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THE  LETTER

Serving members and friends of
Community of Christ

November 2015
Volume 26 Issue 4

2015 GALA Retreat



Hand in hand—we are one! GALA celebrated this theme at our annual International Retreat held at the Bluewater Campground in beautiful Lexington, Michigan. On the banks of Lake Huron, we made new friends and reconnected with old friends and family. We celebrated our connections to each other and our tentative new connections within the larger church body.

We were one in Christ as we prayed for each other and worshipped together. We were one in Christ as we studied theology together with Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith. We were one in Christ as we celebrated at this year's banquet . . . "Under the Sea" (or maybe Under the C?).

We walked hand in hand as we did crafts with the children at the retreat. We walked hand in hand as we took each others' hands, both literally and figuratively in construction paper, at the final service. We walked hand in hand as we colored our tree on tapestry, weaving the beautiful colors together into one single tree of life.

If you were able to join us, whether for the first time or the latest of many times, thank you! We are glad to have added you to our fellowship and our family. If you were unable to join us in Michigan, we would love to see you on Labor Day weekend of next year, or before!

Thank you for the love, acceptance, and support you provided to each other at the retreat, as well as throughout the in-between times. Thank you for making a difference, sometimes THE difference, to each other and the community outside the reach of this group. Thank you for walking hand in hand—we are truly one.



2016 GALA Board Retreat

The GALA board retreat, to be held January 15-17, 2016, will be in Independence, Missouri, at the Open Arms Community of Christ congregation (1021 W. College). The congregation has just approved their welcoming statement to become a member of the Welcoming Community Network. Members and friends are invited to an open house/GALA visiting time on Saturday, January 16, at 6:00 p.m.

GALA

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Visit us on the web

www.galaweb.org

President's Message

Erin Cavanaugh, GALA President

GALA knows change. We have seen many changes throughout our thirty years, both of blessing and of sadness. These past few months have brought more changes to GALA. Clyde Phillips-Frey, who has served GALA for many years, has resigned from his position as president of the board.

We are sad to see Clyde leave GALA. He has given much to the board over the years, and for that we are enormously grateful. On behalf of GALA I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Clyde for all of his service.

I never expected to be writing a letter to the GALA membership as your president, yet here I am. Through the past few months leading to me becoming president of GALA, I have felt God's blessing. My hesitation to serve in this role has lessened. At the GALA International Retreat, I could feel God leading me toward leadership and was unsure why I was feeling this call, as I was clearly vice president. In my prayers I often end up laughing because God leads me to completely unexpected places. He shows me the path and I take a few wrong turns before I get on board. I am on the path now and ready to lead. I ask for your continued support in this role, for without the **membership** of GALA we are nothing. When GALA comes together we have done great things and I have seen great blessings.

As we enter into GALA's 30th anniversary year, I know that we will continue to do great things. I am eager to see how God will bless this community and, in return, allow us to share His blessings. Please keep GALA in your continued prayers for guidance that we will be able to be there, ready to answer the call, to welcome all into community.



GALA Financial Report

by Lisa Meyer, Treasurer

As treasurer of GALA, I believe it is my job to keep you informed about the state of the financial affairs of the organization. I try to be as transparent as possible, so if you find you have questions about the budget, the expenses, or anything else financial regarding GALA, please ask and I will get back to you at my earliest convenience. This is an organization that we all care deeply about, and I want to ensure it's solvency for the future. Our current budget shows us at having brought in \$8,974, which amounts to 72% of our budgeted income at the end of the third quarter (9/30/15). Our expenses have totaled \$5,946, or 48% of our budgeted expenses at the end of the quarter. This leaves us with a positive cash flow of \$3,028 for the first 3 quarters of 2015.

The recent annual retreat held at Bluewater Campgrounds was blessed to have an amazing cook/kitchen staff who were able to save us nearly \$1000 on anticipated food costs by taking advantage of discount options. In addition, the silent auction brought in \$800, which was the largest amount in my memory of GALA.

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These allowed us to have a retreat that not only made its expenses, but that profited the organization a little over \$1600.

Thanks to all who attended and made extra donations to assist in covering expenses and allowing us to offer a large number of scholarships for those who couldn't afford the full cost of the retreat. Let's continue building community together!



This Is My Story

by Dave Brosh, Member-at-large

This month (November), I celebrate my fourth year as a member of Community of Christ. The road has not been easy, but has been worth every second! I remind myself, every day, how truly blessed I am.

Over four years ago, I was on a spiritual quest. Longing for a place that could be my spiritual home. I checked out a myriad of religions. Do I return to the religion of my ancestors, Judaism? Do I become a Buddhist? Should I explore atheism? All these questions kept popping up, as I wanted to fill a void in my life when I quit attending the LDS Church.

Being gay was a major reason for not further attending the LDS Church, but not the only one. I had constantly gotten in trouble, because I was always questioning, and willing to buck the system. I am a free thinker.

Once I discovered Community of Christ, it seemed like a natural fit. I had found my "spiritual home". There were many individuals who reached out in friendship, and helped me on the early part of my journey. Then, came the hard part! I swear G-d has a sense of humor! He wanted to see what I would do if plunked down into a very homophobic congregation. It happened! From day one, I experienced what would turn out to be a constant environment of hostility.

After National Conference, the congregation closed its doors. Everyone left, angrily, except for the pastor and myself. It was a very confusing time and a very lonely time. However, we quickly caught our breath, and continued our path into the unknown future. We soon found we were not alone. So many in our mission center reached out and

supported us.

Our building was rented out for three years. Fortunately, that time will be up in less than a year. Our numbers are small, but we are currently working with some LDS seekers. We meet twice a month, renting a room in the local Adventist church.

I was ordained an elder earlier this year. It was a beautiful service. Friends came from all over the mission center to attend. I even invited some nonmember friends to participate in the service. It has had such a positive impact. Suddenly I feel I can't make excuses anyone, and really need to be in the forefront, blazing the trail. A few months before my ordination, I was voted onto the GALA board as Member-at-Large.

We have use of our church building on Tuesday. We decided to reach out to the needs of the local LGBT community. I had heard the LGBT youth had nowhere to meet. They occasionally met at a park and also at Starbucks. Neither were conducive to a safe atmosphere.

The LGBT Youth are now meeting on a regular basis in our church building on Tuesday afternoon. This project is still being fleshed out, but it is a start. I see a bright future. Things are, admittedly, going slow, but going in the right direction. Prayers appreciated!



Welcoming Community Network (WCN) Corner

by Pat Marmoy

Receiving training through the national organization, Institute of Welcoming Resources, I have enjoyed becoming familiar with the statement: It's all about "being church". In other words, if the work of the church is to be the body of Christ in the world today, then truly "being church" is accepting, affirming and giving ministry to absolutely anyone who walks in the door.

On occasion, I have used a video of a UCC advertisement to open Welcoming Community Network classes regarding the process needed to create a culture of welcoming in a congregation. It shows "objectionable" people being propelled out of the sanctuary like a pilot from a plane about to crash; people like a homeless person, a mother with a crying baby, an old lady with a walker and a gay couple. They

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go on to say, in effect, that, unlike many churches, you can be sure of being accepted in one of their congregations. It is a funny metaphor of what actually does happen in many of our congregations.

A recent Church School Class people reflected on lapses in the hospitality of their own congregation. They included a former pastor's son absent from the congregation for years then showing up looking rather disheveled. He overheard someone say "I hope he doesn't come back again". A couple black young men stood for a long time after the close of a service before anyone went to meet them. A woman in a motorized chair that came and went without notice. None of these people returned. All this in a congregation that prides itself as being warm and welcoming – just not quite "being church". It appears that although we think of ourselves as being welcoming to everyone, that is not always the case. Basically, everyone I talk to describe their congregation as welcoming. If I press them on it and say "If an openly gay couple came into your congregation could you guarantee that no one would give them 'the eye'?" that usually changes the picture.

As a U.S. national church we have changed policy to give the LGBTQ community full inclusion in participation in the church. In some people's minds that solves it all! Now everyone is welcome; except that is just not true. Things are changing, but in many of our congregations and the minds of many people, the culture that views being welcoming to this community as incompatible with the gospel of Christ still exists. There is a need for the application of a well-formed process to bring about the change of that culture. This is the work of WCN.



Michigan Mission Center Conference

By Erin Cavanaugh, President

GALA continues to make a difference in the places throughout the country where we live and attend church. One of those places was at the Michigan Mission Center Conference. GALA set up a table with information and support for those persons interested during breaks in the conference. Thanks to a generous donation, we were able to

disseminate several free copies of both *Touched By Grace* and *Homosexual Saints* as well as several free copies of *For the Bible Tells Me So*. We also had on hand information on the organization, the Welcoming Community Network, and LGBT issues. There were quotes from the stories in *Touched By Grace* for conference participants to view, and a variety of books able to be used for inclusive children's moments or focus moments for congregations to examine and discuss.

The conference participants were very interested in the materials, as well as in asking questions about the organization and the status of LGBT individuals within the church and within local congregations. Or perhaps they were most interested in the candy? But either way, we had lots of good conversations and made new friends and allies. We spoke with several conference attendees who were coming to terms with newly outed children or grandchildren. We had good conversations with many people about becoming welcoming congregations and how to welcome those who currently don't feel welcome within our church. GALA is moving . . . both in the church and in the world!



All Are Welcome

By Pam Robison, Under-secretary for Publications

In 2007, Steve Veazey, prophet-president of Community of Christ, brought prophetic guidance to Community of Christ at the denomination's World Conference (international meeting of members) which included the following:

- a. Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God's shalom, invites all people to come and receive divine peace in the midst of the difficult questions and struggles of life. Follow Christ in the way that leads to God's peace and discover the blessings of all of the dimensions of salvation.
- b. Generously share the invitation, ministries, and sacraments through which people can encounter the Living Christ who heals and reconciles through redemptive relationships in sacred community. The restoring of persons to healthy or righteous relationships

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with God, others, themselves, and the earth is at the heart of the purpose of your journey as a people of faith....

7c. It is not pleasing to God when any passage of scripture is used to diminish or oppress races, genders, or classes of human beings. Much physical and emotional violence has been done to some of God's beloved children through the misuse of scripture. The church is called to confess and repent of such attitudes and practices.

In 2010, he brought additional guidance including this:

- 6 a. As revealed in Christ, God, the Creator of all, ultimately is concerned about behaviors and relationships that uphold the worth and giftedness of all people and that protect the most vulnerable. Such relationships are to be rooted in the principles of Christ-like love, mutual respect, responsibility, justice, covenant, and faithfulness, against which there is no law.
- b. If the church more fully will understand and consistently apply these principles, questions arising about responsible human sexuality; gender identities, roles, and relationships; marriage; and other issues may be resolved according to God's divine purposes. Be assured, nothing within these principles condones selfish, irresponsible, promiscuous, degrading, or abusive relationships.

These words of guidance seem particularly appropriate at this time, when many members of the LGBTQ communities are concerned about the recent LDS change in policy that denies the sacraments of baby blessing, baptism, ordination, and the opportunity to go on missions to children of same-sex parents. This policy also states that individuals who are in same-sex relationships are in apostasy and a disciplinary hearing is required.

Many members of GALA understand the heartache this change in policy has created in families. We are aware that some have chosen to leave the LDS church, while others are struggling to reconcile their faith with their love for their families. Many have found a safe place in an online seekers group on Facebook, in local Community of Christ congregations, or in one-on-one discussions with individuals

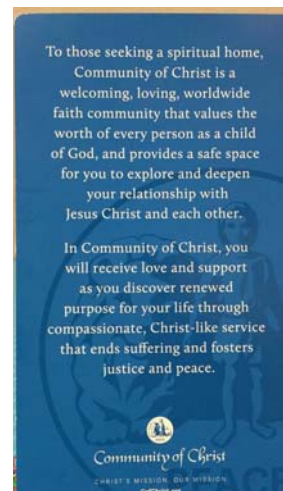
they can trust.

In Community of Christ, the sacrament of baby blessing is available to any family who desires that prayer and community support for their child. Children may be baptized (with parental consent) at the age of eight, regardless of the parental relationship. Same-sex marriage (where legal) may be performed by Community of Christ ministers in the USA, Canada, Australia, and Europe, and members of the LGBTQ community may be ordained to function as priesthood members.

Three resources available for individuals who are looking for a church home where they would be welcome are listed below; we will add others online as we become aware of them.

- Facebook Latter-day Seekers group - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/latterdayseekers/> - A group for members of Community of Christ and earnest seekers with a Restoration heritage who are investigating what Community of Christ has to offer as a spiritual home. Members must be approved by the moderators in order to keep it a safe place.
- Welcoming Community Network listing of Community of Christ congregations that are welcoming to members of the LGBTQ communities - <http://welcomingcommunitynetwork.org/wcndirectory.htm>
- Community of Christ LGBTQIA Prayers and Safe Zone - <https://www.facebook.com/Community-of-Christ-LGBTQiA-Prayers-and-Safe-Zone-1654228701494911/> . This is their page, and on it is a place to request information about the website.

All are welcome at Community of Christ.





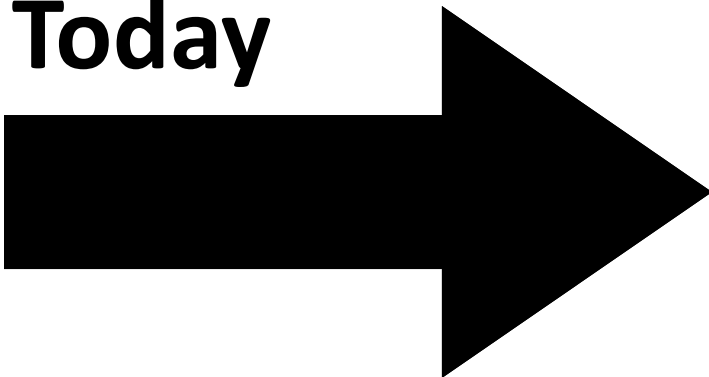
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