

THE **galaNEWS** letter

Fall 1997

The Call to Retreat

In the midst of a battle, sounding the call to retreat is not the same as waving a white flag. Retreating isn't defeat. It is a temporary withdrawal, an admission that the opponent is stronger for the moment. A retreat is for the rallying of the troops. It is a time for the soldiers to rest and build strength to renew the fight again.

GALA's annual retreat provides a time for peace, security, study, prayer, meditation, fun and fellowship. Participants commune with God and with each other renewing their strength to live their lives fully and to continue their struggle for justice.

The following thoughts and experiences of a few of those who participated in the 1997 GALA International Retreat demonstrate the renewing power of the experience. —AS

Marge Damitz (California) — I looked forward with great anticipation to my second GALA International Retreat. I needed to meet with my new friends of last year. What a joy it was to watch the volleyball games with the diversity of players and witness the joy and love you had for one another. A paradigm could be drawn here. Wouldn't it be wonderful if all walks of life could be so.

Frankly, I considered not going to the campfire on Lake Huron. I was tired. However, I went and enjoyed so much the singing, words expressed, Lauren singing and Mark playing the instrument he had made. On the way back to camp I was walking alone, but I didn't feel alone. At the top of the stairs Alan Cochran just came out of the blue and took my hand. God's love touched me deeply through Alan's firm hand as we walked back to camp. When we least expect it we are abundantly blessed.

Melba Jean Dixon (Michigan) — Attending the 1997 GALA Retreat with my son, Mark, and my dear friend, Marge, held special meaning for me. I am very pleased that more parents were in attendance. The loving support of Nick's parents as he ably presented the Bible class was indeed a joy.

The Olympic fun, the laughs we shared at the Talent Show, the Spirit's warmth, and the tears that flowed as we broke bread together during our closing worship service, are all placed in my storehouse of memories.

I will long remember Ed and I sharing after the campfire. I am grateful that, in some small way, I contributed to his newly-found courage to speak to his parents. For all these experiences I praise God.

Ed Davis (Illinois) — While sitting on the shore of Lake Huron listening to the crackle of the campfire my perspective about myself and others changed instantly. After all the camp songs were sung there was a time for sharing thoughts, prayers and wishes. I felt I needed to share with everyone how welcomed they had made me feel. However, when I started to speak different words and emotions came forth. The words were not to thank everyone for being so welcoming, but to thank all the parents at the retreat for showing me their love and support of their gay children. Their love gave me hope that one day my parents would also be as loving and supportive.

Well guess what? As promised, two weeks after the retreat I told my parents that I am gay. Finally what I had always prayed for came true, their love and support of me hasn't changed even though I am gay.

Todd Davison (Missouri) — I will always remember that rather impromptu campfire we had after the talent show on Sunday night. The free-form nature of the evening was refreshing to me. Everyone just called out what they wanted to sing, or people shared, or prayed or just enjoyed being together. So often I find myself trying to plan spiritual experiences and I am surprised and awed when they sneak up and happen to me.

Sharon Troyer (Colorado) — My favorite things were the rich ministry by Dave Premoe, the wide participation with parents, spouses and newcomers, and the unforgettable "first ever" GALA Olympic Games!

Mark Henson (Kansas) — Over the years, I have made friendships with individuals whose [sexual orientation] is different from mine. My questions have been: How can I be supportive and understanding of you? How can I be helpful to you? The retreat was a beginning to the answering of these questions.

I am thankful for having the opportunity to attend the retreat, make new friends, learn new things about people, and find new brothers and sisters in Christ with whom I can share ministry. Thank you for being my friends. I now have more friends to lift up to God for blessing.

Nick VanAtter (New York) — Probably the biggest highlight for me at the GALA retreat this year was to have my mom and dad be a part of it. I believe that they felt comfortable enough to share their feelings. Even though we are a close family and always talk about things openly, there seems to be things, in regard to my sexuality, that we assume and don't discuss. The retreat helped to bring the walls down. A lot of personal growth on their part as well as mine took place. The retreat allowed my parents an opportunity to see what is so special about GALA and each person involved in the group.

My dad especially surprised me. He is a pretty open guy, but during the retreat he seemed very nervous. My dad shared things that I have never heard. I believe that his nervousness was not from the fact that he was at a "gay" retreat, but rather from the fact that he was in a spiritual setting and felt touched enough by God's spirit to want to share. That would be a first for my dad and for that I am thankful.

I don't believe that my parents realized how much their presence at the retreat meant to other individuals. Several were contemplating coming out to their families and were very upset with the possibility of rejection. My parents participation helped them think otherwise and hopefully gave them courage to take that step.



A Word from the President

Two months have passed since many of us joined together in Michigan at the annual GALA International Retreat. When things get a little harried with life, or at work, or with the local congregation I think back to a wonderful retreat. Why was it wonderful? Because I spent three days with some of the most caring people in the world. People who love each other unconditionally, listen to each other without judging, know how to laugh, who sing in beautiful harmony, and welcome the spirit of the living Christ into our midst.

That alone would make it memorable. Yet there was more. My mother was there supporting me, we built teamwork together playing some outrageous games, and we had many different people sharing their talents. Anthony's direction of the retreat was excellent. Without Kip and Allan's assistance we wouldn't have had a smooth running kitchen nor would we have moved people from Detroit to up around the thumb of Michigan. Sharon, Nick, Dave, Darwin, Libby, Jerry, and Dan offered loving teaching, pastoral care, energetic campfires, and ministry through the sharing of talents.

We held the annual GALA business meeting where we decided to support the continued outreach of GALA through a commitment to develop literature to share with potential new members and friends, donate current texts on homosexuality to Graceland and Park Colleges, and be a supporting organization of the 1998 RLDS World Conference. I want to say thank you to Todd and Mark for the counsel that they have provided this past year and for their sharing of the responsibility of chairing the leadership of the business meeting.

With the acceptance of the revised by-laws, an appointed position of Chaplain was created. Following prayerful consideration I am pleased to announce that Nick VanAtter has agreed to fill the role as GALA Chaplain. I encourage all members and friends to contact our chaplain with any spiritual guidance that you may need. I am also pleased to announce that Allan Fiscus has agreed to take on the responsibilities of GALA Historian. Allan is gathering pictures, stories, and momentos so that our history is fully captured.

We begin a new year for GALA. We have much to do. Your support is critical to GALA reaching our goals of outreach, and the continued development of an organization that is meeting the needs of many who have no other place to turn. We are holding elections for the positions of President-Elect and Member, Board of Directors (three positions). Only members may vote for the nominees. Please send in your membership so that we may have a broad based election.

By the time you receive this newsletter it will almost be the first of November and we will be close to the beginning of a new calendar year. Soon each of us will be celebrating Thanksgiving, Christmas, and then New Year's. What are we thankful for? How do some of us who are separated or estranged from our family survive these family holiday's? WWJD?

Excuse me, you are thinking, WWJD? I recently picked up a catalog from a Christian bookstore and wondered what the "WWJD?" meant that was on some T-shirts being advertised. I then saw that it meant What Would Jesus Do? So what would Jesus do? With unconditional love Jesus would invite the stranger or the outcast into his sacred fellowship. That is not only what he would do but did do, shouldn't the T-shirt read "WDJD?" or What Did Jesus Do? I would hope that each of us will think about WDJD, particularly as we celebrate these upcoming holidays of thanksgiving and love.

Perhaps each of us can do just a little bit of what Christ did. Wouldn't our neighborhood, church, and world be a better place? To use another popular phrase, Just Do It!

My wish of Peace goes out to all.

Alan Cochran
GALA President

RLDS President Grant McMurray Addresses GALA

To Participants of the GALA Retreat

Dear Friends:

I am pleased to send greetings and good wishes as you assemble for this year's GALA retreat. I trust you will be richly blessed in your gathering, enjoying the fellowship, spiritual nourishment, and reflective thought that such events so often generate for each of us.

This is an exciting, searching, exploring time in the life of the church. In Transformation 2000, we have made a commitment to be peacemakers, reconcilers, and healers of the spirit. I cannot help but believe that the enthusiasm with which this goal has been received in the church is an indication of the readiness of our people to move forward into a new era. I hope each of you feel that same commitment and are prepared to move with us and share the journey.

I will not pretend that it will always be easy. I do not think we have a clear idea of what it means to be that kind of people, of what it will ultimately require from us. There will be mountains to climb and rough roads to travel. But surely it is a journey worth taking. We cannot help but be better disciples and a more deeply committed people if we sojourn together in that way.

I want you to know that the gay and lesbian community is a welcomed part of the body of Christ.

The church cannot be expected to resolve every social, theological, biological, and psychological issue that swirls around the controversial cultural debate generated by homosexuality. We will continue to struggle with policies and procedures and we cannot expect agreement among the members of the church. What we CAN expect is that all persons should be treated as children of God, [are] loved without condition by God, and therefore [should be] by each of us. That principle should be at the core of our life together as a church.

In that spirit, I pray that God's richest blessings will attend you in your gathering and that you feel the Spirit in much abundance among you. I look forward to our continued association in the cause to which we are all committed.

Warm good wishes,

Grant McMurray

On the Banks of Lake Huron

Thirty-nine members and friends of GALA met for the 1997 International Retreat during the Labor Day weekend at Blue Water Reunion Grounds in Lexington, Michigan.

The theme for the weekend, "Discovering Yourself," was explored in a class led by Sharon Troyer, a psychotherapist from Denver. She introduced the group to the "Enneagram," a tool for identifying and understanding different personality types. Using the enneagram, class members began to identify their "type" and learned about the behaviors and reactions they could expect of themselves and others.

Nick Van Atter, from New York City, led a class on "What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality." A lively discussion resulted from examining Old and New Testament relationships, rules and social conventions from a twentieth century, RLDS perspective.

At the GALA business meeting reports were given by Regional Facilitators and it was announced that new by-laws had been unanimously accepted by members through mail-in balloting. Money was budgeted and plans were begun to develop new brochures about GALA and issues relating to homosexuality and the church. A donation of books to the Graceland and Park College libraries will be made. GALA's traditional activities at World Conference (P-FLAG meeting and noontime worship service) will hopefully be augmented this

Conference by a GALA booth.

A banquet and talent show highlighted Sunday night's activities culminating with a campfire and sharing service on the bank of Lake Huron. On Monday morning, the closing communion service was led by David Premoe.

—Todd Davison

GALA Donates Books to Graceland and Park

"GALA is dedicated to providing outreach to Graceland and Park. Knowledge is power. We hope that the texts we have donated to these college's libraries will empower whomever reads them. If only one person comes to a greater understanding and awareness of homosexuality, our outreach will be a success."

—Alan Cochran, GALA President

The following is a list of the books donated:

Bass, Ellen and Kate Kaufman, ed. Free Your Mind: The Book for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Youth--and Their Allies.

Bawer, Bruce. A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society.

Bawer, Bruce, ed. Beyond Queer: Challenging Gay Left Orthodoxy.

Bech, Henning. When Men Meet: Homosexuality and Modernity.

Bernstein, Robert A. Straight Parents/Gay Children: Keeping Families Together.

Bouldrey, Brian, ed. Wrestling with the Angel: Faith and Religion in the Lives of Gay Men.

Cleaver, Richard. Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology.

Comstock, Gary David. Gay Theology Without Apology.

Duberman, Martin, ed. Queer Representations: Reading Lives, Reading Cultures.

Duberman, Martin, ed. A Queer World: The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader.

Eichberg, Rob. Coming Out: An Act of Love.

Geis, Sally B. and Donald E. Messer, ed. Caught in the Crossfire: Helping Christians Debate Homosexuality.

Helminiak, Daniel A., Ph.D. What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality.

Isay, Richard A. Becoming Gay: The Journey to Self-Acceptance.

LeVay, Simon. Queer Science: The Use and Abuse of Research into Homosexuality.

McNaught, Brian. On Being Gay.

Monette, Paul. Becoming a Man: Half a Life Story.

Mondrimore, Francis Marc. Natural History of Homosexuality.

Quinn, D. Michael. Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth-Century Americans: A Mormon Example.

Rosario, Vernon A., II, ed. Science and Homosexualities.

Sacanzoni, Letha and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott. Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?

Scroggs, Robin. The New Testament and Homosexuality.

Spencer, Daniel T. Gay and Gaia: Ethics, Ecology, and the Erotic.

Sullivan, Andrew. Virtually Normal, An Argument About Homosexuality.

Vaid, Urvashi. Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation.



Get to Know the Candidates

GALA is holding elections this fall for President-Elect and Board of Directors (three positions). The following are statements about the candidates:

Lauren Hall for President-Elect

I live, work and play in the Chicago area with my partner of 7 years, Kelly Propst, our two fat felines and Sam, the dog. Jet LithoColor, a multicolor commercial printing company, has kept me gainfully employed for ten years as an Account Executive-Vice President Sales. I graduated from Graceland College in '85 with a B.A. in English Lit. And met Kelly there. I love traveling, a good book, long conversations with friends, good wine, late nights, and home.

I know it's true that we must be careful what we ask for because we might just get it. This past year that was most evident. Although our lives were happy and full, Kelly and I had been cruising along in the slow lane (where it wasn't very crowded) on a comfortable plateau. We had discussed several times the need to kick into overdrive and tear off for the surrounding landscapes. It was time for a richer, more elevated experience in which Christ could be at the heart of it. We also knew we could no longer idle through the current fog from political and religious homophobic rhetoric. It was time to take the top down, so to speak!

Not long after we shifted gears, GALA came into view. First, it appeared as a mere blip on our map when mentioned by John Billings at a small homosexual forum hosted by our local congregation. Then when a caring friend showed us a road sign that read, "GALA Retreat, Colorado Springs", we sped off to this new, what-do-we-have-to-lose adventure. Without driving this into the ground, let me continue the road trip analogy a little later.

Seven months ago at the base of the Rocky Mountains, Kelly and I found GALA. It was a transforming experience. The retreat and the people there, unlike any other we had ever attended, were suffused with warmth, openness, and the joy of being together. Since we knew and accepted each other's sexuality, there was freedom to form other, deeper bonds. Without fear, there is freedom to explore, learn, grow, love, lean and laugh . . . a lot! As we continue our journey, we meet the most amazing "travelers". Bright, funny, beautiful people. And, although GALA is not the ultimate destination, the folks there can make the journey a heck of a lot easier. For those of us who get tired and lonely sometimes, friends at GALA provide comfort, strength, and fuel to keep going. For when we love each other, we're loving God.

You see, I think of GALA as a glorious Pit Stop. It's a refuge where gay, lesbian, bisexuals, our family and friends come to relax and be nourished, challenged and enriched by our God-given gifts and shared stories. Ours is a unique and powerful experience that belongs, "now in this moment", as a part of the RLDS story of faith. As the church revs-up its engine for Transformation 2000, who better to be catalysts of peace and compassion, community and courage than those of us in the homosexual community who in our own lives have longed for that very thing!

So in the meantime, let us continue to reach out to each other and others who don't know that a resting place is just around the corner. Travelers who might otherwise turn around and miss the fun unless we build the biggest and brightest road signs that read, "GALA Straight Ahead! We're here and you're welcome!" Then, as always, when we're so full but still don't want to go, we'll hit the road and enjoy the journey 'til we meet again.

Janis Webb *for Board of Directors*

I am an RLDS church member and an ordained High Priest. I have been a member of the GALA organization for 3 years. I have served on the Greater Los Angeles Stake High Council from 1993-94 as well as served as Presiding Elder of the Orange Congregation from 1994-96. I am currently a resident of Tempe, AZ, having moved here in January of 1997. My vocation is working with children and families, and currently I am the manager of an early intervention program for children ages 0-3 with disabilities and their families.

I am dedicated to the mission of the RLDS church and wish to uphold that vision for all people, most specifically, those who have been disenfranchised from the acceptance of the church. I am committed to the belief that the essence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that all people are welcome in the family of God.

Wayne Thompson *for Board of Directors*

Wayne is a graduate of Graceland College (1941). He was under RLDS general church appointment for three years in Seattle and San Diego after leaving Graceland. Wayne is now retired from his career as an investment real estate manager for an insurance company in Los Angeles, CA. Wayne has been a resident of Laguna Beach, CA for over 25 years.

Wayne would like to help GALA continue to grow into an organization with clear and attainable goals. He has been a supporting member of GALA for many years and has enjoyed the fellowship and worship of the local group in Southern California.

Curt Filer *for Board of Directors*

My educational background includes four years of undergraduate study at Graceland College, Yuba College (Marysville, Calif.), and Chico State University (Chico, Calif.). My emphasis was in business administration and music. I am a fourth generation member of the RLDS Church. I have been active in leadership roles in the church including being Pastor of the Yuba City Branch. I have served as President of GALA and as a member of the Human Diversity Task Force for the World Church, whose work lead to the adoption of the Human Diversity Statement at World Conference. I am a proud parent of a gay son. I envision the equality of lesbian, gay and bisexual persons in the church ministries.

The Election Process

All members who have paid prior to November 7 will be sent a ballot in mid-November. Ballots must be returned (postmarked) by December 1st. We will announce the results of the balloting in the winter newsletter. Terms for those elected begin December 1st.



Upcoming Retreat

Transforming Our Tapestry

The Central Region of GALA is planning an exciting winter retreat in Wichita, Kansas from Friday evening, February 27, through Sunday, March 1st. We will meet at a private retreat center just outside of Wichita.

The facility is a very large, beautiful country ranch with paved walking paths through the woods, horses to ride, a stone fireplace in the center of the house, a balcony surrounding the fireplace, and an equipped exercise room.

In keeping with our support of Transformation 2000, this retreat will help us celebrate our diversity, recognize our many gifts, and look at how we can build bridges of understanding that contribute toward peace and justice. Special guest Jack Ergo from the World Church Worship Commission will join John Billings from St. Louis in offering special guest ministry.

The cost for the weekend is \$45.00 per person. For those making travel plans, Wichita is served by several airlines and is a three hour drive from Kansas City and a two and a half hour drive from Oklahoma City. Please plan departures out of the Wichita airport after 2:30 p.m.

For more information and to register contact: Larry D. Pickering, through [GALA](#).

Back to Business

The following budget was approved at the 1997 business meeting:

| GALA | Budget 1997 | Actual 1997 | Budget 1998 |
|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Administrative | 2450 | 957 | 1700 |
| Newsletter | 1500 | 1355 | 2225 |
| Annual Retreat | 5000 | 2671 | 5000 |
| Regional Support | 300 | 300 | 300 |
| Special Projects | 250 | 195 | 3525 |
| Total | \$9,500 | \$5,478 | \$13,000 |

The 1998 budget reflects GALA's commitment to increasing its outreach efforts. The successful completion of these goals, which include the creation of new brochures and expanding the distribution of the newsletter, depends on membership support.

Next Issue

The Winter issue of the GALA Newsletter will focus on "Family." Please consider writing thoughts on your family's experience of relating to a lesbian, gay, or bisexual member. Write as if you were telling your family's story to a friend or to a person whose own family is just beginning to deal with the issues your family has addressed.

Submissions are due January 7. (Feel free to write about how your family celebrated the holidays and what your hopes are for the new year.) —AS



GALA info

GALA (Gay and Lesbian Acceptance) is an association of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons, their families and friends of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS) community. Our purpose is to affirm the dignity and worth of all persons without regard to gender, race, sexual orientation or religious affiliation. We support and encourage self-actualization in an atmosphere of love, understanding, and confidentiality. We are dedicated to the celebration of diversity. We are committed to exploring the issues of spirituality and justice through dialogue, education, and action.

GALA

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- *Western*, Jerry Dale
- *Central*, Kip Dawson
- *Eastern*, Anthony Fox

The GALA Newsletter is published quarterly. Letters, essays, reviews, and announcements are welcome. Opinions included do not necessarily reflect those of GALA leadership.

Subscriptions to *The GALA Newsletter* are provided to members. To join GALA, please send your membership payment to: GALA, 393 S. Tustin Ave., Orange, CA, 92866.

Aaron Sherer, Editor