



gala news

THE LETTER

March 2008 – Volume 19 Issue 1

Thirty Years...and Still on the Journey

I feel really old....30 years ago this year, I came out to the World Church leadership of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS—now called Community of Christ—COC). I use that name here because it was a part of my history. The name impacted my life as a youth, not always pleasantly, but it helped shape my life. I was criticized for being a member of the church with the funny name, just like I was bashed because I was a member of the gay community. It's been an interesting journey. Here's one of the recent roads traveled.

A few weeks ago I was invited to the St. Paul, Minn., Community of Christ Congregation, to present the morning message and be a part of the adult class—what a privilege! I was wonderfully blessed by the presence of the Holy Spirit in my preparation and presentation of the sermon. The warmth, love and acceptance from the Saints in St. Paul were overwhelming. The adult class dialogue offered an open, relaxed setting for any question or concern. I've never had such a calm and affirming setting in which to share. But more important (and historic for me), was to be invited to speak openly as a gay member of the Community of Christ. Thirty years ago I lived in fear to share who I was with the Saints.

One of the questions I hear often when sharing with the Saints or the community at large: "Why do you stay when there are other churches more open?" I tell them it's not been easy; at times I do want to say, "Enough is enough!" But I also have to tell them that I've always known, since a young child in this church, that the focus of my ministry would be in this area. All my trials and frustrations, though not understood at the time, would prepare me for the road ahead. I shared with the St. Paul Saints some stories of my interactions in various church settings—camps, reunions, World Conference, congregations. I never knew for sure if I was making a difference, but still stepped out in the faith that I was doing what I was called to do.

The biggest lesson I've learned is that sometimes my presence alone is a ministry. When people observe me interacting openly and freely within the church, it makes an impact. Like the scattered seed, we never know if it has

landed on fertile ground, so I continue to be a presence whenever possible, and hope it bears fruit.

Another question that came up was, "How can I make a difference in the church, community or workplace?" My suggestion: Look for places or opportunities to show your support of the GLBT community. You never know who's around you that needs to hear a positive statement regarding GLBT people.

I asked how many of them had heard negative statements toward the GLBT community—*that's so gay... queer....dyke...faggots*. The list goes on. Many hands went up. I then asked, "What did you do when you heard it?" "Nothing," was the response from a few. I talked about families in COC congregations sitting in silence, listening to negative comments against the GLBT community from their church "friends," and at the same time not knowing that the family across the aisle was suffering the same pain.

By standing up and stating simply that such statements are offensive, or you don't appreciate those words being used, does two things. It makes the person stop and think about what they just said (because it's a "command slam" phrase these days), and it also may let someone who is hiding in silence know that you might be a safe person to talk with. Sure, it's not easy to stand up, but sitting in silence has a negative impact. Especially in this church, we need the Saints to stand up. Be a ministry of presence by showing your hope for the GLBT community.

My thirty-year journey with the RLDS/Community of Christ has had many rocky, winding mountain roads filled with some deep potholes. But more and more I'm traveling some very smooth roads, with a gentle slope into a beautiful, peaceful valley. Yes, I still watch out for the bumps in the road. It keeps me alert, watching for those individuals along the way that need a friendly word of hope...or a word that challenges their way of thinking. It is my hope that we will be guided into a peaceful, safe place together with our Lord God.

*Love always,
Allan Fiscus, GALA President*

A Letter From Apostle Ron Harmon

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

I recently had the privilege of meeting informally with GALA's President Elect, David Howard, during a dinner at my parent's home in Northeast Ohio. It was characteristically cold, but the fellowship with family and the opportunity to share with David was a warm experience. I deeply appreciate David's vision and commitment to work constructively with the church leadership in forging a path for continued discernment, conversation, and resolution of a number of issues related to gays and their participation in the life of the church.

I want to share with you that the issue of "homosexuality and the church" is a deep concern of mine and my colleagues in the World Church Leadership Council. It goes to the heart of our basic understandings of human sexuality and identity, about which there is much misinformation and misunderstanding. Groundwork is being laid for more meaningful discernment and conversation as we address the issues as a community of faith.

The years since the 2005 World Conference have been focused on financial challenges, changes in the Presidency and other leading quorums, and reworking headquarters structure to better support an international church. We have also focused on our identity, message, and mission, which is a strategic component to many other important initiatives in the life of the church. These include lifelong discipleship formation, priesthood faithfulness and development, and navigation through challenging and divisive issues facing the church. Significant work is currently underway to clarify our core values as an international community of faith.

This work is incredibly important because it lays the foundation for so many other conversations and issues. Core values drive our behaviors, our relationships, and our experience together. They are the foundational principles that make us who we are. Like the DNA in a cell, our values are like the spiritual DNA of the church and give us our distinctive identity. These values stand the test of time. They are connected with what God seeks to bring forth through us as a movement dedicated to ministries of restoration and wholeness for all creation.

These shared values provide the framework to ask the important questions, the answers to which are true to our values. I have been deeply moved by the work occurring with a fairly large group of individuals representing many places where the church has a presence. We are learning valuable insights about process and our personal biases as we struggle to come to common understandings about language, symbols, and meaning in many different cultural contexts.

Why am I talking about this process? Because it gives me great hope that we are (1) laying the foundation that will guide our decisions in the future, and (2) learning how to reason together under the impress of the Holy Spirit.

I look forward to continued association with David and many of you as we work together to tear down walls of fear and misunderstanding. Our call to sacred community is a call to uphold the worth of every person. This is one of our most precious central values as a movement. We have much work to do that is critical to bring the Kingdom of God closer in the places where we are privileged to serve in the name of Jesus Christ,

*Ron Harmon, Apostle
East Central USA Mission Field*

First Regional Trainings Held in Minneapolis

February in Minneapolis may sound like a terribly cold place to be, but if you were participating in the National Field Organizing Project's first training, "Towards a Welcoming and Inclusive Church," you found warmth for your heart and spirit!

The regional training is designed to build capacities in congregations to more effectively move towards being a welcoming church to LGBT folk. The first training session took place on February 15- 18, 2008, at the Mayflower UCC in South Minneapolis.

The training focuses on congregational leaders (lay and ordained), denominational staff, and anyone else interested in the following topics: addressing conflict, change in congregations, public storytelling, organizing skills and strategies, and building a positive theology. The workshop allows time for denominational groups to strategize and plan for action after the workshop. There are opportunities to worship together and build relationships to support one another in the work of building a more inclusive church.

Other training workshops are scheduled: in North Carolina April 24 to 27, and in Southern California on June 5 to 8. Others will be planned for the fall in Indiana and the Washington, D.C. areas. For details on all the trainings and registration information, please go to:

<http://www.welcomingresources.org/welcomingchurchtraining.htm>

Come join in the movement for faithfulness through inclusion, justice and welcoming.



COC members at the February workshop included Meredith Bischoff (lower left), Sam & Pat Marmoy (standing, 2nd & 3rd from left), & Sharon Troyer (standing, far right).

Put Yourself in the Forefront! **Highlights of the** **WCN Annual Meeting**

The second WCN annual meeting was held at the Walnut Gardens congregation in Independence, MO, on Jan. 12, 2008. Board members met with new friends and advocates for a day of dreaming and planning for the future.

As part of the business of the day, three new board members, DeziRae Astle (Colorado), David Woosley (Kansas), and Jon Mendenhall (Colorado) were confirmed. [A fourth new board member, Arthur Butler (Missouri) was added in February.]

During the meeting, a strategic plan was developed for the next three years, which includes building relationships with mission center leaders and congregations within chosen mission centers. This will initially be done by distributing our welcoming church packet, which includes a DVD, a number of brochures, booklets, and the WCN Resource CD.

The Board and other WCN leaders will also continue to foster relationships with and between WCN congregations through e-mail and direct contact.

All along the way, WCN will nurture and support the growing number of Community of Christ congregations interested in welcoming and affirming GLBT members, their families and allies. This will include sending invitations and announcements about upcoming training opportunities.

Another project will be the development of Pastoral Care Guidelines for LGBT members and their families in the life of a congregation.

The slogan for the next three years will be: "Put Yourself in the Forefront!" This is derived from the Doctrine and Covenants 151:9: "You who are my disciples must be found continuing in the forefront of those organizations and movements which are recognizing the worth of persons

and are committed to bring the ministry of my Son to bear on their lives." All felt this phrase captures the energetic participation that WCN hopes to inspire.

Allan Fiscus Ministers **in St. Paul**

"Loving, caring, personable and hopeful" are words that best describe Allan Fiscus's ministry in the St. Paul Congregation on Sunday, February 3, 2008. During the worship service, he spoke to the day's theme of "Hunger and Thirst for Justice." Allan urged the congregation to be faithful in its resolution to welcome and encourage people of all sexual orientations, to share in community life, worship and sacraments, including leadership and ministry in the church. He commented on his joy at seeing the rainbow symbol welcoming GLBT persons on the church sign as he entered the driveway. He said that, to date, it is the only Community of Christ church sign where he has seen the rainbow symbol displayed.

Allan serves as an elder in the East Lansing, MI, congregation. A nurse by profession, he spends his working days (and nights) organizing blood drives for the Red Cross and working in the emergency room at Sparrow Hospital in Lansing.

In the informal setting of the church school class following morning worship, Allan spoke more personally of his story and the dedication he feels toward his brothers and sisters in the faith. He shared personal testimonies of how God has been present and is working in his life and the life of the church. He also has experienced the pain of his GLBT brothers and sisters who have felt rejected by the church, and expressed his sorrow with the church's slowness to accept and include them. He urged all those present to continue to push for change, and emphasized the importance of the ministry of perseverance and presence.

--Vern Hill, St. Paul, MN

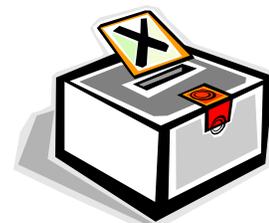


2008 Elections

This is probably the most exciting election cycle for president that we have had in memory. We have a chance to elect a president who, at the least, will change the direction of this country and hopefully steer a course that is more inclusive and way less partisan. We also have a chance to elect a president who is much more favorable to the issues that affect our lives on a daily basis.

I first of all urge you to register to vote (shame on you if you aren't already), and secondly, get involved in what is happening. Visit the websites of each of the candidates, and see how they mesh with your values and the values of your faith and the LGBT community. Senator Clinton's page is: <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/feature/lgbt/> Senator Obama's page is: <http://pride.barackobama.com/page/content/lgbthome> So far we haven't found one for McCain.

GET INVOLVED! How, you ask? All campaigns need money and people to do everything from stuffing envelopes to setting strategy. Also don't overlook your local races for judges, city council, county commission, school board, state legislature and governor. All of these impact your freedoms and your quality of life. So, what are you waiting for? Get involved. It's fun and a good way to meet people and build relationships!



Rainbow Wedding Network applauds the passing of Oregon's House Bill 2007, The Family Fairness Act, through which domestic partnerships will offer Oregon GLBTQ families needed benefits and security. The Family Fairness Act was signed into law to be effective as of January 2, 2008. Unfortunately, out-of-state conservative organizations such as Arizona's Alliance Defense Fund are attempting to overthrow the legislative process by drawing invalid signatures into question. Currently Domestic Partnerships have been placed on a "temporary restraining order" that has delayed the implementation of it for the citizens of Oregon.

www.RainbowWeddingNetwork.com and The Same Love Same Rights® organization are committed to educating and energizing the community throughout the nation, to motivate involvement in issues concerning equal rights in marriage.... We want to send a message to conservative organizations that the GLBTQ community is watching and that we will work together to stop their attacks against us. And we are sending our thoughts in solidarity to our GLBTQ brothers and sisters in Oregon that they are not alone, and that we stand with them in support!... We must inform the GLBTQ community about the situation in Oregon. The fact that a legitimate law has been put on hold for these reasons is an atrocity, and we must take immediate action....

The next Same Love Same Rights Mobile Marriage Summit and LGBT Wedding Expo will be held in Seattle, WA, on April 6, 2008, at the Marriott Waterfront Downtown 12:30-3:30 pm. Always FREE to attend. Visit www.SameLoveSameRights.com for more details.

Equality Forum 2008

The 16th annual GLBT event will take place April 28 to May 4 in Philadelphia, featuring 63 programs, including 34 panels, 14 parties and 15 special events. The largest annual national and international GLBT civil rights forum has no registration fee, and all substantive programs are free. All Equality Forum 2008 programs and events are online at:

www.equalityforum.com. High-lights include:

- Featured international programming: Gays and Lesbians in the Muslim World.
- International Equality Dinner at the National Constitution Center, honoring New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson and Wachovia Corp.
- Conversations with Congressman Barney Frank and Muslim Reformer Irshad Manji
- "Out in the World: Building a Global LGBT Human Rights Movement," presented by Amnesty International USA.
- National Politics Panel, Thurs., 5/1. This program

will focus on the 2008 federal elections.

- National Legal Panel, Fri., 5/2. Moderated by D'Arcy Kemptz of the National Lesbian & Gal Law Association.
- National Military Panel, Sat., 5/3. Moderated by Sharra Greer. Presented in collaboration with Service Members Legal Defense Network.

About Equality Forum: It is a national and international GLBT civil rights organization with an educational focus. Equality Forum coordinates GLBT History Month, produces documentary films, undertakes high impact initiatives and presents the largest annual international GLBT civil rights forum.

A Gay Person's Prayer

Dear God, I have come to You today,
Because, well, You know, I am gay.
The world thinks that this is my choice,
So they refuse to hear my voice

I have been told that You hate me,
Can this really be a possibility?
They say that I am damned to an eternal hell,
But if I act as if I'm not what I am, all will be well.

But God You know that I have tried,
You know how many times I have cried.
You know that I have pleaded for a change,
That my life You would take and rearrange.

But no matter how hard I tried,
No matter how many tears I cried,
Everything inside of me has remained the same,
So I ask You now, who should I blame?

Do I blame the society that is unaware?
Do I blame the people who just do not care?
Do I blame those who sit by and shake their head,
Proclaiming that I would be better off dead?

We have become the lepers of today,
And everything that goes wrong is blamed on those who are gay.
However, I know that I am who I am today,
Because it was You who made me this way.

I did not choose to purposely disobey,
I did not choose to turn away;
But I have chosen to be who I am,
Without shame and not living a sham.

I have chosen to embrace the gift of love,
For surely, this was a gift from above.
So God, now I ask You take me by the hand,
And help me make others understand.

Remove the blindfolds from their eyes,
Remove their shackles and disapproving cries,
Awaken in them the spirit of love so true,
And let them know that being gay came from You.

--Mac McClure, 8/28/05

KC Area GALA 2008 Calendar

March 9 - National GALA president-elect David Howard and GALA president Allan Fiscus meet with area GALA members and allies at the home of Curt Filer, 1011 S. Main, Indep., at 2 p.m. on Sunday, March 9. If by great luck you read this before the meeting and are in the KC metro area, please join us.

March 15 – SPAGHETTI DINNER AND GAME NIGHT with Lois Sloan and Gwen Smith at Independence Square Townhouse Community Room, 1360 Baker Dr. (between Truman and Walnut, Independence), 6:30 to 10:30 p.m. Spaghetti, meatballs and sauce will be provided. Please bring salads, breads, desserts and soft drinks. Please bring your favorite games to complement Mexican train and other games. 816-254-3139 (home) or 885-6465 (cell)

April 19 – FAMILY OUTING AND PICNIC AT POWELL GARDENS. (30 miles east of Kansas City on U.S. Hwy 50--directions and more detail later). Highlights include:

- Orchid and begonia display in the conservatory
- Spring display in the Visitor Center beds and containers,
- Trees: flowering crabapples, dogwood, redbuds, wild plum and Asian magnolias
- Shrubs: Viburnums
- Vines: Wisteria, Trumpet Honeysuckle
- Perennials: bleeding hearts, dwarf phlox, dwarf iris, hen & chicks, woodland wildflowers
- Bulbs: daffodils, tulips, grape hyacinths, freesias
- Annuals: pansies and violas, ornamental greens, snapdragons, stocks, calendula, diascias, monkeyflower, linaria, nemesia.

May 16 –Exploring the possibility of a sponsored public showing of “For the Bible Tells Me So.”

May 28-June 1 Kansas City Gay Pride activities. No official GALA involvement. Details at <http://www.kansascitygaypride.org/>

June 21 – FAMILY PICNIC AT ROTARY PARK off Westport Road in Independence. This is a water park ideal for children and the “child within all of us”! Bring frisbees and other lawn games.

July 19 - Possible trip to Macon to see “Blythe Spirit” at Todd Davison’s theater. May hire a van for the day.

August 15 – POOL PARTY AND BARBEQUE at home of Mike Brush.

September 19 – MINIATURE GOLF EVENING, followed by ice cream at Sheridan’s on Noland Road.

October 18 – HARVEST HAYRIDE.

November 15 – THANKSGIVING DINNER, location to be determined.

December 20 – CHRISTMAS PARTY at Arthur Butler’s home. Evening will include white elephant gift exchange and food donations to Hillcrest Ministries.

Houston Chapter Retreat

February 15-17 found 13 of us gathered together near Shepherd, Texas (an hour north of Houston) for a weekend of fun, fellowship and sharing. The location was a rustic retreat center where previous retreats have been held.

There was an abundance of good food, lots of visiting and catching up, crafts, and a very interesting presentation by Don Rumer-Rivera, a local Houston attorney. Don shared insights into the status of gay-oriented laws, followed with a discussion of the importance of the up-coming Texas presidential primary and general elections.

We made a beautiful cross covered with colored stones to be presented to the Pasadena, Texas, congregation of the Community of Christ. →→→

2008 Labor Day Retreat

The annual retreat will be held this year at **Temple Grove Campground**, part of the Eastern Great Lakes Mission Center. Fifteen people from the mission center are already involved with the planning. Events will include

- a worship service in the Kirtland Temple,
- a tour of the Temple and Mormon Village,
- spiritual stimulation in the Spiritual Transformation Center.
- Miss Gladys Over will MC the talent show...so start practicing!
- Gladys will also host gay bingo!
- Of course we have included our story telling and a chance for great fellowship.
- We also want to learn how to tell our story better, and
- begin preparing for the 2009 Regional Conference.

The GALA Board will flesh out details at their retreat in early March. Registration forms will be included in the next newsletter. Activities will start on August 29 and conclude on September 1. Make plans now to attend!

(Houston Retreat, cont.) Although the weather on Saturday did not cooperate (those of you who were here a few years ago can remember what it’s like when it rains), we had beautiful, sunny mild weather on Sunday. Everyone enjoyed the restful weekend away from the busy schedules we all have.

--Dave Swart, Houston, TX

Excerpts from a Worship Service: "Prepare a Table"

Come to the Party

When God throws a party the whole house is lit up,
signaling the joy inside.
There's music and dancing, and laughter resounds.
The invitation list is infinite—including you and me
And no one's left out—
not even those with the sag of dissipation in the face
and the smell of pigpen clinging to the shoes.
No one—except for those whose squeamish
unforgiveness throws a dead-bolt on the door.
So what do you say? Come to the party!
--Robin E. Van Cleef, Alive Now! M/A '87

Big, Big House

I don't know ...
where you lay your head or where you call your home
where you eat your meals or where you talk on the phone
if you got a cook, a butler or a maid
if you got a yard with a hammock in the shade
if you got some shelter, say a place to hide
if you live with friends in whom you can confide
if you got a family, say a mom or dad
if you feel love at all, but I bet you wish you had.

Come and go with me to my Father's house.
Come and go with me to my Father's house.
It's a big, big house with lots and lots of room.
A big, big table with lots and lots of food
A big, big yard where we can play football.
A big, big house. It's my Father's house.

All I know is a big ole house with rooms for everyone
All I know is lots of land where we can play and run
All I know if you need love and I've got a family
All I know is you're all alone, so why not come with me?
*--From "Don't Censor Me," by Audio Adrenaline,
Forefront Records, ASIN B000005KUS*

Gracious Spirit, help us summon other guests
to share that feast
where triumphant Love will welcome
those who had been last and least....

Turn our worship into witness
in the sacrament of life;
Send us forth to love and serve you,
bringing peace where there is strife.

Give us, Christ, your great compassion
to forgive as you forgave;
May we still behold your image
in the world you died to save.

Let us affirm God's all-inclusive love in our lives
and the call to share that love with others. God's love
transcends boundaries created by fear, prejudice and
religious piety. No one is excluded from the miraculous
blessings of Jesus.

Loving and gracious God, You hear the cries of the
afflicted; you prepare a table for all who are outcast and
despised; you welcome homecoming wanderers with
joyful celebration. Help us to truly believe that you hear,
nourish and welcome all, through Christ our Savior.
(especially you and me).

...for the BIBLE tells me so

Dear GALA friends,

I want to bring to your attention the award-winning
documentary feature FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME
SO! Winner of the Audience Award for Best
Documentary at the Seattle International Film Festival,
Dan Karslake's provocative, entertaining documentary
brilliantly re-conciles homosexuality and Biblical
scripture, and in the process reveals that Church-
sanctioned anti-gay bias is based almost solely upon a
signi-ficant (and often malicious) misin-terpretation of
the Bible.

Through the experiences of five very normal, very
Christian, very American families -- including those of
former House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt and
Episcopalian Bishop Gene Robinson -- we discover how
insightful people of faith handle the realization of having
a gay child.

For all information about the film, including where it
is playing in theaters around the country, visit: [http://
www.forthebibletellsmeso.org/](http://www.forthebibletellsmeso.org/) The list is updated
frequently, so check often for the most up-to-date info,
including latest news on the film's rollout, theatrical
dates in your community, special events, and to com-
municate directly with the film-making team. You can
also register to be notified automatically when the DVD
is available.

ALSO: we are currently building FOR THE BIBLE
TELLS ME SO resources for faith communities, includ-
ing discussion guides, worship resources with sample
sermons, hymn and prayer resources and other material
to help faith communities engage the question of inclu-
sion. If you would like to be a part of this process please
reply to this message express-ing your interest.

FINALLY: If you would like to arrange a screening
of FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO for your faith
community, please call or e-mail us. Phone number &
e-mail addresses are listed below. It will be our pleasure
to work with you! And if you have any other questions,
please do not hesitate to contact us.

Rev. Dámaris E. Ortega, 212-870-3178
Office for Faith Community Outreach
FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO
forthebibleoutreach@gmail.com,
www.forthebibletellsmeso.org

Join Or Renew Memberships Online!

You can join, renew, or make gift contributions on GALA's web site, www.GALAweb.org. If you have not yet paid your annual dues for 2008 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 to:

- Produce and distribute our GALA newsletter
- Operate our website www.GALAweb.org
- Provide sponsorships for retreats
- Defray GALA's expenses

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HAVE YOU PAID YOUR 2008 MEMBERSHIP?!

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____ or \$_____

Contributions to GALA are tax deductible.

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

The GALA Newsletter is also available electronically at our web site, www.GALAweb.org

March 2008

214 E. Hansen Ct.
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