

# The looking glass

## A glimpse of life on the flipside

### Religion



Pastor Maureen Dickmann helped Rock Bridge Christian Church become the first Disciples of Christ parish in the region to be officially "open and affirming."



### Some Columbia churches show they are open to change.

**P**astor Maureen Dickmann never intended to hide anything from her congregation in her first eight years at Rock Bridge Christian Church. The reality that she was a lesbian simply never came up.

Everything changed in 1996. New laws discriminating against gays were all over the news, Dickmann recalls. The Supreme Court overturned a Colorado amendment that would protect LGBT rights. Her church's own evangelism committee got together that spring and proposed taking a more official position welcoming gays, though some wondered if there was a need.

"Besides," one said, "we don't have any."

Dickmann thought, "Um, hello!" She had identified as a lesbian for at least 20 years. The time to come out officially had arrived.

That May, the pastor began letting people know individually rather than in a big sermon and then held a forum to talk about the subject. Most people believed it was the right action, she says, though one of the five elders wasn't happy. He and another person supposedly wanted Dickmann to move on, but they gave up by December 1996.

The 80-member congregation lost a few people and feared some financial difficulty, but everything turned out OK, says Dickmann.

About eight years ago, the church voted to officially become "open and affirming," which meant it welcomed all sexual orientations.

The Unitarian Universalist Church has also been open to members of the LGBT community and has nationally accepted congregants and ministers into its community for more than 25 years. The Columbia UUA church has worked in the past three years toward a designation as a "welcoming congregation." As part of that effort, the church forged a relationship with the Center Project, whose members have sought to form a LGBT community resource center since 2003. The church cleared office space for the group and charges it \$1 a year for rent.

The church's Reverend Bill Haney says he prefers to build a community out of diversity rather than conformity. He has conducted many holy unions between individuals of the same gender and says calling homosexuality a sin is misguided; this sentiment is echoed by Dickmann.

"You don't read Shakespeare without annotation," Dickmann remarks. "Loving, committed relationships between people of the same gender aren't even on the radar screen of the Bible."

— JOHN HENDEL

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If you need a supportive friend or a place to go where you're always accepted and can get valuable information, check out one of these organizations, advocacy groups or

they thought they had given their child is no longer the identity the child lives with." Hayes likens the adjustment process to that of overcoming grief. PFLAG helps parents "move through that process and accept the child for who they are," she says.

Other groups in Columbia that offer support include The Center Project and the Mid-Missouri LGBT Coalition. At MU, students can turn to the LGBT Resource Center or the Triangle Coalition.

Lance Pierce, founder of Allies in Action, however, saw a different need that wasn't being met on campus:

allies. That is, anyone who advocates change in the perception and treatment of the LGBT community.

"Being an ally doesn't mean that you're gay or doesn't mean that you're straight," he says. "We don't even ask what orientation you are."

After a film screening, Pierce says, a student there for a class said when the event began he didn't approve of homosexuality, but by the end he had reversed his stance. "He's going to have a ripple effect on everyone he comes into contact with," says Pierce.

Through such events as film screenings and lectures, Hayes of PFLAG hopes, "we can educate the general public, and we can cut down on the number of discriminatory practices.

"Overall, Columbia is safer and more supportive (than most of the state). But there are still elements within Columbia where it may not be safe." For those instances, there are at least a few places to turn to for support.

— KATHERINE HARMON

## Politics

### Log Cabin Republicans seek equality for all.

Lindsay Barth grew up in Alton, Ill., where his values flourished under Republican parents. But when Barth came out to his sister 12 years ago, she couldn't stop the words from escaping her mouth.

"You can't be gay!" his sister exclaimed. "You're a Republican."

Although his family has been supportive of his sexuality, that's exactly the reaction Barth wants to disprove these days. In 2007, Barth became the president of the St. Louis chapter of the Log Cabin Republicans, party loyalists who joined together to advocate for gay

rights in the late '70s. The name comes from equality crusader and Republican Abraham Lincoln, who was born in a log cabin. The group's booth at the Pride St. Louis festival led Barth to join about four years ago. He relates to Ronald Reagan's vision of small government and fiscal conservatism despite living in an America where extremes dominate the two main political parties.

"The Christian Coalition has taken the Republican Party hostage," says the 37-year-old podiatrist. "The federal government needs to get back to what they're designed to do."

As Barth prepared for his first Log Cabin meeting as president, he feared no one would show up, but he had a

pleasant gathering of 12. They chatted about their values and hosted the group's national president during that meeting. Barth likes to have speakers such as Senator Jack Danforth at the Log Cabin Republicans' quarterly meetings.

Bill Jenkins, chapter treasurer and a member of the national board, remembers having 40 to 50 active members in the late '90s. George W. Bush's presidency, which tried to pass an amendment banning gay marriage, has driven away many potential members, Jenkins and Barth believe.

Chapters of the party group have emerged in St. Louis and Kansas City. From April 10 to 13, Barth, Jenkins and others from St. Louis were in San Diego

Lindsay Barth, president of the St. Louis chapter of Log Cabin Republicans, believes in changing the party from within.



for the national Log Cabin convention, where Senator McCain earned the group's presidential endorsement.

Jenkins stresses that he is a loyalist looking to change his party from within rather than turn Democrat or independent: "What you're finding in the Republican Party is a lot of soul-searching."

— JOHN HENDEL