



## Church display relates gay experience

### Liturgical stoles a collection of stories

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By Charles Agar

ASPEN — The Aspen Community Church welcomes the Shower of Stoles Project, a display of liturgical stoles that tell the stories of gays, lesbians and transgender people worldwide.

Chuck Cram, the Methodist minister at the Community Church, first saw the Shower of Stoles at a general conference of Methodists and decided to bring the display to the church to coincide with Gay Ski Week. The stoles will be on display through Sunday, Jan. 21, and Cram will deliver a sermon about Christianity and homosexuality at 9:30 a.m. that day.

Each stole is a story, and more than 100 are on display this week. Clergy who have been defrocked or have stepped down because of their sexual orientation have contributed some. Parishes have signed others in support of gay and lesbian parishioners or clergy.

"We have sins to make up for," Cram said. After centuries of oppression, punishment and misery against people of a different sexual orientation, Cram said, it's time to do it differently.

Homosexuality is "incompatible with Christian teachings" according to the Methodist Church's Book of Discipline. But Cram is part of a group of "reconciling" Methodists who oppose the church's official position and want the church to be more open to alternative lifestyles.

Cram is frustrated with church officials who use scripture as a justification for hate, and he wants to reach out to the gay and lesbian community. Dogma and guilt drive many spiritual people away from organized religion, he said, and he wants his church to be a safe place for all.

The stole project started more than 10 years ago when Presbyterian pastor Martha Juillerat was defrocked for coming out and speaking about gay and lesbian rights. When Juillerat went before the church council to stand down as a pastor, she laid out some 80 liturgical stoles that friends, supporters and other homosexual clergy sent her.

**That collection grew to more than 1,000, and the display became Juillerat's ministry. She traveled with the stoles and told her story for a decade until she passed the exhibit on to the Institute for Welcoming Resources, an arm of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force that works with religious bodies on gay and lesbian rights issues.**

"We clearly want to make the church welcoming to all," said Rebecca Voelkel, program director of the Institute for Welcoming Resources. "And we have all kinds of resources that engage people."

Voelkel likened the stoles to the AIDS Memorial Quilt, and said that the human stories of the stoles engages people. "You can't argue with someone's lived experience."

Aspen is a liberal place, Cram said, and he commended the organizers of Gay Ski Week. But he

hopes that efforts like the Shower of Stoles and his ministry will give people further opportunity to abandon old beliefs about homosexuality.