



# galanews

THE  LETTER

Serving members and friends of  
Community of Christ

September 2017  
Volume 30 Issue 3



## *2017 Labor Day Retreat!*

The 2017 GALA retreat is now part of our history—a lengthy history with many twists and turns in the road. This retreat is no different.

It is no secret that there were concerns about the theme when it was announced. The choice of the word “queer” as part of the theme excited some while it created pain for others. Unfortunately, language can often impact us in unexpected ways, and yet, if we give it a chance, we can also be blessed with new (and sometimes challenging) insights. That is true of this weekend as well.

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# GALA

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jerrydalejr@gmail.com

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sjydonahoe@gmail.com

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gayle.humphrey@sbcglobal.net

**Brittany Mangelson**  
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brittanymangelson@gmail.com

**Pam Robison -**  
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**Publications**  
robison\_p13@yahoo.com

**Lisa Meyer - Treasurer**  
lisameyer1975@yahoo.com

### Members At Large:

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dgregory86@hotmail.com

**Clay Birks**

**Ginger Farley**

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# President's Message

*Jerry M. Dale, Jr., GALA President*

The 2017 annual GALA retreat is now in the GALA history books. Congratulations to Clay Birks and Ginger Farley for being elected to the board. We are excited to have you join us. Additionally, I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Lisa Meyer for all of her years of service to GALA, most recently as treasurer. Lisa is resigning her position effective December 31, 2017. According to the by-laws, the board has named John Billings to be Treasurer for the remainder of Lisa's term. John and Lisa will be working together to ensure a smooth financial transition.



With attendance at the retreat between 40 and 50 throughout the weekend and 25% of the participants coming from within 3-4 hours of the campground we are considering this a successful retreat. Final financial numbers will be released in a future newsletter.

Some highlights from this year's retreat include no cellular service and limited internet access, a full day of storytelling with the entire camp which included moments of blessing, incredible meals, a fire in the fireplace each morning and evening, fellowship, prairie picnic and a talent show where Community of Christ traditions and LDS traditions were shared.

I am personally thankful for the retreat as it has helped us, as your leadership team, continue to vision the future of GALA. I am even more convinced of the powerful ministry that GALA has to offer to the church. If you have not had an opportunity to listen to the web address by President Steve Veazey, please do so and consider how you would like to have GALA respond. Let us know your thoughts by e-mailing us at [GALACofChrist@gmail.com](mailto:GALACofChrist@gmail.com).

Blessings to each of you  
Jerry M. Dale, Jr.  
GALA President



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(Labor Day Retreat—continued from page 1)

On Saturday, Michele McGrath, our guest minister, gave a brief introduction to the topic of queer theology, the foundation for the theme as well as a response to the concerns that had been raised.

- God is love – a love so radical, so extreme, that it dissolves all existing boundaries, whether those are boundaries that separate us from our fellow creatures (one another), the Creation, or the Creator (God)
- This radical love lies at the heart of both Christian spiritual formation *and* queer theology.
- Radical, boundary-crossing love is at the heart of the Christian gospel because as Christians we believe in a God who, through the incarnation of Jesus Christ (relationship), has dissolved the boundaries between death and life, time and eternity, human and divine.
- Eph. 2:13-14: Jesus used his own body to break down the dividing walls between people and make us one.
- Radical, boundary-crossing love is also at the heart of queer theory because it challenges our existing boundaries with respect to sexuality and gender identity (gay v. straight, male v. female) as social concepts – false binary categories vs. a spectrum of possibility
- At its heart, Christ’s mission is fundamentally queer: it’s all about love – a love that challenges convention and dissolves all the boundaries humanity has worked so hard to construct

She also continued by sharing two things that she felt needed to be said:

The planners of this retreat, I among them, chose the theme “Blessed are the Queer in Spirit” with this concept of radical, transgressive love in mind, and the desire to place the GLBTIQ+ community squarely in the center of God’s love and blessing.

I want to acknowledge that for some, the word “queer” has painful connotations, especially if this word has been used as an epithet against you, a weapon intended to hurt and diminish and silence. I cannot claim to fully understand the pain this has caused. I can, though, as a part of several groups

and institutions (Christians, church leaders, heterosexuals, cisgender) offer my apology for the way you have been treated. It was wrong. It was sinful. I’m sorry and I want you to hear that.

We acknowledge that in recent years, the term queer has been used increasingly by scholars, advocates, and people who identify as queer as a way to reclaim it from negative connotations and describe their experience and orientation. And though the term had once been used in a derogatory sense, since the late 1980s the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED) Online* notes that its usage has become increasingly neutral or positive.

This might not be helpful if the term feels hurtful to you. But queer theory and queer theology are vibrant, growing areas of engagement and it is in this spirit of a radical, transgressive love that, with your permission, we will use the term this weekend.

Sunday morning we spent time talking about the concept of the Trinity as an inclusive community of radical love. As a way of understanding and experiencing the concept, we went through an exercise of thinking of a word, holding our hands in front of our mouth and then speaking the word aloud. The thought is like God, where the idea begins. The spoken word is Jesus Christ, who is described as the Word in John 1, and the breath on our hands is the Holy Spirit, the breath that carries the spoken word out, the action that puts the idea into practice.

We talked about the idea of God being non-binary—never either/or. This concept presents the essential truth about God’s nature as relationship—that God is a community of radical love. We pondered a couple of questions: (1) What does it mean for us when the creation story says that God created humanity in “our” image? It’s not singular; it’s not either/or and (2) What if creation is God’s coming out to us? A continuing self-revelation of God’s true self?

(Labor Day Retreat—continued on page 4)

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*(Labor Day Retreat—continued from page 3)*

At other times with Michele, we explored a number of different spiritual disciplines. We spent time dwelling in the word, looking at new ways of praying, taking a scripture quote walk, spending time in nature and then letting the artist in us come out as we painted on a tile our response, and walking the labyrinth.



## **GALA Retreat 2017 Members Business Meeting**

Members Present:

- Jerry Dale
- Sharon Troyer
- Velton Peabody
- John Billings
- Stephen Donahoe
- Tyler Marz
- Tom Beck
- Max Coopwood
- Arthur Butler
- Mark Davies
- Todd Davies
- Leon Berg
- Michele McGrath
- Sam and Pat Marmory
- Megen Olson
- Meggan Molgard
- Sean Langdon
- Barb Landers
- Gayle Humphrey
- Joyce Humphrey
- Cindy and Ken Campbell
- Bethany Weaver
- Robin Linkhart
- Charley and Pam Robison
- Maria Hiatt
- Brittany Mangelson

Nonmembers:

- Rachelle Talley
- Crystal Moreno

Gayle Humphrey opened the meeting with prayer

Minutes from 2016 GALA Retreat business meeting:

- Jerry Dale suggested deferring approval of minutes from last year's retreat  
Arthur Butler moved; Mark Davies seconded
- Leon Berg suggested amending the motion to appoint a committee of the board find last year's minutes, and review, approve and publish the minutes. Charlie Robison seconded.
- Arthur Butler moved the previous question. Motion passed unanimously to end discussion.  
Motion passed.

Election results:

- Kathy Sharp withdrew her name from the election about a month ago. Since we had two positions to fill and two candidates, we did not have an election.
- Ginger Farley will be in the 3 year position of the Member at Large.
- Clay Birks will fill Kylie's position as a Member of Large
- Lisa Myer has a year left on her term; resigned as of Dec 31<sup>st</sup>. Now we need to fill the position of treasurer. We will need to change our address. Next year we will elect a treasurer elect. We are very grateful for her leadership with GALA.
- Undersecretary of Publications- Pam Robison agreed to run for this position again and was uncontested.
- Vice President- Stephen Donahoe rotates off at the end of the year. Parker Johnson will become the Vice President.
- Jerry Dale will be the President Elect and President. He ran uncontested for that position.

Jerry read his letter from the most recent newsletter.

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(2017 Members Business Meeting —continued from page 4)

## Proposed GALA Budget:

- Jerry Dale presented the proposed FY 2018 Budget.  
As of July 31, 2017 we have \$25,701 in cash on hand.
- Discussion of Go Fund Mission
- Motion to approve 2018 budget. Charlie Robison moved; Velton Peabody seconded.
- Discussion of participation at Pride events. We know of 15 congregations that participated in Pride events. We have increased the marketing budget by \$500 from last year and are considering a Go Fund Mission project for this purpose.
- John Billings called the question on the budget.
- Budget passed with one abstention.

## Retreat Location for 2018:

- Potential options under consideration- Camp Bountiful in Ohio, Deer Park in Pennsylvania (less handicap accessible), Camp Red Cliffe in UT, campground close to Graceland
- About 10 people came from the surrounding area this year, a core group of whom were young people. Also the price of the retreat at Camp Red Cliffe was really good.
- Considerations- having geographic distribution enables students living in the area to attend; would it be possible to move the retreat earlier in the summer to enable students to attend
- Airport hubs may make the retreat cheaper
- Try to find a place where there is a budding affiliate program and work to nurture that afterward
- Our pattern has been West Coast, Central, East Coast, Central. Point that there could be more opportunities to reach LGBTQIA+ people on the coasts.

## Why not fund 5 people for travel funds

- Another idea: do Labor Day Retreat every other year and then on off years have local affiliate retreats.
- Go Fund Mission funds- support students or seniors to come to GALA retreat
- Spring and Fall Breaks could be good times to attract students

## Action items going forward:

- Proposed 2019 Budget- Evaluate whether we will have actions for sale at GALA booth at World Conference, and make sure this is included in the budget.
- Develop a formal policy for retreat scholarships. Our practice has been to provide a full scholarship the first year they ask for a scholarship and then provide half scholarship the second time they ask for a scholarship.
- Can we add the possibility for congregations to join GALA?
- More of an investment in affiliate/GALA relationship
- Could we amend the low income membership fee to be a student/low income membership fee.
- Consider how we might make contact with other orgs like GALA in other Christian denominations.

Pam Robison moved to close the business meeting at 5pm. Motion passed.



## RETREAT THOUGHTS

*Brittany Mangelson is a first-time attendee and a member of the GALA board.*

Since this was my first GALA retreat, I wasn't exactly sure what to expect. I was part of the team that planned the retreat and involved in the conversations that happened prior to the event. There were some hurt feelings, hard conversations, and to be honest, I was really nervous about the dynamics of the weekend. My hope was that the connection of Jesus' gospel and the LGBTQIA+ community would be so apparent, so boldly stated that we would be able to put aside our differences and recognize once again that we are on the same side. That's exactly what happened for me at the retreat. That weekend, something magical happened. We opened up to each other and God in unexpected ways. The story circle activity, so deeply beloved by GALA, was scheduled for three hours and we ended up going almost twice that long as so many shared their hearts around that sacred circle. We learned about identities and labels that were

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## MY SONG IS FROM MY HEART

*This was a poem (by Nelda Kerr) shared at our retreat, and Barb Landers asked that it be shared in the newsletter. The video of it can be found at <http://vimeo.com/75430817>*

My song is from my heart  
and though I long to start  
a love that dares to be so real,  
I'm a little scared, I feel unprepared, undeclared, unaware  
So, if my voice isn't quite steady,  
it's because I'm not sure if I'm ready  
to share a love too big for words,  
to care fo you so much it hurts,  
to dare to shout in a silent church  
of the radical love I've found.  
It's not a can't touch the ground  
kind of love,  
or an eloquent, profound  
kind of love.  
It's a barely makes a sound  
kind of love that  
dwells in the mystery,  
gives way to simplicity,  
and sparks a light deep within me,  
and though that spark is small,  
it will grow to be  
alive in such divinity  
if you would only sing with me!  
And together we will grow to see  
the beauty of true community  
when "me" becomes "we,"  
when harmony grows from melody  
we will love so radically  
we're gonna need  
a microphone, a megaphone, a mountain  
to declare the hope that is found in  
a love we can all share.  
My hope is that you dare  
to abandon despair  
and begin to repair  
the brokenness found in  
the fear I was bound in  
until I discovered something new:

the song in me met the song in you!  
Love is something we have to do!  
And so I bring my song to you  
in hopes that we'll sing something true,  
that our generation will grow to be  
the change that our world needs to see  
a declaration of generosity  
shaking foundations of animosity,  
and saying yes to a call  
that runs deep within us all.  
Though it may start small,  
you have to let it move you.  
Let it breath and improve you  
so that you may be one with  
the mystery  
saying, "I am me" authentically.  
That's Gandhi, King, and Kennedy,  
but it can be me and you  
if we choose to believe!  
And I believe in you.  
I believe you have so much more  
and so if my feet fall to the floor,  
you leave your seat,  
you walk out the door  
and carry with you nothing more,  
let these words rise above:  
You are loved,  
you are loved,  
You are loved.  
Let my voice, soft and sweet,  
Or loud in the busy city street  
echo these words on repeat, may they always rise above:  
You are loved,  
you are loved,  
You are loved.



## SAVE THE DATE!

Join us in 2018 for the Labor Day retreat! It will be August 31-September 2. Watch for the location to be announced. We hope to see a lot of folks there.



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*(Brittany Mangelson reflection—continued from page 5)*

not our own and how we are all needed in God's Peaceable Kingdom. We shared stories of abuse, loss, death, and doubt, but also stories of belonging, hope, acceptance and faith. There were conversations about mission in our local areas and we talked at length about ways to make GALA relevant in the upcoming year. We laughed, we sang, we explored the LGBTQIA+ journey within the context of Community of Christ, and we listened. Not having grown up in Community of Christ and not being of the LGBTQIA+ spectrum, one might think I would feel out of place being at the GALA retreat, but the opposite is true. Over the weekend, this simple phrase from the Mission Prayer echoed in my mind: "Grant me the courage to risk something new." I believe this is what happened at the retreat this year. We opened our hearts to new people who might think differently from the way we do. We shared stories that had never been shared before and we claimed our belovedness in sacred community.



*This is a portion of a blog post by Sean Langdon about his experience at the retreat. The entire post can be found at <https://uncommondevotion.com/2017/09/23/celebrating-bi-visibility-day-the-journey-continues/>*

This past Labor Day Weekend I attended the GALA Retreat at Camp Red Cliffe in Hunstville, Utah. GALA is an organization whose mission seeks to "Providing sanctuary, spirituality, and transformation: For persons of ALL sexual orientations and gender identities through our shared faith experience in Community of Christ building bridges of understanding". In the months leading up to the retreat I experienced a wide range of emotions. I went from being excited and couldn't wait for it to arrive to feeling nervous about the experience and almost canceling my registration, to being excited and filled with anticipation again and so on. Additionally, I also struggled with the retreat theme of "Blessed are the Queer in Spirit" which hindered my anticipation for the event. In fact, the only reason I followed through with attending was that I was traveling to

and from the retreat with a friend and didn't want to cancel on her. I did follow through though and attend the retreat and I was blessed.

I will readily admit that I was withdrawn and resistant to fully dive into the experience during the first part of the long weekend. Even within the LGBT community, there is prejudice towards the 'B' in LGBT. So, I wondered if I would experience any of that there. I wondered if I would feel like I fit in. I wondered if I would feel like I belong. And, quite honestly, I knew that there might be an age gap so I wasn't sure if I could relate. All these thoughts influenced my experience during the first part of the retreat. But as our first full day rolled on, my heart softened and the tension I felt began to dissipate. I heard the personal stories of so many who were present. People who shared their stories of coming out. Who shared their own journey. Those who shared stories of not feeling like they could come out yet. We also heard stories of allies and their journey as people who supported those of us who were LGBT. More importantly, I heard the stories of those whose experiences I felt connected to. These stories invited me to let go and be. They were powerful, heart breaking, and inspiring!

The GALA Retreat was an important experience on my journey in life. Through it, I was able to experience a safe, welcoming place to be me. I discovered a new tribe that I could call friends and companions on the journey. On this day, I hope that all my bisexual brothers and sisters around the world can be given the space to be themselves in their community. I wish for them to have the courage to be their authentic self and embrace their identity. More so, I wish for everyone else to have the courage to look us in the eye and see us as fully embraced human in society. To my follow bisexuals on this Bi Visibility day, I see you! I love you! May you be able to be the 'you' that you were created to be without fear, always!



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## I BELONG IN THE SKY

Pictures from Jerry Dale

*This poem was written and shared by Meggan Molgard (Gigi).*

I cannot believe you.  
You tell me I am loved.  
You tell me there is a place for me,  
But come November I'm out on the streets holding my  
baby girl to my chest,  
Both of us sobbing, outcast and alone.

I cannot believe you.  
You tell me you speak for God,  
That this man in the sky condones this exclusion,  
That if I had more faith I would understand,  
That it's out of love for my future children.

I cannot believe you.  
You say I am needed,  
That I am wanted and valued in this boys club you have  
going here,  
Saying you care as you drive the daggers deeper into my  
soul  
Because who I love is wrong and you are always right.

I cannot believe you.  
Your lies do not control me.  
Your honey-drenched daggers flail at the sky,  
Because I've found my wings, feather by feather.

A feather for a God who does not condemn love.  
A feather for a God who is real and alive and within.  
A feather for a child who loves her mamas and  
her church.  
A feather for infinite, impossible, radical love.  
A feather for a woman who is always enough.

I cannot believe you.  
There is no place for me here.  
I belong in the sky.



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Pictures from John Billings



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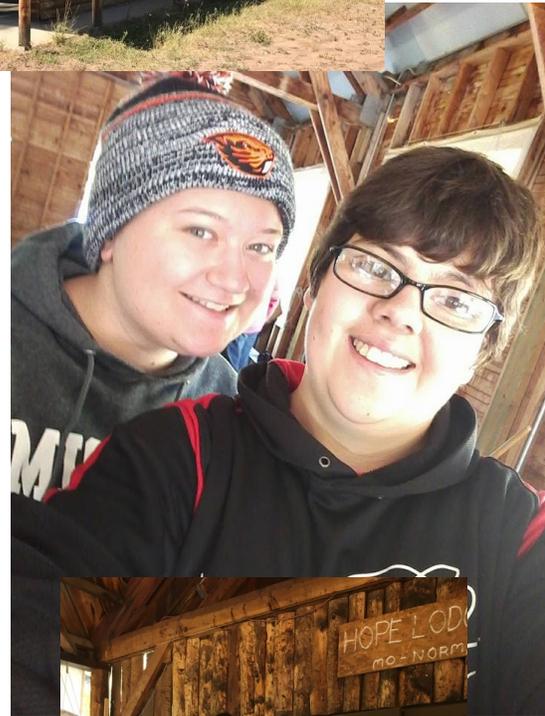
Pictures from John Billings



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Pictures from Brittany, Jordan, Leon, and Stephen





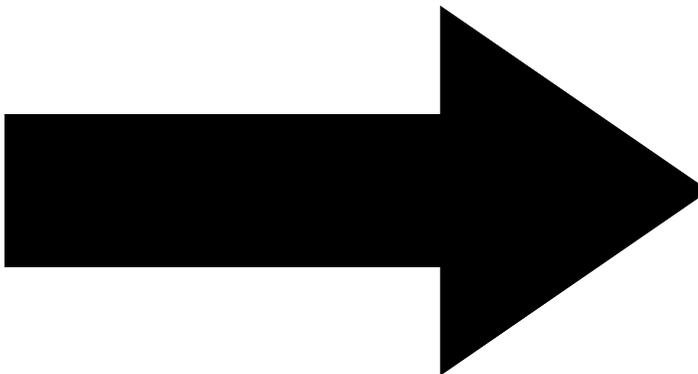
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E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

YES; send me the newsletter by e-mail

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership Level (U.S. dollars):**

Individual(\$25)       Family(\$40)

Student/Limited Income(\$10)

I would like to make an additional donation for the 2016 retreat:  
 \$50     \$100     \$200    or \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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.*

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