gifts given /designated Donate by mailing a check to MFSA Iowa c/o Mike Biklen 515 E. 11<sup>th</sup> St., Muscatine, IA 52761-3920 or via Paypal at [mfsaiowa.org](http://mfsaiowa.org).