



gala news

THE LETTER

October 2007 – Volume 18 Issue 3

Retreat Reflections

The 2007 annual GALA retreat, “*On a Wing and a Prayer*,” was held at Camp Chihowa Retreat Center outside Lawrence, KS. Forty-five campers were present during the course of the weekend, and the youngest camper...1 month old! We enjoyed the special ministry of Blake Smith, Eastern Great Lakes Mission Center President; Anita Bradshaw, National Field Organizer for Welcoming Church Groups within Institute for Welcoming Resources; Meredith Bischoff, WCN President; and Donna Ross, who spoke about the transgender experience.

Each retreat experience is unique because of the campground, weather, activities and people attending. Some of our special gifts this year:

- Our wonderful cook, Rose and her family, made fantastic home-style meals. We put on a few pounds--those cookies!
- Meredith launched our weekend with a fun mixer and musical campfire.
- Ellen and Gary Frye led the lakeside morning devotions.
- Mark Dixon and Curt Filer lead a wonderful hymn/songfest.
- Blake challenged us in the theme classes.
- Anita shared her thoughts and ideas for the future, using her new role in IWR.
- Donna told her story living in the transgender world.
- Todd Davison planned and led a fun-filled evening of music, talent and special costuming in the USO-style variety show.
- Our unique “sharing our stories” session
- A successful silent auction brought in about \$500 for our next retreat.
- And so many more.....

Jason will add pictures from the retreat to his personal website for you to check out and download.
Go to: www.jasonengel.net/GALA

For me, the highlight of this retreat, as with any retreat, was our fellowship: reconnecting with our GALA family and friends, catching up with those special people we haven't seen in a while, hearing

how our lives have changed and expanded since our last encounter. Part of reconnection is reflecting on past retreat experiences with each other, and seeking information about friends not attending this retreat.

Our reconnection with each other is as wonderful as welcoming new people into the GALA family, watching them participate in our camping experience, hearing their stories, and sharing our stories with them. Welcoming new individuals into our midst gives us hope for the future that our place in the community will always be important.

I left this retreat experience filled with God's love, which came because of the spirit of God in each camper present. I am grateful to those involved in the planning and sharing of themselves to make the retreat special and fulfilling.

This year marked a milestone. 20 years ago GALA used the first Community of Christ campground at Camp Manitou in Michigan. The theme: *We are One in the Spirit*.

We hope to see many more new faces, and more GALA family at our next retreat at the Temple Grove campground and Kirtland Temple, and to have another mountain-top experience.

--Allan Fiscus, GALA President

Paperback \$19.95

NEW TITLE from John Whitmer Books, September 2007:

Homosexual Saints: The Community of Christ Experience, edited by William D. Russell.

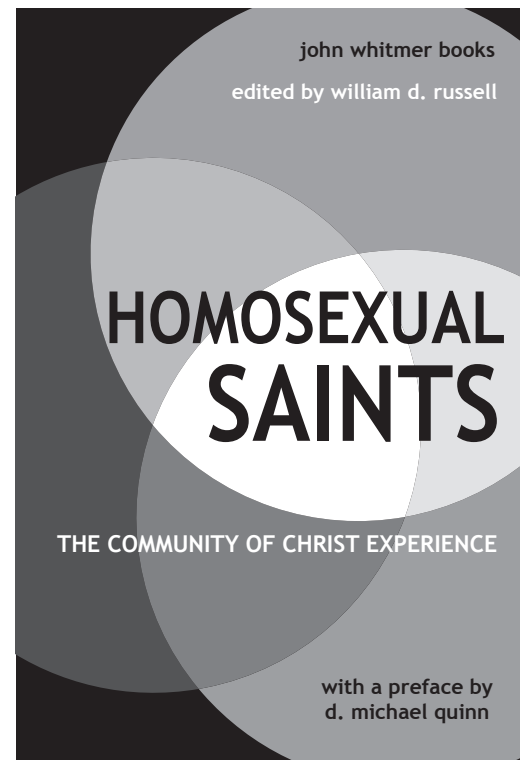
Members of Community of Christ (formerly the RLDS church) have polarized opinions concerning the status of their fellow members who are homosexual. The two major issues are priesthood ordination (in a predominantly lay church) and whether the church will marry and bless same-sex weddings.

Homosexual Saints explores these issues with twenty-four narratives that explain the experience of gay and lesbian members of Community of Christ, as well as the experiences of their family members and supporters.

William D. Russell, professor emeritus of history, Graceland University, has compiled these compelling stories and included a detailed history of the status of homosexuals in the church since 1954.

The work is prefaced by celebrated Mormon historian **D. Michael Quinn**.

John Whitmer Books is an imprint of the *John Whitmer Historical Association (JWHA)*. Founded in 1973, JWHA is committed to the study of the broader Latter Day Saint movement. Visit us online at www.JWHA.info and www.JohnWhitmerBooks.org.



Praise for *Homosexual Saints: The Community of Christ Experience*:

"I have always believed that the pathway to understanding the issue of homosexuality is in the telling of personal stories. Decisions about policy and law, whether religious or secular, must first have a human face. Bill Russell's compilation of personal essays — some courageous, some tragic — provides an excellent resource for the dialogue that has only just begun."

—**W. Grant McMurray**
President, Community of Christ (1996-2004)

"By collecting these remarkable first person accounts, Bill Russell has performed a great service to everyone in the church. We cannot move forward together without practicing the spiritual disciple of non-judgmental listening. All who attentively read these stories will be transformed as together we become more caring and accepting community."

—**Don H. Compier**
Dean, Community of Christ Seminary

"If ever there was a collection of stories to inspire and enlighten, this is it. Here also is an example of the power and beauty of story to build sacred communities. These stories will do far more than legislation or official dogma to dismantle walls of fear and indifference."

—**Dick and Barbara Howard**
Independence, Missouri

"Stories draw us into the lives of others, where we participate in their emotions of love, fear, acceptance, rejection, loneliness, and bittersweet triumph. Marginalized, invisible, and dispossessed homosexuals in the church have long needed an advocate like Bill Russell to tell their stories with sensitivity and compassion. How shall we respond?"

—**Susan D. Skoor**
Apostle, Community of Christ

"When individuals have the courage to tell their personal stories, as the contributors to *Homosexual Saints* have done, their words can be surprisingly powerful. There is no means more effective for dispelling ignorance about homosexuality and for overcoming prejudice against gays and lesbians than forthright, thoughtful explanation by those who have experienced this reality personally or know of it through someone they love and respect."

—**H. Wayne Show**
Author of Remembering Brad

"A key chromosome in the Latter Day Saint DNA is the presence of marginalization. All who are intellectually curious and have a genuine desire to understand this unique religious movement's true identity should read carefully this fine collection of personal stories."

—**Mark A. Scherer**
Community of Christ Historian

AFFIRMATION CONFERENCE IN D.C.

By Bill Russell

I attended the Affirmation Conference (Mormon Church's equivalent to GALA) in Washington, D.C. on October 6. I was invited to discuss the situation for LGBTs in the Community of Christ, and also the book of stories I collected, *Homosexual Saints: The Community of Christ Experience*.

About 160 people attended the conference, and I was pleased that approximately 30 attended my breakout session, as the competition was good. People were full of questions, and very appreciative of the support from many individual leaders in the Community of Christ.

I was thrilled that the gay Episcopal Bishop, Gene Robinson, was a featured speaker. His talk was excellent and witty. He is the only bishop of any denomination that I have ever hugged.

Jonathan Rauch, who published *Gay Marriage: Why It Is Good for Gays, Good for Straights, and Good for America* (New York: An Owl Book, Henry Holt and Company, 2004) gave an excellent speech about gay marriage, going beyond what we usually hear on the subject.

Also speaking were Gita Deane and Lisa Polyak – the lesbian couple who had recently sued for the right to marry in the state of Maryland. They thought there were three possible results of their lawsuit (win, lose, or punt) but didn't expect to lose, fearing only that the court might "punt" the issue to the state legislature. But instead the court decided against them, using strong language in turning back their challenge.

Another featured speaker was Carol Lynn Pearson, a prominent Mormon whose husband died of AIDS. Her 1986 book, *Goodbye, I Love You*, was widely acclaimed far beyond the LDS community. Recently she interviewed many Mormon gays and lesbians and published *No More Good-byes: Circling the Wagons around Our Gay Loved Ones* (Walnut Creek, CA, Pivot Point Books).

At one meal I sat next to a man who recently changed his first and last name because his parents, who adopted him at birth through the LDS Church, disowned him when he came out. He was able to find his birth mother's name and changed his last name to hers.

Homosexual Saints: The Community of Christ Experience is scheduled to be released in October.

Books may be ordered for \$19.95 plus \$3.00 shipping/handling from:

Bill Russell, Graceland University
1 University Place, Lamoni, IA 50140

russell@graceland.edu

Phone: 641-784-5171

FAX: 641-784-5410

GALA will receive the proceeds from book sales.

Great gift for your family and friends
this Christmas!

It was a great conference and a great bunch of people. I hope to attend Affirmation conferences again.

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New Religious Institute Publication

Sexual and Gender Diversity

I am pleased to announce the publication of *A Time to Seek: Study Guide on Sexual and Gender Diversity*. The study guide offers a concise review of current sociological, public health and scientific data regarding sexual orientation and gender. It also considers key scriptural passages in light of contemporary understandings of sexual and gender diversity.

A Time to Seek summarizes the scientific research into the origins of sexual orientation and gender identity, and provides a glossary of relevant terminology. The study guide also provides data on the prevalence of sexual and gender diversity, demographics on same-sex couples and their families, and the status of marriage equality in the U.S. It also explores the psychological and social challenges faced by LGBT persons, particularly youth, and their families.

A Time to Seek is designed for individual or group study, with discussion questions aimed at specific religious concerns, such as the interpretation of scripture, the role of LGBT persons in faith communities, and the recognition of same-sex unions. An extensive resource guide is provided to encourage further exploration of sexual or gender diversity issues.

The publication is available for download from the Religious Institute's website, www.religioustheology.org. Printed copies are available for \$12.95 each (bulk rates available) from Lifequest Publications. To order more than one copy, call (419) 872-7448.

The Reverend Debra W. Haffner, Director

Religious Institute on Sexual Morality,

Justice and Healing

304 Main Ave., #335, Norwalk, CT 06851

Phone 203-840-1148

Because just one day—National Coming Out Day on October 11—wasn't enough, the entire month of October has been dedicated to the many fine individuals in this world who happen to be LGBT. Since a group of teachers and community leaders hatched the idea of a nationally recognized month to celebrate LGBT folks in the early 1990's, the month-long celebration has been endorsed by such groups as the Human Rights

Campaign (HRC), the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), and Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), to name a few.

The theme is “31 Days. 31 Icons.” 31 LGFT icons were selected with the help of state and national leaders. These icons are people, living or dead, who have distinguished themselves within their fields, as national heroes, or in the LGBT civil rights movement. Each day, one icon is featured on the website <http://www.glbthistorymonth.com/> with a biography, short video, and other multimedia information.

This is a great opportunity for education and celebration, so don't miss out. Check the website for more information and profiles of the 31 selected icons:

1--Leonard Bernstein, 2--Annie Leibovitz, 3--Angela Davis, 4--Alexander the Great, 5--Billie Jean King, 6--Pedro Almodovar, 7--Bessie Smith,

8--Klaus Wowereit, 9--Susan Sontag, 10--Gore Vidal, 11--Lily Tomlin, 12--Peter Gomes, 13--Mary Edwards Walker,

14--Frederick II, 15--Virginia Uribe, 16--Frank Kameny,

17--Nancy Mahon, 18--David Hockney, 19--Audre Lorde,

20--Cary Grant, 21--Renee Richards, 22--Sherry Harris,

23--John Maynard Keynes, 24--Gertrude Stein, 25--Zhou Dan, 26--Carolyn Bertozzi, 27--Cole Porter, 28--John McNeill, 29--Florence Nightingale, 30--Billy Sipple, 31--Leonardo da Vinci

Jerry Vagts, grassroots@lcna.org

Grassroots Organizing Coordinator

Washington – On October 4, 2007, the National Stonewall Democrats and more than 150 groups announced the launch of a united lobbying and advocacy campaign to win passage of the fully inclusive Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), H.R. 2015. United ENDA is a coalition and campaign to build upon the unprecedented solidarity in strategy demonstrated by more than 150 organizations determined to pass the original ENDA.

“National Stonewall Democrats are united in our support for the original ENDA which includes protections for both sexual orientation and gender identity,” said Jon Hoadley, Executive Director of National Stonewall Democrats. “We recognized early that this week would quickly become a tipping point in how our movement organizes and

how Democrats interact with our community. We have helped launch United ENDA in order to capitalize on that momentum and ensure that our party is pushed towards a winning strategy to end employment discrimination for working Americans."

National Stonewall Democrats was at the center of early organizing efforts to save the original Employment Non-Discrimination Act. Working with organizations such as the Task Force, and the National Center for Transgender Equality, Stonewall Democrats quickly helped organizers build a coalition that has now grown to more than 150 organizations.

United ENDA is the active lobby and campaign effort to pass the original Employment Non-Discrimination Act. It began with organizing a joint letter to Congress and quickly developed into a full campaign complete with grassroots and professional lobbying efforts. ...

NSD launched NoSubstitutes.org as an online organizing tool to allow individuals to add their names to a growing list of Americans who support the original Employment Non-Discrimination Act. NSD used its contacts with these individuals to schedule in-district meetings with Members of Congress to urge support for the original bill.

Member organizations of United ENDA are communicating daily with Representatives to keep pressure on Congress. United ENDA will allow organizations to better coordinate lobbying strategies, grassroots mobilization efforts, online activism, media and legal strategies. The 150-plus organizations that share this position will continue to do their own lobbying, release their own statements and mobilize their own members, while the unified campaign will make sure that every organization has the latest information from Capitol Hill, the latest strategic plans and the most up-to-date reports from the grassroots.

www.NoSubstitutes.org, www.UnitedENDA.org

Christian Leaders Call for Passage of National

U.S. Employment Non-Discrimination Act

(ENDA)

the Bishops and Elders Council, a network of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) affirming churches and organizations touching the lives of 98 million Americans, called on the U.S. Congress to pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) and on President Bush to sign it into law.

Meeting in Sarasota, Florida, September 7-9, the Bishops and Elders Council noted the hundreds of scriptures in the Bible on economic justice. Deuteronomy 24:14 says, "You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers." According to Rev. Rebecca Voelkel, program director for The Institute for Welcoming Resources and a

convener of the Bishops and Elders Council, “Jesus crossed lines of all social divisions to include people in the realm of God. His opening sermon in Luke 4:18 proclaimed good news for the poor and to release the oppressed.” ...

Rev. Troy Plummer, executive director of the Reconciling Ministries Network, which works within the United Methodist Church, commented, “In a time of economic uncertainty for many Americans, LGBT people in most states face the added burden of being at risk for being fired at any time, or not being hired at all, simply because of their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.”

The Bishops and Elders Council was founded September, 2006, in Dallas, Texas, and stated, “We are a unified body of followers of Christ who are committed to speak boldly in our own communities and the larger culture as those who have been both oppressed and oppressor. We will communicate God's consistent call for justice, wholeness and peace, and work to equip ourselves and others to take concrete action to achieve God's loving shalom. We are committed to work on

Sometimes it's difficult to know whether one should celebrate or fight harder. Sometimes both are called for at the same time. The latest news from the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church and the latest twist in the Federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) are good examples.

Bishops of the Episcopal Church met recently in New Orleans to face a truly daunting task: How to stay in the worldwide Anglican Communion and affirm the full participation of LGBT Episcopalians. As Anglicans have always done, the bishops tried to strike a compromise for the sake of unity. Sadly, the cost of that unity is once again being shouldered by LGBT people. In their published statement the bishops agreed to “exercise restraint” in electing any more gay and lesbian bishops but also affirmed the “full participation” of lesbian and gay people in the church.

On the legislative front, the long journey toward passing ENDA, which would protect lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people from workplace discrimination, seemed very close to passing in recent weeks. Sadly, in the 11th hour protections for transgender people were stripped from the legislation as a way to ensure its passage....

At what cost do we buy unity? Who pays the price for equality? These are not new questions. In the 19th century many churches sought unity at the cost of African slaves. Abolitionists in the same century worried that working for women's rights would dilute their efforts to abolish slavery. In the 1960s and 1970s the Episcopal Church, among others, debated church unity at the cost of the ordained ministry of women. Christian unity and social progress are obviously ideals, but these can never be bought at the cost of human dignity or at the price of justice for some.

At least for Episcopalians, we can remember that our bishops cannot act alone but must deliberate with lay people, deacons and priests meeting in General Convention, which won't happen until 2009. As an openly gay Episcopal priest, I remain hopeful that my church will act in that convention to reaffirm without compromise the full participation of people like me and my lesbian, bisexual and transgender sisters and brothers in the church.

Meanwhile The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry (CLGS) will continue to work with a variety of organizational partners to provide resources and education on LGBT issues across the country. This kind of biblical, pastoral and theological education is critically important, not only for Episcopalians but for every faith community seeking to affirm the dignity and full participation of all their members as well as full equality for every American citizen, regardless of their gender identity and expression.

The Rev. Jay Johnson, PhD, Senior Director

Academic Research & Resources

The Center for Lesbian & Gay Studies in Religion & Ministry

GALA Retreat 2008
August 29 to September 1, 2008
Temple Grove Campgrounds
Greenville, Pennsylvania

The 2008 GALA Retreat will be held at the campgrounds for the Eastern Great Lakes Mission Center in Pennsylvania. The grounds are located 2 hours east of Cleveland, and 2 hours northwest of Pittsburgh. The grounds include a beautiful lake, two lodges, one of which with private bathrooms, cabins, and a dining room.

Plans are already under way with hopes to make it the biggest retreat GALA has ever known! One of the very special events will be our worship service in the Kirtland Temple. We already have it reserved for a half day on Sunday. We are also considering a side trip after the retreat to Palmyra.

Additional events may include a side trip before or after to Cedar Point, home of the biggest roller coasters found anywhere. Rumor has it that three-time Miss Gay New York may be attending the retreat too. We in the mission center have already begun to reach out to our gay friends as well as allies and others in hopes of getting them to attend. And to top it all off, the cooks from the Chihowa retreat have asked if they can come and cook for us at Temple Grove too!

So mark your calendars...put in for vacation...start saving those pennies....and plan on having a great experienceAGAIN...at the GALA retreat!

GALA on BROADWAY

For several years GALA members have expressed a desire to do something fun and different outside the retreats. Well, this might be the chance! We want to gauge the interest in attending a **mini-retreat in New York City on Feb. 22-24** that would possibly include a couple of shows, great food, museums, tourist stuff, and just good fellowship. The weekend will be fairly unstructured but give lots of time to hang out and do things together for those who want to. We will put together a package which will include a moderately-priced hotel and also one of a little higher quality.

But first, I need to know who may be interested. Please send me an e-mail at howard092248@yahoo.com by October 31 to express interest. Tell me which shows you may be interested in seeing. If we have enough interest I'll see what kind of package we can get for accommodations and take the next step in planning.

GALA Members in Southern California
Observe Solidarity Sunday

On October 6, the twelfth annual observance of Solidarity Sunday was held by the Southern California GALA Chapter. It was also the tenth observance (as a congregation on its

own) by Basileia: An Open Door Community of Christ. The pledge below was included in our service.

Solidarity Sunday is a faith-based anti-violence initiative. DignityUSA founded Solidarity Sunday in 1995 as a way of making our opposition to anti-gay violence visible. It is held every year on the Sunday before Oct. 11 (National Coming Out Day). Solidarity Sunday is dedicated to the memory of the many who lost their lives through violence because of who they were or who they were perceived to be. May their deaths not have been in vain. For more information go to the web page at <http://www.dignityusa.org/solidarity/index.html>

Solidarity Pledge

I pledge: I will work for civil and human rights for all people, including gays, lesbians, bisexuals and the transgender. Civil rights are not special rights.

I will seek to stop jokes and unkind language about anyone, including gays, lesbians, bisexuals and the transgender when spoken in my presence. Words that hurt and bigotry are not funny.

I will speak out against any slander, debasement, lies or dehumanization of anyone, including gays, lesbians, bisexuals and the transgender, including when spoken by political or religious leaders. Violent speech leads to physical violence.

I will work to stop physical violence against anyone, including violence against gays, lesbians, bisexuals or the transgender. Violence against any person is violence against all people.

**All dressed up
for the retreat's
banquet &
variety show**

Reader Survey

Please answer the following questions and return to: P.O. Box 2173, Independence, MO 64055.

Would you prefer to receive the GALA Newsletter by e-mail? Yes _____ No _____

Do you also want a paper copy mailed to you? Yes _____ No _____

Would you like to be permanently removed from the GALA mailing list? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, why? _____

Are you active in a local church? Yes _____ No _____ Community of Christ _____ Other _____

Would you be interested in a recreational retreat without worship services or other church-related activities? Yes No

Do you have any suggestions for a recreational retreat? _____

Regional retreat? Yes _____ No _____ Location(s)? _____

What can GALA do to assist in your life's journey? _____

What does GALA mean to you? Is it still relevant in your life? How can we make it better? What other changes or enhancements would you like to see GALA attempt? _____

We invite you to pay dues for 2007-2008 or make additional contributions to GALA either by mail (address above) or on GALA's web site, www.GALAwEB.org. Please make sure we have your correct home address, phone and e-mail address.

Name(s) _____ Phone _____ Email _____

Street Address _____ CSZ _____

Membership Level (U.S. dollars): _____ Individual (\$25) _____ Family (\$40) _____ Limited Income (\$10)

I would like to make an additional contribution to GALA's outreach and educational goals in the amount of \$ _____
Contributions to GALA are tax deductible.

**Please Respond to Our Survey
and Renew Your Membership**

(See the other side of this page.)

You can join, renew, or make gift contributions on GALA's web site, www.GALAweb.org. If you have not yet paid your annual dues for 2007-2008, we invite you to do so now!

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

- Produce and distribute our GALA newsletter
- Operate our website www.GALAweb.org
- Provide sponsorships for retreats
- Defray GALA's expenses

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October 2007

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