

A night of remembrance



Madee Weisner and her father, Ben, of St. Louis Park, listened to a Holocaust survivor's reflection during Tuesday's Yom HaShoah commemoration in Mendota Heights. Photos by JEFF WHEELER • jwheeler@startribune.com

Pastor says love, not fear, is the basis of salvation

• North Central University was not an easy place for a Christian college student to come to terms with "gay tendencies."

By PAMELA MILLER
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As a fervently Christian student at North Central University, the Minneapolis college run by the Assemblies of God, Laurie Crely believed "you had to be straight to be a Christian."

"I had internalized a belief from the teachings of the church and school that I should fear and reject gay people as wicked, void of God's presence," she said.

When a friend revealed that he was gay, she said, "I felt I had to cut relations with him off to remain pure."

But privately, Crely, a cross-cultural-studies major, was wrestling with her own secret, and in her senior year she decided to confide in someone. After much agonizing and prayer, she told a friend and fellow student that she was struggling, privately and in counseling, with what at the time she called "gay tendencies."



Crely

The friend went directly to the dean of women, who, Crely said, "called me in and questioned me."

"I was shocked when she said she'd heard this rumor from others," she said. "Even when I was most in line with the rules — celibate and closeted — people still perceived me to be gay."

The experience "shook the foundations of my faith," Crely said. She fell into depression.

"I felt I couldn't trust anyone, but most of all, I wrestled with myself," she said. "I agonized: If I was so pure, why was I so miserable? Why was this theology so merciless and destructive to me?"

Finding her faith home

In the years since, Crely, now 42 and associate pastor at Parkview United Church of Christ in White Bear Lake, has reconciled her faith and her sexuality.

She now believes that "love, not fear of punishment, is the basis of salvation and true Christianity."

As a pastor, she still believes that love and sexuality are best expressed in a committed, monogamous relationship. She's channeled her view that gays and lesbians should have the right to marry and have families into activism as co-director of the Minnesota Faith, Families, Fairness Alliance, an interfaith advocacy group.

"The grace of God" and the support of fellow Christians have led to a life "rich in blessings," said Crely, who lives in Golden Valley with her partner of nine years, Denise, her partner's daughter and an ark's worth of pets.

A painful break

Last week, Crely was among several speakers at a rally at Elliot Park, across the street from North Central. Earlier in the day, young activists from the Soulforce Equality Ride had been barred from entering the school to talk about its stance on homosexuality. (North Central offered to talk to the Soulforce riders through a third party, but the activists declined.)

Crely continues: A "wonderful, healing time. E10 ▶



Ralph Jacobus, 85, of St. Paul, was one of the Holocaust survivors at Beth Jacob Congregation Tuesday night. His son, Dan, stood behind him. Jacobus, a native of Berlin, lost 21 members of his family, including both of his parents, in the Holocaust.

Even though it is a vanishing generation, Holocaust survivors mark the commemoration of Yom HaShoah each year. On Tuesday they gathered at Beth Jacob Congregation in Mendota Heights, where they shared stories and prayers and promised to never forget. This year, special note was given to Henry Oertelt, 85, of Little Canada, who was a prisoner at Theresienstadt, Auschwitz and Flossenbürg concentration camps during World War II. He is one of five people whose stories of survival are highlighted on the website of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. (The site can be reached at www.startribune.com/a1238.) □

An exploration of the roots of our faiths

• Bestselling author Karen Armstrong talked about the common basis for the world's great religions.

By BARBARA TUTTLE
Special to the Star Tribune

With the contemporary world haunted by terrorism committed in the name of God, bestselling author Karen Armstrong, in her latest book, plumbs ancient history to uncover the essential message of today's great religions.

Whatever your religious leaning, the foundation of your belief is the Golden Rule. In "The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions," Armstrong cites the sages of the Axial Age, the period from 900-200 B.C. The sages during that time — including Buddha and Confucius — preached the

message "Do not unto others as you would not have done unto you." In later centuries, the message was passed on by others, including Rabbi Hillel and Jesus. They all were responding to the violence of their own time.

Armstrong, 61, a former nun whose 1993 book "A History of God" gave her an international reputation as scholar, writer and speaker, made three book-tour stops in Minnesota recently. She took time out to discuss her new book, as well as prospects for peace in our time.

Armstrong continues: Dogma is an expression of ego, she says. E10 ▶



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Karen Armstrong said her next book, "Incarnation," will address the era when people began seeing the divine in the human.



BELIEVER ROD SAWTELL, 76, ST. BONIFACIUS

Occupation: Pastor (retired)

Faith: Christian

Place of worship: Watertown Evangelical Free Church

Favorite hymn: "All the Way My Savior Leads Me," written by Fanny Crosby, a blind poet, in 1875

Favorite Bible passage: Hebrews 12:1-3: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us

throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow

weary and lose heart."

What do you believe and why? I believe Christ died on the cross for my sins. He gives my life meaning and purpose. Jesus said, "I am come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." (John 10:10) He also said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) I have come to Jesus in

faith and repentance of my sin. He has received me by his grace as his child. Having him as my Lord and savior today and knowing that I will be with him in heaven gives me great peace and joy, even in difficult situations.

If you know a person of faith who would be a good candidate for "Believer," e-mail pmiller@startribune.com.