



# gala **news**

THE LETTER

Winter 2004-2005 – Volume 15 Issue 3



## An Interview with GALA President Curt Filer, December 3, 2004

*What is your response to Grant's resignation?*

I have always trusted in Grant's judgment. He has honored the church with service for over half his life, and provided the church with

forward-looking leadership in the US and around the world during his years as president. After all his years of public leadership, we respect his need for privacy for himself and his family. We will miss Grant greatly, but have the utmost confidence in the leadership of the church to guide us through the transition.

**What is happening now with the Welcoming Community Network (WCN)?** GALA is very pleased to sponsor WCN, and is committed to financial support. WCN is a program of ministry for congregations wanting to become fully inclusive, and Sharon Troyer and others in GALA have helpful tools to assist congregations in becoming more intentionally welcoming. We are part of an ecumenical movement with numerous other denominations who are working with the welcoming church movement. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America already has 360 churches in a similar program called Reconciling in Christ. We are also part of a new Kansas City Coalition of Welcoming Churches.

**What do see ahead for GALA?** First of all, we are delighted to announce that our next international retreat, **September 2-5, 2005**, will be in southern Ontario, Canada. Please put that date on your calendar now, the specific location will be announced soon.

Gary Kelsey, a professional fundraiser, is advising us regarding our efforts in a major **fundraising** and grant writing as well as budgetary means to support our programs, especially Sharon's role. This is one of the most critical charges before us. We must motivate people in GALA and outside foundations to help us reach our goals and make the Welcoming Community Network financially viable. We already have four mission centers that have pledged financial support.

We are encouraging gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people in the GALA family to become **more involved in congregational life**. Ten years ago there was a need for privacy and safety, but now if you can be open in your congregational community, it will help break down stereotypes.

GALA will continue to be a **supportive sanctuary** for persons who feel isolated or unable to find support in their local jurisdiction. We will also be an **organization of advocacy**, along with WCN, in efforts to help change the landscape of the church.

GALA continues to welcome expressions of sexual orientation and gender identity that are healthy and responsible, and is interested in establishing a church-wide registry of couples who have made a full-life commitment.

**What would you like to say about the current World Church policy on homosexuality and the priesthood?** As it stands, church officials won't rescind previous calls or ordinations, but no new calls are being processed. It has felt like a step back, and we are wanting to change the policy. *I would encourage leaders to be ecclesiastically disobedient—* following their own judgment as they respond to the call of the Spirit in their jurisdictions. If a person is leading a responsible quality of life which represents the life of Jesus, and their pastor perceives a call to ordination for that person, I encourage them to do so. This will bring the challenge within the system.

GALA leaders have had direct assurance from the First Presidency that the current policy is *not* financially driven. Any decisions regarding the policy will *not* be subject to financial pressure by any church members.

*Note from the Editor:* Because of the resignation of W. Grant McMurray from the Presidency of Community of Christ on November 29, we felt a need to address the meaning of the situation, especially in the midst of the Christmas season. *You will find on pages 2 & 3 "Find Hope in the Child" by Bob and Barbara Mesle, Graceland University faculty members.* Grant's resignation letter is on the church's web site, [www.CofChrist.org](http://www.CofChrist.org), and will be in the January issue of the *Herald*. In addition, Richard Rathman's generous response to the activities of GALA's retreat last September can be found at [www.GALAweb.org](http://www.GALAweb.org).

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**FIND HOPE IN THE CHILD**, Sermon by Bob & Barbara Mesle  
Walnut Gardens Congregation, December 5, 2004

**BOB:** Hope is the spirit of Christmas. We hope for peace, love, and joy. As Scrooge's nephew observed in *A Christmas Carol*, "I have always thought of Christmas time...as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time..." Yet, Dickens also knew that it is precisely at Christmas when want, need, and loneliness are most keenly felt. Sometimes at Christmas we feel besieged.

**BARBARA:** Usually, it is my nature to feel besieged--yes by woe, but also by wonder. Last Wednesday [December 1—the day Grant McMurray's resignation was announced], however, I could manage precious little wonder. Pieces of three seemingly disparate stories--one epic, one fairy tale, and one short novel--seared them-selves into my heart.

The epic by Dante, begins this way: "In the middle of the journey of our life, I found myself astray in a dark woods. I had lost sight of the right Road..."

In the second story, we read, "Once upon a time, when they awoke, it was already dark night. Gretel began to cry and said, 'How are we to get out of the forest now? But Hansel comforted her and said, 'Just wait a little, until the moon has risen, and then we will soon find the way.' And when the full moon rose, Hansel took his little sister by the hand, and followed the pebbles which shone like newly-coined silver pieces, and showed them the way home."

The third famous story is about Ebenezer Scrooge. "Scrooge is a hard case. He works too much, loves too little, laughs not at all. He steps over the poor on his way to the counting house." Scrooge is, to be honest, entirely too much like...well, like us. "The ghosts grab him by the back of the neck and shove his face into the emptiness at his dead heart. And when Scrooge wakes up (alive) after his three wrenching visitations...the realization hits--it is not too late! Dickens believes that if we remember, if we witness and feel, we can still be saved."

Last Wednesday, in my tired English teacher brain, images hurled themselves out, cast widely like stars in the galaxies, spinning off, careening wildly, beyond my control, and, God help me, mixing metaphors, reshaping themselves, and swirling into new formations. I thought of George Eliot's web of relationships. For her, this web is the connective tissue, the very fiber of our individual and collective beings. It is the stuff of which we are made. It is paradoxically, tough and fragile, vulnerable and resilient. We are connected to each other, for good and for ill, in ways we can not now glimpse, whether we want to be or not. George Eliot could not know of an African proverb that proclaims, "I am because we are; what I am is what we are." But she would have agreed with it, agreed that all of those who belong to the same family, clan, tribe, or congregation—the living, the dead, and the yet unborn—make up a single cohesive community irrevocably linked across space and time. Whether we want to be or not, we are one. Whether or not we like all the hard work it takes

to maintain and rebuild these webs of relationship, whether or not we occasionally want to shout, "I want to be alone in my web," we are thoroughly relational creatures whose lots in life are cast together. Actually, I believe, we very literally make ourselves out of relationships with each other.

I thought of the stunning lines in Isaiah directly before those in today's scripture. In the preceding verse we learn that the divine Forester shall humble the pride of the forest, lopping the boughs with terrifying power so that the majestic cedars of Lebanon will fall. Then shall come forth a SHOOT from the stump of Jesse, and a *branch shall grow out of his roots*, and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him...and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed together. Their young shall lie down together; and the Lion shall eat straw like the ox, the suckling child shall play safely near the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in All my holy mountain."

I thought of a tiny, exquisite, jewel-like poem, by Antonio Machado. Machado's hopeful title is simply, "It's possible."

*It's possible that while sleeping // the hand that sows the seeds of stars // started the ancient music going again— // like a note from a great harp— // and the frail wave came to our lips as one or two honest words.*

Machado reminds me that sometimes when we awake... the universe will have restarted and the moon will be up so that we can find our ways home...

**BOB:** We lived in this congregation for one year, 25 years ago, and it still feels like home. Remember that Robert Frost said, "Home is the place where when you have to go there they have to take you in." So I guess you're stuck with us. More than that, you are part of us. If we are a tree, you are part of our root system. If our life is a tapestry, you are some of our most beautiful threads. You are a spiritual home for us, and when we come to you, we know you will take us in. That is the kind of people you are.

The same is true of the Christmas story about baby Jesus in that manger and all those sheep, goats, camels, wise men, Mary, Joseph, shepherds, angels and that star. All of us have roots in this story; you will find its threads in the tapestry of our lives. It is a spiritual home for us all. Even if we only lived fully in the Christmas story during our child-hood long ago and ran away from it when we were in college, it is still home, and Christmas still takes us in. We lived here once, long ago, and Christmas still takes us in, and gives us hope for another year. Since Christmas is home, it doesn't matter if we knock on the door and say, "You know, I don't think this really happened." Joseph won't slam the door on us if we say, "This story isn't even IN the Bible?" Even if once we threw a rock through the window and shouted "I don't believe in the virgin birth!" Mary will just stick her head out and say, "I know, but come on in while the rolls are hot." And we will.

While Joseph will take our coats, we may shyly admit that we are really into Buddhism these days. He'll smile and say "Great! We're all about compassion here." A shepherd will milk a goat and make some eggnog while the angels provide light and music for the party. Baby Jesus will coo and gurgle, while Mary pulls out some of those casseroles Barbara Howard brought. Joseph will put up a Christmas palm tree and when the Wise Men unpack their gifts someone is sure to argue that we *should* have opened the presents on Christmas Eve, and someone else will insist that we should have opened them one at a time.

Eventually, we will confide to Baby Jesus that we don't deserve to be here. We aren't very good people. We have hurt people we love, and have not forgiven them when they hurt us back. Our life is a mess. We are lost in the woods and were too stupid to drop pebbles. Probably Baby Jesus would rather we left.

Baby Jesus will just smile and gurgle at us. Mary will lean over and say, "Please stay. He wants you here. He's too little to tell you now, but when he gets older he'll tell you the *whole* story. The story is that He knows we aren't always good people but he loves us anyway. He loves us so much that he came here to share our sorrows and burdens, and to help us find our way out of the woods. Baby Jesus loves you, and wants you to be so filled with love that you can't help loving everyone around you. He wants us all to be like Him, helping each other find our ways out of the woods. Christmas love is your home, and your hope."

**BARBARA:** So how do we find our ways through the dark woods? I do not have the answers, of course. There may be many paths. The only thing I know for certain is that we must seek those paths together, or we won't find them at all. Those of you who have read Hansel and Gretel recently will remember that finding their way back home through the forest was not a one-time journey for these children, but a path--perhaps one that became an *old, old, path*--that they had to travel again and again.

We seek a world where little babes are safe, where, in the image of Isaiah, the weaned child shall put her hand on the adder's den. We seek a world where all children are fed and loved and safe. We seek such a world because it would bless us all, would give us all what we cry out for, what we all must have, a way back home. A way back home to who we really are at our core, thoroughly relational creatures, creatures who can thrive only in community. Can you see the pebbles illuminated in the moonlight? Can you take the hands of your sisters and brothers? If so, we can find our way out of the dark woods, our way home, to where we live and move and have our being, blessed by the spirit of this season. We are demanding, tender, luminous creatures, besieged yes, by woe, but also by the wonder of the child of Hope. That little child shall lead us.

**BOB:** The wonderful Buddhist Monk, Thich Nhat Hanh advises us to "[E]mbrace your suffering like a mother holding her baby." What strangely wise advice. "Right mindfulness,"

he adds, "is like a mother. When her child is sweet, she loves him, and when her child is crying, she loves him."

We would misread Hanh if we cling to our suffering or wallowed in it and made it grow in us so that suffering filled us up. He means rather, that we must honestly and fully acknowledge our suffering, caring for it with patience and tenderness.

Sometimes people neglect their children because they are overwhelmed by life, with no family or community to give them the resources they need. We, too, sometimes neglect or drown in our suffering. Our suffering may make us feel guilty, inadequate, or just weary. We may neglect our suffering because we feel desperate, finding no community to whom we can turn for strength.

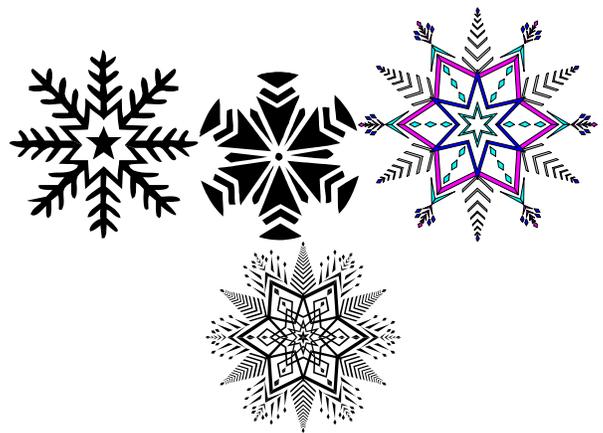
If we are going to heal our suffering, Thich Nhat Hanh teaches us, we must embrace our suffering tenderly. We must find the courage to name it as our own, and summon the strength to care for it. If we do this, Hanh assures us, suffering can be transformed into greater compassion and deeper community, and hence into greater joy, greater hope.

The baby in the manger stands as a powerful symbol of the hope which emerges when suffering is transformed by a community of love into peace, joy, and liberation. You... are people who know about the importance of accepting each other's brokenness, of seeking reconciliation, of loving each other.

According to the Christian story, God loves us all so much that even in our brokenness, God loves us and reaches out to us. God did not wait for us to get our act together, to earn God's love, or to be righteous. As the Apostle Paul wrote: "*hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy spirit that has been given to us.*"

The Christ child is a child of hope, of love. Let us embrace that child in our hearts, as we embrace each other. There is love, joy, peace, and hope before us.

**BARBARA:** And now, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." (Romans 15:15) Amen.



## Graceland University Gay-Straight Alliance, by Samantha Clark and Andrea Swall

Graceland University, sponsored by the Community of Christ, from the beginning has been supportive of filling the needs of students, even those marginalized by society. In 1997 an international student from Russia, Andrei Dzhunkovsky, approached professor C. Robert Mesle with an idea to start a sexual orientation support group for the students at Graceland. Mesle had been working since 1994 to change the non-discrimination policy to include sexual orientation. When the idea was brought to Graceland's administration, immediate efforts of support and enthusiasm were displayed.

The original name of the club was Thinking Out loud, chosen because the simple words signified the need to bring a private struggle, being gay or lesbian, out in public—more simply, thinking about one's private life in a public arena. The first meetings were held rather secretly. Small numbers of people showed up, and knowledge of the group's existence traveled only through safe circles of supporters and closeted students. The meetings regularly consisted of willingly outed people talking about their life experiences, the struggles they faced, the support they have found, and ways of coping with those who try to pull them down.

In the organization's second year, the group met at a visible location on campus in the Memorial Student Center and often attracted 20 or more attendees to its regular Monday night meetings. In years to follow the name Thinking Out Loud was changed to the Gay-Straight Alliance. The new name was more inclusive for all students, and was also a save-face for those students still afraid to come out who needed the companionship of students *with whom they shared much in common*.

Through the years, the Gay-Straight Alliance has made huge contributions to the equality of treatment for all persons at Graceland. The club played a major role in getting hundreds of signatures on petitions to pass the Domestic Partnership Policy at Graceland, which states that Graceland would give the same benefits to committed gay and lesbian couples as it does for married couples. The policy is now in effect at Graceland University and printed in all the handbooks.

When a dialogue session was brought up in the 2002-2003 school year, the GSA also played a pivotal role removing the anti-homosexual hate speeches of Dr. Paul Cameron off the university campus. Dr. Cameron

was brought to campus to give his view on homosexuality. When it was discovered his speech lacked scientific research and teetered on the edge of hate speech, the administration, through a push from concerned faculty members, students and GSA members, removed him from campus. The dialogue was set up to provide understanding from both viewpoints on homosexuality, not to provoke hate. The GSA also participated in a silent protest of Dr. Cameron's speech, which was moved to the Lamoni Community Center.

The current GSA participates in AIDS walks in Des Moines and Kansas City, educational forums and movie nights, and promotes speakers from outside the walls of Graceland to share their stories and experiences. The Day of Silence is observed at Graceland, where participants stay silent all day and wear black armbands to signify the need to stop hate crimes. Membership this year in the GSA is the largest it has ever been, with over 100 people on their e-mailing list. It lists more faculty support than any other club. Members are working to put on a drag show, sponsoring sporting events, possibly showing the "Laramie Project" movie as a Wednesday night movie, and sponsoring trips to educational forums. The goal for this year's GSA is to become a proactive club in educating people about GLBT students, and to be more inclusive by sponsoring "safe" events in which large groups of students could participate.

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*Andrea Swall, a junior at Graceland University, is the current **president of the Gay-Straight Alliance**. She is a Scorpio who likes long walks on the beach and candle-lit dinners. She spends most of her time living life on the edge in Lamoni, Iowa, which usually consists of running away from rabid cows.*

*Samantha Clark is also a junior at Graceland University and is the **Vice President of the Gay-Straight Alliance**. She is a Gemini who enjoys nature walks and stargazing. She currently resides in a tent on the soccer field on account of that is where she spends most of her time.*

*Together Andrea and Sam want to move the ideas and goals of the GSA to accept and embrace people from all walks of life. They want to make the club a more proactive, inclusive presence throughout the campus and surrounding community.*

## Greetings from the GALA Field Coordinator

Sharon P. Troyer

The theme of our anniversary retreat, “*The Journey IS Home*” enriched us all! The concept of “journey” was made poignant in the ministry of Chris Glaser, an excellent retreat leader, and in the devotions and scripture studies led by GALA’s long time friend, Martha Juillerat, Director of the *Shower of Stoles Project*. We looked at how often in both Hebrew and Christian Scripture there are stories of people like Abraham, Moses, Naomi and Ruth **moving** from one place to another in response to God’s call to specific action. Martha did a wonderful job of tracing similar historical movement in the early Restoration story, and together we recognized that positive change rarely happens without both metaphorical and often **literal movement** from specific locations and ways of thinking! In today’s contemporary language we use the word “movement” to describe a specific time of often controversial, organized effort that brings deep cultural change. The civil rights movement and the women’s movement are good examples—periods of history when transform-ative change happens because of the prophetic urgings of those who are willing to “see with new eyes.” It requires **action by people of faith** who step out of their comfort zone, to name injustice which robs people of dignity, **to challenge the status quo**, and nearly always, to do this in the face of stern resistance by religious people and organizations.

One of the most exciting aspects of recent GALA leadership has been our active involvement in the welcoming church movement. This became part of a discussion at the eleventh annual Peace Colloquy which focused on ethnicity and racism. Over thirty GALA members attended the award ceremony on November 6<sup>th</sup> as this year’s International Peace Award was given to Reverend James Lawson, a black Methodist minister for his work in eradicating racism through the practice and teaching of non-violent principles. In his acceptance speech, he said that, even though he learned much in his work together with Martin Luther King and his studies of Gandhi while in India, he believes the life-changing message about non-violence and change rests most fully on the principles and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. In a conversation over lunch, Lawson encouraged GALA to continue building bridges between Community of Christ and other faith communities who are successfully promoting social justice in welcoming congregations. In his keynote address, Lawson spoke of how important it is to widen the doors of hospitality to all, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered persons!

In GALA, the program of ministry specifically designed to assist congregations interested in becoming more intentionally welcoming is called the **Welcoming Community Network (WCN)**, about which there is

growing interest. Through the dedicated work of John Billings, who in some ways has been the midwife of WCN, GALA’s leadership became a part of the Welcoming Church Program Leaders, sharing ideas and training with leaders from numerous denominations. January 13-16<sup>th</sup> in Houston, Texas, several of us, including Pat and Sam Marmoy, will participate in three days of training in core leadership skills for faith-based organizations, based on the principles stated in *Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing* by Dennis Jacobsen. It is very exciting to be part of adapting wonderful resources for Community of Christ congregations.

GALA is currently working with congregations in three different missions centers, and teams will be available for this expanded support ministry as more congregations express interest. Julie Dimmit from Lombard and Lakeview Congregations in Chicago, Carol Constance from Stone Church in Independence, and Bruce Albert from Blue River Mission Center in Michigan have learned to use a *Congregational Assessment Tool* which helps determine how quickly or slowly a particular congregation might want to engage in the WCN process. We use the *Implications Wheel*, which helps groups have a productive, interactive opportunity to see implications of taking or not taking certain actions—while at the same time avoiding debate.

Members and friends who want to know how to be more inclusive in their outreach might form a small informal group to talk about how best to proceed. I like to think of this as a “seed group” rather than a “task force,” because there is a very organic quality about it. Eventually this small group engages the leadership team and/or pastor in discussion, and we now have teams from WCN available to assist with such discussions. Eventually the congregation is brought into a prayerful discernment process about how or when to proceed.

If a church family decides they are ready to begin the WCN process, they would select study methods that fit them, listen to each other’s stories, and pre-prepare to make a well-thought-out decision. A frequently asked question is, “*Why must we specifically say we welcome persons who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender?* *We already welcome everyone to our congregation.*”  
(cont. on pg. 7)



**GALA'S 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY INTERNATIONAL RETREAT—"THE JOURNEY IS HOME"**  
**Camp Doniphan Conference Center, Excelsior Springs, MO, September 3-6, 2004**

**Chris Glaser:** Before I left our gathering, I mentioned to Sharon Troyer what a very special group you are. She responded modestly that I must experience that with a lot of groups. I said, "Well, then, GALA is VERY, very special." Leaving y'all was like leaving home (it brought tears to my eyes), a taste of the commonwealth of God we seldom enjoy on earth.

You are blessed and a blessing. It was nice that I could be a part of it, but your collective Spirit brought out my spirit, brought out the best in me. I wanted to be how you perceived me! And I can't help but think other guests who come, not just guest ministers, but ALL participants, must want to be the beloved child of God that you see in us. If only all of our churches—and our culture—were structured on that basis. In addition to your positive, Godly spirit, you are all so talented and generous with your gifts!

I returned wanting to see More Light Presbyterians have more of your experience. I've talked about you to my own congregation as well as to some of the leadership of MLP. You are a shining beacon for all of us. I realize this may sound "over the top"—oh well! I came away enriched, encouraged, and inspired. Thank you! Thanks be to God for all of you!

**Barbara Howard:** Standing ovations for an 85-year-old GALA supporter, Marge Damitz from California, and a 17-year-old GALA supporter, Sol Kelley-Jones, from Wisconsin, who reflected the enthusiasm and joy that permeated the weekend of Sept. 3-6 at Lake Doniphan Retreat Center.

Martha Juillerat's morning devotions (nearly unanimously supported at 8:00 a.m.—is that not miraculous?) included incredible insights about scripture as well as healthy humor. Her Shower of Stoles surrounded us throughout the weekend and deepened our sense of solidarity with hundreds of oppressed GLBT persons.

The integration of Martha's work with the content of Chris Glaser's sessions seemed to be a metaphor for the entire weekend. Continual reminders of God's unceasing, unconditional love for each person attending accompanied the emphasis on scripture.

The inspiring classes reinforced a challenging FY 2005 proposed budget of \$67,930. At the variety show Sunday evening, the group responded with an offering of \$600. (It is unlikely that the peculiar offering baskets will be replicated at any future World Conference!) A generous response to the silent auction also augmented the weekend's financial picture.



Contributing to the new budget will help us fulfill our common commitment to the general purpose which the GALA membership has adopted: to increasingly support gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons. Throughout the weekend this commitment to GLBT folks was sensed with the presence of heterosexual friends, parents, grandparents, siblings & their spouses, all of whom participated in the activities. Our journey is indeed our home, as Chris and Martha reminded us. We will joyfully embrace the future with hope.

**Lois Sloan:** When I heard GALA would be having a retreat at Lake Doniphan, I was excited. I have many memories of wonderful experiences at Doniphan, and here I was going with a group I wanted to know more about. Terrific! So Gwen and I sent in our registration and also our dues for GALA. Right after arriving and settling in, I offered my help in hanging up the stoles, then checked in and volunteered for K.P. What wonderful people! I was welcomed, encouraged to be me, was accepted for what I am, and felt at home.

Worship/devotionals were outstanding; no way could I express how I felt about Martha Juillerat and her humor. I was in awe of the time she took to read our history and be able to bring it back to us. I've wished many times that her comments could have been taped, especially at the talent show! Chris Glaser was amazing—so at ease with us, and so willing to share his personal experiences. He is an incredible speaker.

Time flew by; the banquet was so much fun. (I did feel the movies did not fit in; our theme was okay, but the male dominance was too apparent.)

Some folks I will never forget because of their sharing with me personally. I was so proud of Arthur, Sharon and Curt. Thanks to everyone for your sharing and leaving a piece of you with me!!

### **Paul Gagnon**

Greetings from Canada! I've known from an early age that we are all on some kind of journey—one that can be very short or long, smooth or uneven. As I looked around, I saw individuals who had journeyed through some horrendous times, but emerged stronger in themselves.

We are truly amazing people; we can hurt, shun, reject, label, even hate because of who one is, but we all have the capacity to forgive, understand, be loving and compassionate towards one another. There is so much to learn from this journey. Let's get rid of our "blinders," and begin to see what others are all about, ask questions, but most of all, listen with our hearts.

Let's take those who have become displaced and bring them home again. Many of us have been displaced, so we certainly know how they feel. At the retreat I felt love surrounding me, reminding me that we are all capable of helping one another. Let us not forget that, at some point of our lives, we were also stopped on our journey, but because of the love of others we were able to move forward. Let's be there for others, to help them go on.



Sarah Davis  
& Arthur  
Butler with  
the Houston  
chapter's gift  
to GALA.

*(Gala Field Coordinator, cont.)* One of the answers is, “Historically religion has been part of the problem in labeling LGBT people as ‘sinful,’ with an implied welcome only if repentant or celibate.” Unless there is consensus and evidence of a change in this thinking, gay people are not inclined to trust the words, “everyone is welcome here.” If a lesbian couple is looking for a congregation or wants to have their baby blessed, will there be loving support? Can gay parents enroll their children in Bible School or be asked to teach in church school? Often these questions haven’t been considered. The WCN process for every congregation is unique, but there is support from a WCN team to see that certain significant steps aren’t omitted. Eventually WCN congregations create a statement that is made public. They describe the kind of hospitality they will offer, and even though this may be broad and include many kinds of diversity, it *must* include a specific welcome to persons of all sexual orientations.

We are thrilled at increased interest in the Welcoming Community Network, including congregations in the Central Mission Center. GALA is now part of the **Kansas City Coalition of Welcoming Churches**. With Emily Eastwood, Executive Director of *Reconciling in Christ* and *Lutherans Concerned of North America*, we met in the Peacemakers room of the Temple in October to form an ecumenical group. In November we met at Saint James Lutheran, with members from Community of Christ and Lutheran congregations. We enjoyed practicing together how to use the Implications Wheel.

We want all galaNEWS readers to know we’d love to hear if you are interested in learning more about WCN, or if you’d like support in organizing a GALA chapter in your mission center. As congregations begin to do *their* part of change and growth, we need to support them with our attendance and participation. We CAN respond to the recent election in the U.S. by showing that all religion is not identified with fear and hatred. I invite you to share your greatest gift—that of your Presence in congregations. The love of God is made evident when we are authentic and truly present with each other in this way.

## Joy Howard Responds to "Real America" Representatives, November 4, 2004

...We have zillions of employee discussion databases, for pretty much any legal topic you want to talk about. In one of the databases I frequent, a couple of Bush supporters were astonished at the level of anger, dread, and disappointment expressed by some of us yesterday. One guy's post said, basically, Bush won, deal with it, you're out of touch with the real America. And he specifically cited the eleven states banning gay marriage as evidence of the "moral values" supported by this "real America." As you might imagine, that did it for me, so I explicitly came out of the closet "with both feet," as my mom would say. I love that expression. I'm going to start doing things "with both feet" a lot more often. It's the beginning of yet another stage of my personal revolution. Here's how I responded to him:

Contradictions abound. You mention that conservatives "aren't some group of evil people intent on destroying your life." From my perspective, as a lesbian, I am sickened by how our re-elected president energized his fundamentalist religious base precisely by pandering to their demonization and, yes, hatred, of lesbian and gay people. It should not be news to you that, in fact, there are evil people out there, under the banner of "conservative" and, even worse, "Christian" who are absolutely committed to destroying my life, and the lives of people like me. I have walked past them as they spew their hatred and wave their vilifying banners. I've been spat on, screamed at, and threatened by these "conservative Christians" who are an essential part of our re-elected president's base.

You mention the eleven states that voted against gay marriage as a "moral" issue. The rush to jump on the "ban gay marriage" bandwagon, a bandwagon proudly driven by our re-elected president, horrifies me. I count my blessings that I live in Massachusetts, where this summer I could legally marry the love of my life. Does this desire to bear the responsibilities of legal marriage make gay and lesbian people immoral? Are we just innately immoral by accident of birth? Many "conservatives" actually believe that. So if this is "the real America," where does that leave me? What advice do you have for me on how to explain this so-called "real America" to my daughters, one of whom voted for her first time this year? I'm an American and proudly so. But does one get to be part of your "real America" only if one's party is in control? Does one get to be a "real American" only if one is heterosexual?

You say that the government does not exist to provide or to privilege. And yet you define government's purpose by using the words "provide" not once but twice, and so I am unconvinced. This

government, this one that just won this election, is deeply, maybe inextricably, wedded to privilege, and to providing for the privileged. The tax code, the no-bid contracts, the Enrons, the criminalization of poverty, the list is longer than I can cope with just now.

Our re-elected president, fallaciously described as a "conservative," has presided over one of the largest expansions of government in history, has abandoned any pretense of fiscal responsibility, and is working desperately to keep government out of the boardroom, yet firmly ensconced in the bedroom (but only if you're queer like me), in the examining room (if you're a woman needing to terminate a pregnancy), and in the courtroom (litmus tests for judges.) He has abandoned traditional "conservatives" for the favor of religious fundamentalists (I refuse to call them the "religious right.") The nightmarish and insidious possibilities of this marriage of religion and government should be particularly obvious to us now, given how the fundamentalist Islamic movement has contorted both legitimate and rogue governments abroad.

I'll admit to the temptation to seek refuge in Canada, where same-sex marriage is legal in numerous provinces, and where diversity is thought of in terms of a "mosaic" and not a "melting pot." I am weary of being devalued and dehumanized on a regular, sometimes daily, basis by politicians looking to score some easy points. But I'm sticking, because I believe in the positive possibilities of this nation and I want to pass that belief on to my children, through thick and thin. I'd rather be part of the movement to turn America around, away from divisive, marginalizing, and exploitative politics and policies. The pendulum will swing back. Not to be too sappy, but that America will be born not out of fear, but out of love: love of neighbor, love of justice, and love of freedom for ALL citizens, not just the majority. And I want to be here when that love is made real....

Love to you all,  
with both feet and more,  
Joy

~~~~~  
*Excerpts of an e-mail sent by Joy Howard, Watertown, MA, to her parents, Barbara & Richard Howard, among others. Copy made available with her permission, 11/05/2004.*

## CBS, NBC Refuse to Air Church's Television Advertisement

United Church of Christ ad highlighting Jesus' extravagant welcome called 'too controversial'  
CLEVELAND -- The CBS and NBC television networks are refusing to run a thirty-second television ad from the United Church of Christ because its all-inclusive welcome has been deemed "too controversial."

The ad, part of the denomination's new, broad identity campaign set to begin airing nationwide on Dec. 1, states that -- like Jesus -- the United Church of Christ (UCC) seeks to welcome all people, regardless of ability, age, race, economic circumstance or sexual orientation.

According to a written explanation from CBS, the United Church of Christ is being denied network access because its ad implies acceptance of gay and lesbian couples -- among other minority constituencies -- and is, therefore, too "controversial."

"Because this commercial touches on the exclusion of gay couples and other minority groups by other individuals and organizations," reads an explanation from CBS, "and the fact the Executive Branch has recently proposed a Constitutional Amendment to define marriage as a union between a man and a woman, this spot is unacceptable for broadcast on the [CBS and UPN] networks." Similarly, a rejection by NBC declared the spot "too controversial."

"It's ironic that after a political season awash in commercials based on fear and deception by both parties seen on all the major networks, an ad with a message of welcome and inclusion would be deemed too controversial," says the Rev. John H. Thomas, the UCC's general minister and president. "What's going on here?"

Negotiations between network officials and the church's representatives broke down [Nov. 30], the day before the ad campaign begins airing nationwide on a combination of broadcast and cable networks. The ad has been accepted and will air on a number of networks, including ABC Family, AMC, BET, Discovery, Fox, Hallmark, History, Nick@Nite, TBS, TNT, Travel and TV Land, among others.

The debut 30-second commercial features two muscle-bound "bouncers" standing guard outside a symbolic, picturesque church and selecting which persons are permitted to attend Sunday services. Written text interrupts the scene, announcing, "Jesus didn't turn people away. Neither do we." A narrator then proclaims the United Church of Christ's commitment to Jesus' extravagant welcome: "No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here." (The ad can be viewed online at [www.stillspeaking.com](http://www.stillspeaking.com).)

In focus groups and test market research conducted before the campaign's national rollout, the UCC found that many people throughout the country feel alienated

by churches. The television ad is geared toward those persons who, for whatever reason, have not felt welcomed or comfortable in a church.

"We find it disturbing that the networks in question seem to have no problem exploiting gay persons through mindless comedies or titillating dramas, but when it comes to a church's loving welcome of committed gay couples...they draw the line," says the Rev. Robert Chase, director of the UCC's communication ministry.

"...The consolidation of TV network ownership into the hands of a few executives today puts freedom of speech and freedom of religious expression in jeopardy," says former FCC Commissioner Gloria Tristani, currently managing director of the UCC's Office of Communication. "By refusing to air the United Church of Christ's paid commercial, CBS and NBC are stifling religious expression. They are denying the communities they serve a suitable access to differing ideas and expressions."

Adds Andrew Schwartzman, president/CEO of the not-for-profit Media Access Project in Washington, D.C., "This is an abuse of the broadcasters' duty to inform their viewers on issues of importance to the community. After all, these stations don't mind carrying shocking, attention-getting programming, because they do that every night."

The UCC's national offices in Cleveland speak to, but not for, its nearly 6,000 congregations and 1.3 million members. In the spirit of the denomination's rich tradition, UCC congregations remain autonomous, but also strongly in covenant with each other and with the denomination's regional and national bodies.

From the Worldwide Faith News archives [www.wfn.org](http://www.wfn.org)  
UCC Barb Powell, press contact (216) 736-2175  
<[powellb@ucc.org](mailto:powellb@ucc.org)> <<http://www.ucc.org>>

*To Barb Powell, United Church of Christ Press Contact: On behalf of the leadership team of the Welcoming Community Network, (WCN), and the Board of Directors of GALA (Gay and Lesbian Acceptance), affiliated with Community of Christ, we offer our support for your strong stand in the public media about widening the doors of hospitality to persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities. We are saddened, like you and many welcoming church program leaders of various faiths, that the inclusive ministry we need to offer GLBT persons is considered "too controversial" to be named on CBS and NBC. We commend your persistent efforts, and stand in solidarity with you at this time. It is clearly past time for churches to offer the intentional welcome that lies central in the ministry and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. To do less is to allow the recent political and social climate to stand unchallenged by prophetic voices of contemporary people of faith.*

*Sharon P. Troyer, Ph.D.,  
WCN Program Director & GALA Field Coordinator*

## Treasurer's Report Fiscal Year Ended 9/30/04

Several people at the retreat requested that a final report for the fiscal year 2004 be printed in the newsletter. As you can see, membership dues are not enough to keep GALA afloat. You can also see what our major expense categories are and what a retreat really costs.

*Fran Zimmerman, Treasurer*

|                                    |                 |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Cash on Hand 9/30/03.....          | \$31,749.00     |
| <b>Income</b>                      |                 |
| Memberships .....                  | \$ 4,454.00     |
| Contributions .....                | 25,130.00       |
| Other .....                        | <u>146.00</u>   |
| Total Income .....                 | \$29,730.00     |
| <b>Expenses</b>                    |                 |
| Field Organizer .....              | 29,945.00       |
| Retreat .....                      | 4,979.00        |
| Newsletters .....                  | 3,133.00        |
| All Other Expenses.....            | <u>8,267.00</u> |
| Total Expenses .....               | \$46,324.00     |
| Expenses in Excess of Income ..... | \$16,594.00     |
| Cash on Hand 9/30/04.....          | \$15,155.00     |

### Retreat Income/Expenses

|                           |                 |
|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Registration Income ..... | \$14,306.00     |
| Fundraisers .....         | <u>2,973.00</u> |
| Total Retreat Income..... | \$17,279.00     |
| Lodging & Meals .....     | 19,030.00       |
| Program Costs .....       | <u>3,228.00</u> |
| Total Expenses .....      | \$22,258.00     |
| Net Retreat Expense.....  | \$ 4,979.00     |

A copy of the detailed budget and income and expense report are available upon request.

## Mission Centers Support GALA!

We are happy to report that **four mission centers** have passed resolutions of financial support to GALA and the Welcoming Community Network (WCN).

- Midlands Mission Center became the first mission center to make such a commitment when they voted to budget \$1500 each for 2004 and 2005.
- Greater Pacific Northwest Mission Center USA followed with a \$1500 one-year pledge.
- Rocky Mountain Msn Ctr and Southern California Msn Ctr—just this fall—each passed a strong resolution to support the Field Coordinator position for two years at \$1500 each year! These combined pledges of \$10,500 are greatly appreciated! To meet the \$67,000 budget GALA passed at their annual business meeting, we are in our **major fundraising campaign.**

GALA sees this kind of support as a message that many church members want Community of Christ to widen the doors of inclusive ministry and hospitality to all. They support GALA's goals of promoting spiritual wholeness and seeking social justice for people of all sexual orientations and gender identity in their greater communities.

We hope more mission centers will take similar action so GALA can bring the ministry of WCN to inter-ested congregations everywhere. As Treasurer of GALA, I want to thank each person who works to make this happen. If you haven't joined GALA, please send in your household membership and consider **adding a special contribution** as part of your Christmas giving! Remember, GALA is a non-profit organization and your dues and contributions are tax deductible. You may go to our website, [www.galaweb.org](http://www.galaweb.org) and use your credit card or use the provided form in this newsletter.

*--Fran Zimmerman, GALA Treasurer*



## The Queen's Kitchen

You can blame the "newby" editor for not finding more space for the Gala Gourmet this issue. She says she's sorry! Please continue to send your favorite recipes to [Galagourmet@aol.com](mailto:Galagourmet@aol.com).

### Chicken Corn Chowder

*(This recipe is not exact because I don't use a recipe. It's what I used for the pot of chowder I made for the GALA gathering at our house on October 16.)*

**Dice 5 lbs of potatoes. Cook in liquid that is half chicken broth and half water. When potatoes are about three-fourths cooked, drain.**

Put potatoes back in pan and cover with half and half or milk. [I usually use about ¾ half and half to ¼ milk.]

*Be sure to put heat on low and stir frequently so milk does not stick or burn.*

Add: 3 large cans of chicken breast with the juice  
4 cans of whole corn with the juice  
Salt and pepper to taste  
Approximately 1 teaspoon of cumin

Bring to a boil and thicken to preferred consistency with a mixture of flour and water. Serve immediately or reduce heat and simmer on very low until ready to serve.

*--Submitted by Ginger Farley*

## ***GALA GRATITUDE***

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Special thanks go to *Arthur Butler, Tom Beck and Mark Dixon!* *Arthur* served with tireless dedication as President of GALA the last two years and, thank goodness, he has another year on the GALA leadership team and Board of Directors as Past President. *Tom* did a great job in his two-year term as Secretary and now turns that role over to Pam Mayfield, whose election was announced at the recent retreat. *Mark* has served GALA in numerous roles, but most recently, a two-year term on the Board of Directors and Director of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary retreat! Tremendous things have taken place under the leadership of these three dedicated leaders!

Curt Filer has begun his two-year term as GALA President after one year as President Elect. Continuity of leadership is helped by these creative people: Sue McLaughlin, Gary Kelsey, John Billings (Chaplain), Meredith Bischoff (Western Regional Facilitator), and Kelly Propst (Central Region Facilitator). They are now joined by Leah Sheppard, our newest member of the Board of Directors.

We are also happy to announce that Carol Cavin is the new editor of *The galaNEWS letter*. Please send Carol your letters to the editor, articles, and digital photos at [ccavin@cofchrist.org](mailto:ccavin@cofchrist.org).

There is not time or space to thank everyone who helped make our recent retreat such a success. But special thanks go to Martha Juillerat and Chris Glaser for their excellent guest ministry, to Kip Dawson for the wonderful theme banquet and Todd Davison for the playful spirit of the silent auction and variety show!

And last, but not least, hats off to everyone who came this year for the first time. You added so much, and we look forward to having you back

next year! The GALA international retreat will be held over Labor Day weekend, 2005, near Toronto, Ontario, Canada, a location where marriage is legal for persons of all sexual orientations. We will be extended a warm welcome!

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## Join Or Renew Memberships Online!

Streamlining the way GALA does business has been a goal of the executive board for some time. You can now join, renew, or make gift contributions on GALA's web site, [www.GALAweb.org](http://www.GALAweb.org). Our webmaster, Meredith Bischoff, has designed a way to get WHAT you want WHEN you need it. If you have not yet paid your annual dues for 2004 or made your pledge, we invite you to do so now using this service!

GALA continues to need your support. Your gift, membership or contribution helps:

Produce and publish our GALA newsletter  
Operate our web site [www.GALAweb.org](http://www.GALAweb.org)  
Provide sponsorships for retreats  
Finance our new Field Coordinator position  
Support the costs of GALA's many expenses

Our organization has the vision. We have the leadership. Now, all we need is YOU.

### Membership & Contribution Form

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Membership Level** (U.S. dollars)

\_\_\_\_ Individual (\$25) \_\_\_\_ Family (\$40) \_\_\_\_ Limited Income (\$10)

#### **I would like to make an additional contribution to advance GALA's outreach and educational goals:**

\_\_\_\_ \$50 \_\_\_\_ \$100 \_\_\_\_ \$200 \_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Contributions to GALA are tax deductible.*

**Please return to:** P.O. Box 2173, Independence, MO 64055

\_\_\_\_ I would like to receive the galaNEWSletter electronically for future issues. This will help save GALA money and make better use of our web site, [www.GALAweb.org](http://www.GALAweb.org)