

## Does TRANSFORMATION 2000 Include Us?

by Todd Davison

The highlight of the recent RLDS Elders and Congregational Leaders Conference held in Independence, Missouri, was certainly the Thursday night address by RLDS President, Grant McMurray entitled "Envisioning Our Future: A Call to Transformation." (The entire text of this sermon is available at the World Church internet site, [www.rlds.org](http://www.rlds.org)) With a powerful, charismatic, yet down-to-earth, accessible delivery, He called the church to this "transforming goal, by the convening of World Conference in the year 2000: ' We will become a world-wide church dedicated to the pursuit of peace, reconciliation, and healing of the spirit.' " This goal, is the center piece of an emphasis called

"Transformation 2000" which also includes these five specific objectives:

1. We will articulate a clear and compelling Christ-centered theology of peace and justice grounded in the scriptures, faith and traditions of the Restoration movement.
2. We will engage 20,000 children, youth, and young adults in ministries with teach Christian values and Restoration principles, sustain high self-esteem and involve them in the pursuit of peace and justice through acts of community responsibility.
3. We challenge every congregation to participate in outreach to children and youth and in specific ministries of peace and justice, and enlist 200 congregations willing to model these emphases through high-energy, high-impact congregational witness and service.
4. We will establish 200 new congregations through creative ministries of outreach and witness, bringing to the church new life, freshness of spirit, and ethnic and cultural diversity.
5. We will add 200 full-time field ministers, at least one-third of whom will focus on youth and children and all others on congregationally-based ministries of peace, justice, reconciliation, evangelism and spiritual revitalization.

Before introducing the specifics of "Transformation 2000," President McMurray spoke of his personal experience, struggle and insight into the inspired council that says, "the temple shall be dedicated to the pursuit of peace" (D & C section 156:5) during his years as church secretary and in the Presidency. His message was one of firm conviction and action:

"Tonight, I want us to extend our conversation beyond the things we need to talk about to the things we must do if we are to be faithful to our heritage and adequate to the future we would envision and create" he said. "It is time for us to take stock and to pose some serious questions to ourselves, questions that go to the heart of our movement and to the mission we embrace. It is time for us to place before ourselves, in stark terms, the things we need to do to respond faithfully to our witness of Jesus Christ in an emerging global society, and then determine if we have what it takes to do it."

The good spirit in the Conference Chamber during that service and the excited buzz that accompanied thousands of conversations in the hours, days and weeks following, testify to the positive reception this bold statement from World Church leaders received from those in attendance. I, too, was inspired, challenged and energized by the experience and the ideas, but as a gay RLDS priesthood member, I continue to ask, "does it include me?"

Immediately after stating the "transforming goal" of becoming "a world-wide church dedicated to the pursuit of peace, reconciliation and healing of the spirit," President McMurray said, "Hear me now! We will become...Not we will believe. Not we will affirm. Not we will espouse or proclaim or embrace or declare or try to be. We will become!"

This is about getting it down into our bone marrow. It is "writing it on our inward parts," as the Hebrew authors declared about the making of the covenant. This is about responding to life circumstances as people of peace, reconciliation and healing of the spirit. This is about declaring first to ourselves and then to the world that this is who are, in the name of Jesus Christ, who is the resource of our peace."

I hope he is speaking to me and to my gay brothers and lesbian sisters. Not all homosexual people find peace, reconciliation or healing of the spirit within the RLDS faith community. Currently within the church homosexuals are not granted the opportunity to legitimize life-long relationships. Some have been ostracized, chastised and silenced when they have committed themselves to a relationship. In some congregations that generally tolerate or even accept gay couples, tension and apprehension still may be found. Questions about what is appropriate for a heterosexual member to say or do as they observe the homosexual couple. Questions concerning how homosexual couples should "act in church" are frequently raised, while little attention is given to the behavior of heterosexual couples, wed or unwed in the congregation. I hope the RLDS church will become an organization that extends justice to all.

Some homosexual RLDS members are tired. Some homosexual members are angry. Angry at double standards. Many of the tired and angry have left active participation in the church. Sometimes the individual suffer. Always the church suffers. I have been tired. I have been angry. I have suffered. It is discouraging that I have written more than once to homosexual friends, "don't get your hopes up" with respect to church policy changing.

Despite the seemingly overwhelming obstacles, I have found inspiration in the [Transformation 2000](#) goals and by President McMurray's dynamic leadership. Christianity is all about hope. "Proclaiming Jesus Christ" means to me that no matter how bad it gets, even to the point of death on a cross, we can expect resurrection, new-life, and transformation.

Paul was a Pharisee. A letter-of-the-law guy, legalistic, a Bible-thumper. He was extremely active in the church, a leader among those who refused to accept the experience and practice of the followers of Jesus. Then he was hit by the Spirit of God and he became a "new creature." He was transformed. He became the man who said ANYONE could be adopted as a son or daughter of God. He became the man who challenged Peter - the very companion of Jesus - and said "you missed the message." He became the one who nearly single-handedly assured that you and I could become followers of Christ. He ministered among and to all kinds of people and assured them that the gospel was for them also and thereby established the church that survived for centuries instead of just a generation or two. The transforming God that Paul knew is the God that we can know.

I challenge Gay and lesbian RLDS members to be a part of the transformation of our faith movement. We only have ourselves to blame if we are not learning about peace and justice and not teaching it to others. What are we afraid of? Little old ladies and kindly men in our congregations who might reject us. We can transform them. We must transform them. They have the wisdom of years. When they speak, people listen.

When President McMurray stated the first objective of **Transformation 2000**: "We will articulate a clear and compelling Christ-centered theology of peace and justice...", he said, "We are not called to this goal for any other reason than the fact that it is rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and in the lived-out experience of the Restoration movement." The justice evident in Christ's ministry was all about person to person, neighbor to neighbor. Being a neighbor is a reciprocal arrangement. We can't expect justice or understanding if we are not willing to offer justice and understanding to people different from us.

Some within and outside the RLDS church may believe that the goals of **Transformation 2000** are unreachable. I believe President Ken Robinson powerfully addressed this negativism when he stated the day after President McMurray's address, "We don't do this because it is rational or logical, we do it because we must--it is the right thing to do."

Together with President McMurray's vision of peace and justice to guide us, we will reach our common goal; acceptance of all regardless of race, color, creed, or sexual orientation.

I am committed to the RLDS church. I am committed to the goals of **Transformation 2000**. I am committed to seeing same-sex marriage recognized by the RLDS church. I pray that these will bear the fruit of, joy, hope, love and peace.

---

## A Word from the President

I hope that every member has had the opportunity to review the revised bylaws that were mailed the end of June and have sent your vote into Todd. We enjoyed working on the revisions. Our goal was too more effectively capture the mission of GALA. I am excited about the proposed changes and the impact that they will have on our organization. I am hopeful that each member will be supportive of the proposed revisions.

I attended the RLDS Elders and Congregational leadership conference that was recently held in Independence, MO. GALA was well represented. Mark, Melba Jean, Todd, Sharon, Maridan, Art, Janis, Tim, Gail, and others were there sharing with congregational and church headquarters leaders their story about GALA. The RLDS church is moving in some wonderful directions. I can say that because there were two breakout sessions that GALA members facilitated. One was regarding PFLAG (parents and friends of lesbians and gays) as a resource for congregational leaders and the other was the Initiation of a Dialog on the topic of Homosexuality. This is the first time that the church has provided an opportunity for an officially sanctioned dialog on homosexuality to be held at a conference.

I can personally tell you that the two 'Dialog' sessions that were held were successful as I was the facilitator for both. We had some wonderful testimonies shared regarding reconciliation and love. There were also others who shared their struggle and denial with the recognition of homosexuality as a gift from our creator. I kept a smile on my face, most of the time, because I was keenly aware of the support that was being given to me by my family, friends and church leaders who were there. I applaud the RLDS church for this initial movement into the process of dialoging about homosexuality. I also challenge the church to continue to provide opportunity at every conference and event to continue the dialog regarding homosexuality.

You have read about the upcoming international retreat. I am hopeful that many of you will be able to attend this wonderfully uplifting event. It has been many years since GALA has been in beautiful Michigan for a retreat. We are glad to be going back to our roots. Please send in your registration as soon as possible, if for no other reason than to save a little money. We do need some additional funds to assist a few who would like to attend but are unable to.

Please contribute to the scholarship fund if at all possible. I look forward to seeing those of you who will be in attendance in Michigan.

Peace to all.

*Alan Cochran*  
GALA President



## **PRAYER FOR PARENTS OF GAY/LESBIAN CHILDREN**

Merciful and Loving God, comfort the parents of your gay/lesbian children, as they wrestle with worry and fear, as they struggle to emerge from hidden places.

As you consoled and strengthened the sorrowful heart of Mary, aching in the rejection of her precious son by many, may the parents of gay children drink from the well of your strength and compassion to come out in love.

Lord Jesus, you also came forth from a humble womb, scandalous in the eyes of many. Likewise, the birth of gay/lesbian children are seen as scandals to hide, wrongs to be made right. But God, you have chosen the foolish things of this world to shame the wise, and the vulnerable ones to shame those who are strong. It was you God, who formed their innermost being in their mother's womb.

As you embraced your child Jesus, by rejoicing at his birth, by caring for him in the wilderness, and gently wiping his tears of fear and loneliness, may parents of gay/lesbian celebrate their birth, and bring healing to them in the isolation of their lonely closets.

God, you anguished in the crucifixion of your son Jesus; so parents of gay/lesbian children feel crucified by shame, prejudice and loneliness. Turn their darkness into light.

God, you glorified your child Jesus through resurrection, so may parents offer the gift of new life by reconciling with their precious gay child, and embracing them unconditionally.

God, intimacy with Jesus brought danger and risk to his family and friends, yet his mother Mary and a few others never left his side. Lord, strengthen our parents to stand at the side of their gay children, rather than flee.

God, let not their hearts grow weary, but bless our parents with courage to join in solidarity with their gay children, to voice a plea for a safe home in this world.

We pray for our parents in their journey toward truth, understanding and acceptance, that they may rise above the piercing arrows that proclaim judgment against them.

May our beloved parents of gay/lesbian children rest in knowing that you are holding their hand and heart throughout this journey, as you once did with Mary and her son Jesus, as he came out to a world that received him not.

AMEN.

By Ann M. Amideo



## A Letter to the Editor

Dear GALA Editors:

I wish the task force on Human Sexuality would take a position recommending new language for the church in regards to acceptance and affirmation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members, leaders and priesthood. I think the church needs to proclaim the positive aspects of sexuality as being intrinsic to God's creative vision for humanity. Consensual sex among adults should be based on relationships of love. It is not the church's business to monitor, evaluate, judge or codify the sexual conduct of members who are in positive, affirming relationships. The church should open the marriage sacrament to all couples regardless of sexual orientation. **THE TIME FOR HESITATION IS PAST.** At the same time, the church needs to be clear that it opposes sexual battery, incest, and child sexual abuse. We don't need more study or a cooling off period, we need reconciliation and an end to the abusive dimensions of current church policy which, when enforced, has tragic consequences, and which by its very existence tends to dehumanize. Let's turn the water of our tears into wine!

Sincerely,

Glenn Johnson  
Orange, CA



## By-Laws Update

by Todd J. Davison

Copies of the current and proposed new by-laws were sent in June to all GALA members. A ballot was enclosed in the mailing so that the changes could be acted upon (according to the current by-laws) by the Annual Meeting at the Labor Day Retreat. Please return your ballot soon. You may bring it to the retreat, but if you send it now while you still know where it is, we can have the votes tallied prior to the retreat and not have to shuffle so much paper.

The GALA Executive Committee has worked diligently on updating and refining the by-laws to serve GALA into the future. As we envision GALA and the work we can do in the next several years, this document should serve us well. In addition to adding the offices of Chaplain and President-Elect, the proposed by-laws create a Board of Directors whose purpose is to offer broad guidance and creative thinking to GALA in an advisory role. Properly executed, all three of these changes could be healthy for our organization. The Executive Committee urges your support.

---

## **GALA's Presence Felt at Leader's Conference**

by Ray Biller

The third week of June, some 1600 Elders, Congregational Leaders and RLDS World Church Staff met in Independence, Missouri for a conference entitled "Shepherds Abiding in the Field." This event featured speakers from within and outside the RLDS faith community, 139 individual workshops on an array of topics, energetic worship services and the presentation of the International Peace Award.

GALA was well represented at the event both officially and informally. Several new GALA contacts were made as parents and family members said "please contact our gay loved one," or "how do I get more information about GALA." On the opening night of the conference, GALA members and friends enjoyed a reception at the Family Life Center. Refreshments and visiting were the order of the evening.

Alan Cochran, GALA President, facilitated two sessions entitled "the Dialogue Has Begun...How to Discuss Issues on Homosexuality." Both of these sessions were well attended and provided ample time for a number of persons to share statements of support and concern for and about homosexuality within the RLDS church. The majority of folks who spoke up told personal stories and urged acceptance of gay people. There were also individuals present who were struggling and had real concerns and questions which they had the courage to raise.

Gail Biller led two workshops about PFLAG which were also well attended and provided an opportunity for much information to be shared and healing to take place. In a number of other workshops and general sessions homosexual persons participated, or "homosexual issues" were usually raised in a very positive light.

---

## **11th Annual GALA Retreat**

by Anthony Fox

The 11th Annual GALA Retreat will be held August 28-September 1 at The Bluewater Campground in Lexington, MI. The theme for the weekend is 'Discovering Yourself.' The cost for the weekend is \$85 if you pre-register by August 15. If you pay at the door the cost is \$90. You can pre-register by sending your information to the GALA address in Orange, CA. If you have any questions, ideas, or concerns please call, write, or e-mail [GALA](mailto:GALA).

The weekend will include the usual festivities: campfire, playing, learning, praising. Our very own Sharon Troyer will be conducting sessions to help you discover yourself. We will also don our sports apparel to champion the greatest of all events the 'Gay Olympics'! There is a possibility of a cruise on Lake Huron. For those of you familiar with the ocean it looks similar but tastes much better.

The retreat will start at 5:00 PM on Friday and will go through Noon on Monday. Make travel plans to arrive at Detroit Metro Airport on Friday and leave Monday @ 3:00 or after. Please see the insert in this issue for complete details, including a map to the campground.



## "Called to be a Healing Presence"

by Sharon Troyer

I was privileged to attend the recent RLDS World Church Leadership Conference. I returned to Denver greatly inspired and encouraged for several reasons, some of which I would like to share. During both the pre-conference theology workshop and the main conference itself, there was a prevailing spirit of openness, willingness to grow and change, and frequent references to celebration of diversity. At times the references were subtle, but to me, they also felt direct. Two examples stand out in my memory.

At the beginning of one of the opening sessions in the auditorium, we were welcomed by Hal Davis who shared his testimony. He shared the joy of his families recent growth experience in having a daughter marry a Jewish man, whereby his family enjoyed a wedding and reception that blended both RLDS and Jewish traditions. He then related that his other daughter had recently shared with the family that she is lesbian. He expressed great joy in knowing that their relationship was now genuine. Finally, he described a meeting he attended where it was necessary to use headphones to hear in English what was otherwise spoken in Spanish. His experiences were moving. To me, his casual but very obvious inclusive reference to his daughter's "coming out" was precious. His testimony established a tone and gave example of how we can use educating references in all of our ministry.

A second example is the story told by President Grant McMurray, and printed in his article entitled "Beyond 'One True Church': Developing a Relational Ministry for a Secular World" (Chapter 3 of the newly published handbook, *Shepherds Abiding in the Field*, a resource that will prove very useful in peace and justice work in months and years to come!). Grant tells a personal story of how touching it was to see the Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt in Washington D.C., and how deeply he was moved when he heard the name McMurray announced in the reading of some 70,000 names read daily. Even though he knew it was not personally his name, he said, "on another level it was my name.... and now the quilt took on a new and personal dimension....I had to look at it in an all together new way. He was not speaking about AIDS as the issue, but about the transforming feeling of personalizing a relationship to those who have suffered.

There was also a specific spirit of encouragement repeatedly given about sharing our personal lives and experiences as the most effective method of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. The **Transformation 2000** emphasis on youth ministry, peace, and justice opens up many arenas where we can truly make a difference in our wounded world. I personally want to accept the challenge. I encourage all of you to respond in your own way to this invitation. We can and will build communities of joy, we are entitled to be full participants in this sacred journey.



## Sexuality and the Church: An Earlier Discussion

Aaron Sherer

While the church currently has a committee discussing sexuality, this is not the first committee of its kind. Almost twenty years ago, the First Presidency created the Human Sexuality Committee and charged it with the task of recommending ways the church should be responsible and responsive to this aspect of life. The committee published a summary of its report in six consecutive issues of the Saints Herald in 1981. The work of the committee appears to have been thoughtful in reflection and progressive in recommendation presenting several basic and challenging affirmations regarding human sexuality.

Throughout the articles published in the Herald, the concept of wholeness is emphasized. In the first of the articles, wholeness is said to involve "fulfilling and responsible relationships with self, others, community, church, and God's entire universe." In the second article, regarding the scriptures, the committee says that the Bible teaches "that sexuality is a part of human wholeness." The committee feels this is in "sharp contrast to contemporary emphases which isolate sex for purposes of personal, social, economic, and/or political gain." The committee also states that Jesus affirmed human dignity and wholeness and that at the "heart of Restoration theology is the belief in the wholeness of human life." The third article describes the nature of wholeness in ethical relationships. "Wholeness in union with God and others should be the goal and the chosen course for every person's life." The fourth article, regarding sex roles, explains that "wholeness may demand that men discover the 'feminine' dimensions of their personalities and women the 'masculine' content of theirs." Finally, the last article in the series states that "God seeks human growth, movement toward wholeness.?"

James B. Nelson, a theologian discussing sexuality, believes wholeness is an important concept to discuss. In his book *Body Theology*, he says, "I assume that wholeness as bodyselves is the destiny for which we were created . . . the dualism that splits us into the war of the spirit versus body is a fundamental and enduring problem.? Dualism is the separation of two things that necessarily should be together. Concerning human sexuality, it is the separation of spirit/love from body/sex. In *Reuniting Sexuality and Spirituality*, Nelson says, "In this dualism, spirit is opposed to body, with spirit assumed to higher and superior and the body lower and inferior.? Wholeness means living with sex and love, body and spirit intimately connected. They are united aspects of the same whole--human sexuality. Wholeness breaks the sex/love dualism because it sees sexuality as a natural and healthy part of living that is experienced and expressed in the world in which we live and in our relationship to that world. *"There is unity to life in which the body and the spirit make up the soul of the individual?"* (Doctrine and Covenants 85:4a).

Beyond the concept of wholeness, the committee presented several affirmations for sexual relationships and sexual ethics, and it proposed guidelines for a Christian sexual ethic, each of which I have excerpted from below:

1. Whatever persons due in terms of sexual relationships is guided by an expression of love rather than mere satisfaction of intrinsic urges. Yet persons should not forget that those desires are a part of total human sexuality--in themselves good, but needing appropriate control and expression.
2. Cruelty, in whatever form, is the denial of love and is thereby unethical.
3. No one should be urged into forms of sexual activity that are offensive.
4. Those who engage in sexual activity accept the responsibility for whatever it entails.

5. The normative way of finding sexual expression in society is through a commitment in married life. This commitment should arise from mutual love. Sexual activity is an expression and a strengthening of mutual love.
6. God is present, and God is at work in any and every yearning to love and to be open to another's love. No human being should be afraid to love or fearful of accepting love.
7. Love demands more than control; it demands difficult decisions.

In "The Theological Meaning and Nature of Human Sexuality," the third in the series of articles, the committee states:

"As a gift, sexual behavior is intended to nurture human relationships which are reconciling . . . Human sexuality which builds concern, establishes hope, ministers healing, and confirms love is indicative of the covenant relationship announced by Jesus. An ethical sexual relationship is one in which the interrelatedness and wholeness . . . are preserved and honored in thought and act . . . It achieves fulfillment in mutual trust and the development of mutual companionship."

Love is that quality of relationship in which persons acknowledge the unconditional value both of self and of another. Love is fulfilled in mutuality.

The work of the committee has interesting implications for same-sex relationships. Its assertions seem to support that such relationships be affirmed. While this probably was not the committee's intent, it strongly encourage individuals to move attitudes and statements regarding sexuality from an absolute ethic to a contextual ethic. After nearly twenty years of growth and over ten years of interaction with GALA, the church's contemporary context calls for a re-examination and re-formulation of a Christian sexual ethic inclusive of same-sex relationships—a worthy task for the current sexuality committee.

The following are the works published by the Human Sexuality Committee in the *Saints Herald*:

*Joe A. Serig, ed.*, "A Review of the Work of the Human Sexuality Committee," March, 1981.

*Barbara Higdon, ed.*, "A Scriptural Approach to Human Sexuality," April, 1981.

*Barbara Higdon and Sandra Colyer, ed.*, "The Theological Meaning and Nature of Human Sexuality," May, 1981.

*Linda Jane Stuart Koehler*, "Sex Roles and Variant Life-styles," June, 1981.

*Joe A. Serig, ed.*, "Sexuality Education," July, 1981.

*Richard D. Hughes and Joe A. Serig*, "Ethics and Human Sexuality," August, 1981.



## 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  
393 South Tustin Street  
Orange, CA 92866-2590  
USA

714-538-8223

Email: [GALA@pridemail.com](mailto:GALA@pridemail.com)

Website: <http://www.angelfire.com/ca/GALA/index.html>

President: Alan Cochran

Secretary: Todd Davison

Treasurer: Mark Dixon

Regional Facilitators:

- *Western*, Michael Lewis
- *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