



gala **news**

THE LETTER

Spring 2005 – Volume 16 Issue 1

ANNOUNCEMENT

Curt Filer offered his resignation as GALA president, effective immediately, to the board of directors at their April meeting. The board accepted Curt's resignation with sadness and with deepest appreciation for his service.

The GALA board has therefore appointed Arthur Butler as president pro tempore to fulfill the remainder of the first year of the vacated two-year term. In accordance with the GALA bylaws, Article 4 section 4, a special election will be held at the 2005 fall retreat to elect someone to fill the second year of the vacated position. Please submit nominations and bios of those interested in serving a one-year term for GALA president to Arthur Butler, at cbnuneaton@yahoo.com or GALA, P. O. Box 2173, Independence, MO 64055.

Report from GALA Field Coordinator Sharon P. Troyer

At the recent board meeting we decided it is important to have **balance between** the traditional role GALA has always played, which we call **sanctuary ministry** (providing support for persons of all sexual orientations and gender identity to find unconditional love and acceptance, confidentiality and safety in fellowship through retreats, chapter gatherings, our newsletter and individual contact). At the same time, we are committed to support the **transformational ministry** found in the Welcoming Community Network (WCN) which offers support to congregations within Community of Christ. Highlights of our efforts included:



- January meeting, Houston, Texas—GALA chapter and meeting with the Pasadena, TX congregation to discuss WCN.
- Arthur Butler and Sharon Troyer attended the Welcoming Church Program Leaders Retreat in Houston with leaders from ten denominations.
- Sam and Pat Marmoy, David Woolsey, Cricket Mercer, Marilyn Lawrence, and Libby Vestal participated with Sharon Troyer at a faith-based core leadership training held in Houston, TX, January 13-16.
- Meredith Bischoff, GALA's Webmaster, will attend a similar training in Portland, Oregon, the end of April.
- Congregations in Kansas, Texas, Missouri and Florida are discussing welcoming Church status.
- Small exploratory gatherings have taken place with leaders of Stone Church about WCN. On February 21st, sixty-eight people were facilitated by Emily Eastwood, Exec. Director of RIC in ELCA Lutherans. Eight groups were led by members of the K. C. Coalition of Welcoming Churches.
- February 25-28 Julie Dimmit from Chicago joined Sharon Troyer in providing ministry at the invitation of the Clearwater Community of Christ in Florida. This included participation by several other people from the Florida Mission Center. Clearwater is taking formal steps toward being designated as part of WCN.
- Sam and Pat Marmoy have trained and are working as WCN volunteers in Arizona as well as Central Mission Center.
- Sharon brought the communion message at Cornerstone Community of Christ in Center Mission Center in April.

GALA

2004 - 2005

P.O. Box 2173

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Please visit our newly updated website at www.galaweb.org. Thanks to our creative webmaster and board member, Meredith Bischoff.

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Holey, Wholly, Holy: Coming Out Spiritually Whole

*“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness...to give you a future and a hope.”
(Jeremiah 29:11 ESV)*

GALA International Retreat Five Oaks Educational and Retreat Centre Paris, Ontario, Canada September 2-5, 2005

Join together with friends and family for **the first International GALA Retreat held outside the borders of the United States** as we enjoy the warm welcome of our neighbors to the north, Canada.

We are excited to announce that Meredith Bischoff will be our retreat director. You may remember the wonderful ministry she provided in planning the GALA retreat on Samish Island, WA and at Happy Valley in Santa Cruz, CA. Our heartfelt thanks to Meredith, who wrote the following:

Our theme this year will explore spiritual wholeness. Scripture strongly affirms spiritual healing. The word healing in New Testament Greek, *sozo*, is the same as that of salvation and wholeness. Spiritual healing is God's work of offering persons balance and wholeness of body, mind, and spirit, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

After accepting the leadership of the retreat, I awoke the next morning with a new perception of the old hymn, “Holy, Holy, Holy,” replacing the opening phrase with three homophonic descriptors of the spiritual journey I hope to offer retreat participants. We come together “holey” with fragment-ed, bruised and broken spirits. We explore opportunities for fulfillment through the body, mind, and soul to become “whole.” We create a sacred celebration of our spiritual health – “holy.”

Christian de la Huerta contends in his book, Coming Out Spiritually, that LGBT individuals have separated their sexual identities from their spiritual identities. He also notes that coming out spiritually is a culmination of the journey of self-discovery. Coming out means healing old wounds and moving beyond old identities from spiritually fragmented to embracing oneself as "empowered,

compassionate, loving, ready to make a difference in the world, and fully able to embrace the totality of life."

We are very fortunate to have Don H. Compier, Ph.D., as our Guest Minister this year. Don is the dean of the new Community of Christ Semi-nary, a part of the Independence Campus of Graceland University. Don received his Ph.D. in theological studies from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. For nine years he served as professor of theology at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, the Episcopal semi-nary of the Graduate Theological Union, an ecumenical and interfaith consortium in Berkeley, CA. Other guest ministers have also been invited.

The retreat will be held at Five Oaks Educational and Retreat Centre, located 90 minutes' drive west of Toronto in Paris, Ontario. Five Oaks is affiliated with The United Church of Canada. It is named for the majestic oak trees that grace the land, and in recognition of the five central Ontario conferences, which it served first.

Start planning now to attend this wonderful retreat! You will need to have appropriate documentation with you to cross the border. You **MUST AT LEAST** have a government-issued picture identification, such as a driver license, AND a certified copy of your birth certificate. Crossing the border with a passport is preferred by the U.S. Customs office, but will not be required until Jan. 1, 2006.

With the fluctuation in currency conversion rates and program development for the retreat still on going, we have not yet set the cost of the retreat, but it may be approximately \$250.00 US.

For more information contact Meredith Bischoff at 714-579-1573 or merigrll@merigrll.com.

GALA Activities at World Conference

JOIN THE SHOWER OF STOLES AT WORLD CONFERENCE!

You are invited to be part of the Shower of Stoles display at the GALA worship service at World Conference this June. The Shower of Stoles Project is a collection of liturgical stoles from gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people of faith from 24 denominations. Each stole has a message attached to it telling the story of one person's sense of call and service to the church. Stoles from GALA members have been displayed all over North America; we hope yours will be, too!

While stoles are not a part of the Community of Christ's tradition, please remember this: ***Stoles are not the important part of this project, stories are!*** Like panels from the AIDS quilt, stoles are simply a way of carrying a story, and they are a symbolic reminder to the church that we are a faithful people, called by God to serve the church. Many of the stoles come from GLBT people in churches that don't ordinarily have stoles, including Baptists, Mennonites and Pentecostals. Stoles from these folks are often very simple homemade ones.

Here's how you can participate:

1. **Make a stole**, as elaborate or as simple as you wish. Suggestions for sewing a very simple stole can be found on our website: www.showerofstoles.org. Don't worry about it "looking like a stole"; we have scarves, foot-washing towels, even neckties – anything that includes your story!

2. **Write a brief message telling your story**, up to 100 words. You may include your name, city and church affiliation, or donate the stole anonymously. You don't have to attach your story to the stole, just send it to us and we'll take care of the rest.
3. **Get your congregation involved**. See our web site for more information about how your congregation can contribute a "signature stole" to the collection.
4. **Send your stole and message to Martha Juillerat at the Shower of Stoles Project, 57 Upton Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55405 IMMEDIATELY** (hopefully no later than May 10). This will give us time to sew on your story and inventory your stole before we take it to Independence.

We invite every gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender member and every GLBT-affirming congregation in the Community of Christ to become a part of this remarkable collection. ***This is your chance to tell your story to the whole church!*** Please don't hesitate to ask us for assistance in making your stole. We can be reached by e-mail at stolesproject@earthlink.net or through our website at www.showerofstoles.org.

GALA AT WORLD CONFERENCE!

- *"Lift Up The Ensign: We Are All God's Children"* will be the theme of a **GALA Worship Service on Saturday, June 4th** from 12 noon to 1:00 p.m. This service is being held in conjunction with the special conference during which delegates from around the world will select the new president of Community of Christ. We will again meet at College Park Community of Christ at 1021 West College (just west of River, six blocks north of the Auditorium).

As in years past, GALA invites you to share in this inspiring worship experience that welcomes people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. We will be blessed by dynamic speakers, beautiful music, and an opportunity to celebrate God's love in our global community, which is growing in its appreciation of diversity.

- You may want to drop by the **Main Street Coffee House**, just south of the Independence Square between 4:30 & 6:00 p.m. We hope GALA friends can use this time to visit together.

Looking for LGBT resources on the web about:

- Becoming a Welcoming Congregation?
- Coming Out to family and friends?
- Families with same-sex parents?
- Bisexual or Transgender issues?

Check out the new web portal:
<http://WelcomingResources.org>



Developed by: The Institute for Welcoming Resources

Unexpected Blessings

Blessings come to us in many ways and under many circumstances. In my life, I am blessed by being a part of a caring, loving, and inclusive congregation.

We have a very dedicated pastor who is skillful in ministering to people. He has a way of helping people; especially children feel that they are safe, loved and valued. He is also a proficient leader and administrator for the congregation.

One afternoon, my husband Vern and our daughter-in-law Karen sat in the hospital waiting room waiting for my surgery to be over. Karen had needed to make arrangements for someone to be with our granddaughters after school. Our pastor volunteered. He met the girls at school, took them to a movie, out for dinner, and then he took the girls shopping for an Easter present for their parents.

Our daughter Sue and her four children moved back into our home after her divorce. Sue began attending church with us. I'm sure you can imagine how difficult it was for her as the single parent of four children to find her place in the world of couples. However, there were three individuals in our congregation that made a special effort to include Sue and offer her some social time with adults away from the children. They asked her out to dinner, to movies, and invited her into their homes for dinner and the evening.

Three of Sue's four children are preschoolers. When she first began bringing them to church, they had not had very much experience in a worship or church school setting. They were very hesitant, clinging to their mother, not knowing if they wanted to enter into the class activities or not. Their teacher was a quiet, young woman who took them under her wing. She gave them interesting things to do in class. She sat with them while they sculpted figures out of play doh, and she colored pictures with them. I never really heard her say very much, but her quiet, caring way spoke to them. After a few Sundays, the children would run to sit beside their teacher during worship service and were eager to go with her to the classroom.

Our pastor is gay. The children's church school teacher is lesbian. Of the three individuals who befriended our daughter, two are a lesbian couple and one is gay.

By my desk at home, tacked up on the wall is this saying: "Don't miss out on a blessing because it wasn't packaged the way you expected."

I am so thankful that I have not missed out on these blessings because they weren't packaged the way I expected.

Our congregation is a "welcoming" congregation. In 1996 we passed a resolution stating that we "specifically welcome and encourage people of all sexual orientations to share in community life, worship, and sacraments, including leadership and ministry." Our mission statement reads, "We are called to be a questing, caring, and inclusive community of faith." I am thankful that I am part of a congregation that is Christ centered, person oriented, inclusive, outreaching, and missional. It has brought many unexpected blessings.

--Jan Hill, vjhill@comcast.net

Members from the Houston GALA Chapter: (standing, left to right) Dave Swart, Gracie Day, Peach Williamson, Jeanette Early, Thonda Radcliff, Lynette Early, Dorothy Hibbard, Marjorie Early, (sitting) Peggy Shelton, Sarah Davis, and GALA Field Coordinator Sharon Troyer.



The GLBT community has become the inadvertent subject of a nationwide debate. The issue of moral values found itself at or near the top of the list of voters' concerns in the recent election. Although most media sources have interpreted this to mean that a majority of U.S. voters disapprove of gays and gay-related issues, there are many people in this country -- good church-going people -- who don't believe there is a correlation between immorality and being GLBT. The members of the *Community of Christ* congregation in North St. Paul are just such people.

This small congregation has been around since 1945. For the first 30 years or so of their existence, they had an older and somewhat conservative member base. Then, in the early 1970's, there was an influx of young families with small children and teens. This new group of young families changed the character of the congregation. The little church became more active, vibrant and full of life. The aspect of the congregation changed again in 1978 with another new incursion of fresh faces. This time, there were young adults, some of them un-married, some newly married and fresh out of college that filled the pews. Several of them were attending the United Theological Seminary, which is known for graduating some very forward-thinking individuals. During church services, they would share their innovative ideas about theology and social justice with the rest of the congregation, who became excited about what they heard. Pretty soon, the St. Paul Community of Christ congregation became known as young, progressive and on fire. The congregation is now comprised of many critical thinkers – people who really like to ask difficult questions, and to look at how they can live their faith out in their daily lives.

The current pastor, Gary Kelsey is a gay man and a convert to the church who first started attending 17 years ago. A few years later, he was ordained a lay minister in the church. The Community of Christ does not have any paid ministers at the local level. All ordained priesthood members perform their duties on a voluntary, unpaid basis. In his paid professional life, Kelsey is an independent organizational development consultant who works mostly with non-profit, government and educational organizations. He is also a professor at St. Mary's University of Minnesota, Program Director, and he has faculty status at Walden University, University of St. Thomas, Concordia University and City University of Seattle. Kelsey was elected by the entire congregation nearly two years ago to fulfill a two-year term as pastor. When I asked him about why he was attracted to this church, he answered, "I came to this church, initially, because it was a small worship community. That was important to me, having

grown up in a large, mainstream Catholic congregation - it was too large. This congregation is small and cozy. People know each other and they have formed genuine relationships with one another. To make the church run smoothly, people all have to volunteer and pitch in: from cleaning the church, to shoveling the driveway, to planning the worship services, to assuming worship leadership roles, to working in Christian education. Seeing this hard work, steady determination and loving commitment that the church members put into making this congregation succeed, I couldn't help but be impressed and drawn to it."

Like many Christian denominations, the Community of Christ is struggling with the issues of ordination of GLBT individuals and gay marriage. Currently, the church proclaims to affirm the worth of all persons, including GLBT individuals. Everyone has "full claim upon the acceptance and reconciling ministry and care of the church." However, in the 1982 Statement on Homosexuality from Community of Christ's *Standing High Council*, (a statement that is still in effect today), it says that practicing homosexuals should not be admitted into the priesthood. However, celibate gay and lesbian persons are eligible for ordination. It is also the position of the church is that "homosexual unions are not and should not be considered marriages in the sacramental sense." The Community of Christ does not currently sanction gay marriage.

Pastor Kelsey noted, "Even though there has been a lot of discussion and debate since that 1982 statement came about, the church has not formally welcomed, celebrated and included GLBT members in *all* aspects of ministry in the church. It is the goal of our congregation to change this. Back in 1996 three church members drafted and proposed a piece of legislation that declared that we were an open and welcoming congregation. The resolution was passed unanimously, after a brief season of discussion. The St. Paul Community of Christ congregation now officially states that, 'We specifically welcome and encourage people of all sexual orientations to share in the community life, worship and sacraments, including leadership and ministry.' So in our congregation, although it is in opposition the official policy of the World Church, we welcome the ministry, ordained or otherwise, of all individuals, including GLBT people. That is one of the things that I think makes our congregation unique among the majority of churches in our denomination. Our congregation's GLBT members are free to take part in all aspects of worship, including creating worship services, presiding over these services, delivering sermons and being involved in outreach."

Good Things Come in Small Packages, Cont.

This congregation is not alone in the struggle for justice for its GLBT members. Kelsey mentioned there is an organization called GALA (Gay & Lesbian Acceptance), which has a loose affiliation to the Community of Christ (much as *Dignity* is related to the Catholic Church and *Lutherans Concerned* is related to the Lutheran Church). GALA, which was formed in 1984, provides a venue for fellowship, worship, sharing of stories and community. When this group was first formed, it was a place for GLBT folks, who had become disenfranchised from the church (some of whom had had their ministry taken away or their priesthood calls held up because they were openly gay), to gather together, draw strength and support and to heal. Each year, GALA hosts an international retreat around Labor Day Weekend. In 2005 it will move to Toronto, Ontario, although it is held in a different location each year. This retreat is an important event, providing space for people to come together, re-new old acquaintances, make new friends, worship in a friendly, accepting atmosphere and to create community for GLBT folks who feel isolated, separated or marginalized. According to Kelsey, "GALA traditionally afforded opportunities for fellowship and chances for worship and support, but they have recently started moving into more of an advocacy role with the World Church and beyond. They've created their own project called, 'The Welcoming Communities Movement' in which they go into congregations that wish to have dialogue about the full inclusion of GLBT individuals in the church. Through networking and discussions, congregations ideally will arrive at a place where they can proclaim themselves -- as we did many years ago -- opening and welcoming to people of all sexual orientations and identities. So far, this effort has been very successful." Pastor Kelsey currently sits on GALA's board of directors.

Although the St. Paul Community of Christ congregation is very gay-friendly, most of the people in the congregation are not GLBT, but are straight allies and supporters. Kelsey noted, "It is not what you would call a gay congregation, so much as it is a congregation where it makes absolutely no difference what your orientation is. Whether you are gay or straight, it is simply not an issue. It goes beyond welcoming. You are looked at as a person, as an individual, rather than simply seeing you first as a person of a different sexual orientation.

Word of this congregation's reputation has spread to different parts of the U.S. within the Community of Christ denomination. Kelsey shared the

story of a lesbian couple from out of state. "There is a lesbian who has been in a committed relationship for many years. She and her partner have several kids, one of whom is eight years old and wanted to be baptized. Since they did not feel accepted in the St. Louis congregation, these women asked if the St. Paul congregation would consider baptizing their daughter. I responded back to them jokingly, 'Of course we will. Sometimes we baptize straight people.' All in all, it was a very moving experience for the entire congregation, not just for this family."

Kelsey's term as pastor is over. After a democratic congregational election, a new pastor was elected. The former congregational president, Karen Hill be-came the new pastor on January 1, 2005. The Associate Pastor is the current Counselor to the Pastor, Holly Caskey. Looking to the future of the congregation, Kelsey commented, "I expect that the church will remain solidly committed to continuing its support for its GLBT members.

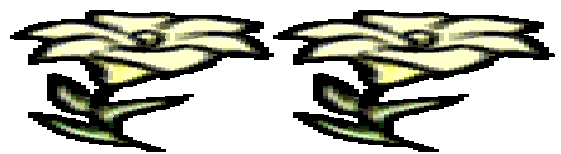
And so this little church that you have probably never heard of, will continue to do what it does best -- to welcome, embrace and share the good news with all people who enter its doors. They look forward to sharing with you, and hope that they will be graced with the talents and gifts that God has given *you*. At the St. Paul Community of Christ, no one's gifts are wasted or taken for granted.

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This article appeared in the 12/29/04 issue of [Living Out](#).



Stephanie Shaw has recently been doing stand-up comedy for a performance venue called Diva Riot Cabaret. It's for all divas (mostly lesbians, but also for ANY divas, whether they are male, female, gay, May 7, as well as at the Twin Cities GLBT Pride Festival on Sunday, June 26 (around 3:00 or 4:00 pm), along with other Diva Riot comedy divas.

In addition, Stephanie will be doing the Red Ribbon Ride, a 300+ bike trip to raise money for nine different Minnesota AIDS organizations July 14- 17. If anyone is interested in donating or in doing the ride with her, contact Stephanie at shawwheels@yahoo.com.

Welcoming Community Network (WCN) Workshop

On February 27, 2005, I attended the Welcoming Community Network (WCN) Workshop at the Clearwater, Florida Community of Christ. I had heard a little bit about WCN, but I did not expect to have such a wonderful learning experience.

At this day of orientation, 11 participants were introduced to the process a congregation would follow to “start a process of study and discernment regarding their welcome of persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities.” Each participant was encouraged to share their personal story regarding gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) persons and what brought them to this workshop.

The review of the birth of the GALA organization and the journey to WCN was informative and enlightening. It emphasized the opportunities we have to integrate inclusive language and responsive programming that is sensitive to persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities. While the needs of GLBTs were highlighted, the principles also apply to other disenfranchised persons.

Two important tools for use by congregations were demonstrated. A “*Congregational Assessment Worksheet*” was used as a tool to measure the learning needs of a congregation regarding WCN. Based on the scoring results, congregational leaders would have a baseline for customizing their study focus and determining the pace the members will need to follow as they work through the process.

The “*Implications Wheel*” is an additional tool in determining whether a congregation is ready to proceed toward being part of the WCN. It provides an inexpensive and comprehensive way to identify the pros and cons of proceeding in a specific direction. With the input of diverse members, the congregation can anticipate the potential positive and negative outcomes if they decide to proceed, and the planning process can be adapted to minimize the trauma of change. While the tool is an integral part of the WCN process, it is applicable for any group planning a change in mission.

Essential to the entire process of discovery is the need for a prayerful discernment process. The work-

shop emphasized the need to prayerfully seek guidance, and to be sensitive to the leadings of the Holy Spirit. Various methods were illustrated, including the use of responsive readings, music, prayers and meditation. It is critical that congregations excited about proceeding as part of the WCN confirm this direction in a time of prayerful discernment.

If a congregation determines that they are called to become a part of the WCN, they will write a welcoming statement to proclaim their openness to persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities. This, along with various marketing techniques, will inform the community of their mission to minister to GLBT persons. While not every congregation is willing to explore this process, it is important that those who are interested receive encouragement from community supporters and from other members of Community of Christ.

I am grateful for the opportunity I had to participate in this informative workshop. Thank you to Sharon Troyer and Julie Dimmit for your competent and experienced leadership. Your loving ministry offered through this WCN Workshop has heightened my sensitivity to the needs of persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

--Becky Savage, Florida Mission Center



Sam and Pat Marmoy,
Welcoming Community Network volunteers

Upcoming Event

Together in Faith 2005

August 5-7, 2005, Eastern Michigan University

<http://www.togetherinfaith.com>

"Together in Faith" will be hosted by the Faith Action Network, a project of the Michigan office of The American Friends Service Committee Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Issues Program. This conference will bring together LGBT and Ally people of all ages, races, religions and spiritualities from around the country for skill-enhancing workshops led by nationally renowned activists, and community-building activities with like-minded progressive People of Faith/Spirit/Conscience. Attendees will leave with new information, tools and networks to help them create LGBT-affirming cities and faith communities.

The conference begins on Friday, August 5, 2005, with a kick-off reception. The workshops will begin on Saturday, August 6, at 9:00 a.m. in McKenny Union on the Eastern Michigan campus and will continue until 5:00 p.m. On Saturday evening there will be a special Together in Faith concert at Pease Auditorium on campus. On Sunday the conference workshops will begin again at 9:00 a.m. and continue throughout the day. Ticket price for the event is \$150 for both days. You may purchase a ticket for Saturday only or Sunday only for \$75. Limited scholarships are available.

Twenty-four GALA members and friends from the Anaheim, Basileia: An Open Door Community of Christ, and Inland Empire congregations met on the evening of Palm Sunday at the Anaheim congregation to celebrate GALA's 12th annual observance of the Passover Seder. Additional guests traveled to participate in the Seder from two congregations in the Southwest Mission Center as well as the Florida Regional Center. Brian Sadler did a marvelous job preparing the food and leading the Seder. Those participating observed a special spirit during the extended meal. Several members shared their testimony of a new understanding of the Passover: a struggle for peace and justice in our own lives and in our world through the retelling of the Exodus story.

Meredith Bischoff led a second Passover Seder in Independence for the GALA Board of Directors on Saturday, April 9th. Fourteen GALA Board members, partners, spouses, and special guests gathered in the

home of Arthur Butler to share in the Passover Seder. Arthur prepared a marvelous feast. The rituals, the story of freedom and justice, and its application to our current times uplifted everyone involved. Meredith left a Seder plate, Elijah cup and copies of the GALA Haggadah for members in the Kansas City area to use in years to come.

Houston GALA Chapter Moves OUT!

On Saturday, February 19th, five members of the Houston GALA chapter joined forces with other gays in Houston to protest the "Love Won Out" conference sponsored by the Focus on Family organization at one of the local "mega-churches." The conference was attended by approximately 800 people, and the emphasis was on "corrective" ministry as a way to "fix" those individuals mired down in the sin of homosexuality.

We joined approximately 150 others in the protest sponsored by PFLAG in picketing across the road from the church. We remained in place holding banners and signs for two hours. It was a gray, gloomy day, but the spirit of the protesters was evident. The demonstration was peaceful and no confrontations took place. It was heartening to hear horns honking in support of our efforts as cars passed by. I saw only one "thumbs down" during the protest. We got wonderful press coverage in the local papers (gay and straight) as well as clips on at least three of the local television stations.

Not all of the protesters were gay. Tanya Jackson, a heterosexual holding a banner reading "Jesus Wept," said she participated in the protest after seeing a billboard advertising it on the highway, which said, "I questioned homosexuality. Change is Possible. Discover how." Jackson said it was very shocking that someone could so blatantly condemn a person for who they are. "It's hatred to me," she explained. Jackson went on to say this was the first time she had ever attended an event in support of gays and lesbians.

By contrast Mike Haley, director of gender issues for Focus on the Family said, "We're protested every-where. What's interesting to me is that while the gay community likes to cry tolerance, they're very intolerant of our message."

After the demonstration, the five of us went out for breakfast together. We were happy to have given up our morning in an attempt to make a difference. None of us had ever done this before, but I doubt that it will be the last time.

--Dave Swart, Houston GALA

Book Review: Called Into Ministry by Mary Albing

Called Into Ministry: To be a Good and Faithful Pastor. Reflections of a Partnered Lesbian, Mary Albing, 2004, 149 pages. Soft cover, \$16. Kirk House Publishers, Box 390759, Minneapolis, MN 55439, 1-888-696-1828 or www.kirkhouse.com. Reviewed by David R. Weiss, a theologian and poet with whom several of us have trained in Core Leadership Development for the Reconciling in Christ program of the ELCA Lutherans. David is an excellent essayist and poet, and even though this is a Lutheran story, I think the parallels are certain to interest our readers. Sharon Troyer

Mary Albing is a partnered lesbian seeking to faithfully pastor a small Lutheran parish in Minneapolis, in the midst of a national church steeped in turmoil about people like her. But her book is a calming gift to this church in days overshadowed by forecasts of stormy weather. In these personal reflections, framed equally by her self-understanding as a lesbian and her sense of call as a pastor, Mary Albing shows us the human side of both. And in so doing she demonstrates the simple truth that it is possible to be both at the same time. The book is organized around the various sorts of "calling" that we all experience. To be Christian, indeed to be authentically human, is to be called into moments of hearing, compassion, sorrow, love, laughter, seeing, vocation, hope and courage. Albing explores each of these themes through poignant anecdotes drawn from her pastoral experience. At times these anecdotes shift from one to the next without warning and put the reader momentarily off-balance, but overall it becomes surpassingly evident - in my case as a reader, tearfully evident at times - that Albing pastors with uncanny grace.

As each chapter unfolds she reflects as well on each theme out of her experience as a lesbian. She writes movingly, without shame, but with honest sorrow, about the pain of leaving a marriage that was no longer life-giving not because of her husband or because of any dysfunction with the marriage itself, but because of the unanticipated yet equally undeniable truth of who she was. She makes no attempt to hide the pain that her coming

out journey caused family, friends, and herself. But she is just as eloquent in describing the grace of friendship with her ex-husband, the deep bond with her children, and the joy discovered with her partner. And we accompany her on this journey through the same themes that mark her ministry

Albing concludes each chapter with a sermon, all preached during the past year while she has served a Minneapolis parish - and while she has been in a covenanted relationship with a woman. Moving from the assigned Scripture text for the day, Albing proclaims to us - as she did initially to her own parishioners - good news in a message that resonates with the chapter's theme.

Despite its title, this book is foremost about the challenge of being human - and being Christian. It explores the challenges of living faithfully that confront each of us. In this sense, the book remains from first to last, an invitation to self-discovery for each reader. It is only secondarily - but eloquently so - about the twin challenges of being a faithful pastor and a partnered lesbian. And by leaving this witness rest rather in the background, not as an argument to be made but simply as a truth to be shown, Albing may well turn more than a few hearts along the way.

Called into Ministry is a relatively quick read, the language is easy and the narrative style is inviting. But sometimes still waters run deep, and these chapters have the potential to pull readers into reflection about the course of their lives, the course of their own callings. Although it might be a quick read, it isn't a book to be read quickly. It would make a fine gift to parents, friends, siblings or anyone else sincerely wondering whether God can do God's work through the lives and loves of gay and lesbian persons. Without ever directly arguing this position, by the end of the book most readers answer the question for themselves with a resounding, 'Yes.'

David R. Weiss directs the Reconciling in Christ Program in the Twin Cities and serves as Director of Resources and Education for Lutherans Concerned/North America. He can be reached at ric-mn@lcna.org.

Voices Must Rise as Community

This editorial by Bill Tammeus appeared in the Kansas City Star just before the outstanding concerts presented by the Heartland Men's Chorus on Saturday & Sunday, April 2 & 3, 2005. The concert was completely sold out for both nights as Mel White of Soul Force and Martha Juillerate of the Shower of Stoles Project teamed up with the chorus to create an unforgettable evening of music, story and healing enthusiasm for hundreds of eager listeners. GALA members Jan Bergman, Mike Boring, Todd Davison, Curt Filer, Larry Pickering & Paul Winegarden have all had the honor of singing at one time or another in this outstanding chorus.

When the Rev. Mel White opens the Heartland Men's Chorus presentation of "All God's Children" tonight at the Folly Theater, he plans to say these painful words: "For the vast majority of religious organizations, the idea of accepting homosexuals fans fires of anger and conflict."

White, a gay man who once ghost-wrote books for the Rev. Billy Graham and the Rev. Pat Robertson, will narrate faith stories from members of the chorus, almost all of whom are gay.

The faith communities to which these men belong include Baptist, Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Mennonite, Jewish, Buddhist, Disciples of Christ, Pentecostal, Mormon, Assembly of God, Unity, Community of Christ, United Church of Christ, Unitarian-Universalist, Metropolitan Community Church and Wicca—to say nothing of the atheists and agnostics among them. In some way, most of them have struggled with how to be gay in congregations that often think of homosexuality as a sin.

I am not gay. So I cannot speak for anyone who is. But I am someone with a commitment to one of the faith communities—the Presbyterian Church (USA)—that officially refuses to ordain otherwise qualified gays and lesbians to ministry or to the office of elder or deacon. I disagree with my church on this.

If I could speak to members of the chorus...I would say to them what I said to a national gathering of three Presbyterian gay advocacy groups last year when I was the keynote speaker: Stay in your religious community and fight from inside. From my perspective as a Presbyterian elder, I also would tell them this:

"Even when the church gets things wrong—as it surely does sometimes—those of us who disagree are

called to do so publicly and aggressively but lovingly, even if sometimes the church itself doesn't behave that way.

"It's important to acknowledge how hard the call can be for gays and lesbians to stay active in the church. And we should not be judgmental and intolerant of people who have made another choice, even if that choice breaks our hearts.

"It helps to think about what it means to be a faith community. The Greek word most often used in the New Testament for church is 'ecclesia.' It means 'called out.' That is, the church is not a voluntary organization. Rather it's made up of people whom God has called out of the world and to whom God has given gifts that the church needs. You have some of those gifts, without which your own faith communities will be impoverished. "That's part of why I believe you should stay within your religious bodies to work for change so they will repent of their exclusivity, discrimination and misuse of the Bible as a weapon of sexual oppression."

Religion generally—and the Christian church in particular—has been a major reason that the broader society has oppressed gays and lesbians and that such oppression continues. So the church must become a leader to change that.

The faith journey of gays and lesbians must seem incredibly lonely at times. And I will be the last person to condemn them if they decide they can't be part of what they consider an abusive relationship anymore.

But they are not alone within congregations. There are allies, friends, brothers and sisters who want to walk with them and who are, in fact, beside them on this journey.

Beyond that, their faith communities need them. I won't say those congregations need them more than they need the congregations. I think that the grace churches can help to mediate to everyone is a treasure without price. So I would say they need the church, too, even if it fails to live consistently as a channel of God's love and grace. We together make up communities of faith, but if those communities are divided—and they are—all of us suffer.

So I would ask the men who...sing in [the Heartland Men's Chorus] to stay the course, to renew their faith commitments to be light and life, to help their religious organizations find their way.

That may not happen in my lifetime or theirs, but it will happen, and their faithfulness will be part of the reason we'll get there.

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