



PLYMOUTH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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REV. LOIS MUELLER
MINISTER

To Whom It May Concern:

October 10, 2008

Gary Anderson and American Legends Theatre Works came to Plymouth United Church of Christ in Oakland September 25-27, 2008 and presented *Lucasville: The Untold Story of a Prison Uprising*. Our Justice and Witness Ministry was pleased to sponsor the play and glad to address the issues of the death penalty and wrongful convictions to the local community.

This play, co-written by Gary Anderson and Staughton Lynd, was presented with a cast of 17, who presented a dynamically staged reading presentation of the longest prison uprising in American history in 1993 Lucasville Ohio.

This is a powerfully sad play. In real life the five inmates are waiting to be put to death. Anderson brings the injustice of this and the wrongness of the death penalty to light with his production. Plymouth Church stands against the death penalty as our Christian faith would have us do.

Costuming and sets were minimal, with an authentic sound track and projected images from the prison revolt. The script is strong enough to stand on its own and needs no elaboration, and is only enhanced by the special effects. It is comprised of verbatim conversations, court documents, and actual tape recordings of the events which led up to the outrageously unjust trials and capital sentencing of the five prisoners who tried to bring peace to the prison after the famous uprising which resulted in the deaths of ten people.

This story of the friendship of three Black Muslims and two Aryan Brotherhood members is a remarkable story by itself. The audience members responded to the subject matter and the impassioned performers with tears, gasps, sighs, and laughter as there were some funny bits, too. Seeing four men carry one of the murdered men from the rebellion as a "body" through the audience was chilling. The rather stark beauty of the Plymouth Sanctuary actually worked very well as a performance space, the enormous wooden cross a reminder of the unjust taking of life.

Astoundingly, Anderson pulled this production off with only 8 days of rehearsal. He selected a cast and did the staging and blocking as they were learning the lines. The actors were natural and convincing, and scary when necessary. After the performances the audience and family and friends of the cast had a chance to meet and talk about the justice problem. Both the Death Penalty Focus and the Alameda County Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty shared their literature. Neighbors found each other and reconnected with church members.

The play is intense and gratifying, and the week of preparation, though intense in itself, was thoroughly justified by the presentation.

We strongly recommend your consideration of the play, the issues and this remarkably touching program.

If you have any questions please call me.

Michelle Burr, 510 - 451- 3608

Moderator for the Plymouth United Church of Christ