



galanews

THE  LETTER

Serving members and friends of
Community of Christ

May 2015
Volume 26 Issue 2

Welcome back to Michigan!



Michigan is excited to host the next GALA annual retreat. It has been several years since we have had a retreat in Michigan, and we are excited to come back to the mitten. This year's retreat will be held at Blue-water Campground in Lexington, MI.

The two closest airports are Detroit, MI (DTW) and Flint, MI (FNT). Flint is slightly closer, especially when traffic is factored in. Flint is the smaller of the two airports and can be easier to get in and out of. Transportation to the campground will not be provided, so you will want to make your own arrangements to get back and forth from airports.

Bluewater is a beautiful campground with a beach and lakefront views of Lake Huron. The campgrounds are beautiful to walk and handicap accessible, with sidewalks to all buildings that will be in use. There are plenty of options available for lodging. There is a lodge available with individual rooms with varying numbers of bunk beds. There are two floors, but no elevator. If stairs are an issue, please register early to reserve a first floor room. There are community bathrooms in the lodge. You will need to bring your own bedding, towels and bathroom supplies. There is also an RV lot with hook-ups available. For the more rustic camper, there are rustic cabins on the campground, also with bunk beds, and a tent camping area. Both the RV area and the cabin/tent area also have modern restroom facilities with showers within walking distance.



The tabernacle on the grounds is newly replaced due to storm damage several years ago. It is made of logs and is both heated and air-conditioned (in Michigan, you never know which you may need). The lodge is heated, but no air conditioning, and the cabins are neither heated nor air-conditioned. The dining hall/gym is part of the lodge. Meals will be served here, and after hours volleyball or basketball is a possibility if people are willing to take down and put back up tables and chairs. We have the option for both indoor and outdoor campfires, depending on weather.



This year we will be blessed with guest ministry from Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith.

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Visit us on the web

www.galaweb.org

President's Message

Clyde Phillips-Frey, GALA President

I read the story from Dan Gregory that appears in this edition of the GALA Newsletter just before I sat down to put the thoughts that had been racing around in my head onto paper to share with anyone that reads this edition. I was touched by the pain, growth, love, and hope that was expressed by Dan. In reading the story, I was reminded of the importance of sharing our stories that is ever present. Although we've expressed our stories often enough that they seem "old hat" to us...there will always be someone to whom the story is new, fresh, vibrant, and may just fill a gap in their life journey. So, keep on, keepin' on!

Some time back, a writer for our local newspaper, the Buffalo News, contacted my spouse and asked him if he would allow her to interview him for a feature article she was going to publish about area Gay teachers. His response to her was that he would be glad to be interviewed, however, he is a teacher, period. The fact that he is also gay has no bearing on his teaching credentials nor his professional status. So he is not a "gay teacher" but rather a teacher, who happens to be gay. Unfortunately she just didn't get the difference; he did not do an interview.

Recently I was copied on an email request made to my spouse (if it is sent to me, folks figure I'll follow up and make sure he gets it and responds) from a friend and I believe she still works as a teacher in the same school system. The request was from what appears to be another vocation of hers and it went like this:

"First, I wanted to thank you for allowing me to reach out to you with these questions. I'm the Senior Writer for Mark Barnes's website, Brilliant or Insane, and I'm eager to publish a piece that illuminates the important role that LGBT teachers play in our public and private schools." [I found it on the web: www.brilliant-insane.com]

"I'm hoping that you might be able to address that topic for me and share a bit about your experiences, observations, and hopes for the future.

I'm not quite sure what this will look like in the end, but know that I will send you the draft and seek your endorsement before I publish it. It's very important to me that the piece honors who you are, what you value, and all that you do for kids."

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I recalled the local news paper writer's request and wondered to myself if the response that would be made to this request would be any different. Had circumstances changed in the intervening time?

When the second request came through, I asked him if he'd received the email and, if so, if he'd responded. He asked me to respond to her and to indicate that with state testing at school, personal health issues with a family member that lives several hours away, and the every-day activities of work, church, home....you get the gist...that it might be some time before he would be able to respond. I told him I'd respond...be careful what you ask for:

"Although no one asked me (and he might or might not agree) I have an opinion on the subject.... and that is that a teacher, a person that has gone to school for a number of years, taken a multitude of courses, performed hours of observation in the classroom as well as the student-teaching experience....should be exactly as the term "educator" is understood to mean in our society....a teacher or educator or instructor; whatever term one chooses to identify those that work within our public and private educational system(s). The position is one of trust and in the classroom, the person performing the function should act, and should be expected to act, in a strictly professional manner.

Although a person who also happens to identify as LGBT should also have a greater sensitivity, compassion, understanding, and rapport with a diverse student population, how would this be any different from a person in the same position that is say, Jewish? Although someone may choose to be Jewish, the sensitivity, compassion, understanding, or

rapport that they can have with students that happen to be Jewish is ancillary to the fact that they are a professional....a teacher, and should act, and be expected to act, professionally whenever they cross the threshold of the front door into the school building where they find themselves employed. [Note: I do not believe that anyone 'chooses' to be LGBTQ and would not want to mislead anyone. I needed a comparison and that is what came to mind.]

So, in my opinion, those who seek out the education profession, work within the system each and every day of their career, give countless hours in and out of the classroom, and make a financial contribution to cover the gap in school budgeting to help cover what students need in the classroom to facilitate learning....those are what we have come to know as teachers...professionals that make a difference in the learning and the lives of their students. The rest is just icing."

We've heard expressed, "It is what it is!" just as surely as we've heard, "God doesn't make no junk!" (a double negative, but the point is still made), and the familiar, "I was born that way!"

Dan stated it, "This is who I am, and I am known and loved by the God who made me!"

Grab hold of hope, encourage those that need encouraging, give praise to God for the lives that we live, express joy in our daily living, bring compassion and peace wherever the need is perceived...which means we need to continually listen, look, hear, and feel the presence of the Spirit within and throughout our lives. We touch many lives that we may never know about.

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Continued from page 1— Welcome Back to Michigan

We are excited to spend a weekend in fellowship and learning from them.

As usual, the retreat will be held on Labor Day weekend, which is September 4-7, 2015. The retreat will begin on Friday evening and close up by Monday around noon. Start saving for your retreat now! The cost will be \$150 per person if reserved and paid in full by August 1, \$175 if reserved and paid after August 1. Children 5 years of age and younger are free. The fee structure has changed a bit due to the fact that we need to purchase our food in advance and pay actual food costs, so we need as stable of a participant count as possible.

The retreat registration form is attached to this newsletter and is also available online on our website.

Please contact Erin Cavanaugh or Lisa Meyer with any questions as they are familiar with the area and campgrounds.



Board Nominations Are In

by Stephen Donahoe, GALA Secretary

Good news—we have an excellent slate of candidates for board positions to be voted on during the membership meeting at the Labor Day Retreat! Thank you to everyone who has stepped up to have their name put forward.

While the current candidates are wonderful, we would welcome other nominations from the membership. If you have nominations, please send them to GALA Secretary, Stephen Donahoe (sjydonahoe@gmail.com) no later than July 1st. See

the relevant portion of the GALA Bylaws below.

Without further ado, the slate of nominations is:

- President-elect (2016, becomes President without further electioning 2017-2018, and Past President 2019) **Jerry Dale**
- Vice President (2016-2017) **Erin Cavanaugh**
- Undersecretary for Publications (2016-2017) **Pam Robison**
- Member-at-large (2016-2018 - three year term) **Mark Davies**

From the GALA Bylaws:

"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 1st. In this event ballots listing the Nominating Committee candidate(s) and other candidate(s) shall be prepared and distributed to the GALA members for a vote. All votes shall be tabulated no later than seven (7) days before the Annual Meeting."

Thank you to the Nominating Committee for your work on nominations this year: Kip Dawson, Cindy Campbell, Nathan Phillips-Frey, and Lisa Meyer.

Remember, anyone who would like to run for the GALA board needs to be a dues-paying member, which is a good reminder to pay your dues. These dues and other donations help to make sure that GALA can continue the important work of reaching out to LBGTO people with the message that they are loved and have special gifts to share with the world.



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Daring to Live Our Stories Out Loud: Reflections of an Openly Gay Mission Center Leader

by Dan Gregory

The first time I came out publically was June 2, 2013. And it certainly wouldn't be the last. Though my message may not have always been as well-thought-out or as eloquent as that turning point in early June, each time I have shared that I'm gay the underlying themes have been the same as I wrote on Facebook that afternoon:

I have been so richly blessed with the assurance that the God who created me also deeply loves me. It is this steadfast assurance that has led me on a sacred journey of recognizing and claiming my identity as a gay man. I am so grateful to belong to a church and many circles of friends who love and affirm me as I am and as I may become, and I pray for continued grace on this journey of liberation, celebration, and affirmation. It is such a powerful experience to share openly and honestly, "This is who I am, this is how God made me, as gay, known, and loved!"

For me, the radical love and welcome of God has been my constant through the thrills and pains, lost friendships and unexpected connections, nerves and freedoms that have been my journey. Sharing our stories isn't always easy, but it is essential, for in storytelling we not only communicate our truths to others, but more deeply to ourselves. My story has been powerfully blessed by the surrounding arms of this community that I hold so dear, and that I pray will continue to free others to share and live their own stories as authentically as possible.

When I began working for Community of Christ based out of Des Moines, Iowa in late 2008, I felt like I had no one to share my story with. I was deeply ashamed

and even unsure of my sexuality, and felt that the moment I cracked open the door my world might come flooding in. Was it safe? Was it possible? Would I be loved and accepted and able to unite my faith and my attractions? I had to start somewhere, though, so I went for a walk with my best friend and shared the truth that I was coming to embrace: I'm gay, and I think that's okay. With his amazing support and humor-filled acceptance, I found new strength to affirm my own story. And soon I was opening up with a few more friends, and then a few more. My inner circle was still very small, but it was real, life-giving, and humbling. And most of all, they respected my ups and downs, my need for confidentiality, to be heard, to be carried. The vast majority of these heroes were members of the church, and they assured me that God loved me and that the community loved me, no matter what.

By the time the 2010 World Conference came around, I was out to my family, comfortable in my own skin, and passionate about the local, national, and church conversations on LGBT rights that were swirling. Serving in an official capacity with the church, it was very difficult to remain publically neutral, especially because I (rightly or wrongly) didn't want to be perceived as swaying outcomes. When the Iowa Supreme Court made our state the fourth in the nation with equal marriage, I had to absorb comments from some in our Mission Center that disparaged the idea, including one that quietly but forcefully shared that "we should drive every f*ggot from the state by any means necessary." Such comments obviously hurt deeply, but they were countered by such a strong and steady stream of love and support that I couldn't help but feel joy at the direction we were moving. Through this time, faithful disciples reminded me of the nature of God and the type of faith community I call home.

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Continued from page 5—Daring to Live Our Stories

After the USA National Conference made official what I had known for some time – that we are a church that seeks to expand justice and uphold the worth of all – there were still bumps in the road. Congregations in our Mission Center that considered closing. Members who left. Friends publically lamenting the shift. And the dreaded question of how people would actually respond when a now-Mission Center officer came out as gay. Our entire staff, my apostle, and close friends all assured me that they were behind me 100%, and that it was my decision whether to come out and how to handle it moving forward. So on June 2, I took the leap.

I wish I could say that everyone was thrilled – they weren't. I wish I could say that I was welcomed with open arms in every congregation – I'm still not. I wish I could say that I just had to say it once and could move on – but as we all know, sharing our story is a never-ending rhythm, constantly claiming and re-claiming and working up the nerve and hearing yourself say the words that no longer come from fear, but celebration: I'm gay! But what I CAN say is that this incredible community continues to amaze and inspire me and love me and see me first and foremost as an awesome child of God.

Having the visibility of my position has its pros and cons. I've been able to help others articulate their stories of sexuality and faith, and have also been the one people whisper about. I've been able to assure those driven from other denominations that there is a church that will welcome them with complete love, and hurt as I see congregations torn apart by different understandings. We still have a long way to go, and the journey will demand much grace and sensitivity. But I firmly believe that God's story of love to and in the world is yet unfolding and has amazing new

chapters just waiting to be written through you and me, if we will dare to live our stories out loud.

Everyone deserves the right to declare, "This is who I am, and I am known and loved by the God who made me!" May we be a church that celebrates each of these stories!



GALA Survey

by Jerry M. Dale, At Large Board Member

Hey, did you get your GALA news blast? Did you see the link to the survey? If you didn't that's okay, you can still participate. Go to: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/BP6NXZX> to participate (sorry for the weird web address). The Survey will close on **May 15th**, but don't wait...do it....everyone else is.

GALA is asking for your input regarding a change to our Mission and Vision statements and what we can do make GALA more relevant to you. We have 15 responses to date and we would appreciate hearing your thoughts. Once the survey closes the results will be analyzed and then shared in our next newsletter.

The GALA board is here to serve you. We look forward to reading your responses and putting your suggestions into action.



Smile and the World Smiles With You! Changes at Amazon.com

by Clyde Phillips-Frey

Once upon a time...all one needed to do was click on

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Continued from page 6—Amazon Smiles



a link on the GALA website home page which took them to Amazon.com and a percentage of all purchases made while there were directed to GALA.

Times and seasons change and Amazon made some changes to their charitable donations program. The most significant change is that those that want to share a percentage of their purchase with GALA must now make the specific designation on the website through smile.amazon.com.

It is an easy process and once signed up, each time one signs onto Amazon.com one will be asked if one wants to go to smile.amazon.com to place their order; that link keeps one with Amazon.com, but now provides support to GALA. The charitable donation will automatically be credited to GALA.

It only takes a few moments, the purchases cost the same, GALA receives a charitable donation that helps support our budget each year...and everyone WINS!

The best part is everyone that buys from Amazon.com may designate GALA Gay and Lesbian Acceptance, Inc. as their charity of choice whether they are members, supporters, or just heard about GALA.

ACTION ITEM: go to the Amazon.com website today and sign up at smile.amazon.com to have GALA Gay and Lesbian Acceptance Inc. as your charity of choice, then post it on your Facebook and other social media accounts and encourage your friends to do the same.

Thank you for your continued support of GALA!



Welcoming Community Network (WCN) Corner

by Jerry M. Dale, Jr., Vice President, WCN

Welcome to the new section of the GALA newsletter...the WCN Corner. At the last GALA retreat in Arizona I used some of the materials available through WCN to teach a class about Gender Identity. Education is an important aspect of WCN, just like sharing our stories is foundational to GALA. I'll be teaching another class at the Michigan retreat and look forward to growing with you.

Our mission: **Welcoming Community Network (WCN) is an international grassroots organization that exists to enable full participation of persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities in the life and ministry of Community of Christ both in policy and practice.** Our website is <http://welcomingcommunitynetwork.org>.

WCN is part of a much larger ecumenical welcoming movement. Community of Christ is not the only church growing in acceptance of LGBTQ individuals. Isn't it nice to know that we are not alone? One of the great resources available to us is The Institute of Welcoming Resources (www.welcomingresources.org). Take a few minutes and read about what's going on outside of Community of Christ.

I serve as the liaison between GALA and WCN which means providing a clear line of communication between the two organizations. GALA gave birth to WCN. As the two organizations continue to mature we are finding ways to come together to support each other's mission more fully. At the GALA board retreat in January 2015 there was a great discussion

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about how GALA and WCN can work together to build a strong foundation for LGBTQ and Ally Community of Christ members.

Each newsletter there will be a WCN focused article. Up next will be Meredith Bischoff, President of WCN, to share some thoughts with you.

May God's peace be with you on your journey.



GALA Financial Report

by Lisa Myer, Treasurer

GALA finances are looking good! So far this year, we have brought in income of \$2,429, mostly from memberships, donations, and royalties from the book. Our expenses have generally fallen in line with the 2015 approved budget. The only line item that is overspent at the current time is the GALA Board Retreat, due to assistance provided for board members to be able to attend. That line item is overspent by 22%, or approximately \$230. However, we also have \$580 of recorded in-kind donation by board members in their travel costs for attending the GALA retreat—and there was more that has not been recorded to date.

At this point of the year, where we would aim to be at 25% of budgeted income and expenses, we are actually at 19% of income expected and 15% of expenses expected, leaving the organization with a positive cash flow of \$545 for the year to date. Our total amount of cash on hand in the checking account is \$16,352. Keep in mind, our biggest time of income/expenses is August/September, around the time of the annual retreat. Hopefully, we will break even on

the retreat this year, as that is always our goal. Also, to date for 2015, we have received 42 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 please feel free to contact me with any questions!



Florida GALA Retreat March 2015

by Cindy Campbell

Twenty-three LGBTQ and allies joined together to celebrate a “first” at the 4th annual Florida GALA Retreat at Deerhaven Campground. Our theme was “Love Wins” and we demonstrated the truth of this by having a beautiful wedding Saturday evening! Ken and Cindy Campbell performed the ceremony for Clay Birks and Carl Moser, a same-sex couple from Jacksonville, FL who have been together for 35 years. “Florida Wins!” we said, as Florida approved same-sex marriages in January of this year. Carl and Clay win too! And so do we, their friends and family and churches. Several people new to the campground joined us for the weekend, and a wonderful time was experienced by all.





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).



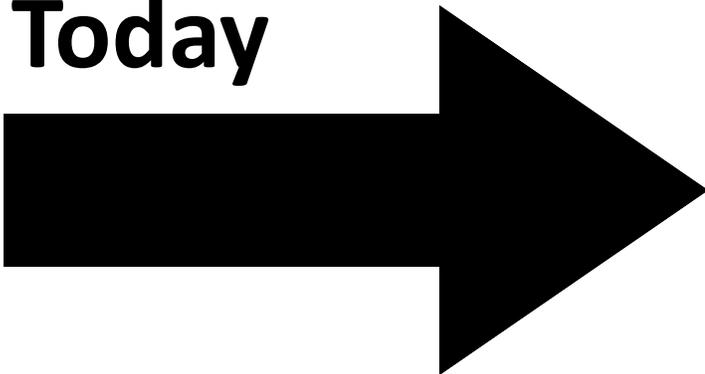
May 2015

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YES; send me the newsletter by e-mail

Address: _____

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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

