



gala **news** THE LETTER

Summer 2006 – Volume 17 Issue 2

Hello GALA members and friends!

June has been an interesting month for me. I've been enjoying the challenges of a new addition to my home, a rescued racing greyhound, "Andy Pandly" (his race name)—how gay can you get...so I kept it. We're learning each other's quirks...yes I have quirks...and so does he. But he seems to charm the world when we're out walking the neighborhood, at gay pride events or attending greyhound awareness events. People mention that my new life mimics a parents life... feeding, cleaning up after him, visiting the vet, training him, taking him to events, taking him to the park for a good run, changing schedules to meet his needs...the list goes on.

My mother is enjoying her new "grandson" and the challenges he creates in my life. Mom grins and says, "Isn't parenthood wonderful?" She loves hearing about her grandchildren and "grandchildren's" events and their parents' frustrations, which obviously gives her a chance to remind us of our antics, stunts, and less than wise choices we inflicted on our parents. But, hopefully we learned from those. Thanks for the memories and lessons, Mom.

June is a month of memories for many of us. June is now traditionally "Pride" month for GLBT individuals. We look at the past pride events in our lives. Especially our first pride or an especially poignant milestone in our GLBT lives. We look at the past "GLBT" world and culture, reflect on the growth, and dream for still desired/needed changes for our equal place in our communities.

My mother reflected on her greatest memory of her mother's reaction to my homosexuality. Grandma attended a gay pride parade in Michigan—on her own, not at my request—to show her love and support for me. As Mom shared that with me, a major flood of tears welled up, and I couldn't talk, but that reflection left me with a warm loving feeling. Thank you Grandma. I could keep going on with memories...and I know you could too.

Some friends, at this year's Michigan Pride Event, remarked that people are not attending parades like they have before. A discussion developed regarding the changing times...more local support systems now than in the past. More freedoms than in the past...more

options for resources...easier access to the community... and more GLBT friendly churches. A few friends mentioned leaving their denominations for GLBT welcoming churches.

Of course this brought on a new discussion of faith concerns, and brought back good and bad memories of my denomination. But I'm excited for our Welcoming Community Network (WCN), and the growth it can inspire in the Community of Christ (COC). Until the COC fully welcomes our community into its faith, we will continue to offer loving support as GALA and WCN, until no longer needed. Until then, join us for our retreats, local events and personal home visits.

This year's retreat is fast approaching! We're looking forward to wonderful sharing experiences, growth, fun, craziness, dancing. Good and exciting news! We will be having another silent auction at the retreat. The proceeds will go to publishing our Book of Memories. Contact Dave Swart at AKDave@aol.com, or add a note to your registration if you are bringing a silent auction item.

We still need a water safety person (life guard) in order to use the pool! Let me know if you can help. If you have other talents you'd like to share, we're always hunting for volunteers!

One concern, we still need volunteers for treasurer, and two board members. Please contact me as soon as possible! Thanks.

Well, I've gone on long enough. Can't wait to see you at the retreat! Love and hugs! Allan...oh... and Andy Pandly!

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Treasurer's Report, 3/7/06 – 6/20/06

We have two pieces of good news to report this time. We received a \$200 donation from the Hallmark Fdn again this year. We also received another check from Amazon for commissions on purchases all of you have made through the GALA website. This makes our total for 2006 \$416 from Amazon!

	Actual Expenses	Budget FY '06
Cash on Hand 3/7/06.....	\$ 8,379	
Income		
Memberships	1,335	2,000
Contributions	12,573	50,000
Grants & Foundations.....	200	3,120
Merchandise Sales	15	
Commissions	416	
Special Projects	76	
Interest	4	
Total Income.....	\$14,619	\$55,120
Expenses		
Administrative	1,0478	4,270
Field Organizer.....	13,785	34,200
Retreat	400	5,500
Newsletters	721	2,500
Welcoming Community Network.....	199	2,000
All Other Expenses.....	6,650	
Total Expenses.....	\$16,152	\$55,120
Expenses in Excess of Income.....	\$ 1,533	
Cash on Hand 6/20/06.....	\$ 6,846	

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2006 GALA Retreat "Good News of Freedom" at Camp Sionito outside San Antonio, Texas Labor Day Weekend, Sept. 1-4, 2006

Classes will include transgender issues and Welcoming Community Network (WCN)
Other activities: silent auction, variety show, square dancing, campground service project, banquet BBQ
See insert for registration form.

Carol Cavin, Nominee for Board Secretary

Larry and I had been married 35 years when he told me he is gay. He and his partner Bobby Wilson are an important part of my life. We had two children. Our son Chris lives with his family in Independence. Our daughter Kelley died of toxic shock in 1990 at age 14. I have been editor of the KC region newsletter for The Compassionate Friends since 1991, and consider it the most important mission in my life.

I have degrees from Graceland and Indiana University. 20+ years of my work life were spent at Community of Christ headquarters in a variety of positions. I am most proud of having been the Executive Assistant to the 1981 Hymnal Committee, and am happy to say that I am now retired.

I have been GALA's newsletter editor since the Fall of 2004 and will be happy to continue in that position along with being secretary if I am elected.

Kansas City Anti-Violence Project

Our **retreat guest speaker Donna Ross** is on the Board of Directors for the Kansas City Anti-Violence Project, a non-profit organization that helps GLBT victims of hate crimes, domestic violence and sexual assault. She is organizing an outreach/fundraising campaign on behalf of KCAVP entitled "Turn Down the Heat" directed at welcoming and caring faith communities in the Kansas City area. Participating churches are asked to (1) offer a peaceful homily at their August 13 worship service to counter the angry voices that are aimed at the GLBT community, and (2) seek a "second offering" or small fundraising event for the benefit of KCAVP. Contact Donna at donnapdx222@yahoo.com for more information.

Lawrence, KS, GALA Chapter

The Lawrence Chapter of GALA held a movie night as its first official gathering on Saturday, April 1, at the home of John and Cricket Mercer. Everyone brought snacks to share and enjoyed good conversation and the double-feature, "Torch Song Trilogy" and "Connie and Carla."

The May gathering was an evening on the town. Everyone met for dinner at "The Mad Greek" restaurant in downtown Lawrence, and then walked down the street to "Aime's Coffee House" for dessert and conversation.

The scheduled June movie night cancelled so individuals could attend events being held throughout the weekend at Kansas City Pride.

The regular schedule of meeting the first Saturday of each month resumed July 1. For more information or directions, contact David Woosley at dwoosley@earthlink.net or Cricket Mercer at cricketmercer@msn.com.

**The Community of Welcoming Congregations
and
The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies**

present
An Interfaith Conference

“Transforming Faith: A Transgender Witness”

Saturday, October 21-Sunday, October 22

**First United Methodist Church
Corvallis, Oregon**

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott

Plenary Speakers:

The Rev. Malcolm Himschoot

The Rev. Dr. Erin Swenson

The Rev. Dr. Justin Tanis

A Saturday evening concert
by the Gospel Choir **Transcendence**

Registration will open soon. Contact us if you are
interested in leading a workshop or in volunteering.

Rev. Tara Wilkins, Executive Director
The Community of Welcoming Congregations
PO Box 14948, Portland, OR 97293
503-665-8741,
tara@welcomingcongregations.org

**The Evanston Northwestern Healthcare Research
Institute** is looking for participants for its "**Molecular
Genetic Study of Sexual Orientation.**" Specifically,
they are looking for families with two or more gay
brothers. Some of our GALA members have already
signed up to participate.

Why study families? Earlier studies suggest that
homosexual orientation runs in families; 8-12% of
brothers of gay men are also gay, compared to 2-4% of
men in the general population. Twin studies suggest that
this pattern is largely due to heredity rather than
environment.

The study will look for genes that may influence
some brothers to become homosexual, as well as those
genes that may influence other brothers to become
heterosexual. It involves an initial screening, a
questionnaire and a blood sample, and is absolutely
CONFIDENTIAL.

The principal investigator is Alan R. Sanders, M.D.,
Director of the Behavior Genetics Unit and Associate
Professor at Northwestern University.

For more information or to participate, interested
persons should contact the Behavior Genetics Unit toll-
free at 866-364-7571 or email www.gaybros.com.

*As you are organizing events and people, please don't
forget to check out www.WelcomingResources.org.
This is a website that hosts a whole number of resources
for activists like yourself. There are books, films,
sermons, other websites, The Shower of Stoles Project--
which can have a display in your area, a calendar of
events for across the country, a listing of all the
welcoming and affirming congregations across the
country, a news service with articles on pro-lgbt
religious activities and events.*

Blessings!

Rev. Rebecca Voelkel, Program Director

Institute for Welcoming Resources

612.821.4397, www.welcomingresources.org



19th Annual Creating Change Conference

**The nation's premier LGBT gathering
is coming to Kansas City, Missouri!**

Please join us at the Westin Crown Center

November 8-12, 2006

Creating Change is for you if you are:

- An activist and organizer in your community, campus or workplace;
- A board member, staff member or leader in a LGBT organization, community center or foundation;
- An elected or appointed official;
- An advocate for our communities;
- A change agent for justice, freedom & equality for all.

Creating Change™ the premier national grassroots organizing and skills building LGBT conference. Each year the conference is held in a different region of the United States and attracts 2,500+ participants from within and outside of the LGBT community. The conference is well known for providing a unique environment where activists and leaders come together from diverse places and backgrounds to create a community that is both strengthening and inspiring to the participants. The 18th Annual Creating Change™ Conference was held in Oakland, CA.

For more information, e-mail
creatingchange@thetaskforce.org
or call 202-639-6333.

Have you noticed lately that it is nearly impossible to snap on an AM radio station or to punch in a news station on the TV remote without hearing something about the issue of marriages ... 'Our' marriages. We've all heard, "Homosexual marriage rips at the very fabric of our society. Surely death and destruction will be visited upon all of humanity if we don't use every fiber of our being to put a stop to it now."—delightful words of wisdom from the big-haired leader of a large Christian/family group. I also heard a conservative senator say, "It's Adam & Eve, not Adam & Steve. Biology just isn't with them to procreate, and that is the basis for all marriage...." Evidently he guessed wrong that we'd never heard that one before.

And finally, "Marriage needs to be defended at all possible cost. This is a cultural WAR, and we have a very determined enemy to battle with...." That warm fuzzy thought came from a red-faced, thrice-divorced legislator from the south. Makes me wonder which of his three marriages he's defending. Even sweet little 'W' felt the need to put in his two cents worth, and make a public push for a Federal Constitutional Amendment banning gay marriage. He said he didn't feel marriage ought to be defined by "activist judges." What exactly an "activist judge" is, I'm not sure; but as near as I can see, it's anyone with judicial authority, whose decisions are not 100% in line with 'W's' socially conservative dough-headed opinions.

Enough is enough. I've got to step up to the plate to set things straight (so to speak). To all of the straight people out there on your soap-boxes, ranting and raving about the evils of gay marriage, can you all please take a pill and listen for a sec? Gay marriage is NOT the problem here. It is a wonderful, stable, secure and caring thing—a place of warmth, hard work, respect and love. It is NOT scary. It is NOT immoral. It will NOT threaten your marriage. And, it will NOT cause the world as we know it to implode. I think you're all mixing up gay '*marriage*' with gay '*weddings*.' There's a big difference. Gay marriage—Good. Gay weddings—Yikes!

Nine years ago, I came home from work to find all the house lights dimmed. Candlelight filled the living room with a warm, romantic glow. As I opened the front door, my love gently took my arm and guided me to my favorite chair, softly asking me to sit down and relax. Then she left for a short time, returning a few moments later holding a small velvet box. "Open it," she whispered, as she dropped to one knee. I did as I was told and beheld a beautiful silver goddess pendant in the box. "That's your engagement ring, if you'll have me. Will you marry me?" she asked nervously. This tender moment concluded with me whole-heartedly accepting her offer, and with us sealing our new commitment with a kiss (This is PG-rated, you'll get no more details from me). And so, our wedding fate was sealed. There was no going back now. If only I had known what lay ahead...

After the fog of engagement bliss wore off, gay wedding reality hit me over the head like a ton of taffeta and tulle. Years ago, when I accepted the fact that I was a lesbian, I kissed good-bye the notion of walking down the aisle with my intended. Weddings were for straight couples - nothing that concerned me. So when I heard the first rumblings about gay marriage, I was just as surprised about it as Pat Robertson and

Phyllis Schlafly were. It wasn't even a blip on my radar screen. When my bride-to-be started pestering me about invitations, decorations, guest lists, music, poems & feathered guest book pens, my head started turbo-spinning—Linda Blair would have been envious. Not being acquainted with the fine art of wedding planning, I was clueless as to how to respond. However, after several weeks of responding to her questions with "Er, ah, ummm, I dunno," I knew I'd better just bite the bullet and pretend to be interested in all of the wedding minutiae, act like I knew what the hell I was doing, and just to get it all over with.

Since we were on a very tight budget, I was forced to schlep my wedding 'to do' list to stores all over town looking for the best buys on silk ivy garlands, votive candle holders and mini grapevine wreaths. I was on a first name basis with the employees of every fabric store within a 20-mile radius of my house (I love fabric stores...I also love the dry heavens). Because of cash constraints, we made all of the decorations for the entire affair by hand; unbelievable, given the fact that I acquired the nickname Winky, after my last run-in with a hot glue gun.

Amazingly, I blundered my way through it all with relative ease, and started to chide myself for imagining that wedding planning was a scary thing. I also was pretty proud of my one major coup: securing the definitive wedding facility for peanuts. We booked the upstairs of the Town Hall in a quaint little river town. The building I chose was one of the most historic and beloved of all the edifices in that little town. The room I booked is actually a theater with a stage, an old wooden floor, a piano, and lots of space ... a perfect place for our wedding, dinner, and dance. My sweetie, Barb, could not be there when I booked it, so when the Town Clerk asked me what I was using the building for, I simply said, "a wedding." I wasn't ashamed to be having a gay wedding, but I didn't feel like giving her too much information, in case she didn't approve. I wasn't going to let any bad vibes leach into the most important day of my life.

On the day of the wedding rehearsal, we were ready. We invited our families and friends to join us at the Town Hall to help decorate the building with all of the flowery crap that Barb and I had so carefully assembled. What are families for, if not to sponge some free labor off of them? Once we finished decorating, the rehearsal didn't take long to blow through. Walk to the front, blah, blah, blah, walk back out. Piece of cake. After the rehearsal, we all sat down to a dinner of carry-out pizza and soda pop (Tight budget, remember? There were no groom's parents to spring for the Groom's Dinner.)

Later that evening, 'it' happened. Barb's son realized that his leather jacket was missing. He was upset, because he had \$300 in his pocket that he had planned to use to buy our wedding gift. He was sweating bullets until the mystery was finally solved. My dad called up to say that he had picked up the wrong jacket, and could we please look for his? Apparently, his blood pressure medication was in the pocket and he needed it soon. So, we quickly made the jacket switch, and all was well, much to everybody's relief. Every wedding has one big catastrophe. The groom leaves his shoes at home...the bride forgets her 'something borrowed' at the hotel room...the cake collapses on the flower girl...the best man

Going to the Chapel *(continued)*

barfs in the punchbowl. Name any calamity - it's happened at a wedding. Thankfully, our wedding boo-boo was now history, so we assumed that everything else would go smoothly. NEVER MAKE ASSUMPTIONS!

The big day finally came. That theater, illuminated by the soft lights of candles, festooned with grapevines, ribbons and flowers, and filled with soft piano music, was transformed into our dream wedding sanctuary. The guests filed in, each one looking dapper and well pressed. The wedding gifts piled up on the small table in the lobby (Yes!). The guest book filled up with good wishes from friends and family. Barb and I both had butterflies, but we were excited as we anticipated walking down the aisle together. The 'walking' music started to play, so we emerged from the back and slowly made our way to the front of the room. Once we had climbed the steps to the stage, we took our places to either side of the minister.

After the minister offered a brief welcome, Barb's friend, a Native American medicine woman, walked onto the stage to honor us with a water-cleansing ceremony. As a part of this ceremony, sweet grass is burned in a small bowl.

Unfortunately, we failed to notice that our smoldering bowl was sitting directly under a smoke detector. As she performed the ceremony, the sweet-smelling smoke drifted innocently upward. Nothing could have prepared us for the blast of the deafening fire alarm that slammed into our ceremony like a B-52 hitting a school playground. In unison, one hundred heads snapped upward to look at the ceiling - the source of the noise. The sweet grass smoke had tripped the fire alarm system in the entire building. Brave soul that I am, I ran to the back of the stage, melted to the floor and buried my head in my hands, with my mother and my 'best man' (my friend Lora) at my heels to comfort me. Meanwhile, Barb and an electrician friend of hers had to chase down my father to stop him from cutting the wires that connected the alarm to the smoke detector. At that moment, chaos reigned supreme.

Of course, 'horrible' is never quite enough once things really get rolling. Imagine everyone's shock when a new and angrier sound joined the festivities. The emergency weather siren, next to the Town Hall, suddenly started wailing out a fire alarm that could be heard from miles around. It sounded like we were under attack from the 'Evil Empire.' I shuddered, shut my eyes and pulled a stage curtain up over my head, trying to disappear. A few moments later, a dozen volunteer fire fighters from four nearby towns burst into the building, demanding to know where the fire was. So much for keeping our little lesbian wedding low key. They were skeptical as Barb explained to them about the sweet grass ceremony, but after they had checked the building from stem to stern, they turned off the alarm, and gave us the green light to continue.

Once Barb was able to peel me off of the stage floor, we started up again. The audience heaved a collective sigh of relief after we were pronounced 'wife and wife.' We floated out of the room to the strains of Louis Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World," and headed downstairs to form the reception line. The fire chief met us on the landing. "That was a beautiful commitment ceremony. Congratulations." All I could choke out, was "Thank you." Great, he made me cry when he said that to us. Now, on top of the fire alarm fiasco, I had runny mascara, but it wasn't a big deal. I let it roll off of me like water off a duck's back. I knew I could get through

anything that life threw my way from this point forward. And so, I wasn't phased when a small child made handprints in the wedding cake. 'So what!' I didn't bat an eye when a friend tore her rotator cuff while doing the 'Macarena' during the wedding dance. 'Don't worry, it'll heal.' And I took it in stride when Barb and I clinked our champagne flutes to toast our nuptials, and they shattered. 'We can sweep it up.'

And so, for all the folks out there, belching out anti-gay, anti-marriage racket, I've got one thing to say to you. I've heard worse. After my own big, fat, LOUD gay wedding, there is no noise you can make that will ruffle my feathers. Now please pipe down and stop bothering all of the happy queer people so they can turn their attention to planning their very own personal wedding catastrophes. After all, why should Barb and I have all the fun?

Dave and Sam's Story

by Samuel W. Bellinger



It was just after the GALA retreat at Camp Bountiful in September 2002 that I met my partner Dave Caceres. We chatted off and on for awhile, and when I first met him I felt the attachment right then and there while we talked in his living room. I think it was our second meeting when he decided to break out his guitar and play for me; what an experience that was. We started seeing each other frequently. After a month or so a friend of mine asked why I hadn't been around much, and I told her I had met someone.

Everyone in my congregation had heard about Dave by the time of our harvest dinner in November. I invited Dave to the service and the dinner afterwards, so that's when I introduced him to my church family, which is very open and loving. After that service Dave started attending with me whenever I went to church, which was hit and miss at that time.

I moved into Dave's house in January, which was a very big step for me, and he got me a real nice job where he worked. Our relationship has developed over the last four years. He and I started attending church together regularly, and he helped me plan my worship services and do music for them. Dave is a very gifted singer and song writer, and through the songs he writes expresses his journey and his love for Christ. *(Continued on page 7)*

Although by nature, I tend to have a grumpy, curmudgeonly temperament, I find an uncharacteristic optimism invading my psyche these days. Assuming that the current opening to God’s lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people will not close in some cataclysmic social reversal (fears from my pessimistic side), I foresee a number of ways in which the whole church will benefit from the impact of gay liberation. So...I thought I’d climb out on a limb and look ahead at some of the ways that “gay” liberation will benefit the church as a whole.

One of the major benefits for the church will be a healthier, more theologically astute attitude toward all of sexuality. A major reason that homosexuality is such a problem for the church is that sexuality in general is a problem for the church. If you ask most Christians about the relationship between sexuality and spirituality, they will stare back at you like the proverbial deer in the headlights. Christian sexual ethics, at least until modern times, has followed St. Augustine and rationalized the pleasure of sex by saying that it is necessary for procreation. It is permitted to enjoy the act since it is a sort of bonus on the way to achieving the *real* purpose of sex, which is to produce the next generation.

But what are we to think about the pleasures of sex when procreation is not involved? Before being chosen as the current Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams was a professor of theology at Oxford University. Speaking before the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement in Britain, he suggested that same-sex love can help all Christians recover a sense of joy in sexuality. He proposed that one reason there is such obsession with same-sex relations in our culture is because same-sex relations “annoyingly pose the question of the meaning of desire in itself.” Does the pleasure of sex have theological significance? Why did God create women cap-able of orgasm? Reproduction is certainly possible without it, as I suspect many women can testify. Did God create sex as much for joy as for procreation? As shocking as these questions may sound today, I imagine that in a hundred years, thanks to gay and feminist insights, the church will be much more comfortable with them.

A second benefit from gay theology will be the strengthening of family values. Since the rhetoric of the traditionalist position is precisely the opposite, namely that the gay movement is weakening the family, this may take some explaining.

I suppose every experienced counselor has had to confront the situation...[in which] a man or woman comes to the counselor in deep depression. They have realized that their true sexual orientation is toward their own gender. Although they love their spouse as a person, a physical relationship with the spouse has become impossible, to the deprivation of them both. The counselee is miserable, depressed, and—typically the husband—perhaps acting out the fantasies in surreptitious sexual encounters, putting them-selves and their spouse in danger of contracting HIV or some other STD. What is to be done?

I’m not a therapist, but I am personally aware of so many cases of this sort that I know what usually happens: divorce, and another case of children deprived of two available caregivers. (Those who have seen the film *Brokeback Mountain* will recognize the pattern.) Heterosexism is so much the norm for our society that LGBT kids equate conforming to the binary, male-female, heterosexual pattern with fulfilling the will of God. They mistake the friendship and affection they feel toward someone of the opposite sex with what the culture calls love, not realizing that the erotic attraction they have toward members of their own sex is something quite different that they will never have with their legal spouse. However, when young people growing up in the church have role models of loving, stable, same-sex couples, they will see that there are viable alternatives to heterosexual marriage. They will find a partner of the same sex and avoid the all-too-common mistake of trying to deny their inner orientation and to live according to the heterosexual pattern. And one more divorce will be avoided and family life will be strengthened.

Another beneficial result of gay liberation theology: It will deliver the church from an increasing self-contradiction and hypocrisy. The way in which cultural homophobia has caused some Baptists to abandon the freedom of

the Gospel in order to turn to authoritarian patterns is a sufficiently familiar story that I’ll give some examples from other Christian traditions.

According to a Roman Catholic theologian/friend, the following is a true example of Roman Catholic policy. Suppose there are two Catholics who are homosexual. One is as sexually promiscuous as an alley cat; the other is living in a faithful, monogamous, long-term relationship. The first one, the promiscuous one, can go to confession, confess his homosexual acts, receive absolution, and participate in the Eucharist. The second may go to confession but will not receive absolution and will not be able to receive the sacrament. Why? By living in a permanent relationship with someone of the same sex, the second is in a state of “intractable sin,” whereas the promiscuous one has the possibility of reforming and becoming celibate. So the practical result of official Catholic policy is to encourage promiscuity and discourage stable, loving relations. To be fair, other Catholic friends tell me that enforcement of this policy can vary from parish to parish; some priests see the absurdity of the official position and quietly admit those in stable relationships to the sacrament; but in so doing, they violate official Catholic policy.

Here is an example from the Presbyterian world. The gay issue first hit the Presbyterians full force at their General Assembly in 1978. The issue was the ordination of openly gay or lesbian elders. In the Presbyterian tradition, not only are pastoral ministers ordained, but also the elders who are the lay persons performing the normal tasks of running a church. At this and subsequent meetings of the General Assembly, Presbyterians went on record as condemning discrimination against LGBT persons in secular hiring, but forbade the ordination of open gays and lesbians. Also like the Catholics, they accept the fact that sexual orientation is part of a person’s innate personality structure and not something that is chosen. Thus they have no problem with LGBT persons being members of Presbyterian churches, but LGBT people are not supposed to hold office, since that requires ordination.

“Behold the Days...” (cont.)

The self-contradictions here are easy to point out: (1) Presbyterian polity condemns discrimination in hiring on the basis of sexual orientation for everyone else, but not for themselves....

(2) In Presbyterian polity, congregations have the right to choose their own leadership, and they accept the fact that many present members of Presbyterian churches are gay or lesbian; they just will not allow GLBT persons to be ordained as leaders... No organization can go on in-definitely with this kind of absurd inconsistency at its core. This is a sure sign that their present policy is based on faulty premises and will only be resolved by abandoning their current position and accepting GLBT people into the full ministry of the church.

The point of these examples—Baptist, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian—and unfortunately, I could add many more—is to show how homophobia has caused these Christian bodies to distort or abandon their most central beliefs and practices, just so they can accommodate the homophobia of American culture. (In fairness, I should point out that there are strong welcoming movements in both the Roman Catholic and Presbyterian communions working for change.) These churches have tied themselves up in knots and in self-contradiction over this issue. No system can persist with this much internal distortion and cognitive dissonance. Only by realizing and accepting the fact that God welcomes all people regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity will these churches be able to re-establish congruence between their theology and their internal practice.

Dave & Sam’s Story (cont.)

Dave and I attended the 2004 World Conference, and Dave met some GALA members during our trip. Then in August 2004 he was baptized. During all this time our relationship has grown to a very loving one, but not without the occasional snag, which we have learned to work through. Then he lost his job and was out of work for almost nine months, which was a great test of our love for each other. During that time Dave was able to attend the 2005 World Conference with friends of ours, while I stayed in Michigan to work.

In September 2005 we decided it was time to have a commitment ceremony, which we had talked about for almost two and a half years, so we set a date for September 2006. We are both nervous about our ceremony as it

“Walking the Talk of Welcome”

gets closer and there are lots of details to attend to...but we are looking forward to it and to our future together with great joy. ♥

Last December, 2005, the Welcoming Community Network (WCN) co-sponsored an Ecumenical Welcoming Church Core Leadership Training with Lutherans, Methodists and approximately 20 members of Community of Christ at the Temple in Independence. Since that time, a small group of participants from Missouri and Kansas have continued to meet and strengthen a coalition now called the **Kansas City Coalition for Welcoming Ministries**. Active in this group have been David Woosley, Cricket Mercer, Michael and Chuck Hewitt, Sharon Troyer and Arthur Butler.

This small group felt called to “plant seeds of welcome” by initially planning events that would educate the greater public about the grass-roots organizing methods of the Welcoming Church Movement. We sponsored a panel entitled “TRANS-forming our Communities” which was well received. Panelists shared their experiences of finding spiritual homes in congregations that have become open and affirming to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. It was held at Country Club United Church of Christ, where Donna Ross is a member.

At the recent Kansas City Gay Pride celebration, the KC Coalition had a booth at which we handed out small zip locked bags of bird seed, along with information about ways to “plant the seeds” of welcome in your church or synagogue.

We also advertised a Kansas City event scheduled for September 21 entitled *Walking the Talk of Welcome*. We are inviting four congregations who have completed a welcoming study process to become publicly known for fully welcoming LGBTs in their faith communities. Though Community of Christ has numerous Independence congregations where gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons are welcomed, none is formally affiliated with WCN. At the present time, WCN congregations include *Basileia* in California, Clear Water Community of Christ in Florida, Lakeview Community of Christ in Chicago, Illinois, with several other congregations waiting to begin the official process.

In another exciting development, WCN was invited to join discussions with four different denominations about writing a grant proposal to support the work of a **full-time field organizer**. In February, Sharon Troyer met with Welcoming Church Program Leaders from Disciples of Christ, a coalition between Church of the Brethren and Mennonites, Ken Penning from the welcoming church program of the American Baptists, and Rebecca Voelkel, the Executive Director for the Institute for Welcoming Resources. We are now evaluating how such a shared ecumenical position would serve the goals of WCN and assist Community of Christ congregations and mission centers in becoming more welcoming and affirming to all!

WCN hopes to have completed the process of becoming a non-profit organization before the September retreat and annual business meeting. We look forward to sharing together with GALA members and friends.

—By -Sharon Troyer

*We are called to each other
vastly different though we are;
Race and color, class and gender
neither limit nor debar.
Join the hand of friend and stranger;
join the hand of age and youth;
Join the faithful and the doubter
in their common search for truth.*



GALA RETREAT REGISTRATION FORM
“Good News of Freedom”—Sept. 1-4, 2006
Camp Sionito outside San Antonio, Texas

Name _____ Phone: (____) _____

Address: _____ City State ZIP _____

E-mail: _____ How are you arriving at retreat? _____

Flight Information Airline: _____ Flight # In: _____ Time: _____

 Airline: _____ Flight # Out: _____ Time: _____

Will you need transport from San Antonio Airport? _____

Do you have any special dietary or medical needs? _____

What room would you like? _____ Regular or _____ Private (Additional \$10 per night per person or couple)

Registration Fees: \$100 per person before August 22nd
 \$120 if postmarked after August 22nd

Mail registration form and check to: P. O. Box 2173, Independence, MO 64055
or register online at www.galaweb.org

Camp Sionito Address: 7754 State Hwy 16 N, Bandera, TX 78003; Phone: 830-796-3510
For driving directions: www.galaweb.org for map link

Friday

5:00 Open registration
7:00 - 8:00 Snacks
8:00 Welcome and Mixer
9:00 Relax Time
11:00 Taps

Saturday

8:00 Devotions
8:20 - 9am - Breakfast
9:15 Registration
9:30 Sharing our Stories
11:30 Break
Noon Lunch
1:30 Guest Presentation
3:00 Break
3:30 WCN Presentation
4:30 Swim Time
6:00 Supper
7:30 Hymn Sing...Campfire
9:00 Movie Night
11:00 Taps

Sunday

8:00 Devotions
8:20 Breakfast
9:00 Class/Discussions
10:15 Break
10:45 Square Dance Lessons
Noon Lunch
1:30 GALA Business Meeting

Sunday (cont.)

4:00 Swim Time /Free Time
6:00 Banquet BarBQ
7:30 Silent Auction Finalized
8:00 Talent Show / Campfire
11:00 Taps

Monday

8:00 Rise and Shine up your rooms
9:00 Breakfast
9:45 Sending Forth Experience
11am Close camp

If possible, plan to be at retreat Friday night and schedule flights out after 2pm on Monday.

Our **guest speaker** is **Donna Ross**, who recently moved to Kansas City, MO, from Portland, OR, where she worked in broadcasting for more than 30 years, as well as teaching broadcasting to high school students.

Donna disclosed her transgenderism to her work colleagues in January 2004 and began the transition in July 2004, which was chronicled by the *Portland Tribune* (“Hello, Donna!,” 5/18/04, “The Woman in the Mirror,” 9/24/04, and “Donna Ross Takes Another Big Step,” 7/22/05) and by Portland’s News Channel 8. (“Finding Donna,” 11/29/04, by Laural Porter and Brian Robertson, received the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association’s highest award.)

In the summer of 2005 Donna moved to Kansas City with Christy, her wife of 3½ years. She has two grown daughters and is currently a homemaker. She is also on the Board of Directors for the Kansas City Anti-Violence Project.

For more information:
Call or e-mail Allan Fiscus
at 517-410-2823
or <acfiscusrn@comcast.net>

A Plea for Mercy

Oh God of Mercy... Please don't let her be one of "them!"
Why didn't I see all those years ago when that stubborn child
so hated skirts and could not make a choice at 13 years be-
tween a lacy bra and a B-B gun, and so we bought them both.

Oh God of Mercy... She was once engaged and had a ring.
And then it was all over—she a Baptist,
he staunchly raised a Polish Catholic and baby of the family.
We thought it ideology—a conflict of theology—
And still I could not see that it was she,
who loving him too much to see him hurt on down the road,
or children ruined by the load of learning
that the one who was their mother was one of "them"
who had rather been their father.

Oh God of Mercy... She believes in you, accepts your Son
as Savior, was baptized and sang within our family as we
traveled much from church to church—The Singing Star-
lings—blessing, praising, ministering to so many.
How can I now believe that she is doomed because an X & Y
genetic cross within my womb condemn her now to hell?

Oh God of Mercy... She who sang Amazing Grace at the
funeral of my mother with her hand so lightly resting
on the shoulder of an atheistic cousin, shook him
from his head to feet with such a frightening power
that he never felt before.
How can your power pass with such intensity through one
who now is destined to be cast into the flames for an eternity?

NO GOD! Take me. I brought her to this world. Blame me.
Yet I believe that sexuality, be it hetero or homo or a combina-
tion of the two, contains those who are evil and deprived and
those who are spirit-filled and try to lead a holy life.

Oh God of Mercy, God of Justice, Creator God,
Who knew us each before our birth, accept us who believe
and keep us free from those who would imprison us in
legalism and willful ignorance. Halt this Inquisition
which would torture, maim and kill once more.

Oh God of Mercy... I implore you to accept all souls
who place their trust in You—
all who are reviled, who others call defiled;
Hold them in the circle of your love—
let them not be harmed while encircled in Your arms.

For You are God and Father of us all.
This I must believe, for I have heard your call
to defend these members of your flock, whom others mock.

This I must believe, or I cannot believe in You at all.

--Beverly Ann Starling, in *The InSpiriter*,
Vol. 10 No. 3 Spring 2006

A Gay Person's Prayer

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

-- Mac McClure August 28, 2005

Join Or Renew Memberships Online!

Streamlining the way GALA does business has been a goal of the executive board for some time. You can join, renew, or make gift contributions on GALA's web site, www.GALAweb.org. Our webmaster, Meredith Bischoff, has designed a way to get WHAT you want WHEN you need it. If you have not yet paid your annual dues for 2006 or made your pledge, we invite you to do so now using this service!

GALA continues to need your support. Your gift, membership or contribution helps to:

- Produce and publish our GALA newsletter
- Operate our web site www.GALAweb.org
- Provide sponsorships for retreats
- Support the costs of GALA's many expenses

Our organization has the vision. We have the leadership. Now, all we need is YOU.

Membership & Contribution Form

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Membership Level (U.S. dollars)

____ Individual (\$25) ____ Family (\$40) ____ Limited Income (\$10)

I would like to make an additional contribution to advance GALA's outreach and educational goals:

\$50 ____ \$100 ____ \$200 ____ or \$ ____

Contributions to GALA are tax deductible.

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

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