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THE  LETTER

Serving members and friends of
Community of Christ

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Merry Christmas

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of the One we call Jesus, we wish you blessings of peace, joy, love. We know that this can be a difficult time for some...that some wonder where (or whether) they have a home. You are welcome here!

This Jesus spent time with the marginalized, the outcast... His family were refugees, and he knew what it was like to not be accepted. And so, it is in the spirit of the One who said "Come to me, all you who are tired of carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest" that we wish you the blessings of peace this season.



GALA

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www.galaweb.org

President's Message

Jerry M. Dale, Jr., GALA President

Happy Advent, Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays to all. As we enter into this time of year I am reminded of the beauty of the season. The decorations, the pageants, the candlelight services, holiday parties and such. I am also aware that this is a very challenging time of year for many in the LGBTQIA+ community.

We, as members of GALA, have a unique perspective to offer the Community of Christ church in our deep understanding of family, both biological and chosen. In recent years I have worked with my home congregation in Washington, DC with this idea of family. Every Advent we decorate the windows of the church as biological family units. I felt left out or even worse...an 'add-on' to another family. As I began to share my definition of family a deeper understanding and acceptance began to grow within my congregation. May we all have the courage to speak our truth in our church communities...even when it is hard.



There is a lot of information to share about our organization this newsletter as well. First, a heartfelt thank you to Stephen Donahoe and Lisa Meyer for all of their years of service to the GALA board. We are a better organization because of your presence with us and we look forward to continuing in fellowship with you. Dan Gregory has resigned from the board to accept the pastor position at the Apple Valley Community of Christ in Minnesota. Dan, your gentle spirit has been a blessing. With Dan's resignation the board will be appointing someone to fill the remaining 1 year term.

The board will be meeting for a retreat and planning in Independence January 19th through 21st, 2018. Please hold the board in your prayers as we work together to lead this organization into the future. The officers, Parker - VP, John - Treasurer, Brittany - Secretary and I have begun meeting monthly to ensure a smooth transition of leadership and to envision a new future for GALA. We will share our work with you in the next edition of the newsletter.

Thank you so much for being part of GALA and remember to join again in 2018.
Jerry

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Parting Thoughts

This is my final month on the GALA board as my term as Vice President has come to a close.

My biggest takeaway from these three terms on the GALA board is the importance of relationships. We are tied together in really important ways, many of us because of shared heritage through the Community of Christ and shared experience in our identities in the LGBTQ community or as allies.

One of the ways that we are working together to further connections and build relationships is through the GALA Table Facebook page. We have also gotten several requests to share contact information with the group of participants from the GALA International Annual Retreat. Since we did not ask ahead of time for permission to share this information, we won't be able to share everyone's contact information. However, the board has decided that we will ask in advance next year and make it a policy to share contact information after retreats (for those who give permission).

I also want to encourage everyone to remember that relationships are the most important part of our work together. It is through relationships that we heal old wounds and self-hate, build resilience to handle difficult times, and support each other through personal struggles. In my time on the board, I have seen too many relationships frayed and broken because of disagreements, leadership styles differences, or divergent visions for the organization. I beg people to reach out to each other where those relationships have been injured and seek reconciliation.

Our community is too small to be so fractured. Our vision is too big and too important to let interpersonal conflicts overtake us. I think with all the oppression and conflict we are seeing in the world, it is easy to point fingers at each other instead of focusing on the bigger forces that are at work in the world.

Thank you for those who are continuing to lead us in our work through GALA board service. This work is not glamorous and board members often get more complaints than complements. However, it is important work and I am grateful for your service. I think GALA is in a really strong place and the current board is poised to take the organization forward into the future. We will be even stronger if we can forgive each other and work together for the good of the community.

—Stephen Donahoe



Meet Parker Johnson, New GALA Vice President

As we enter the holiday season and the new year, I reflect on 2017 with a lot of grief and loss. While this probably reads as a considerably negative introductory statement, I don't mean it that way entirely. I grieve the wrongdoings that took place over the past year, but I am energized by the response of so many who have categorically denounced such acts. It spurs the realization that I am not alone, and that we are capable of so much. I also acknowledge the loss I've felt as I've worked on myself throughout 2017. I've recognized my own need for self-care and acted accordingly, and I have let go of a lot of baggage that had long overstayed its welcome. My 2018 is shaping up to be better because of this.

I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. My name is Parker Johnson, your new Vice President of the GALA Board. I am thrilled that an opportunity to serve has become available that so perfectly aligns with my own values and principles. I thought I'd share a bit about myself for those I've yet to meet.

A little bit about me:

Personal Life: I love photography; in fact, my bachelor's degree was heavily focused on black-and-white film photography (35 mm). It is a therapeutic hobby of mine, and I look forward to locating a dark room in my new city so that I can continue this interest of mine. I recently relocated from Tulsa, Oklahoma, to Calgary, Alberta,

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(meet Parker Johnson—continued from page 3)

Canada, in order to pursue a position with Community of Christ here. I love the mountains, and being so close is so good for my soul. My boyfriend, Preston, and I are excited to be in Canada with our two miniature dachshunds, Walter and Amelia.

Church Involvement: I am a lifelong member of Community of Christ, and have served in numerous World Church capacities over the years: *World Service Corps volunteer in 2007, a member of the Young Adult Giving Committee, World Conference Young Adult Planning Committee, and I currently serve as a major contributor to World Church communications strategies.* I was raised in rural Oklahoma, where I attended the nearby Seminole Congregation throughout my childhood.

Professional Background: My specialties include communications, change management, and business development. I earned my bachelor's degree in 2010 at the University of Oklahoma in Media Communications and my master's degree in International Management at Colorado State University in 2015. I am currently a student at Community of Christ Seminary and am projected to complete this program in Fall 2018. Over the years, my writing has been recognized by several prestigious organizations such as the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), Ragan Communications, and Hermes Creative Awards. I currently serve as Community of Christ Canada West Mission Centre's *Church Mission & Young Adult Ministry Specialist* and reside in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

I hope this helps you *get to know me* as well as one can through the written word, and I can't wait to engage with you all on a more meaningful level in the future as we consider what it means to be truly welcoming, affirming, and loving.

—Parker Johnson



Thoughts from New Board Members

I feel it an honor and a privilege to serve as member-at-large on the board of GALA. My first two meetings were very informative and enlightening.

—Clay Birks



As a founding member of GALA I have watched the growth of the organizations and it's ups and downs. Due to the dedication of members and the board GALA survived.

I was very involved in the early years of GALA. The time came when I needed limit my involvement. I was tired and discouraged. It did not seem that we were making any headway with acceptance in the church.

I stayed in touch with GALA members and attended retreats through the years, but did not participate fully. When I was asked to submit my name to be on the GALA board with prayerful consideration I decided it was time to once again be a fully committed member.

I am committed to ministry to church members and non-church members who are hurting and yearning for acceptance with no reservations or qualifications. From the beginning of GALA the first goal was to love and accept those who were hurting because they had been found unacceptable, in some cases, to their church, their families and their communities because of who they loved. GALA continues 30 plus years later to continue to provide a safe place.

I am looking forward to my tenure as a board member. As a retired social worker of 40 years, and a lesbian, I believe I bring some unique perspectives and talents to the board. I am excited for the future of GALA.

—Ginger Farley



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Come and Join Us!

If you haven't yet sent in your membership for 2018, this is your invitation to join us! GALA needs **your** voice to help us shape our future...to know the direction you want to see us go.

We are in the process of obtaining a new mailing address, so to join GALA, please currently go to <http://www.galaweb.org/membership5b.html>

We look forward to hearing your voice!



Project Zion

Have you listened to any of the Project Zion podcasts yet? Josh and Brittany Mangelson (board member) are doing a wonderful job of sharing stories from a variety of perspectives—and they would like to use some of the voices from GALA. If you would be willing to share your story, please contact Brittany at brittanymangelson@gmail.com



A Christmas Meditation

Let us join our hearts and minds together in the spirit of meditation and prayer.

May these moments of quiet lead us to the heart of the season, which is peace.

May we breathe deeply of peace in this quiet place, relax into its warmth, know we are safe here, and let us open our hearts to the evening's story.

Like the wandering couple, may we find that our greatest trials issue forth from our greatest joys.

Like the harried innkeeper, may we find ways to be of help to others.

Like the lumbering beasts, may we be silent witnesses to the unfathomable glory of life.

Like the shepherds on the hill, may we know that we need never be afraid.

Like the journeying wise, may we always have the courage to follow our stars.

Like the angels, may we cry peace to a troubled world.

Holy one, to these prayers for our own transformation we add our prayers for all of those who suffer and grieve this evening. May they find comfort. And we add our prayers for all those involved in war; may they be safe. And may this season of peace and goodwill nudge our world towards its ideals, for then will Christmas truly dawn.

Amen.

—Christine Robinson

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/19219.shtml>



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Christmas Greetings 2017

Dear friends,

I love the fact that Christmas actually begins on December 25 and the days of Christmas continue through January 5 coming to an official end on January 6 with the Feast of Epiphany. I relish this time of reflection. The craziness of consumer Christmas comes to a sudden halt on December 26 as the world outside my front door rapidly removes all signs of Christmas. Meanwhile, the meaning of Christmas continues to stir quietly in my heart and settle deep into my soul. A question bubbles to the surface over and over, "Just as God called Mary to bear God, Emanuel, God with us, Jesus, into our world – how is God calling us to be God-bearers in our world?"

I remember as a child watching my father, year after year, carefully place a single string of lights on our tree. Twenty-five bulbs the size of nightlights, crystal clear and colored, red, green, blue, orange, and purple -- each twinkling on its own whims with no rhyme or reason. I sat for hours every year watching in silence as they danced the hues of celebration across our tree.

Christmas made things possible like childhood fantasies of gifts, yummy once a year candies and special foods, and two whole weeks off from school. Christmas also unwrapped Jesus as we used the nativity figurines under the tree to act out our own creative versions, over and over, of the timeless story of Love made visible in the tiny babe.

The mystery of that holy night continues to speak truth to the hearts of those willing to listen. All around us seeds of **Hope** burst open into new life. **Joy** persists, in places least expected like trees growing through cracks in granite. **Love** shared never goes empty no matter how much we give away, and in a world so fraught with violence, hate, greed, and war, Emmanuel, God with us, still brings light to those in darkness and guides our feet in the way of **Peace**.

God continues to move in the midst of humanity searching for those who prepare the way, with open hearts, willing to be vessels through which Christ is born into our world not only at Christmas, but every day of the year.

I look forward to our continued ministry together as "God-bearers" in a world yearning to hear the Good News of God's healing presence. Thank you for all you do to support and share Christ's peace.

May all the blessings of Christmas be yours and may the spirit of peace rest upon you and your household is my prayer.

Love and joy,



December 2017

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