



galanews

THE  LETTER

Serving members and friends of
Community of Christ

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President's Message

by David Howard



Buffalo News

Picture shows Sharon and Nancy Gerbacht, and Nate and Clyde Phillips-Frey

It was an emotional day for all. I was privileged to attend the wedding in Buffalo on Monday, July 25, of two (2) couples from our Buffalo-Clarence congregation (Nate and Clyde, and Sharon and

Nancy), part of a wedding ceremony in mass; plus another couple who are friends of the church, Diane and Candy.

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GALA

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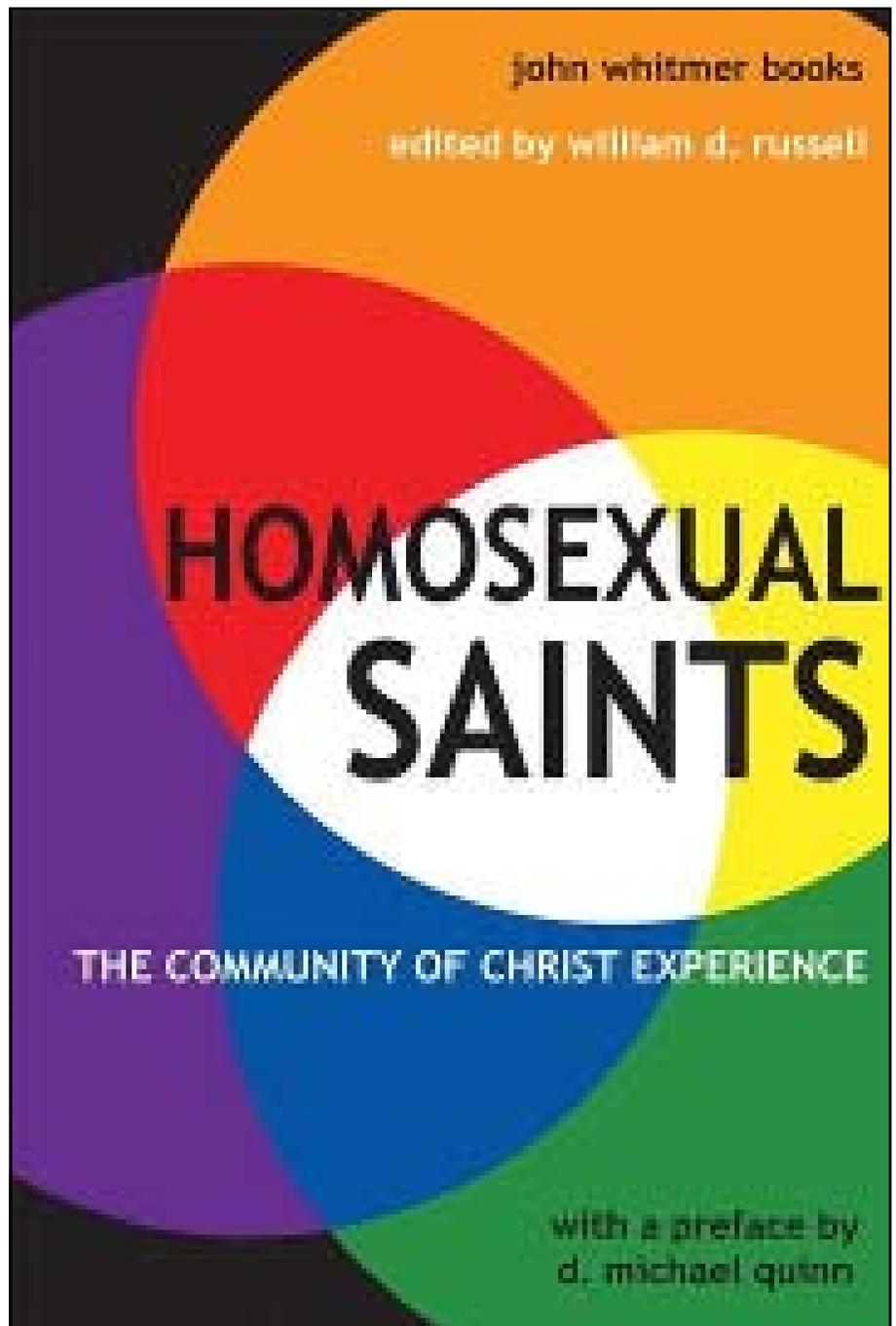
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Matthew Bolton: What would Jesus say to these adults in love?

Note: This letter appeared in the Independence Examiner, July 2, 2011.

To welcome is not just to be passively pleasant. Welcome must be extended. It is an active process of recognizing and valuing the worth, humanity and equality of someone who is excluded, the “stranger,” the “other.”

This Sunday, back in Independence for the weekend, I was asked to preach a sermon on “Welcome All” by a local Community of Christ congregation. I struggled with what to say, but when New York state passed its marriage equality bill late last week, I felt compelled to preach an uncompromising message of acceptance and welcome.

Jesus was radically and prophetically inclusive. He hung out with every group of people that was rejected by polite society – women, tax collectors, lepers, the mentally ill, Samaritans, thieves and political subversives (the Romans would have considered Simon the Zealot a terrorist).

One would thus expect churches to be the first institutions to open their doors to those excluded by the world. Unfortunately, a history of complicity with oppression is Christianity’s skeleton in the closet.

For example, my denomination, the Community of Christ, has had a disappointing record of standing up against racism when it really mattered. Joseph Smith III, writing after the Civil War, argued that different races were “unequal in scale of civilization” and morality and discouraged interracial marriage.

President W. Wallace Smith wrote in a 1956 memo that missionaries in Korea should be

“cautious and slow to ordain men of the colored race.” In 1960, the church magazine’s editor condemned the civil rights movement for disobeying segregation laws. Some people did speak out, like Wilford Winholtz and William Taft Blue, but until racism became broadly taboo, they were not in the church’s upper echelons.

For most Americans, racism seems so clearly un-Christian now that we like to imagine we would be on the right side of a similar contemporary issue. I know I do. But I have to confess that I have not always “welcomed all” when it mattered. I have participated in the exclusion and stigmatization of gays and lesbians, and for that I want to make this public apology.

Growing up in church, in Sunday School and at home, I learned that gays and lesbians were sinful and that the love they might feel for their partners and companions was something deeply dirty. I parroted this bile in a wide variety of settings, including at church camps and even at the church college.

But this hateful artifice began to crumble as I became acquainted with more lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Maintaining the fiction that they were more sinful than anyone else became difficult when most of them treated me with such kindness, while also challenging my lazy thinking.

A couple of people particularly impressed me with their ministry and pastoral abilities, and as I learned more about the Bible in religion classes, I realized just how shaky the theological foundations of homophobia really are.

As I became more interested in following my

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(Matthew Bolton *Continued from page 3*)

vocation of working in situations of poverty and conflict, I found it harder to muster any enthusiasm for condemning homosexuality. If two adults could love each other with compassion, gentleness and mutuality in a world so torn by violence, abuse and deprivation, who was I to “put asunder” an immensely rare and precious human relationship?

One day, quite unexpectedly as I walked back to my dorm from dinner, I had a moment of empathy that tore down the remaining foundations of my unenlightened views. I was in the midst of a woozy, late-teens kind of crush. I suddenly realized that if someone told me that the feelings of attraction, joy and love I felt toward someone of the opposite sex were sinful – and that I needed to one day marry a man – how emotionally devastating it would be.

More recently, as I have grown close to gay friends and participated in a civil ceremony, I see that what they see in their partners is little different than what I see in my spouse, Emily. I can recognize the passion, the warmth, the vulnerability and yes, the occasional friction, that is so familiar to me in my marriage. And I know how furious I would be if someone dared tell me that my love for Emily was dirty, unwholesome or dangerous.

I believe that Christians – all people of faith – have a duty to honor this kind of love and commitment. I still seek forgiveness for the damage I have done. I want to challenge the religious communities in Independence to make it an open and accepting city for all people.

If you are a religious person, consider asking your place of worship to become a welcoming community, a place that actively extends welcome to those traditionally excluded from religious life – including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people – in all aspects and levels of congregational life.

Unfortunately, churches often slow to accept us

To the editor:

I appreciated Matthew Bolton’s comments in his July 2 opinion piece (“What would Jesus say to these adults in love?”) regarding welcoming in our churches today. Institutional change comes painfully slowly, painful for the institution, and painful for those on any side of the perspective. It took me 39 years to deal with it. It took my sister 18 years after that to accept me as a gay man.

My congregation accepts and loves most of me, even though an important part of who I am is considered inappropriate to talk about, almost dirty. I continue to serve as their pastor.

It **IS** time for all churches to put aside the very judgments that Jesus condemned. It **IS** time for us to welcome our lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender brothers and sisters and the gifts they bring. But even beyond this, Jesus asks us to welcome all. There **IS** no place in any of our churches where walls should be built that separate us from one another.

Churches need to be safe places where all people come to learn, worship and to build relationship with God and each other.

In Community of Christ, resources are available to help in your welcoming journey (galaweb.org).

Let all the churches be about the work of building disciples, and not about the work of marginalizing those we judge.

Note: *This letter appeared in the Independence Examiner, July 30, 2011.*

It rained. One of the sons of another gay couple said "these were God's tears because of the joy heaven felt that day!" Forty-six couples participated in the mass ceremony overlooking the Rainbow (American) Falls in Niagara Falls State Park. The Mayor, a City of Niagara Falls Councilwoman and two (2) ministers (UCC and UU) performed the religious portion of the event. It was truly an emotional and uplifting day. Sharon and Nancy have been together 21 years and thought they'd never see this day. Another male couple have been together for 29 years. They wanted to show their commitment, even though their marriage may not equal their relationship in years. These things are what drove this ceremony.

Ten (10) protesters showed...sang a hymn, had prayer and left. Most of the over 200 present were not even aware of their presence.

What I was mostly impressed with was the decorum of the participants. Certainly the dress could have been outrageous...the mood outlandish. It wasn't. It was everyday people wanting to share in the culture of marriage just like everyone else. It was solemn, emotional and...a sacred moment.

There was also a sad note. It wasn't performed by a member of the Community to which these three (3) couples belong. Several of us had wanted to perform the ceremony, but the the participants wanted this a day of joy...and not a day of uncertainty and punishment. The sacred part took place the day before as Sharon and Nancy had a picnic at their house, and Evangelist Nancy Cervi blessed the rings of each and also the hands that would support each other in this life together.

All three (3) of our families made the front page of the Buffalo newspaper, many local stations, Yahoo, Reuters, and CNN. Pictures can be seen on the GALAweb.org site.

We rejoice in this momentous, sacred event and long for the day when we can freely share in this experience!

galaweb.org

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Check-out the GALA website for all the latest updates and news. Updates are posted as often as necessary. Thanks to our super-duper webmaster, Pam Robison.



Rainbow over Yellowstone River

photo by Andrew Greenhill, used by permission

Retreat Check List

- ◆ Registration: Friday, 4pm-7pm in the lower lodge. All fees are due at this time.
- ◆ There will be no dinner served Friday evening; please eat dinner before your arrival.
- ◆ Theme for the Retreat: “Beyond the Horizon”, taken from Doctrine and Covenants 162. What are the possibilities of this scripture?
- ◆ Apostle Ron Harmon will be our guest minister. Ron heads the United States Apostles planning for the 2013 US Conference.
- ◆ The theme of the banquet will be “Blazing Horizons”, and the colors will be yellow and orange. A photo gallery will be set up to preserve the special moment! Lets have fun and be outrageous!
- ◆ All of your bedding linen, pillows, and towels will be provided. You may want to bring a towel for swimming if you plan to do so. They do not allow the room towels to be used at the pool.
- ◆ Bug spray: in case we have any outdoor evening activities, it has been very moist here lately.
- ◆ Bring items for the silent auction. This auction helps underwrite the cost of the retreat.
- ◆ A Pride store will be part of the retreat opportunities. Proceeds will go to GALA.
- ◆ There will be a talent show.
- ◆ A choir will be organized.
- ◆ An offering will be taken at the closing service. Proceeds will be used to underwrite the expense of the retreat.
- ◆ Please bring any DVD’s you feel would be good for the movie nights.
- ◆ Cell phones do not receive coverage in the area. In order to reach us, or for a phone number for family in case of an emergency or you have a hard time finding the camp grounds, the Main Lodge answering machine will be checked often, 816-630-3206; South Mini-Lodge 816-630-6949 (no answering machine); Chuck Hewitt, 816-616-5883 (Thursday & early Friday).



Beyond the Horizon
GALA RETREAT
REGISTRATION FORM
September, 2-5, 2011
Camp Doniphan 12856
Doniphan Lake Rd.
Excelsior Springs, MO
64024



Please fill out this form and send it in By: August 15, 2011

**You do not have to send payment we need an accurate count. Payment is due no later than registration
September 2, 2011**

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: (____) _____ E-mail: _____

Special Dietary Needs: _____

Medical/Special needs: _____

Need to be Picked up? Please contact Chuck Hewitt for arrangements;
(816) 616-5883 or mikechuckh@gmail.com

Payment Enclosed: \$ _____

Retreat Cost:

Adults: \$175.00, kids 5-12 \$116.00 (5 and under free)

(Limited sponsorships available contact howard092248@yahoo.com)

2 people per room (Private room costs \$10.00 per night)

Preference on roommate _____

(Pillows, bedding and towels provided)

Mail Registration to:

GALA RETREAT

P.O. Box 2173

Independence, MO 64055

**Information: Call or e-mail Chuck Hewitt, (816) 616-5883,
mikechuckh@gmail.com**



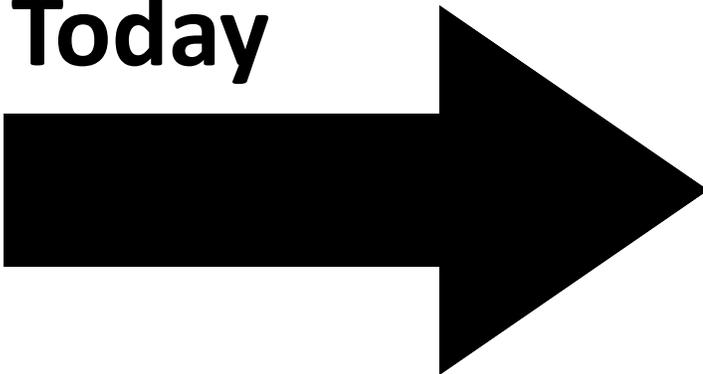
August 2011

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2011 GALA Membership

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YES; send me the newsletter by e-mail

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City,State,Zip: _____

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Membership Level (U.S. dollars):

Individual(\$25) Family(\$40)

Limited Income(\$10)

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

\$50 \$100 \$200 or \$ _____

Contributions to GALA are tax deductible.

Please return to: **P.O. Box 2173
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