



USA National Conference Recommends Policy Changes

First Presidency and Council of Twelve Will Have to Approve before Implementation

The Community of Christ USA National Conference was held April 19–21. After a three-year consent-building process of study, dialogue, and prayer, members from across the nation gathered at Community of Christ Auditorium in Independence, Missouri, to address two issues: same-sex/gender marriage where legal, and covenant commitment services where marriage is not legal; and ordination of people regardless of sexual orientation.

After hearing multiple perspectives, the USA National Conference, by more than the required 67-percent majority, made the following recommendations to the Community of Christ First Presidency and Council of Twelve Apostles:

- The 2013 USA National Conference recommends the sacrament of marriage be extended, where legal in the USA, to persons of the same sex/gender. Thus the 2013 USA National Conference recommends a change to the current policy for the USA on the sacrament of marriage; and
- The 2013 USA National Conference recommends that a church-recognized way for two persons of the same sex/gender to publicly express their covenant to each other be made available in

places in the USA where marriage is not legal. Thus, the 2013 USA National Conference recommends a change to the current policy for the USA regarding same-sex/gender covenant commitment services where marriage is not legal; and

- The 2013 USA National Conference recommends allowing a priesthood call to be processed according to established procedures regardless of sexual orientation, including a person in a monogamous, committed, same-sex/gender relationship (e.g., legal marriage, civil partnership, covenant relationship) in the USA. Thus, the 2013 USA National Conference recommends a change to the current policy on ordination for the USA.

The First Presidency and the Council of Twelve will need to approve policy revisions recommended by the USA National Conference. To develop, approve, and implement interim policies can take up to one year. Any policy changes will pertain only to the United States of America. Other nations will continue to abide by existing church policies.

GALA

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President's Message

by Saundra Merth

Although the USA National Conference answered many questions for our community, it also presents many more like, what is our purpose – as GALA? What's the point of our existence now? Haven't we finally gotten what we wanted after all these years of being marginalized and shunned? After losing some of our best friends to other denominations and no denomination? Some ask – "What's the point?"

All I can say is, "We are far from done on this particular journey with our church." There is still so much to do. Not every congregation is welcoming, far from it. And there is reconciling that is necessary to bring everyone to the table now that we have been offered a chair.

It breaks my heart that there are those who are willing to leave the church that they know as their home just because of the votes taken at National Conference. Many of us have waited a lifetime for this moment to be fully included and there are those close to many of us that have passed before seeing this day. We have been patient with those sitting at the table and we ask that they be patient with us and the church as we find ways to reconcile and heal those that would leave.

This is my prayer that everyone can know that we are ALL God's beloved children – all a part of HIS creation and that we can experience inspiring worship when we have a greater diversity involved.



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Commentary on USA National Conference

To Stay or Leave Your Place at the Table

by Rich Kohlman

During our delegate training session for the USA National Conference we looked at the paper "Faithful Disagreement." My first impression was that this was published to help those who would not be on the prevailing side of the GLBT issues to be discussed at conference, whichever way the final vote went. But while we were discussing each principle I realized that my gay friends had been living in Faithful Disagreement for years and decades. I, for a much shorter time. With the exceptions of a few statements this document described their lives perfectly. Take principle #2 for example, "The commitment, in general, to the overall identity, mission, message, and beliefs of Community of Christ may serve to keep a person in the faith community even when that person strongly disagrees with a particular position. One's love for the faith community is stronger than any particular disagreement."

Some of my friends have stayed at the table for years. Some left and have now found other faith communities in which to magnify their callings, or no faith community. Some left and have come back to the table which is now fully open to them. I expect that will be the case for many of my friends who have expressed that they don't feel they have a place at the table any longer. Some will leave permanently, some will leave and come back, and some will stay. I want to encourage all of them to think deeply first before taking any action, although I know some have already made their decision.

I simple want to ask, "If GLBT persons can live in Faithful Disagreement for years, cannot you stay for at least a few months after the implementation of the recommendations to see what the Community of Christ will really be like at that time?"

I expect for most, it is their reading of the scriptures that makes it a moral issue. It is a choice not a sexual orientation for them. I encourage you to study the DVD Series "The Role of Scripture in Discovering God's Will" again if you haven't already. I encourage you to get to know some GLBT persons, personally. Listen to their story. Let it rest on your heart before deciding to leave or stay at the table.

If you really think it is an immoral choice, then consider deeply the cost of such a choice, and if you really think a person would make that choice considering the consequences. Death is

the sentence in some countries. It is a high suicidal rate because of the constant barrage of comments that are derogatory and meant to treat a person as less than human. It is a denial of civil rights, loss of job, medical care, friends, family, etc. I could go on and on. Is it a choice that one would make considering the ease of making a different choice? Listen to their stories first, and then decide on your place at the table.

I remember my niece as a high school student trying to find a way to tell my wife and me she was a lesbian, at a time when you didn't speak those words openly. I remember a counselor at a youth camp, in desperation, flinging a rock off the mountain trying to rid of his gayness. Another young man came to me asking to be healed of his gayness, and the Spirit speaking ever so gently that healing was not necessary, but rather wholeness, which must come in part from community acceptance. I remember a friend of many years who fought against his sexual orientation and tried to "choose" the role of a straight man. He married, had six kids, living the "proper" life and all the while living in torment because in fact, he was a woman living in a man's body. Suicidal thoughts were common. When he came out, his church family rejected him, and so he came back to the Community of Christ to a congregation that welcomed him and his family, although being confronted with this reality had to take some time to learn about sexual orientations. They became home for he and his family. His natural family also rejected him and his 6 children and will have nothing to do with him. My wife and I have tried to be surrogate grandparents, although we live miles apart now from the family and cannot see them weekly. He had surgery and now "she" continues to live with her wife, who is straight, and the children remaining at home. There are so many other stories I could tell. The "lens" of my experience informs me that homosexuality is not a choice but a created orientation. Not immoral, but moral. Not to be damned in God's eyes, but to be blessed.

There is such profound giftedness in the GLBT community that has enriched the life and ministry of the church even as the church denied them full rights. It will enrich it even more as we welcome them with repentant arms stretched wide. Will it be hard for some in the places they live? Yes! But please, balance that with the Faithful Disagreement the GLBT community has been living with for decades. As we often sing, "Bear Each Other's Burdens." Let us respond to the counsel given the

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April 28, 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings in the grace and peace of Jesus Christ.

Several weeks ago we completed our first U.S.A. National Conference. My purpose in writing is not to outline the results of the conference. You have already received official communications from the First Presidency outlining the outcomes of the conference. I want to bear witness of the power of the Holy Spirit that was present during our gathering.

I listened intently and prayerfully as many faithful brothers and sisters in Christ shared their varying perspectives. I was deeply moved by the spirit of genuine love and concern extended to each person regardless of the perspective they held. In the midst of our different perspectives I was aware of the Holy Spirit drawing us together in sacred community – into a deeper understanding of what it means to belong to one another in Christ even as we hold very different perspectives.

I was keenly aware of the deep struggle expressed by some and the hopeful expectation expressed by others who have yearned for full inclusion in all aspects of church life. There was a profound sense of mutual respect and genuine caring for each person that transcended our differences and bound us together as we truly shared each other's burdens, uncertainties, and joys.

I am sharing this testimony because it is my sincere hope we will continue to extend the deepest level of caring, listening, and compassion outlined in Doctrine and Covenants 161:3b and c, *"Do not be fearful of one another. Respect each life journey, even in its brokenness and uncertainty, for each person has walked alone at times. Be ready to listen and slow to criticize, lest judgments be unrighteous and unredemptive. Be patient with one another, for creating sacred community is arduous and even painful. But it is to loving community such as this that each is called."* In our conference experience we signaled something very different to the world in how we shared together. We are now called to live out what it means to belong to one another in Christ in our congregations even when we don't always agree.

If you are struggling with the recommendations of the U.S.A. Conference I want you to know how deeply you are valued as a member of this faith community. If you are not sure how you feel about the recommendations I want you to know how deeply you are

valued as a member of this faith community. If you are celebrating the recommendations of the U.S.A. Conference I want you to know how deeply you are valued as a member of this faith community.

I recognize our response must go much deeper than caring words. Our actions of love and concern for one another will best demonstrate our commitment to Christ's vision of the peaceable kingdom lived out in each of our congregations. We will likely never all agree on matters that come before the church but we are being called to go deeper in our understanding and expression of sacred community in the midst of our differences.

Understanding what it means to be in faithful disagreement is one way we can learn to value our differences. To this end, I strongly encourage prayerful and thoughtful study of "Faithful Disagreement Principles" included with this letter. Your mission center leaders can assist with discussion and consideration of these principles. They can also help you gain access to a series of lessons on the U.S.A. National Conference Web Page (World Church Website) that will help facilitate study of these principles.

As you continue to prayerfully reflect on the outcomes of the U.S.A. National Conference I would like to hold up a few scripture passages for your contemplation that bear witness to our shared mission:

Psalms 139	Book of Mormon (1966 Ed.) II Nephi 13:29
Mark 12:28-34	Book of Mormon (1966 Ed.) Moroni 7:11
Romans 12	Book of Mormon (1966 Ed.) Moroni 7:52,53
Ephesians 2:11-22	Doctrine and Covenants 162:5
Galatians 3:23-29	Doctrine and Covenants 163:1,2,7,10,11
Micah 6:8	Doctrine and Covenants 164:5,6, 9

These scriptures and many others bear witness to the depth and breadth of God's love in Christ and call us to embody that love in relationship with one another.

During the coming months when some may be tempted to withdraw during times of struggle, let us commit ourselves as never before to be Christ's inviting, loving, and healing presence for one another. May we also respond to our call to be Christ's presence of invitation, hospitality, and healing for those searching for a loving community to call home.

In Christ's Peace,



Ronald D. Harmon Jr.
Apostle, Western U.S.A. Mission Field

church in Doctrine and Covenants 163:7c, "It is not pleasing to God when any passage of scripture is used to diminish or oppress races, genders, or classes of human beings. Much physical and emotional violence has been done to some of God's beloved children through the misuse of scripture. The church is called to confess and repent of such attitudes and practices." Some at conference believed the president/prophet had not spoken to the issue and we should wait. I believe he has spoken clearly. Read again the sections of the Doctrine and Covenants that have been given over the last few years by both presidents Veazey and McMurray. Reread the sermons/counsel published in the Herald and in conference bulletins.

My heart has been heavy in past years carrying the burdens of the GLBT community. Lightened of that burden it will now carry the burdens of those friends who have chosen to leave or may yet choose to leave. It is the cost of discipleship until the peaceable kingdom, even Zion, becomes a full reality. But remember, that a seat at the table is always there, always open, always waiting, until we can sit together again and rejoice in God's compassionate love for all God's creation.

Today We Did Something by Brian McMurray

Today we did something. Today we stepped back from our individual, specific interpretations and we viewed the overall intent of Christianity. Today we confirmed that diversity, inclusion and love are a part of this overall intent. Today we decided that one should have the ability to marry the person they love. Today we decided that one's ability to be an effective minister should not be related to that person's personal sexual preference. Today we lost some members. Today we gained some members. Today we will pray for the healing and understanding of those who are hurting because they disagree. Today we worry about keeping this important Community of Christ united. But today we did something... and because of that tomorrow is bright.

A Place at the Table by Clyde Phillips-Frey

"The Church", 46 years ago, appeared to be *very* middle-of-the-road and *very* noncommittal in taking a stand in one particular direction or the other, at least in my eyes and to my understanding. It seemed, as a growing youth, that there just were some things that the church *should* take a stand on like conscientious objection; but I did not understand why that never seemed to happen.

Fast forward about thirty years to 1998. For me, that was the year I 'came out' to family and friends. During this period of time I came to the realization that God and I were 'okay' with each other. Actually, we were more than 'okay' in that I knew that I was here on this earth, loved by a God of grace, that no other person could destroy. It still took me some time to 'come to terms' with the Christian church community as a whole and

Community of Christ congregants in particular; the terms became that the love of God has no boundaries.

During this time I read and studied and tried to hear the voice of God in my life.

I read about those who were treated with less than respect. I saw those who were shunned and felt less than welcome in the House of the Lord. I saw first-hand those 'Christian communities' who sought to bring the LGBT people of the world into their churches only to tell them once inside that they were *only* welcome if they changed their lives.

Due to the gentle yet stunning suggestion from my partner that he wanted us to go to church the next day...and to my church...we eventually became active participants in a loving church family that encouraged us to grow at our own pace. I returned to the church of my youth and found that there was love, hope, joy, and peace for everyone. My partner became my husband and within the last year has been confirmed a member of Community of Christ.

I was a first time delegate in 2010 to World Conference. My parents had been delegates to just about every Conference held for as long as I could recall. I remembered the feelings of 'being put off' yet one more time when the several resolutions dealing with same-sex/gender marriage and priesthood calls were referred to a later time and another venue; yet there was hope.

The USA National Conference was delayed from 2012 to 2013; this provided additional time to study, pray, and discern the will of God. I felt, at times, like I was wandering in a wilderness, unsure of how the movement of the Spirit would be received. The words to the hymn, "Lord, I Want to be a Christian," came to my heart on more than one occasion as the time grew closer to traveling to Independence, Missouri so I might share with others from the Community of Christ.

The decisions rendered as evidenced in the results of the voting brought tears to many in attendance; tears of joy and tears of sorrow. I recall praying with all my heart, "O Heavenly Parent, as you look upon your children gathered here, may we each feel your presence within us, guiding and directing. May those who feel less than joyful and continue in sorrow know that your loving grace is for them even as it is for each of us as we have gathered at your table. Open our eyes to see and understand your way in this world. Give us strength to be the comfort to others in the ways and places that they so desire." It was with a bittersweet feeling that I realized, as once my heart was broken, now I felt the pain of those who found themselves unable to come to the consensus that this is where God is leading the church...in this time...in this place.

I had to rush out of the Auditorium during the break between the Delegate Session and the final Worship Service, so I

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could make it in time to be present at the baptism of our youngest grandson in the Gudgell Park Congregation. The results of the voting had been posted to the church website by the time I was able to have a few moments to text my spouse with the news. We look forward to our continued efforts of inviting all people to Christ in our home congregation. It is my prayer that we may continue to seek God, be prepared to listen to the Spirit that will direct us, and seek to grow in our understanding and service as we sense God's grace in our lives, for we all have a place at the table!

Gratitude

by Stephen Donahoe

Sitting up in the balcony of the Community of Christ Auditorium as the National Conference progressed, I was overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude. The first survey of the delegates came on Friday evening and doing some quick math, I realized that if no one changed their minds, we were already over the 67% required to move forward on gay marriage and gay ordination. However, I held my shock and enthusiasm in because it was impossible to know for sure what would happen until the final vote on Sunday.

Perhaps the most profound moment of the conference for me was the final vote on gay marriage. The debate over this issue has been much more difficult for me over the last year than I would have ever expected. I think this is partly because the US Supreme Court is also debating gay marriage, which has very real implications for my life because my partner is in the US on a work visa. If the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) were overturned by the Supreme Court, I could sponsor my partner's permanent residency, which would make our lives much more stable. This also comes in a time when my partner and I are planning our wedding, which is stressful (and wonderful) in and of itself. All that combined to give me the overwhelming feeling that I just wanted my church community to be excited for my marriage. I know I don't need to explain this feeling to the GALA community because many of you have also dealt with similar issues for years.

Over the last year, I saw myself slowly pull away from my church community. I was still active some, but I attended my local congregation less and less. I also started justifying to people why I was part of the Community of Christ when there were other faith communities that offer equal recognition for LGBTQ people. Instead of advocating for the church, I had started apologizing for it. That stopped after the final vote on Sunday.

I am still processing how big a step this is for the Community of Christ. It is so exciting for me to finally be part of a community that is choosing to take the hard step of standing up for justice, even when it is painful and very difficult. I know that we have taken action for justice in the past, but the reality is that while our words have been very lofty, our actions for justice are rarely even as bold as mainline Protestant churches

(Methodists, Presbyterians, etc.). That is not true anymore. Now on this very important issue, the Community of Christ is prophetically leading with our actions!

One of the most powerful experiences for me during the weekend was getting to know an Indian member of the Community of Christ who was there to observe the US National Conference. Throughout the process of the church deciding on gay marriage and ordination, I have held a deep concern for the people around the world where this issue is not discussed. I have traveled to India, Nicaragua, Zambia, Kenya, and China, where there is real fear that even talking about homosexuality could have very negative consequences for church members. I have formed friendships with people in these countries and have a deep concern for their wellbeing. Sharing the National Conference with an Indian church member who was very supportive was very healing and assuring for me.

The overpowering feeling I have now is gratitude. I am so thankful that the US Community of Christ has chosen to accept me and other people in the LGBTQ community. I am also very thankful that the international church has responded well to these changes, and I pray this continues.

A Long Journey Home

by Jerry M. Dale Jr.

Attending the 2013 USA National Conference I knew would be a turning point in my life. Preparing for the conference I felt as if this would be my last stand with the Community of Christ Church. As the conference approached I felt so uneasy and at the same time expectant. Uneasy in that I have felt let down in the past and I was making myself vulnerable to the possibility of being hurt again. Expectant in that at the end of the conference I will know what direction the church would like to go and with that comes great responsibilities whichever decision is made.

I have been a lifelong member of the church. Baptized and Confirmed at 8, ordained a Deacon in High School, went to and graduated from Graceland, turned in my priesthood card when I felt another calling in a more welcoming church, and all the time knowing, with every fiber of my being, that I BELONG to the Community of Christ church, that this is my community and these are my people. Belonging is very different than fitting-in or attending... belonging has a much deeper emotional and physical connectedness. Fitting-in takes work and is often emotionally draining or even harmful.

Reconciliation, Healing and Acceptance

Facebook post from April 19, 2013 at 10:33pm

"The best part of today was getting a hug from my father, him telling me that he loved me and both of us crying in the lobby of the Auditorium."

This was the first of many reconciliation and healing moments for me at this conference. The first worship session had ended and there was a short break before the conference session began. Since I was not a delegate I found a friend to go get my dad off the conference floor. I was so afraid not knowing how the conference would vote and deep down, not knowing how my father would vote. I really needed comfort from my fears.

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Being able to receive a hug and some comforting words from my dad was more powerful than I had imagined it would be. I was an observer at the 2013 USA National Conference. Each day I sat in the balcony watching the proceedings happening below. Listening to the stories during the listening sessions I became aware of the Spirit moving in each person... even those with whom I do not agree. Where the Spirit also moved was during the breaks with people sharing personal stories. I was very lucky to have had the opportunity to share with some family friends. In their sharing I learned a lot more about my mom and dad's journey after I came out. Knowing more of the story of their journey I felt the healing power of the Spirit move within me and I was able to forgive old hurts and heal old wounds.

Acceptance

I really struggle with putting into words the emotions of the experience of seeing the results of the polling and ultimately, the voting. I will say this, I cried more in those 3 days than I have in the last 10 years. I cried tears of healing and I cried in empathy for those who are in pain. There were no tears of joy... those will come when I get married in my congregation by a minister of my denomination with my church family looking on. What did come was a deep sense of acceptance... that I am welcome at the table... that I am worthy.

Responsibility or Response-ability?

Since the 2013 USA National Conference I have made the following responses. 1. I am able, so I have begun tithing to both my local and world church funds. 2. I will be responsible and be more present in my local congregation. I am not an every Sunday church person, but I feel called to be more present in and at church activities. Hopefully this will make me more response-able. 3. I will pray for those who are hurting. The last two years we have seen tremendous momentum in the equality movement. The church is going to struggle with a new identity because of this. It is going to take each and every person to be present, to tell our stories and to live openly within our congregations to bring about the culture change that follows the implementation of the draft policies. I think we are a very blessed people to have both GALA and WCN working with us on this journey. What is your response? Are you response-able? My life changed in an instant that day in April 2013. This long journey has finally brought me back home to the church where I belong.

Change of Heart *by Cindy Campbell*

At World Conference I saw a good friend from my area of the country who told me this story. "We were against the issues of the National Conference until 2 weeks ago. I had begun to do a lot of reading about gays and lesbians. Then on the trip out here I heard a testimony that completely changed me! Now, we are in complete support of the church's direction." They gratefully accepted a copy of Touched By Grace from our booth.

GALA Special Award



Sharon Gernaat made a significant donation to GALA to purchase the book, *Touched By Grace*, to distribute for 'free,' leading-up to and at World Conference this

year. These free books were essential to our ministry prior to Conference and at the Diversity Booth during Conference. They made an impact on our efforts to get our stories into the hands of members and delegates to the USA National Conference. This award acknowledged the appreciation of the GALA Board for her donation and personal effort to reach out to everyone around her.

Temple Planting



From left to right: Arthur Butler, Mike Hewitt, Chuck Hewitt, Charlie Robison, David Woosley and Bryan Pettey, participated in GALA's annual planting at The Temple and Heritage House

Florida GALA Retreat 2013

by Cindy Campbell

Our retreat theme was “A Place at the Table for Everyone” and we waited until after the National Conference of Community of Christ to hold our second annual 2013 Florida GALA retreat which was on May 3-5 at Deerhaven Campgrounds in the Ocala National Forest. The mood was joyous and the fellowship rich and deep and inclusive. We sang old camp songs and learned new hymns from the new hymnal. We laughed and cried together at the Talent Show.

Twenty two of us gathered in hurricane like weather (some of you may remember 1998 Labor Day Retreat in Florida during a hurricane!) for a weekend of education, advocacy and support. We were a beautiful and fairly even mix of LGBTQ and allies/advocates, couples and singles, female and male. Of course there were more over 50s than under 50, our age range was 20-84, we were more white than multicultural, and a few attended from other Faiths, so we see where we have outreach to do. We had invited Florida Affirmation groups and other LGBTQ groups and have hopes that in the future they will be able to join us.

A variety of support and education activities were available, including the traditional GALA Sharing Circle. Our classes this year included coming-out as Straight Allies, the Spectrum of our Male and Female Qualities, a QUILT BAG Panel (acronym for queer (a renewal and redefinition of an old term)/questioning, undecided, intersex, lesbian, transgender, bisexual/pansexual, asexual/ally, and gay) which included a transgender woman presenting her story, and a class on communication called Persons of Worth.

We discussed the meanings of ally and advocate and gathered resources for growing ourselves in those directions. Bright posters around the room informed us of national and state groups working for equal rights and education and we were encouraged to form networks of safety and advocacy for the LGBTQ community. We celebrated our Enduring Principles of Worth of All Persons,

All are Called, and Unity in Diversity and the 5 Mission Initiatives.

During closing healing worship on Sunday we were blessed as Evangelists offered prayers on each member of the LGBTQ community who attended the retreat, the allies, and our congregations. We took Communion and witnessed inclusion at the table as representatives from different cultures, religions, genders, LGBTQ and straight community partook together.

We see the need to continue expanding our awareness and education of relevant issues, so we were also invited to choose one or two things when we arrived back home that may be outside of our comfort zone to further ourselves on our journey of being an ally or an advocate. Here is a list of possibilities:



- Visit the PFLAG.org website and just see what is there, read an article and check for a local chapter.
- Take a friend with you or go alone and visit one local PFLAG meeting.
- Google ‘equalityflorida’ or go to their eqfl.org website and see what is going on with that
- Visit national GALA

- website at galaweb.org and read one newsletter; this organization is affiliated with Community of Christ
- Join national GALA; it is a yearly subscription like a magazine, not a one time joining. The money goes for advocacy and education.
- Visit welcomingcommunitynetwork.org website, which exists to enable LGBTQ community to have full participation in Community of Christ
- Visit hrc.org, human rights campaign and check out that national website

Let's stay connected and put leaves in our tables so everyone can have a place there with us! We want to share the wealth of this experience!

“If you're looking for a good way to be an advocate, start by inviting at least one person to join us here next year!”, Peter Smith challenged us.

Nominating Committee Report

Clyde Phillips-Frey—President-Elect

My Story Continues....

“Stories not only teach us how to act – they inspire us *to* act. Stories communicate our values



through the language of the heart, our emotions. And it is what we *feel* – our hopes, our cares, our obligations – not simply what we *know* that can inspire us with the courage to act.” - Marshall Ganz, Kennedy School of Government, 2006

I found a book for my Kindle Paperwhite titled: *Me Again*, by

Keith Cronin, published September, 2012, and was intrigued by the ‘book description’ which was, after all, meant to get me to download the publication; here is part of the descriptor:

“Miracles can be damned inconvenient. That's what thirty-four-year-old stroke victim Jonathan Hooper learns when he wakes up after spending six years in a coma. Everyone calls Jonathan's recovery a “miracle,” but since nobody had expected him to recover, his sudden awakening becomes an awkward intrusion on the lives of his family and friends. To make matters worse, Jonathan doesn't even recognize these people. The stroke has wiped away most of Jonathan's memory, while the coma has withered his body. In short, Jonathan's not the man he used to be - whoever *that* was.”

The impetus for reading this book was the fact that in my place of employment we had a business partner that suffered a stroke a few years back. Although the coma she endured was relatively short, she spent a great deal of time in a rehabilitation facility, then several years at home with round-the-clock care, and currently resides in an assisted living facility. She experienced difficulty speaking, absolutely could not work with numbers, and found reading to be somewhat difficult; focus and frustration were daily occurrences. I wanted to be

able to see if there was anything in the book that might parallel what I'd known to have happened in this woman's life. Perhaps, I might be able to walk in another's shoes if only in part. I wasn't really sure what I would find.

Although a novel, I found the compassion and insight provided therein to be quite an experience. Words like frustration, patience, and compassion began to have a more extensive meaning. Words like loneliness, friendship, and grace were shown in a different light. Toward the end of the book I read observations between recovering stroke patients, Jonathan and Rebecca, following Rebecca's return to the hospital because she had attempted to overdose on pills from her home medicine cabinet. Jonathan said, “I just think life has got to be about more than *fixing* ourselves. I mean, that's really all we've been focusing on, but at some point I think we need to draw a line in the sand and say *this is who we are – take it or leave it*. And quit trying to rebuild ourselves into what we once were, because we both know that's just not going to happen.” And he continued, “At some point, we've got to stop trying to restore our lives, and start actually living them. That means we have to quit focusing on being broken.”

Wow, isn't that what many in the LGBT community express as they travel the path that has brought them to where they are currently located? Acceptance by ourselves seems to come first or it sure needs to it would seem. Jonathan went on to say, “...it's time to start truly accepting who we are... and then say *okay, given that, what's next?*” “But if I'm going to find out what's next, I've got to start by being okay with the fact that no, I will never be the same as I used to be.”

Rebecca responded, “Instead of trying to change ourselves, we need to... to change how we think of ourselves.” “And we need to get our families to understand that. To change how they think of us too. I mean, so far it's like you and I are the only ones who've tried to get to know each other for who we are now, instead of who we used to be.”

(Continued on page 11)

It seemed to me that the thoughts and feelings expressed in the discourse of the book reminded me how my life has changed over the past fifteen years and of recent experiences in the USA National Conference in Community of Christ. The “I am who I am – take it or leave it” statement is the way I felt as I emerged from the ‘coming out’ process and made the conscious decision to live my life as I felt it was meant to be; without being bullied by the expectations of anyone. The consensus measurement at the USA National Conference and the final voting results were bittersweet moments. Although I was positively overwhelmed, the person on one side of me was obviously less than pleased. It was, to me anyhow, evident that there would be tough times ahead for persons who wanted to remain in the faith, yet found the actions of the Conference to be so unlike their perception of what God wants for the church. There would be tough times ahead for those of us who have waited years for the Spirit to work among the people so that there could be gracious welcome for everyone; not just for some.

So, as in the book, “...okay, given that, what’s next?” We know that there will be a time during which the Council of Twelve Apostles and the First Presidency will take into consideration the recommendations of the USA National Conference. The expectation is that there will be an interim policy developed and communicated that will guide the USA church. During this time of preparation we have the distinct opportunity to provide ministry to everyone! Ministry to those persons searching and yearning to understand where the USA church is being led by God. Ministry to those who are just now beginning to feel that they are accepted for who they are and the talents they bring to the table. Ministry as we continue to share the grace of God with church members, friends, families...the bruised, the broken hearted, the lost and the least.

Oh my goodness....isn’t this the same ministry that we’ve been called to provide to everyone right along? Ah, yes, but perhaps we have not seen the calling quite so clearly as we do now. For now is the time to move forward boldly to be the witnesses of

how our lives have been touched by God and how we can share around the table set for everyone! Now is the time to step up to the plate (and cup) and make a difference in the part of the world in which we find ourselves.

What is the story that you hold close and dear to your heart? Share your story with anyone that will listen. Find ways to bring the Peace of Christ into the lives of others. I deliberately left the church for a time. I came back to find the love of Christ in the hearts of the people that continue to minister to me by their presence, patience, and participation. Pray, give thanks, listen to your heart...pay attention and remember to act upon the movement of the Spirit in your life as you witness and provide your own special kind of ministry – nobody does it better than you!

As you consider casting your vote for members of the GALA Board of Directors, I would humbly request that you cast a vote on my behalf for President-elect. Thank you and may you be blessed as you are a blessing in your part of God’s vineyard!

Erin Cavanaugh—Vice-President

My name is Erin Cavanaugh. I have had the honor of serving on the GALA board for the last three years



as a member at large. I have been able to bring my unique perspective to the board that I have gained from my life experiences. Some of the perspective I have brought include: a mother, a young adult, and a social worker. I am very passionate

about GALA and its mission. I am putting my name forward for the office of Vice President. I will continue to work diligently for LGBT acceptance and building a safe community where we can all have equal worth.

Gabe Horner—Under-Secretary for Publications

Born in New Jersey and moving to Colorado before I can remember, I grew up in Community of Christ, or, in my very young years, the RLDS church, attending nearly every Sunday with my parents.

(Continued on page 12)



Before I went to college I discovered at church functions such as SPEC and IYF that my parents were known far and wide throughout the church. More often than not I was introduced as “Andy Horner’s kid”. I involved myself in GALA events and young adult retreats to develop my own relationships and an identity that did not depend on my parents.

I came out as a Gay Transman late in high school. After coming out, I felt more at peace with myself and with God. After high school I went on to an art college, where I will be returning for my senior year in fall 2013 to finish my Bachelor of Arts Degree in Illustration. I would like to apply my skills and education by working on children’s books or with an animation studio.

Della Mowrey –Member-at-Large

My life began in Willoughby, Ohio where I was given a unique foundation in the RLDS church now Community of Christ. As a child, many wonderful memories were established for me as I worshiped in the Kirtland Temple always cherishing the history and dedication of my ancestors. My love for God and humanity was instilled by my loving family and my church. At nine years old I was



uprooted by my parents to Florida where my family was the support of keeping the Clearwater church thriving. Eventually, we established a mission about two hours north in Spring Hill that existed for a number of years until unforeseen happenings disbanded it. I grew up attending all the church camps and reunions, which ingrained my heart with a need for more. At twenty, I married a minister in the church and in southern California I became a pastor’s wife for a few years. During periods of my life I took a hiatus from the church, looking for other answers, discoveries and acceptance. One thing, that never left me, was my loving God or the Holy Spirit, who has

always been my inner guide and comforter.

During my early twenties I discovered my sexuality, but it was not until 15 years of marriage and three children, I did something about it. Years after my divorce in 2001 I was welcomed at my first GALA, a life changing event, making such an impact on my life that I vowed then and there to do everything within my power to attend every retreat thereafter. Eleven years later, I have kept my promise to myself except for the GALA event in Canada where my personal finances were restricted. Not only have I found this organization as a stepping stone for my own awareness in my sexuality, but an unconditional well of love and acceptance from a group of like minded people. As a long term member of of this affiliation, my desire is to welcome others with the same love and compassion given me. My educational majors includes law, criminal justice, art and photography. I have been trained and certified as a Mediator and my work history consists of legal, managerial, health care, public relations and business ownership. I am ready to bring my experience, education, and talents to the forefront so that I can be an asset to this foundation as we work in unity through Christ. I pray as a collective body GALA will be a huge resource amongst the people at large, resulting with positive change for all. I thank you for your consideration to become a board member. God bless each of you in your decision making!

Jerry Dale –Member-at-Large

Jerry M. Dale, Jr. first became involved with GALA when he came out while at Graceland in 1995...that makes it nearly 18 years.



Throughout his time with GALA he organized the Southern California retreat and attended many others. He has been reconnecting with the church over the last 3 years by being out and about at SPEC and other church related events. He believes now is the time to serve you and the church by helping facilitate further culture change in the church. GALA's identity may need to change some with the policy changes in the church and I would love to be part of that process.

In Memorium

by Allan Fiscus

RONALD FREEMAN: July 24, 1923—June 1, 2013

On June 1, we lost a dear friend and advocate of GALA, Ronald Freeman. Ron, and his wife June, attended the first GALA retreat held on any Community of Christ campgrounds, in September 1987 at Camp Manitou in Michigan. June, a High Priest and member of Michigan Region staff, was asked to represent the Michigan Region at this retreat. During the retreat, Ron and June came to know the lost, hurt and suffering disenfranchised GLBT members of the Community of Christ.

Ron and June left that retreat changed forever. They became strong advocates for GALA, and the need for reconciling ministry need for the GLBT Community of Christ members. For years, Ron and June traveled the US and Canada, to attend every GALA function possible, to bring love, ministry and support to GALA. Failing health was the only deterrent to their attendance. June preceded Ron in death. June and Ron became “Mom and Dad” to



many GALA members without family ties. Ron and June shared unconditional love and support, opening their home for retreats, meetings or a safe haven for GALA members struggling with life. Their loving ministry and service to GALA will never be forgotten.

Funeral Services were held June 6th at 10:30am at Community of Christ in St. Johns, Michigan.



Lawrence, Kansas GALA

The Lawrence GALA Group met Saturday evening, May 4, following the Temple planting. The group gets together periodically to have a movie night and watch a TV series. This month, the movie was *Big Eden* and an episode of *Armistead Maupin's Tales of the City*.

GALA Elections

By-Laws:

Article IV, Section 3, Paragraph 3:

Any individual members may nominate a candidate for election to the Board of Directors in addition to those proposed on the Nominating Committee slate. Such nomination must have the consent of the nominee, and identify the specific position(s) for the Nominating Committee's slate. The nomination must be received by the Secretary of the Board of Directors no later than July 1.



Please submit nominations to:
Cindy Campbell, 2210 NW 46th St.,
Gainesville, FL 32605
cicamp7@gmail.com.

Walnut Creek and San Francisco congregations participating in San Francisco's 43rd annual LGBT Pride Celebration and Parade

by Keith Carter

The San Francisco LGBT Pride Celebration and Parade is the largest LGBT gathering and celebration in the nation with over 500,000 people in attendance. This year's celebration will be held on, **June 29th and 30th, 2013**. The event theme is **Embrace, Encourage, Empower**.

This year, we will be sponsoring an informational booth and marching as a contingent in the parade. The informational booth, open on both days, June 29th and 30th, provides a unique opportunity to reach hundreds of thousands of event goers and allows us to talk with individuals about Community of Christ's unique faith movement. The parade contingent will march in the parade on June 30th, and provides us an opportunity to put the name "Community of Christ" in front of hundreds of thousands of people.

We need your help! Volunteers are needed to both, march in the parade, and to talk with interested individuals in the informational booth. We are sponsored by Walnut Creek and San Francisco Community of Christ congregations, but we are there to represent all of Community of Christ. There are individuals from around the world present at this celebration, so we try to provide information about a Community of Christ congregation wherever people live.

The booth will be open on June 29th between Noon and 6 pm, and on June 30th between 11 am and 6:30 pm. The parade starts at 10:30 am on Sunday, June 30th, and is approximately 1.3 miles long. If you are interested in marching, helping us in the informational booth, or want any additional information, please contact one of the following:

Keith Carter, (925) 286-4525, rkc@sbcglobal.net
Kay Fletcher, (925) 989-7755, kfletcher@cofchrist.org
Katrina Petz, (209) 814-4226, kpetz11@gmail.com

The informational booth also gives us the opportunity to **live out** and express Community of Christ's Enduring Principles (adapted):

- **Grace and Generosity:** We give and receive in gracious response to God's generosity by sharing our witness and ministries with others.
- **Worth of All Persons:** God views all people as having inestimable and equal worth. We challenge unjust systems that diminish human worth, following Jesus Christ's example by bringing good news to the poor, sick, captive and, in this case, the oppressed.
- **Sacredness of Creation:** We join with God as stewards of care and hope for all creation.
- **All Are Called:** God graciously gives people gifts and

opportunities to do good and to share in God's purposes. Jesus Christ invites people to follow him as disciples who share his life and ministry.

- **Continuing Revelation:** We humbly and prayerfully listen to understand God's will for our lives, the church, and creation.
- **Responsible Choices:** God allows us to make decisions about the people and ideas we give our loyalty and service to. We are called to make responsible choices that contribute to the purposes of God.
- **Pursuit of Peace (Shalom):** God wants peace or "shalom" for all creation. Shalom is peace, justice, reconciliation, and healing of the spirit, a kind of peace that means wholeness, more complete than absence of conflict alone. We share Christ's peace and the vision of Zion—the peaceable kingdom—with others.
- **Unity in Diversity:** The church embraces unity and diversity through the power of the Holy Spirit. We celebrate Community of Christ as a diverse, international family of disciples, seekers, and congregations, interdependent and united in mission.
- **Blessings of Community:** We create communities of compassion including the poor, marginalized, and oppressed. We nurture each person's spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional health.

May we find ways to live out Christ's mission and invite others to receive blessings in Community of Christ.
Shalom.

GALA Treasurer's Report

October 1, 2012 through May 31, 2013:

Beginning Balance—\$10,643.41

Total Income—\$12,951.69

Total Expenses—\$11709.64

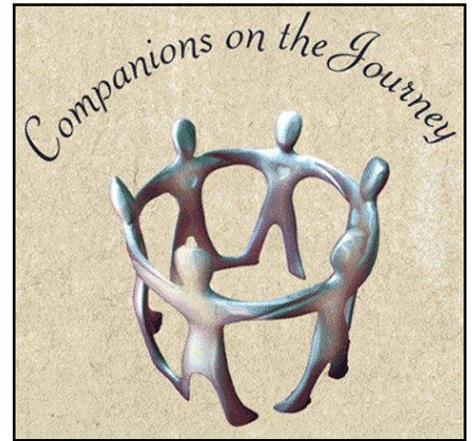
Cash on hand:

\$11,885.46



We are Companions on the Journey

GALA RETREAT 2013
REGISTRATION FORM
August 30-September 2
Temple Grove, 347 Hamburg Road
Transfer, PA 16154



Becky Savage, First Presidency, Guest Minister

Please complete this form and return it by August 17 so that we have an accurate count and can prepare for you. Payment is due at the beginning of the Retreat on August 30.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: (____) _____ E-mail: _____

Special Dietary Needs: _____

Medical/Special needs: _____

Fees:

Early Registration (by August 17th) - \$150.00

Late Registration (after August 17th) - \$175.00

Children (5-12) - \$75.00 (under 5 free)

Private Room—\$175.00

Payment Enclosed: \$ _____

(Limited sponsorships available; contact Sandra Merth at smarth_coc@yahoo.com)

2 people per room; Roommate Preference: _____

Mail Registration to:

GALA RETREAT

P.O. Box 2173

Independence, MO 64055

Note: Temple Grove does not provide any bedding; only a bed and mattress.

For more information: Contact Chuck Hewitt, (816) 616-5883, galatreasurer@gmail.com



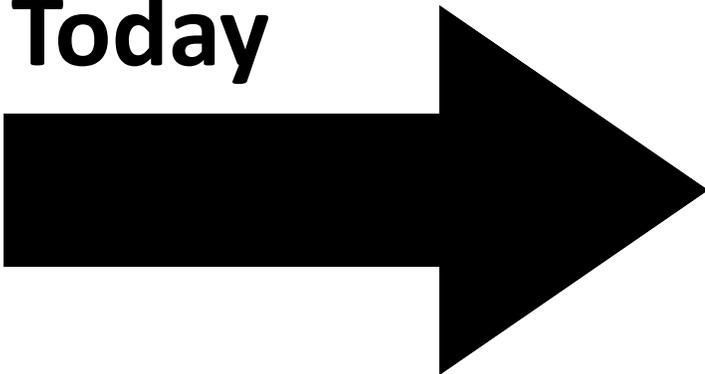
June 2013

P.O. Box 2173
Independence, MO 64055

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MAIL WORKS

Join, or Renew Your Membership Today



2013 GALA Membership

Name(s): _____

E-mail: _____

YES; send me the newsletter by e-mail

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

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**