

GALA members and friends,

GALA has served the LGBTQIA+ community in Community of Christ for over 30 years. In this time, we have looked to the future with hopes and dreams to expand education in congregations about issues relating to the LGBTQIA+ community. Our defining goal has been inclusion and understanding, love and acceptance for all.

The theme for the 2017 retreat was introduced with those hopes and dreams still intact. The GALA board recognizes the need to include the next generation of our community in leadership and decision making. In recent decades, Queer Theory has taken off in various fields of the social sciences. Sociologists and theologians have looked at our history and how our community has fit into both secular and religious societies. This is exciting to many in the LGBTQIA+ community, and reclaiming spaces that we have historically been kept out of can be empowering. For these persons, queer has become a word that rejects strict binaries and gender roles while also providing space for those who do not consider themselves strictly lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. The word queer is used heavily in academia and has been culturally reclaimed by many – though not all – in the community. When deciding on the theme for the retreat, this sparked both interest and hesitation within the GALA board.

Pairing the word queer with Jesus' beatitudes was intentional. Jesus, at his core, was riddled in reclaiming labels, tearing down walls that divide, and breaking through binary veins of thought. His ministry, especially as highlighted in the Sermon on The Mount, took traditionally-dismissive labels and showed how the poor, the mourning, the hungry, etc. would be blessed. Through conversation and prayer, the GALA board felt that by combining these two elements, we would be flipping the script on a word and label that has been used to harm, and reclaim it as part of the gospel story that we have historically been isolated from.

We recognize that some found this year's retreat theme, "Blessed Are the Queer in Spirit," hurtful. We knew the theme would push comfort zones, but we underestimated the magnitude of pain it would cause among some of our members and friends. We truly do apologize for that pain and our part in it. Our hope is that our annual retreat will continue to build bridges and empower our community. We pray for reconciliation as we move forward and explore these topics together. We will continue to promote understanding and healing while remaining faithful to our Enduring Principle of the Worth of All People.

GALA's future is bright, and as we build that future together we find hope in Doctrine and Covenants 165: "Oneness and equality in Christ do not mean uniformity. They mean Unity in Diversity and relating in Christ-like love to the circumstances of others as if they were one's own... And, always remember, the way of suffering love that leads to the cross also leads to resurrection and everlasting life in Christ's eternal community of oneness and peace. Trust in this promise."

With love and peace,  
The GALA Board

