

Wingspan Ministry of St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church is beginning a new focus on global advocacy for LGBT persons. Long recognized as a leading congregational ministry for LGBT persons since its inception 1982, Wingspan's mission has included advocacy for justice in public policy though it is most well known for its years of work within the ELCA on behalf of full inclusion of gay and lesbian persons in the life of the church and as rostered leaders.

"We are most definitely *not* ending our witness and work in the church or in our civil communities here," said Leo Treadway, convener of the Wingspan Global Bridges project. "However, there are LGBT persons around the globe who need our solidarity—and with whom we need to be in solidarity. The Body of Christ is not limited to Minnesota or to the U.S., and today we find ourselves called to stand with and learn from LGBT persons in distant places as well."

Wingspan's first global advocacy project is to raise awareness about the situation of LGBT persons in Uganda. They will also be raising funds to support the ministry of reconciliation led by Bishop Christopher Senyonjo, an Anglican bishop emeritus, who has been a tireless advocate for human rights, including speaking out for LGBT persons at great risk to himself.

In October 2010, Bishop Christopher and David Kato, an activist with Sexual Minorities of Uganda (SMUG), were pictured side by side on the front page of a Ugandan newspaper with the words "Hang Them" posted above their photos. Three months later, in January 2011, Kato was murdered in his home.

Earlier, in 2009, legislation was proposed in Uganda that would institute the death penalty for LGBT persons and impose seven-year prison sentences for anyone considered an "accomplice," from friends and family members to landlords. In April 2011 there were indications that the bill, not yet passed, would replace the death penalty with life imprisonment in an effort to get it approved without further delay. Frank Mugisha of SMUG reports that ever since the bill was originally introduced two years ago anti-gay sentiment and open harassment of LGBT persons has increased, largely because of media attention and conservative churches that have been promoting passage of the bill to their congregants.

Since 2009 a number of conservative U.S. evangelical pastors have visited Uganda and participated in high-profile "anti-gay" conferences. "Whatever view one takes about their theological perspective, in Uganda the words of these American evangelicals have had an incendiary effect," explained Rev. Keith Olstad, pastor at St. Paul-Reformation. "We, who are ELCA Lutherans, claim the word 'evangelical' because we believe we are bearers of 'news that is extraordinarily good.' But the message carried by these pastors to Uganda has only deepened the fear felt by LGBT Ugandans, and it is vitally important that we bear an *evangelical* witness in counterpoint to theirs."

Wingspan's first educational and fund-raising event will take place at St. Paul-Reformation (100 N. Oxford, St. Paul) on June 2, the eve of the Feast Day for Ugandan Martyrs from 7-8:30 p.m. It will include a screening of the documentary "Missionaries of Hate" (45 min.), an opportunity for discussion, and a request for donations. Funds raised will go to Bishop Christopher in Uganda to assist his efforts to promote human rights and his "safe house" project providing a place of sanctuary for those in fear for their lives.

David Weiss, chair of Wingspan, remarked, "We have heard it said that when the ELCA acted to widen its welcome to gay and lesbian Christians in 2009 it risked alienating many of our immigrant members and global partners. One of our hopes in this project is to help the larger church see that our widening welcome is both evangelical and life-giving to LGBT persons of faith both here in the U.S. and around the globe."

For more information about the event contact St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church, 651.224.3371. Secure online donations can be made at: www.stpaulref.org. Click on the "Donate" button at the bottom of the homepage; then find the "Wingspan Uganda Project" near the bottom of the Donations page and enter any amount of your choice. Checks can be made out to Wingspan ("Uganda" on the memo line) and mailed to St. Paul-Reformation, 100 N. Oxford St., St. Paul, MN 55104.