

All the Little Children

J. Kelly Poorman

iUniverse (May 2009)

Softcover \$14.95 (199pp)

978-0-595-52986-5

In a culture whose media are soaked in hateful anti-gay imagery the malevolent words and deeds of hatemongers like Fred Phelps and legislative initiatives that attempt to deprive gay people of their rights this is a refreshing and heartwarming story.

Robert Morrison is an openly gay Christian in his fifties who returns to his hometown to care for his ailing mother. He volunteers at his childhood church but hesitates to join afraid he'll be rejected because of his sexual orientation. On the contrary the pastor welcomes him warmly.

Robert's acceptance in the church is limited however. He is not permitted to mentor a teenaged boy for confirmation class because too many congregants would be uncomfortable with a gay man in that role. Working through his anger Robert exclaims "In a number of books of the Bible it states that Jesus said 'let all the little children come to me.' Not all the straight white male children." Although he's never allowed to be a confirmation mentor Robert does go on to lead the congregation to certification as an "open and affirming" church.

The author has previously published two novels *The Long Pink Line* and *Roman and Jules*. This book started out as a play which Poorman has produced in church workshops. Here he includes the same story in both novel form and as a script. While the story works well in both formats it seems better suited to be performed.

Poorman has created realistic characters in a true-to-life situation. They struggle with prejudice religious beliefs society's expectations and self-loathing. The author has a good ear for natural dialogue and a fine sense of dramatic tension. For instance the stage directions call for a large timer to be prominently placed on the stage set to thirty-five minutes. When that time is up the action freezes while a character announces: "Every thirty-five minutes a lesbian gay bisexual or transgendered child tries to commit suicide. Every five hours one succeeds." There are many such powerful moments in *All the Little Children*.

Without preaching or lecturing Poorman demonstrates that it is possible to be both gay and Christian and beautifully depicts his faith in a God who accepts and loves all people regardless of sexual orientation. For readers who are not members of the author's denomination it would have been helpful to define some of the church vocabulary he uses and he would have benefited from the services of a good editor as the book is rife with misspellings and poor punctuation. These shortcomings do not detract from the quality and meaningfulness of the story which carries a message desperately needed in these times.

KAREN MCCARTHY (July 8, 2009)

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