



# Katalyst

RECONCILING MINISTRIES NETWORK

WINTER 2015

GENDER

# IDENTITY & EXPRESSION

IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

# What's in a name?



C. Kristian Clauser  
(he, him, his)  
Chair,  
United Methodist Alliance  
for Transgender Inclusion

For many transgender people, one of the most profound life milestones we experience is being able to choose—and to finally be called by—names and pronouns that match who we really are. I never tire of hearing about the myriad ways in which we find our names—or they find us.

How did I pick my name? My grandfather owned a funeral home, so in my family there was no avoidance of mortality. This didn't have a gloomy effect, but instead lead us to consider the legacies we would leave behind. I searched for my name for a number of years, until I decided that the most wonderful eulogy that could be offered at my memorial service would be that people saw Christ reflected in my life. Although I often fall short of my mark, "Kristian" reminds me every day of who I want to be at my core, and the One I strive to follow.

The United Methodist Alliance for Transgender Inclusion (UMATI), one of RMN's five extension ministries, also has a name that was carefully chosen to capture the essence of our mission and ministry. For starters, we wanted it to reflect our religious grounding. We, too, are a people called Methodists who will not relinquish our baptisms, nor surrender our church to the forces of fear and oppression. Second, we thought our name should signal our commitment to collaborate with an ever-widening circle of individuals and organizations in the struggle for transgender justice. And lastly, we desired to communicate our hope that people of all gender identities and expressions will one day experience full inclusion in the life and leadership of The United Methodist Church, and in our society.

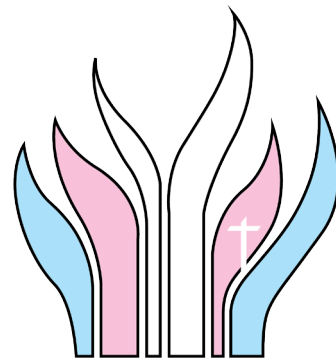
Toward that end, our work is organized around three interrelated ministries:

- **Nurture:** Offer support, fellowship, and connections to transgender individuals and their families throughout the UMC.
- **Outreach:** Provide tools, resources, and strategies to work toward the full inclusion of transgender people in the church and society.
- **Witness:** Provide a public witness in support of transgender people in local congregations, at UMC Conferences, and in society.

Exciting things are happening in all of these areas. A few highlights include:

- A Facebook Group launched earlier this year to help trans/genderqueer United Methodists—and our families and allies—to connect, share information, and support one another. In just a few months, we've grown to 250 members.
- UMATI was very active during *Gather at the River* in San Antonio this past August. We sponsored two standing-room only workshops, and co-sponsored a third with United Methodists of Color for a Fully Inclusive Church. We participated in worship leadership, and also hosted a special half-day pre-conference event.
- More trans/genderqueer writers are sharing their stories on the RMN Blog, creating visibility and bearing witness to the struggles of the transgender community.

If you place yourself somewhere under the transgender umbrella, or are an ally who shares our belief that gender diversity should be celebrated rather than censured, then I invite you to take the name "UMATI Member" and become a part of our network.



United Methodist Alliance  
for Transgender Inclusion  
RECONCILING MINISTRIES NETWORK



[www.rmnetwork.org/umati](http://www.rmnetwork.org/umati)

[www.facebook.com/groups/umati.rmn](https://www.facebook.com/groups/umati.rmn)

[transgender@rmnetwork.org](mailto:transgender@rmnetwork.org)



# 8 Ways to Welcome Trans People in Your Church

- 01 Not all trans people identify as male or female. Use language that is inclusive of all genders. Try using phrases like “people of all genders” instead of “both men and women.”
- 02 Develop liturgy or rituals to support trans children and adults during gender transition, name changes, or other life-cycle events.  
Don’t conflate gender identity and sexual orientation.
- 03 Some trans people are straight, some are not. While some trans people may face discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, the two are different, even if related, issues.
- 04 Practice sharing and asking about pronouns. Provide spaces for pronouns on things such as name tags and membership forms.
- 05 Affirm people of all genders from the pulpit and in liturgy.
- 06 Avoid using gendered language when greeting new people. Save endearing terms like “ladies,” “sir,” “gentleman,” etc for those who have already expressed that such terms match their gender.
- 07 Include “gender identity” in your statement of welcome.
- 08 Easily create gender neutral restrooms by replacing “men” or “women” on single stall restrooms with “all gender restroom” signs. Also, trust that individuals know which bathroom they should use and respect their decision.

I am OtherWise. I am male and female. Neither. Both. I have been given a non-binary gender. Made in the Image of a OtherWise God (Genesis) who transcends labels. “I am who I am.”

I am OtherWise. I honor the courage and strength of my Two Spirit siblings, who struggle to reclaim their traditional places in Native Circles: winkte, nadleeh, and more.

I am OtherWise. I acknowledge that it was settler-colonists, invader-immigrants from Europe who came with rigid and binary ideas about gender. Enforcing those ideas on Indigenous peoples in the Americas through violence and cultural genocide. Labeling my Two Spirit siblings as evil and feeding them, literally, to the dogs of war.

I am OtherWise. Those European settler-invaders were Christians, funded by Church People. The tools of gendered

violence had already been used for many generations in the Old Country to eliminate the OtherWise – gender non-conforming people, as well as pagans, wise women, healers, and other so-called heretics and perverts who challenged the status quo.

I am OtherWise. I hear the voices of the slaughtered still crying out from those “burning years.” The genocide of my own tribe long before Columbus “sailed the Ocean Blue.” Demons unleashed again in the Middle Passage, Residential Schools, Internment Camps... and so many other places from Ferguson, Missouri to Kampala, Uganda.

I am OtherWise. I am a Witness to the Resurrection. All of this is my heritage and inheritance. Jesus calling for our demons be cast out. Jesus inviting us to rise again from these tombs of our own making. Born again.

I am OtherWise. My pronouns are they/them.



Chris Paige is co-founder of Transfaith ([www.transfaithonline.org](http://www.transfaithonline.org)), a multi-faith, multi-racial, multi-gender experiment in being brave together. We are grateful for our partnership with United Methodists Alliance for Transgender Inclusion (UMATI).



# MY GENDER PRONOUNS

Rev. Kim Sorrells

As I approached the altar, I overheard the pastor as he served each person the Eucharist say:

“My brother, the Body of Christ” or  
“My sister, the Body of Christ.”

As I moved forward in line, I panicked. “He’s not going to know what to call me,” I thought. There I was, approaching the place most sacred in my faith, the place where I should find unending welcome at God’s table, and I wondered if I should turn back.

I was a first year seminarian at Candler School of Theology, and luckily the wise professor who was serving in chapel recognized his language was a mistake as he saw me step forward, unsure what my gender was. I could see his eyes shift as if he realized he couldn’t make these assumptions any longer in God’s house. “Friend, the Body of Christ,” he said as I held out my hands to receive the sacrament. I breathed a sigh of relief as I crossed myself and returned to my seat.

The thing is, I’m not always so lucky.

Something so simple as language has the ability to convey to a trans person like me either great welcome, or to jar me out of the worship experience entirely. I identify as genderqueer, a sort of “middle ground” or sometimes “outside the binary” on the gender identity spectrum. While assigned female at birth, I’ve never really identified as a woman, though I don’t really feel totally comfortable with the identity of a man either. Inasmuch as God is beyond gender, I as a genderqueer person reflect that part of the image of God in my very being. I love it!

The thing is, it’s not always easy – especially in church. I am neither your brother nor sister in Christ, but rather your sibling. I don’t like to be referred to as “she” or “he.” My preferred gender pronoun is “they.”

Many people are using “they” as a gender-neutral pronoun these days. In fact, it’s even an option on Facebook! Some argue we can’t use “they” as a singular pronoun, calling it grammatically incorrect.

Rev. Kim Sorrells currently serves as Minister for Youth and Spiritual Formation at Saint Mark UMC in Atlanta, GA. They are ordained in the United Church of Christ and a graduate of Candler School of Theology. Prior to seminary they served with Americorps assisting the homeless and low income populations of Atlanta.



"I'd recommend even having EVERYONE write their gender pronouns on their nametag. It is as simple as a word here or there, and yet those words can mean either a world of welcome or another wound inflicted by the church."

There have been a number of people who have written about how it is grammatically correct or acceptable, or who have written that language is always changing and shifting to accommodate our needs.

At the end of the day though, what it comes down to for me is this: what is higher, the laws of grammar or the laws of love? What is more important, grammar or showing the radical welcoming love of Christ? The words you used are just that - a sign of love and respect, or a way to dismiss me. When you use binary language (brothers and sisters) or use the wrong pronoun for me, it makes me feel that I don't belong. As I said before, while the professor in seminary caught his mistake, often people do not.

Just this summer, I was at an LGBT gathering where they anointed and prayed for us but I was misgendered throughout the prayer as the person praying for me referred to me as "she" and "her," despite having written my preferred pronouns on my nametag. I walked away feeling less than prayed for.

In contrast to that experience, I remember the first time someone prayed for me using my correct pronouns. It caught me off guard,

how "held" I felt in that moment. It surprised me that I felt so seen for the first time in prayer. "God watch over Kim; protect their huge heart," my friend prayed. It was as if someone finally prayed for my whole self, my true self.

When you use my correct pronoun it is like being seen and known, loved and affirmed. When you don't, it is a clear sign that I don't belong. Language matters. Do you use binary language in your worship service? Do you refer to the congregation as "brothers and sisters" or even divide voice parts by "men and women" instead of "low voices and high voices"? All of these are exclusive to those of us who don't really fit in either of those categories. Do you ask people for their preferred pronouns? I'd recommend even having EVERYONE write their gender pronouns on their nametag. It is as simple as a word here or there, and yet those words can mean either a world of welcome or another wound inflicted by the church.

I know that at the end of the day, I am lucky. I've known that God has seen me in all that I am. My prayer is that everyone, everyone, everyone would be so welcomed. Amen.

**hello**  
my name is

## Pronouns:

### Gender Pronoun Tips

- Do you create a way at your church for people to share their gender pronouns? Consider identifying your pronouns when introducing yourself or writing them on your name tag. The more you get used to sharing your own pronouns, the easier it is to remember to ask others for theirs as well!
- You can't tell someone is trans just by looking at them and you can't tell what pronouns a person uses by looking at them. Create a trans-friendly culture where it's as normal to ask someone their pronouns as it is to ask their name.
- Some trans and gender non-conforming people use the pronoun "they" as a gender-neutral singular. It's been used this way by Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde, and the Merriam-Webster Dictionary!
- It's ok to make mistakes. If you use the wrong pronoun, correct yourself and move on.
- Respect people's wishes. It can be difficult to get used to new pronouns for people, but using the right ones really makes a difference.

## Some common gender-neutral pronouns

Subject	Object	Possessive Adj.	Possessive Pronoun	Reflexive
they	them	their	theirs	themselves
ey	em	eir	eirs	emself
ze	hir	hir	hirs	hirsself
xe	xem	xyr	xyrs	xemself



# A Transfiguration Moment

**The gospel story makes it appear that Jesus was transformed – but Jesus was always divine. So was he changed – or were the Apostles who accompanied him changed?**

Two major transgender events take place in late November, Trans Awareness Week (November 14-20) and the long-established Transgender Day of Remembrance (November 20) at which the lives of trans people murdered over the past 12 months are memorialized at more than 300 vigils and gatherings across the world.

I want to use the Gospel story of the Transfiguration as a way to build a bridge of understanding within faith communities about the relationship of Trans Awareness to the devastating and crushing weight of the Trans Day of Remembrance. Unless you know us, really know us, the violence against trans people – physical, emotional, sexual, religious, political, economic violence – will continue unabated; as attested to by the 22 murders of trans people in the U.S. so far this year.

I have a different take on the Transfiguration Story than what has been traditionally portrayed to

most Christians. Let me start with a definition. The Greek root word for transfiguration is metamorphoo – the same as for transformation; what we today call metamorphosis when something has been transformed into its intended, mature destiny.

Jesus takes three trusted followers to the mountain to pray – Jesus prays, they fall asleep and when they wake they see him in a blaze of glory with Moses and Elijah. They understand his divinity.

The gospel story makes it appear that Jesus was transformed – but Jesus was always divine. So was he changed – or were the Apostles who accompanied him, Peter, James and John, the ones who were changed so that they were able to comprehend Jesus' divinity?

I am reminded of a story I read about a pastor talking to a trans man who had transitioned while a member of that church – asking what that

experience was like for him?

“The thing is, I don’t feel like I’ve changed at all. This just let my true self be known and seen by others. This is really who I have always been all along.” Then he said, “Transitioning affected the people around me much more than it affected me. They were the ones who changed their ideas, assumptions and prejudices.”

Amen and amen. Could that be Jesus speaking after coming down from the mountain?

I made my first presentations to a faith community shortly after I came out as a transgender woman and had found Spirit of the Lakes United Church of Christ. I was invited to the UCC Coalition’s National Gathering in Chicago in 1997 to talk to the attendees about being a trans woman and a person of faith. They had never had this conversation before and I was honored to be the one to get it started. Shortly thereafter I got a message

asking me to make my presentation more than just a talk. They wanted me to do something in song, or dance, or poetry – something with drama. I don't do any of those things so I wanted to decline the invitation. But I realized that I was being asked to help this community of people better understand transgender people and decided it was important for me to tell my story – in some dramatic form.

At the Coalition plenary session, I came out on stage as David, my masculine self. I was wearing a long, black terry cloth robe and my hair was short – I looked like a guy. I began telling my journey as a trans woman of faith – and as I talked I began putting on my makeup. At the end of that story, I reached for a wig that I had placed on a nearby table, arranged my hair, dropped my robe and stood before the audience as Barbara Satin wearing a “fabulous” gown. To this day I still get loving comments from people who were in the audience or who heard about the episode from others.

Five months later at a Thanksgiving service at a local Minneapolis church a woman stopped me and said she

had to talk. She told me she was at the Coalition meeting, saw my presentation, and said it had changed her life. Her father was transgender – a cross dresser. She had cut off all contact with him when she discovered this. They hadn't spoken in years. But when she saw and heard my presentation, she realized that she was seeing and hearing her father's story and she began to understand the challenges and frustrations he had been facing in his life. She was so moved that when she came back to the Twin Cities she reconnected with her dad and they have reclaimed their relationship.

So was that Chicago presentation a transfiguration moment for me – or for her? I don't tell this story because I feel it marks me as special. Rather, I feel it marks the individual who interacted with me as special. She saw and felt something from my presence that changed her. I had little to do with that. I was just Barbara Satin. But she was experiencing something much more and I believe it came from her being open to the moment and willing to accept what truth it offered for her life.

As we approach Trans Awareness Week, I wish you all Transfiguration moments in your lives.

2015 has been a year of great loss in the trans community. More than 22 trans and gender non-conforming people were reported murdered.

Trans women of color face the greatest risk of violence against trans people as transphobia, misogyny, and racism compound.

Suicide among trans and gender non-conforming youth has also remained painfully consistent despite increasing visibility of trans identities. 50% of trans youth will have attempted suicide by their 20th birthday.

Visit the official Trans Day of Remembrance website at [tdor.info](http://tdor.info) to read the list of names memorializing those who have been killed due to anti-trans hatred or prejudice.

What can you do at your church or community to affirm trans youth?

How can you combat racism, sexism, and transphobia to create a safer world for trans women of color?

Do you know what rights trans people have in your city? Consider supporting legislation that creates a safer and just community for trans people.

**Barbara Satin is a trans woman who serves as the Deputy Faith Work Director for the National LGBTQ Task Force.**

**She works for full inclusion of LGB and particularly Trans people in churches and other faith settings. As an 81 year old activist she also focuses on addressing faith and aging issues faced by LGBTQ seniors.**



# Disclosing my identity

I entered Boston University School of Theology in August 1980. None knew I was a transgender man. I had completed my medical transition five years earlier. Years of ridicule, social isolation, and discrimination led me to agree with my therapist and medical team who encouraged me to create a fictional history, only sharing my transgender history when absolutely necessary.

So when I moved to Boston I was totally alone for the first time, separated by many miles from family, friends, and the safety of my medical team; apart from anyone who knew my whole story.

Within six months, there was palpable tension among seminary students and faculty regarding LGBT persons, and when one staff member was terminated it was rumored to be because of sexual orientation. Faced with continuing my vocational call and ultimately facing rejection by my denomination, I made a decision. Following weeks of prayerful soul-searching I determined to continue towards ordination. If ordained, I would serve local United Methodist congregations to the best of my ability, including education and conversation about sexual orientation and gender identity. I believed in time I would openly share my history with my denomination.

The effects of sharing my story as a transgender clergy in The United Methodist Church continue to unfold. In the beginning, the support of parishioners and colleagues overwhelmed and sustained me in the midst of negative words and actions from others. Some on either “side”

asked why I disclosed my history, asking if it would have been better both for me and the church had I not.

These are the reasons I gave then and they remain true today: First, since my ordination in 1982 violence and oppression directed towards transgender persons has only increased. Second, transgender people suffer the highest rates of suicide, unemployment, poverty, and homelessness in our country. Third, many transgender and gender non-conforming children and



youth are rejected by family, friends, and faith communities, resulting in homelessness, isolation, and sex for survival. Fourth, transgender persons are often depicted as mentally unstable, perverted, predatory, and unable to function well in our society. People, particularly transgender youth, need role models. Last, but not least, The United Methodist Church in official policy addresses neither the spiritual or practical needs of this community and no matter what *The Book of Discipline*

or *The Book of Resolutions* say, covertly discriminates against transgender persons seeking to fully participate in the life of the church.

I make this last remark as the result of ongoing conversations I share with individuals currently seeking to live authentically and openly within the denomination. Despite the fact that more names than ever before will be read aloud during Transgender Day of Remembrance observances around the world this November, I remain hopeful about the future. There is more awareness and education about transgender people today than I could have imagined forty years ago. Medical research and technology have dramatically improved the lives of transgender persons.

Yet so much remains to be done to address the material and spiritual needs of our community, to decrease and reverse those grim statistics. I remain hopeful that sharing my story in some way helps create change in policies and practices, overt or covert, within The United Methodist Church that currently enable the social and spiritual abuse of an entire population of human beings collectively known as the transgender community.

Rev. David Weekley has served The United Methodist Church as an ordained clergy person since 1982.



Rev. Drew Phoenix is Executive Director of Identity, Inc., based in Anchorage, Alaska. Identity's mission is to advance Alaska's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community through advocacy, education and connectivity.

REV. DREW  
PHOENIX

## ON BEING THE

# FIRST

It has been 8 ½ years since I came out very publicly in front of the entire Baltimore-Washington Conference as a transgender man. I was the first ordained United Methodist Minister to do so.

Various attempts were made to discredit and de-frock me, and add language to the *Book of Discipline* that would explicitly prevent transgender individuals from being ordained. I am happy to say all of these oppositional efforts were unsuccessful; the *Book of Discipline* remains silent on the subject.

The religious right, however, is not silent. Throughout the country, attempts are being made at the ballot box to repeal legal protections for transgender individuals. Since moving to Anchorage and accepting the executive director position

of Alaska's LGBT organization, I have been working diligently to educate non-transgender people about transgender lives. This public education is key in order to counter the religious right's attempts locally to scare non-transgender people with horrific, hateful, cartoonish commercials of bearded men in dresses using women's restrooms.

On the one hand, it is commendable that no negative transgender-related language has been added to the *Book of Discipline* since I came out in 2007. On the other hand, it is unacceptable that transgender individuals are not mentioned and affirmed in the *Book of Discipline*. Our unique gifts to community go largely unrecognized and our presence in church, invisible.

Jesus incarnated a love which made visible the invisible, which created

space at the table for everyone, which honored and elevated those stigmatized and disenfranchised.

As we approach the season of Christ's advent, consider how your congregation can intentionally reach out to and affirm the presence of transgender individuals within your community.



## VISIBILITY MATTERS: Empower trans leadership in your church. With visibility comes understanding.

Trans women of color have a

1 in 8

chance of being murdered.

41%

of trans people have attempted suicide

30%

of trans people have been incarcerated

80%

of trans students felt unsafe at school because of their gender expression

For more information about these statistics and more, visit [transstudent.org/graphics](https://transstudent.org/graphics)

# Faith & Identity

Despite the challenges of The United Methodist church, many trans and gender non-conforming people have found a spiritual home in the denomination and remain committed to the helping the church recognize and affirm that God loves people of every gender and the church should reflect that.

Austin, TX



**Michelle Martin**

“I believe in hope and possibility, and I believe in addressing problems from the inside. That’s how I want to help foster meaningful growth and a mature spirituality for our church.

In times of unrest and conflict there is great opportunity for growth and change, and in the United Methodist Church we are in a momentous and historic period where we will either come together and embrace change as a church or we will redefine ourselves as multiple entities. I’m excited to see how we will resolve our issues with LGBTQ acceptance and hopeful for a time of great spiritual growth.”

Athens, OH



**Alex Shanks**

“My faith grounds my identity in Creation. Its an everpresent reminder that I am not a mistake, that God did not mess up, and I am exactly who I was always meant to be. I can embrace my identity in all of its nuances without shame. That is the essence of truly embracing oneself as a child of God.”

Ellensburg, WA



**Aaron Pazan**

“I think what keeps me so committed to The United Methodist Church is knowing that by staying and telling my personal story, I might help others have a better understanding of what it means to be genderqueer and a Methodist when the denomination’s doctrine says nothing positive. I get to help show that many pastors and church members are perfectly fine with genderqueer individuals and want us to succeed and have a good life. For me it’s knowing that pastors are proud of me for being ‘out’ in a denomination that says I can’t be ordained because of sexual identity.”

# Learning to Love my body



Photo credit:  
Kim Lathe Photography

Brett Ray is a trans man and the author of *My Name is Brett: Truths from a Trans Christian*. He is a second year Master's of Theological Studies student at Duke Divinity.

The process of learning how to love my body has been a long one. For many years, my body was something that, at best, I ignored and, at worst, I despised. Looking in the mirror used to be a task I only dared on my bravest of days because I was too afraid of the body that would greet me. I was too afraid that I would see a body that I knew was not my own, and yet, it was still mine; it was still the only body I had.

When I was 19 years old I finally figured out that I am a transgender man. That moment of clarity was a scary one but it came with a great amount of relief. I finally understood what had felt so “off” about myself for so many years. I finally understood, in a way I never had before, who I was.

But even once I started my social and physical transition, it took some time before I started taking my body seriously as my own. I can remember clearly the days of binders and packing before I had top surgery, or the days before I started hormone therapy when I would try to deepen my voice on my own. Some days were okay and others were just as dysphoric as they were before I

learned that I was Brett.

Today, though, that is not the case. Today, the mirror is my friend, and I wear clothes that fit my body rather than clothes that hide my body. Today, I am unashamed to go shirtless at the beach or pool. I am finally comfortable with my partner resting her hand or her head on my chest—a part of me that even I used to hate touching or looking at. Today, I am unashamed of the scars that line my finally flat chest.

But how does this transition (pun intended) from denial and shame about my body to love and care for my body take place? It started when I realized that God created my body trans and, more importantly, that God loves my trans body. My physical transition is not my attempt to correct a mistake God made. Instead, God made me trans. God made me as a person who was born to go on this transgender journey, and God loves me and leads me and walks with me every single step of the way. I fell in love with myself when I embraced the fact that God rejoiced with me the day I had my top surgery and mourned with me on the days I mourned my body.

For me, being trans is not standing in opposition to God's good creation. It's a matter of recognizing that trans bodies are just as much a part of God's good creation as cisgender bodies. It was a difficult lesson to learn but now that I have, I can't help but feel like myself. I can't help but feel like I'm allowed to love myself and accept the love and support that others offer me.

I truly couldn't have come to this place of self-love without the love and support of others. I couldn't have believed that God created and loved my trans body without pastors constantly reminding me that I'm a loved child of God. I couldn't have believed that my body was worthy of love and care without friends, family, and my partner telling me that they love my trans body as it is—trans and beautiful.

The words and actions of support from loved ones turned my life around. My prayer is that we might all begin to move through this world assuring trans and cis folk alike that they are not separate from their bodies and that God—and we—love them exactly as they are.





RECONCILING MINISTRIES NETWORK

123 W. Madison St. Ste 2150  
Chicago, IL 60602  
[www.rmnetwork.org](http://www.rmnetwork.org)

## Gifts given in memory of...

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Dierdre Ryan: John R. Calhoun

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Peggy & Cindy Hughes, Rev H Sharon,  
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Prickett, Robert Herring, Sarah Wilke &  
Nancy Kruh, Sarah Miller, Sharon Helton  
& Wayne Wood, Stephen Mallett & Susan  
Savage, Steve Digby, Susanna Southard,  
Terrell McDaniel, Theodore Hampton, Tom  
Lee, Vicki Bandy

# Thank you!