



galanews

THE  LETTER

Serving members and friends of
Community of Christ

October 2010
Volume 21 Issue 4

Samish Island 2010



by Chuck Hewitt

This years retreat was at the beautiful Samish Island in the upper northwest of Washington State. When we arrived at the campgrounds on Thursday it was dark and after 10pm. Bob Logan (grounds host) was amazed that we had even managed to find it in the dark, but my mom was prepared with step-by-

step instructions. (I think that is where I received my organizational skills). After getting settled that evening we turned in, our weary bodies tired from travel, and fell into a deep and restful sleep with exciting expectations for the upcoming weekend.

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GALA

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galaweb.org

President's Message by David Howard

I don't like to talk about myself. Perhaps a large part of this dislike came as a result of being closeted for 40 years and having to be careful. That also affected my sense of worth which continually needs to be affirmed and jacked-up. But because of all the outpouring of love and support, through cards, phone calls, Facebook, hugs and tears, I know that there genuinely are people that do care about me (God, couldn't I have learned this lesson in a much easier non-obtrusive way?)

Most of you know I was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, blood cancer, at the end of August as a result of waking up with severe neck pain. Two weeks of radiation later, my neck is pain-free and I just finished my first cycle of chemotherapy; coming through with no side effects and in fact, improved blood test results

Last week, as my oncologist friend, Paul, put it, my "journey took a sharp unexpected turn." The cancer in the fourth vertebrae of my neck has sufficiently eaten the bone so that I will undergo surgery to replace the vertebrae with a new bone from the bone bank (who knew?), which will also strengthen the spine. So much for my trip to New York City on Halloween (the third trip cancelled because of this.) Hopefully I will be able to see the Browns lose over Thanksgiving when my son Matt and his girlfriend come to visit.

Literally from the minute I found out about this "out of the blue" experience, an almost physical sense of peace consumed my body and remains with me. When sharing this, several also received this testimony. I will overcome this. I will continue to be a partner on the journey, and I will see desired change come forth in the Community.

I ask for your continued prayer support, selfishly I know. I have been shown the beauties of community and I rejoice in that knowledge!

Editor's Note: David underwent emergency surgery on October 12; the surgery was successful and David is recovering well at home.

If you make a purchase from Amazon, don't forget to go to the GALA website first, then click on the Amazon logo. GALA receives a percentage of all purchases this way. Here's a trick: Create a bookmark for Amazon and then go into the properties of the bookmark and change the address to the GALA website.



My Testimony

by Cindy Campbell

My testimony is about how my brother's and my relationship was lost and broken and now it is found and restored. I first shared this as part of a sermon using the scripture of the lost sheep in Luke.

My brother, David, and I grew up in a family where there was lots of love and lots of criticism. Our relationship was not close. We both went to college, married, had children, and were active in our respective congregations as priesthood members and pastors . . . and then David came out as a gay man. Those were hard times for him and confusing times for me. I tried to keep my relationship, which was rocky at best, with both him and his ex wife, and lost both----for years. About 20. We had issues. He didn't return my phone calls or answer my emails. I felt rejected.

As we got older, at some point, I felt an awakening and an urgency to do something different about it, and looked about for direction. I tried many things, settling on forgiveness, which was especially hard because I had to start with looking at myself honestly—and forgiving myself—never an easy task. But it felt urgent to me and I persisted.

I prayed for a connection between David and me. It didn't happen on my timeline. Sometimes I felt like I was groping in the dark. Sometimes it seemed like I was the one doing all the work and it was not reciprocal with him. Sometimes I felt like I had already forgiven him many times and so why did I have to keep repeating it—when was enough enough?? What was I not understanding here? Sometimes I felt lost.

And throughout those years, flashes of insight came at times from the Spirit that opened my vision and guided me in words of a hymn or a scripture or a book, from my therapist, and from good friends also on the journey of reconciliation.

Finally I felt ready to initiate contact again and I had clear direction.

Last year 2009, for Labor Day, I attended the GALA Retreat (Gay and Lesbian Association which is composed of members and friends of the Community of Christ), of which my brother is president. I was very nervous because we hadn't communicated or seen each other for several years. My tremendous inner urgency to reconnect gave me the courage to take what felt like a huge risk to

me, going there on his territory, with his friends, uninvited. I planned to give us both space.

What a pleasant surprise! Slowly and safely we reconnected over the weekend in that very accepting and loving retreat environment, and I remember the promise of acceptance, relief and then joy I felt in this mutual experience of finding each other again.

After that weekend, the pace of reconnection picked up. New family events, World Conference and most recently my Labor Day 2010 visit to his home brought us together several times, and it was like our past separation had never happened, or else it enriched the blessings of the present. I bask in this good fortune. Today I am filled with gratitude for our reconciliation. It is more precious than rubies. During this process I changed, and I have also found a precious part of myself that I didn't know was lost. This has turned out to be a better answer to my earlier prayers than I had dared hope for. I am so thankful I followed the leadings of my heart and did the work required of me instead of putting it off. It feels like a God sized hole inside of me is filled and I feel deeply connected to my brother and we are now family together. Now, my cup runs over with joy for our reborn and found relationship. We both rejoice about that.

So the next question begs itself. Why did David get cancer now, after this finding of each other? Who knows? Stuff happens. But now we have found each other and we are united and at peace with the future.



Something Fishy Here!

by Charlie Robison

It seemed like a good idea at the time!

My son Mark and I had gotten up early Saturday morning to meet one of the camp staff for a walk around the swimming lake. After driving for three days to reach Samish Island from Missouri, we were more than ready for some exercise. After walking around the lake for thirty minutes--and listening to our guide tell stories and provide glimpses into the landmarks around us--we decided to head off on our own to explore the island.

So at 6:30 a.m., we found ourselves heading past the native Samish Indian cemetery and on to the point overlooking the harbor. The tide was out, and as we looked along the beach for shells and marine life, I spied fins sticking out of shallow tide pools. Moving closer, I could see large king salmon trapped in shallow water! I thought to myself, "Maybe we could catch some for the salmon cookout we were to have the following evening."

Mark ran back to camp and after learning that salmon were indeed in season, we decided to go for it!

We found some empty 5-gallon buckets and headed back to the beach to do battle with the salmon. And battle it turned out to be! My vision of



scooping them up in the buckets turned out to be no easy task. We slipped and fell, got stuck in mud up to our knees, and found the fish constantly slipping away from our grip.

After battling for a half hour, we found ourselves wet, muddy, and exhausted--but with four fine specimens, the largest weighing in at 18 pounds. We hauled our catch back to camp where we paused on our way to the kitchen to step inside the building where morning devotions were just beginning. We stood just inside the entrance because we didn't want to track into the building any further.

As we stood there listening, a staff member walked toward us, looking over our shoulders and out the door behind us. "Uh-oh," he said, "there's the game warden!"

We turned around and saw the game warden through the doors. We stepped outside.

"Are you the fishermen?" "Yes," we replied.

"Do you have a fishing license?" "No...in Missouri I don't need a fishing license over the age of 65."

"Do you have a catch record?" "Uhh..I didn't know we needed one!"

(Continued on page 5)



The Outlaw Evangelist, Charlie Robison (r) and the Elder Bandit, Mark Robison (l)

"Were you aware that you were fishing in a no-fishing area?" "No..."

"Also, were you aware that you're only allowed to catch king salmon with hook and line? Hands, buckets, and pitchforks (but that's another story) aren't allowed." We grimaced. Again, "No..."

He asked for our drivers' licenses and returned to his truck. We found ourselves in deep trouble, less than 24 hours after arriving on Samish Island!

After some time, he returned. "Well..." he said, "I have good news and bad news. The good news is your story checked out: you don't need a license in Missouri. However, here you do. Under the circumstances, I'm not going to give you the highest penalty. Catching king salmon without a hook and line is \$525 per fish!"



Oops! Tickets

We gulped.

"However, I cannot let you off entirely. You'll each get a \$218 ticket for unlawful recreational fishing and fishing without a license."

At that point, we all had a good laugh together. He said, "There I was, heading off to catch game poachers when suddenly my cell phone started ringing off the hook. I received five or six calls and figured I was going to have to check it out." (It seems as though a number of people were having their morning coffee and could see us wrestling fish out of the tide pools!)

He continued, "You're not allowed to keep the fish. However, since I have no ice or cooler to get the fish into a food bank where I normally take them, I will allow the camp to use them so that they don't go to waste. But this will not happen again!"



We thanked him for his leniency. We well could have been looking at close to \$4000 in fines and jail time had he thrown the book at us!

The following evening, we truly enjoyed a wonderful salmon feast! While Mark and I gifted the camp with salmon, we were gifted with new names: Elder Bandit (Mark) and Outlaw Evangelist (Charlie)!

On the way home we stopped in Yellowstone where we saw a beautiful rainbow over the Yellowstone River Canyon. It became a moment of silent worship as it signified for us God's *Signature of Blessing* on a wonderful experience that our family shared at the GALA retreat on Samish Island...fish and all!



Della Mowrey and Apostle Jim Slauter

GALA retreats prove to be unique and uplifting experiences allowing attendees to leave with a renewed sense of the spirit; the 2010 Retreat was no exception! Friendships were rekindled and new friendships forged as people began arriving at the campgrounds. I was especially blessed because my parents were able to attend this year and share in the GALA experience.

The theme for the weekend retreat "Living in the Light" began each morning with devotions lead by Doug Graves. What a wonderful way to begin in meditation and preparation to set the foundation for the day, then to breakfast for some fine homemade cooking. The first morning was spent in the GALA tradition of sharing our stories. In reflection, I realized that the stories shared 10

weekend was a wonderful opportunity for those gathered to share their stories with Jim, as well as to hear his journey. We are hopeful that as people in the church continue in their journey, they will more fully understand the true meaning of fully inclusive communities of love, hope, peace and joy in the Community of Christ. We thank Jim for the ministry he brought into our presence.

There was plenty of time for exciting activities during the weekend like campfire with Jerry and Doug, GALA on the Olympics with Della and Sandra, and Open Mike Night with Chuck. Talent exploded on Sunday evening with stand-up, singing, poetry reading, instrumentals, and a good time enjoyed by everyone!

'A Toast of the Northwest' was the theme for our annual banquet. Native American gifts and decorations graced our meal as we shared fresh salmon, as well as freshly caught salmon from the Robison's fishing expedition (see page 4). During the weekend we picked



Closing worship

buckets of black raspberries that were transformed into delicious Raspberry Crisp.; a yummy dessert at the banquet.

It was a fabulous retreat! We were touched by the Spirit throughout the weekend as we shared together as friends and family. What a wonderful world we have been given to experience in our stewardship living. My expectations were exceeded beyond my wildest imagination! Thanks to everyone for making this an A++ experience.

Thanks to the many hands and hearts that continue to make the annual retreats a reality!



Kathy Sharp, President, Greater Pacific Northwest USA Mission Center

years ago in retreats were sad and spoke of the hardships faced by being LGTBQ in the Community of Christ. The stories shared in this retreat were of hope, growth and inclusive participation in congregational life.

Apostle Jim Slauter, guest minister for the weekend, shared in a fire side chat session and discussion of the 2012 National Conference. The



My Testimony

by Erin Cavanaugh

The first time I heard about GALA was over two years ago on my spring break trip to Florida. My partner and I decided to check out this church in Clearwater that was “welcoming.” We were a little apprehensive going to this church, but knew that it was accepting of LGBTQ people so we figured we would check it out. We left for the church early that Sunday morning, leaving lots of time to get there, which was fortunate because we got lost. When we finally arrived, ten minute into the service, we couldn’t find the entrance to the sanctuary. There were a couple of doors into the building and we walked around quietly trying to find how to get in and not accidentally walk out onto the stage. After walking around aimlessly for a while, we decided to go back out and try another door. Luckily this time we found our way in.

When I walked into the sanctuary of this little Clearwater church, I had no idea how great of an impact it was going to have on my life. That day we met some people from GALA who opened their hearts to us and told us about an amazing group of acceptance, love, and spiritual growth called GALA. I also felt an over whelming love of God in that place knowing that I had finally found a place where I could be accepted as a Christian and a lesbian.

The next Labor Day weekend, we came to a GALA retreat. The experience was overwhelming powerful. I continued to feel God’s love pour out onto us through my interactions with this amazing group of people. I forged friendships that I know will last a lifetime and made a promise to myself that as long as I was able, I would be at the GALA retreat each year.

This Labor Day was no exception to that promise. I drove with my family to Samish Island, both excited and hopeful for what this weekend would bring for my family and me. This GALA was going to be particularly special for me because it was the first time I was coming as a mother with my daughter (9 month old Kennedy.)

The campgrounds were beautiful and full of so

much history. We heard throughout the weekend about how the campground had worked in the life of the local Community of Christ members. Furthermore, we heard about the history of the grounds and how they were a sacred place for the Samish Native American tribe. The leaders of the retreat did a beautiful job walking us through the story of the native people and helping us to connect it to our sacred stories.

Throughout the weekend, my sacred story had many more pages added. We shared our stories and struggles with each other and lifted each other up in prayer. We also shared many laughs and good times. Meanwhile, the Spirit washed over the whole campground and touched each of our interactions.

The weekend was very healing and renewing. I feel recharged to go back into the world and do God’s work, knowing they may not always be easy. I am also reminded that my family and I are not alone. We have a lovely GALA family to support us on our journey.

That weekend I was elected onto the GALA board. I am so excited and hopeful about this. I hope that with this new position I will be able to help others on their journey, especially if they don’t know about this welcoming family called GALA. GALA has supported me through so many of my hard times. I still keep a picture of that Clearwater church on my refrigerator to remind myself of the amazing ways God works in bringing us together and the love I felt that day. I want to invite you to a welcoming place that will show you a great deal of love and acceptance. Please join us next year on Labor Day weekend at Camp Doniphan for an incredible weekend!



Newsworthy

FY 2010 Income—\$8,177

FY 2010 Expenses—\$11,887

A complete financial report for 2010 will be available soon on the website, www.galaweb.org.

Budget

Another year of GALA has come to a close and we find that GALA is in a good financial situation, thanks to the continued generous support of the LGBT community, allies and progressives within the Church. We fell short of our income projections for the year because of the inability to sell LGBT product as World Conference. The shortfall was covered from the reserves.

Your generous support allowed us to implement our World Conference plan including a wonderful reception, training, and outreach plus reinforce GALA as part of the Church through our contributions to the Organ recitals, Haiti, HIV-AIDS, and the planting of the planters around the Temple. Most of these initiatives we plan to continue next year.

The FY 2011 budget was approved at the Samish Island Retreat. We were able to reduce the budget substantially, a reflection on GALA's drive over the past several years to redo the brochure and stock up on items needed to support the LGBT community and the church leadership. A new item in the budget includes travel support for the Board during the next reunion season.

We thank each one of you who has supported us on the journey to full inclusion in the Community of Christ.

GALA can progress with your tangible continuing support of annual calendar membership....\$25 single membership, \$40 household membership, or \$10 single limited income membership.

GALA's Board thanks you in advance for taking a few moments to send in dues for 2010! Please sit down and go online to www.GALAwEB.org to join or renew with the growing ranks of those lending support by becoming dues paying and, therefore, voting members of GALA. You may otherwise choose to renew or become a member of GALA when you write a check and send it to GALA's post office box. Make checks payable to GALA, PO Box 2173, Independence, MO 64055; in the note section please indicate '2010 membership.' THANK YOU!!!

2011 Retreat

The Labor Day retreat of 2011 will again be held at Camp Doniphon, September 2-5, 2011. We will try our best to keep the cost down to \$175.00 for registration. Scholarships will be available. If you would like to donate to the fund, please do!

Our guest ministry will come from one of the United States Apostles. Please forward to David Howard any suggestions you have for programming and special events...and of course volunteer to help!

Board Retreat

The GALA Board will meet over the Martin Luther King Holiday in Independence, Missouri for its annual retreat. These meetings are open to the membership. The Board will plan a strategy for the year including programming for the reunion experience, and the 2012 US Conference. The meetings will commence with dinner on the 14th and end with conducting a service on Sunday morning in one of the local congregations.

New Board Members:

Erin Cavanaugh: I have been involved with GALA for two and a half years. My partner, daughter, and I are Community of Christ members and have been looking for a place of acceptance in the church. We found acceptance and so much more in GALA. GALA has become a second family to us and I am so eager to support it as a board member. *Editor's Note: Erin was elected to a 3-year term of Member-At-Large.*

Charlie Robison is a retired elementary school teacher/principal of 28 years. He and Pamela Lents have been married 40 years. They have two grown children, Avis and Mark, and three grandchildren, two of whom are living. He is an evangelist in the Community of Christ. They currently live in Sugar Creek, Missouri, but soon will be moving to Heritage

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(Newsworthy Continued from page 8)

Plaza, the church's historical property next to the Stone Church, where Charlie will serve as a guide. The family is active in the Open Arms congregation.

Editor's Note: Charlie has been appointed Chaplin to the GALA Executive Board.

Melba Jean Dixon: The GALA Board is happy to announce that Melba Jean Dixon has been appointed to fill the unexpired term created by the election of Chuck Hewitt as Treasurer-Elect. Melba Jean is no stranger to GALA, being a strong ally and the mother of Mark Dixon. This represents the first time in a number of years that we have had an ally on the board. Her position will be up for election at the Fall 2011 retreat. Welcome Melba Jean!

GALA / WCN at work in Michigan

During the Michigan Mission Center Conference, October 15-17, GALA and WCN presented an information table for the conference attendees. During the course of the weekend information and testimonies about GALA and WCN was available to the ninety six congregations that make up this Mission Center. Some wonderful new contacts were made during the weekend, as well as reconnecting with old friends and allies. I witnessed lives being touched in many special ways during the weekend as we shared our stories and journeys. Multitudes of thanks go out to Melba Jean, Sharon, Erin, Lisa and Kennedy for being at the booth and sharing their ministry of love, hope and peace.

Allan Fiscus

WCN Represented at Florida Summit

Meredith Bischoff, Andy and Jana Horner, Sam and Pat Marmoy, and David Woosley attended the Believe Out Loud Power Summit sponsored by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. The purpose of the free conference held in Orlando, Florida was to train people for organizational work in the welcoming church movement. All of the training tracks were taught by professionals who work with the Gay and Lesbian Task Force. The strength of this Summit came from applying secular experiences and knowledge to the work of the faith organizations.

The four training tracks, (1) Leadership and Board Development, (2) Campaigns – Interdenominational and Secular, (3) Barriers, Resistance, and Conflict, and (4) Communications were each attended by at least one of the six WCN representatives. All agreed that information gained through the conference will be helpful in making WCN more effective in its efforts.



It is helpful when ideas can be exchanged between organizations. WCN did this with a booth where we shared information regarding the power point listing of supportive persons, and the stories and statements display we did for World Conference. We passed out 'Unity in Diversity' buttons and the 'Every Church an Inclusive Church' tote bags were also available. We were pleased with the interest and response generated by the booth.

Among the highlights of the conference were three really powerful sermons, particularly the opening sermon by Rev. Rebecca Voelkel. The sermons, as well as pictures and other information can be found at: <http://www.welcomingresources.org/BelieveOutLoud.htm>.



Melba Jean Dixon, Allan Fiscus, Sharon Gernaat
Michigan Mission Center Conference

My Opinion

by David Howard

No matter what your politics are, I think a person would be hard pressed to say that President Barack Obama is not an inspirational speaker. He said the following (paraphrased) at the University of Wisconsin during the last week of September.

"In the early 1900's when workers had no rights, they began to organize and march and confront their bosses. They knew change had to come. They couldn't pinpoint when that change was going to come, but they felt very strongly that change would happen. And after many broken bones and bloody noses and even bloodshed, they continued forward; marching, organizing, and confronting. Change did come.

A few short years later, women realized that they were equal to men and deserved the right to help choose their political leaders. And through marches and protests and sit-ins and strikes, they were granted the right to vote, and as women and men have continued the movement, more and more of our society has become open to women and their gifts.

In the 1950's and 1960's, blacks and whites risked their lives for freedom from prejudice. Do you think when they crossed the bridge in Selma that they knew change would come on the other side? No, they were probably just glad they weren't shot like the three New Yorkers months before. But they kept marching, suffering the beatings and the fire hoses and the spit and the vitriol. By the time they met with Dr. King on the National Mall, the conviction for change was so strong, they didn't know when, but the renewed sense of hope fueled the movement onward."

Our movement started in 1969 when a few drag queens mixing alcohol and anger stormed into the street. They didn't know if change would come, but they had had enough. From there it has gone to the bedroom, the workplace, the neighborhood, the church. We don't know when this change will come, but I hope all of us can say with conviction, that

CHANGE will come. As we enter this very exciting time, let us be partners in change, in the quality of our lives, the openness of our congregations, the willingness to offer our gifts, the ministry and sensitivity to our brother and sisters.

On another note, as the leadership of Community of Christ continues down the path to implement Section 164 and review the 1982 and 2002 Standing High Council edicts, we have been asked to more fully participate in the financial life of the church by increasing our weekly contributions by a dollar or five or more, so that no opportunities for mission will go unmet. From time to time over the last several months, direct mission to the LGBT community has been discussed. Let us show our support on this journey by sharing more generously our resources.

Why Are We?

by David Howard

GALA exists to ensure that as long as there is even one "Tyler Clementi" in a Community of Christ family, or congregation, or a friend of the Church, that he or she will have a safe place to worship and will find a community that loves him or her and wants to encourage them in their continuing positive relationship with their Creator. Through their journey, they will be encouraged to understand their divine worth and blossom into what our Creator envisioned for them. This is our challenge, by ministry of presence and participation ...to make sure our congregations live up to this expectation...that our LGBT youth of all ages, our brothers and sisters, are not gawked at or bullied because they are perceived to be different! Each of them are children of God and as such deserve to be treated with respect and full inclusion in our communities and treated in the manner designed of God in love, joy, hope and peace.

Tyler Clementi was the young man at Rutgers University who recently, after having an alleged sexual encounter with another man webstreamed throughout the University, jumped to his death off the George Washington Bridge.



**Retreat
2010
Samish
Island
Bow,
Washington**





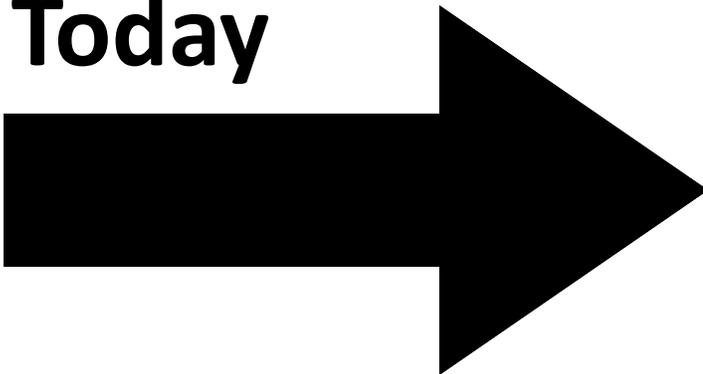
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