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THE  LETTER

Serving members and friends of
Community of Christ

July 2015
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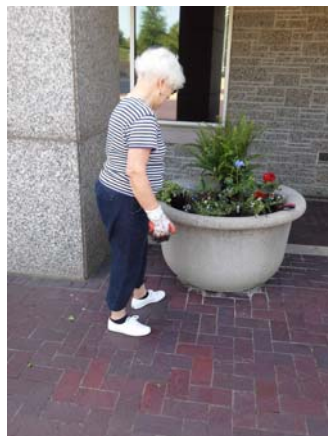
Temple Flower Plantings



Since 2009, GALA has been providing flowers for the planters around the Community of Christ Temple in Independence, Missouri as our gift. We did so again this year. Due to a variety of reasons, we were a month later than usual, but the pots were planted the end of June with beautiful flowers to welcome visitors. Michael Porter, Sam and Pat Marmoy, and Charlie and Pam Robison provided the hands-on experience on one of Missouri's hot days following some bad weather that left downed tree limbs around the Temple waiting to be picked up.

GALA requested permission to have acknowledgment signs added to the planters so that those who were interested can know who provided the flowers. The First Presidency approved the request, and signs were printed on corrugated outdoor paper and placed in the planters by Charlie Robison and his granddaughter Anara. These signs are re-usable for future years' use.

We want to express deep appreciation to Chuck and Mike Hewitt who spearheaded these plantings for so many years and who provided the information needed this year to continue the plantings.



GALA

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Visit us on the web

www.galaweb.org

President's Message

Clyde Phillips-Frey, GALA President

“Hand in Hand – We Are One” is the theme for the Labor Day Weekend 2015 Annual GALA Retreat where we will share with each other about our lives, renew acquaintances and make new friends, grow in our sense of where we have been and where we are going as fully participating members in Community of Christ, and a myriad of other significant things of which we can only imagine!

The theme was chosen because it presents hope first and foremost. For many of us it has been a long and sometimes arduous journey to get to the point where we find that we are included as fully viable and contributing members in our denomination. The struggles of the past have surely formed who we are, how we act and react, and how we interact with those in our congregations as surely as how we do with each other. Hope, because we truly do want to love and be loved by those who promote avenues for spiritual growth in the places where we live; just like everyone else in our community.

Hand in Hand suggests a meeting of the minds as well as pitching in to do our part. Whoever said that anyone was called to sit on their “softer side”? It seems to me that I’ve heard that we are called to be responsible stewards over the gifts we’ve been given. We are called to be visionary and proactive in learning, sharing, telling our stories, and offering the olive branch of peace. We are called to be “adult” in our interactions; for we’ve left the way of the child behind us. We are called to be leaven, to be the change in our communities and in our congregations. We are called to be positive, life giving, and to inspire others as we move forward together.

It used to be that ministry of presence was the strongest avenue we seemingly had as we sought to be in the midst of congregational life so others could see that we are folks, pretty much just like everyone else; including flaws, shortcomings, physical ailments, and sometimes broken hearts. In some areas of the country, ministry of presence is recognized as a very strong and powerful witness to the love of God in our lives, and may be the current means by which to minister in congregational life. In a growing number of congregations, especially those that are seeking to become or have already become Welcoming Congregations, the opportunities to minister are becoming more diverse. The bridge between where we have been in the past and where we are going in the future is, in part, the recognition that We Are One and Hand in Hand is how we will work together as we move forward in Community of Christ.

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I understand that each person moves to the beat of a different drummer...which can mean that for some change comes relatively quickly and for them, those that take longer are a challenge. It is also true that to those that take a little longer, or even a while longer, find that the folks around them that have surpassed them in the journey also become a challenge.

I was reminded of someone I met when I was coming out. When I came out it was like leaving a barn that was on fire; the doors flew open and in about two weeks time everyone I knew that I wanted to tell found out that I was gay. This friend had been out for some time, but only to a select number of people; none of which were his family. I think it took him about a year after I met him before he was comfortable enough to come out to his parents and siblings. He felt encouraged and comfortable to make the transition in part because he saw how I acted and interacted. Isn't this similar to where we find ourselves now? We are called to minister to everyone...at their point of need....wherever they are on their journey...so perhaps we need to learn to leave our frustrations someplace where they will cause less stress as we learn to grow with our church family.

There are times that we find ourselves in a particular place at a particular time for no particular reason, or so it would seem. Recently I was taking a train from Albany to Buffalo, returning from a short weekend trip to see my husband; it was our 4th wedding anniversary.

The shuttle from the hotel seemingly suddenly vaporized at the time I was scheduled to take it to the train station, but kind new friends volunteered to shuttle me there at the last minute. Standing at "D" Gate, waiting for the train, a man with a cane walked over to the elevator; the stairs would have been most challenging and time consuming. Looking at him, something prodded me that I knew this fellow. So I looked again and tried to determine who he might be and why I felt this way. As it turned out, we did know each other but had not seen one another in almost 20

years. We ended up sharing seats on the delayed 6+ hour ride and this man, who was somewhat soft spoken and reserved in all the time we'd known each other, shared with me what was going on in his life and he talked almost all of the way to Buffalo. His elderly mother, a Parkinson's patient, had been in assisted living and he had been in Buffalo for 11 days helping take care of her. On his way back to Massachusetts he received a message that she had taken a turn for the worse and was not expected to continue her journey much beyond the next two days so he was returning to be with her. Unfortunately, just as we arrived in the Rochester train station, he received a call that she had passed. My heart ached for his loss. Consolation and a comforting shoulder were about all I could offer as he began the grieving process. Quite honestly, I remember thinking later that I was so blessed to have been there, in that place, at that time. Certainly not because I needed to be there, but because no one deserves to be alone when life events like this happen and I was there to provide support. I do not believe this was a coincidence. I do believe that we need to pay attention and respond.

Paying attention and responding is what GALA has been for me. GALA has been a place of frustration as well as healing. Frustrating at times because it seems that things just do not move fast enough. Healing because I know that we can work together to be the loving people that we are called to be. When we take our hands and join them with others like us and others unlike us, then we truly are as one as we move forward together. We are called to work this out...we are called to action.

I encourage you to register and attend the 2015 GALA Retreat in Blue Water Campgrounds on the shores of Lake Huron. Our guest ministry will be provided by Tony and Charmaine Chavala-Smith. Come learn, share and grow with LGBT folks and those that support us.

Hand in Hand – We Are One!



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Board Nominations Are In

by Stephen Donahoe, GALA Secretary

Good news, at the GALA Labor Day Retreat, you will have the opportunity to affirm a wonderful group of candidates for the GALA board at the Annual Membership Meeting! In accordance with our Bylaws, when a candidate on the Nominating Committee's slate is running unchallenged, then balloting shall not be necessary and those candidates shall be elected by affirmation at the Annual Meeting of the GALA membership; Article IV: Board of Directors, Section 3: Elections, paragraph 4. For the complete Bylaws: www.galaweb.org > About Us > Bylaws.

The candidates standing for election are:

Jerry M. Dale, Jr. Candidate for President-Elect (2016) [President 2017-2018, Past President 2019]

Jerry has been a part of GALA since Jerry came out in 1995. Jerry's involvement has varied in the organization, but has recently picked up and now he has been asked to become the President Elect. Jerry is currently Vice President of WCN, co-chair on the American Red Cross LGBT team member resource group and on the board of GALA and the St. Mark's Players. Jerry looks forward to learning what it means to be President of GALA if you choose to him as your next President. Jerry lives and works in Washington, DC and is active with the DC Community of Christ.

Erin Cavanaugh, Candidate for Vice President (2016-2017)

Erin has had the honor of serving on the GALA board for the last five years as Vice President and as a Member at Large. She has been able to bring a unique perspective to the board gained from her unique life experiences. Some of the perspectives include those of a mother, a

young adult, and a social worker. She has been involved in creating the Michigan affiliate of GALA and served as president of the affiliate. Erin has also served in various leadership positions in her congregation, including CFO, and was integral in assisting the congregation in becoming a Welcoming Congregation. Erin is very passionate about GALA and its mission. She is putting her name forward again for the office of Vice President. Erin states: "I will continue to work diligently for LGBT acceptance and building a safe community where we can all have equal worth."

Pam Robison, Candidate for Undersecretary for Publications (2016-2017)

Pam Robison has been involved with Community of Christ in a variety of ways all her life. She has been a church musician since she was eight, serving in numerous congregations and as a staff organist at International Headquarters. She has also been a Temple School writer and teacher, served as web editor for the church for several years, and recently retired as a worship and music specialist from International Headquarters. Pam and Charlie attend Open Arms Community of Christ, a congregation that is working on becoming part of the Welcoming Community Network. They have two children, three grandchildren (one deceased), and one great-grandchild, with a second on the way.

Dan Gregory, Candidate for Member-at-Large (2016-2018)

Dan Gregory began working as the Associate Mission Center President in Community of Christ Lamoni Heartland USA Mission Center in May, 2013. In this capacity, he is responsible for congregational and area support, advancing priesthood faithfulness and invitational ministries, and implementing the mission of the church. Prior to this assignment, Dan served for

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over four years as the Mission Center Young Adult Minister. A 2008 graduate of Graceland University, he holds a Bachelor of Arts in Religion and a minor in Business Administration, and received his Master of Arts in Religion in 2014 from the Community of Christ Seminary.



GALA Financial Report

by Lisa Meyer, Treasurer

GALA finances still look good for the year. To this point, we have brought in income of \$3,619, mostly from memberships and donations. In addition, some retreat income is already showing up, as registrations start to trickle in. Our expenses are still generally in line with the 2015 approved budget. At this point in the year, we would aim to be at 50% of budgeted income and expenses. In actuality, we are at 29% of income expected and 15% of expenses expected, leaving the organization with a positive cash flow of \$1,735 for the year to date. Our total amount of cash on hand in the checking account is \$17,587. Our biggest time of income/expenses is coming up with the annual retreat. Hopefully, we will break even on the retreat this year, as that is always our goal. To date, we have received fifteen registrations for the retreat, with more on the way. Remember to register and pay in full before August 1 to save \$25 per person! Also, to date for 2015, we have received 47 paid memberships, which is already significantly greater than the 29 paid memberships recorded for all of 2014. Thank you for the opportunity to be your treasurer, and, as always, please feel free to contact me with any questions!



Welcoming Community Network (WCN) Corner

Love Wins! This is the Day and I am Proud!

This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

On Friday, June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court has ruled 5-4 that marriage equality is the law of the United States.

I am reading the reactions and rejoicing to the Supreme Court decision of many friends on Facebook and am feeling very happy as well. They are sharing expressions of joy and feeling recognition and support on a national level for who they are and who they love.

I, too, am feeling incredibly proud... proud of LGBTQ individuals, couples, organizations and allies alike who have worked for dozens of years for this day. We are truly living out our Constitutional ideals of life, liberty, & the pursuit of happiness by defending the freedom to marry.

My pride is also overflowing that the Supreme Court decision is upholding the guidelines of the church, Community of Christ. We are advised in our Enduring Principles we called to uphold the worth of all persons, unity in diversity, the pursuit of shalom (including justice, reconciliation, well-being, wholeness, and peace), and that all are called to live out God's word. The work of members and leaders in Community of Christ has led to an understanding over the last few years that same-gender relationships are worthy of God's blessing and consecration. The justice of the church's decision is shining through.

We also know that others within the church and community will be saddened by the Supreme Court decision. We hold those that are not celebrating in our thoughts and prayers and a sense of continued inclusion in our congregations. This decision calls all of us, not just those celebrating, to put these same Enduring Principles into action in our ministry.

PFLAG National made a statement on the Supreme

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Court decision on marriage equality that really reflects the feelings of so many, “Today feels like a wedding that the entire country was invited to, and the whole PFLAG family is right up front with hearts overflowing and tears in our eyes...” At weddings everyone has mixed feelings, feelings of joy at the addition of a new family member or friend, and sadness at the change in roles and possible separation as a new journey begins for the happy couple. At weddings, people laugh, and cry, and share, and hug each other. In light of this Supreme Court decision, Welcoming Community Network (WCN) encourages everyone to be part of the national wedding.

Meredith Bischoff, President

Welcoming Community Network (WCN)

Welcoming Otter Lake Congregation

WCN would like to congratulate Otter Lake Community of Christ on becoming a welcoming and affirming congregation in Otter Lake, Michigan! Their welcoming statement is:

We are a community called by Christ to radically welcome, love, and share peace with ALL.

You are welcome if:

--You are Asian, Hispanic, Black or White

--You are male, female or transgender . . .

--You are three days old, 30 years old or 103 years old . . .

--You've never stepped foot in a church or attend church regularly . . .

--You are single, married, divorced, separated, or partnered . . .

--You are straight, gay, lesbian or bisexual . . .

--You are affiliated with a political party or not registered to vote . . .

--You have, or had, addictions, phobias, abortions, or a criminal record . . .

--You own your home, rent or are homeless . . .

--You are fully-abled, disabled or a person of differing abilities . . .

ALL have a place at God's table. We are commUNITY.

Meredith Bischoff, President

Welcoming Community Network (WCN)



Come out, come out, wherever you are! Whether you are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, asexual, queer, questioning, or an ally, come to the GALA retreat! The retreat will be held over Labor Day weekend, September 4-7, 2015, at Bluewater Campgrounds in Lexington, Michigan. It will include old favorites like story sharing, silent auction, and movies. Bring your stories to share, items to donate and money to bid for the silent auction, and movies, games, and puzzles to share. The banquet theme will be “Under the Sea”, and many people dress in costume to attend. In addition, bring any materials you may need to share your talent at the talent show. Rumor has it that the “bag lady” may show up again! However, the retreat will also add some new twists that we haven’t seen before. At Bluewater, the locals set up a volleyball net in the gymnasium and play late-night volleyball—we will join in this tradition and get our competition out for anyone who is interested! Another new piece to the Retreat this year is children’s programming. As GALA members continue to grow and change, some of us are starting or expanding families, and children’s programming is a new area for GALA to expand into. If you are interested in bringing your kids or grandkids, there will be activities for them to do during adult class times. Above all, make sure to register prior to August 1, if at all possible, so we can have an accurate count for ordering food. And if you are able to pay in full before August 1 as well, you will receive a \$25 discount! Come join your family of choice at Bluewater for fun and fellowship.





Hand in Hand – We Are One

GALA RETREAT 2015
REGISTRATION FORM

September 4-7, 2015

Blue Water Campgrounds,
3995 Lakeshore Road, Lexington MI 48450



Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith, Guest Ministry

Please complete this form and return it by August 1 so that we may adequately plan for food requirements.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (____) _____ E-mail _____

Special Dietary Needs _____

Medical/Special Needs _____

Roommate Preference _____

Fees

Reserve and PAY by August 1 = \$150 per person

Reserve and PAY **after** August 1 - \$175 per person

Children five years of age and under are at no additional charge

Make checks payable to GALA and indicate on memo line: GALA Retreat.

Mail completed registration form and payment to

GALA

PO Box 146

Lapeer MI 48446

Everyone is invited to bring an item or two for the silent auction! The more diverse the donated items, the more interesting the bidding! Please plan to pay for auction items separately.

If you wish to dress for the banquet, the theme will be "Blue - Under the Sea."

Please take note of the following for Blue Water Campgrounds:

- The lodge has rooms with varying numbers of bunk beds. If stairs are an issue, please indicate in special needs section of registration.
- Please bring bedding, towels, and bathroom supplies. Community bathroom facilities are located in the lodge.
- There are rustic cabins, RV lot with hook-ups, and a tent camping area. This area also has modern restroom facilities with showers within walking distance.
- Campers are responsible for transportation to and from the campgrounds. The closest airports are Flint MI (FNT) and Detroit MI (DTW).



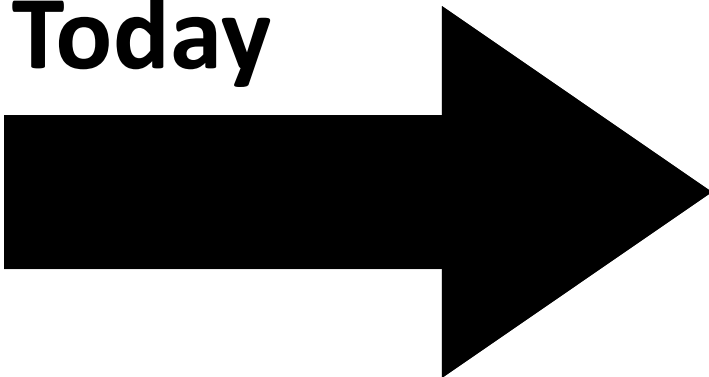
July 2015

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Join, or Renew Your Membership Today



2015 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 146
Lapeer, MI 48446**