



Lutherans Respond to Boy Scouts of America

RIC and ELCA can provide model for policy change within BSA

ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation advocates for the acceptance and full participation of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

This is an excerpt from ReconcilingWorks' mission statement. Most of our work is striving for continued reform within the Lutheran communion and its ecumenical and global partners. We also show ourselves as Lutherans in the secular work when we work for change in the laws at various levels of government that are discriminatory. As an organization founded upon the issues of justice and fairness, we support and stand in solidarity with organizations that have the same mission – to speak out and work toward the inclusion of LGBT people in institutions and places where they live their lives.

Recently, the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) has been in the spotlight because it is considering a change in its policy of banning LGBT scouts and leaders. ReconcilingWorks has no official connection to the BSA. However, many Lutherans know the Boy Scouts because thousands of Lutheran congregations host scouting troops. According to the BSA, in 2012, Lutheran congregations (no distinction is made between the various Lutheran denominations in the U.S.) hosted 3,827 units of scouts, which encompassed

116,417 youth. These figures place Lutherans as the fifth-largest host of BSA units among national religious organizations. Lutherans and Scouting have gone hand-in-hand for many decades and have long traditions together that include newsletters and providing worship and service opportunities. The flagship of ReconcilingWorks is its Reconciling in Christ (RIC) program. With the RIC designation, Lutheran congregations and organizations make



public their welcome of LGBT people. The RIC list of mostly congregations, but also synods, colleges, seminaries, and other organizations, exceeds 500. While most congregations adopt an RIC Affirmation of Welcome to declare that those who are members and participants in worship are welcome regardless of their sexual orientations or gender identities, many congregations extend their welcome beyond these groups. Many Lutheran churches open their doors to BSA units, Girl Scout troops (whose policies welcome LGBT scouts and leaders), and other groups in the community, from organizations that serve the homeless to after-school tutoring programs. It is in these ways that the people of God minister to the public and address the needs of a broken world.

It is the hope of ReconcilingWorks that Lutheran congregations, as the main hosts in the Lutheran community of BSA units, show the grace of God and Christian hospitality in all who come through their doors. It is the hope of ReconcilingWorks that Lutheran congregations that are RIC extend their welcome to LGBT scouts and leaders. It is the hope of ReconcilingWorks that people of all sexual orientations and gender identities will find a welcome in the Boy Scouts, at church, and in all places where they seek community.

Following are some further perspectives on the Boy Scouts of America from ReconcilingWorks members.

Loyal and Obedient

Boy Scouts must evolve to inspire new generation

BY KURT NEUMANN

One day two years ago, my 11-year-old nephew asked me, "Uncle Kurt, were you ever in Scouts?" I replied, "I'm an Eagle Scout like your dad." His eyes lit up, and he replied, "Really?" I replied, "Yes, and I'm proud of it."

But as he becomes more involved, I can't be involved anymore. The singular reason: I am gay.

For those not familiar with Boy Scouts, the Scout law is a set of traits taught to inspire the best in each Scout. In the Scout Handbook, a Scout is loyal: "A Scout is true to his family, friends, Scout leaders, school,

and nation." However, a Scout is also obedient: "A Scout follows the rules of his family, school, and troop. He obeys the laws of his community and country. If he thinks these rules and laws are unfair, he tries to have them changed in an orderly manner rather than disobeying them."

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EMILY EASTWOOD

The Gift of Unconditional Love

In January, I spoke at the annual conference of the Gay Christian Network, a mostly online group of 20,000 individuals worldwide. GCN's annual conferences take on the excitement of family reunions as people who know each other by their online chat names meet in person for the first time. Many then come year after year to renew friendships, delighting in each other's presence in a place where they are safe and welcomed in the fullness of who they are.

I spoke on the conference theme, "Oasis," which was appropriate since the conference center was sitting in a dry Arizona

After my speech, I led a workshop that was loosely labeled "Q&A." Some attendees were having a great deal of trouble accepting themselves, believing they would not "inherit the kingdom" unless they were celibate. A man who had traveled from a distant continent struggled aloud. We worked through the Bible bullets, the passages used against us, as well as through texts of promise. We heard story after story of rejection by families and churches in the name of God. I told stories of hope from our RIC community, from the faithful witness that members of ReconcilingWorks have given in church and society, from our work

I pray that the RIC congregations are indeed **teaching parents how to raise all children as the gifts of God** that they are.

environment. I knew that, for many, this event was itself an oasis of sorts, a place and time of respite and living water where thirst might be quenched, questions answered, and loneliness replaced at least for a while by a community gathered in Christ's name.

for change within the ELCA. There had been laughter, intense discussion, and some tears for over two hours when finally we closed in prayer.

After the formal workshop time, the real work began as numerous individuals and two couples stayed behind to continue more personal conversations with me. Eventually, there was only one older man remaining. We sat together as he poured out the story of his life. Unlike most in the room, he had been raised by his parents without rejection in a Christian household, but as the family moved around they changed churches, and sometimes denominations, as they went. In an era when gays were not allowed in the military, he had served with the support of his outfit. He had been excommunicated by a conservative denomination while he was in the military. However, he took that action as a gift, because it brought him to realize his previous anxieties over that church had been well-founded. He would simply look for another. He had found a partner, and they had lived happily together for many years. He was healthy and now retired. He had had a wonderful life.

Tears came as he asked me why God had

Upcoming "Becoming an Inclusive Church" Trainings

April 5-6, 2013
Salt Lake City, Utah

April 19-20, 2013
Metuchen, New Jersey

May 3-4, 2013
New Paltz, New York

May 4, 2013
Vancouver, Washington

November 8-9, 2013
Dunedin, Florida (Tampa area)

spared him the horrible things that so many in that workshop had endured. I listened in amazement. He was sincere and genuinely troubled. Why was it that God had treated him differently and better than so many? Why did he deserve a good life? He needed to know.

I can honestly say that no LGBT person had ever asked me that question. It took me a little by surprise, but the answer was clear from his own story. The gift that he was given was not that he was somehow spared, but that he was taught acceptance and resilience. He had had various rejections in his life, but they had not affected him in the same way that they would have affected others. He had been loved unconditionally from birth in a household that exposed him to a breadth of experience. He knew what it was to be wholly loved by God though the example of his parents. He saw the glass as half full, even as others might have seen it half or nearly empty. His life was an adventure because of his resilience.

I will never forget this man, not because of his question, but because of his story and the lessons within it. His parents and God had gifted him with life. His parents had loved him as God would have us love. He was given a capacity and an early education for resilience that served him for a lifetime. Disappointments became opportunities. He was truly happy and troubled only by the misfortune of others in relief against his own life.

What lifetime-affecting differences do we make every day when we love as Jesus loved? What gifts do we give when we ourselves choose faithful resilience over despair, opportunity and adventure over submission to the will of unwelcoming societies, churches, pastors or bishops?

I pray that the RIC congregations are

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RIC Settings Added to the Roster since last issue

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rockford, Illinois

Family of God Lutheran Church, East Grand Forks, Minnesota

Grace Lutheran, Victoria, British Columbia

Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Columbus, Ohio

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Gilroy, California

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Loudonville, New York

Lutheran Campus Ministry at UNM and CNM, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Lutheran Church of the Cross, Berkeley, California

St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Beaverton, Oregon

Trinity Lutheran Church, Madison, Wisconsin

For the complete list of RIC congregations, synods, and organizations, go to our website at www.lcna.org

**NICOLE GARCÍA**

ReconcilingWorks' Strength is in the Pews

My adolescent and college years spanned the late 1960s and '70s. I lived the social revolution by knocking on doors, going to rallies, and marching on the University of Colorado Boulder campus. My formative years were spent learning and perfecting grassroots organizing: raising money and generating support for a cause. My concept of grassroots organizing, however, has evolved over the years and has taken on new meaning.

After I saw the light, embraced theology through the eyes of Martin Luther, and became a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, I discovered an incredible group of people who utilized the concepts of graceful engagement, telling one's own story, and seeking intentional one-on-one conversations. Organizing evolved from marching in the streets to sitting in a pew to engage in a deep, meaningful conversation with another person.

That is where ReconcilingWorks:

Lutherans for Full Participation garners strength: in the pews. Social statements and resolutions aren't passed because of a series of rallies, but because of conversation. The core of my faith is touched when I sit in a pew with people as they tell me of the joy

they feel at being back in church. In many cases, they were called to sit in that pew because someone reached out to them and told them that being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender is not a deterrent to being saved by the blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ. *All* really means *all*. I am filled with joy when I learn that they have heard this glorious news from a member of a Reconciling in Christ (RIC) congregation, or because they attended a Building an Inclusive Church training, or because they attend a congregation where a Regional

My concept of grassroots organizing, however, has evolved over the years and has taken on new meaning.

Coordinator (RC) hosted an adult forum. That, my beloved friends in Christ, is true grassroots organizing.

It was Rose Beeson, the RC for Region 2 in 2007, who brought me into the fold of ReconcilingWorks. Jerry Vagts, the Grassroots Coordinator on staff at the time, kept calling me and inviting me to meetings. For many years, I thought Jerry was the voice of God, since each time I heard his voice on the phone, I ended up on a plane. Through the years, I have had the honor and pleasure to know and work with many incredible people who do the grassroots organizing for ReconcilingWorks.

As a co-chair of the Board of Directors, I want to take this time to thank past and present Regional Coordinators for their tireless efforts. In the past, the funding for almost all of their travel and presentations has come from their own pockets. I am happy that at the last ReconcilingWorks biennial assembly, we authorized a \$2,000 per year budget for each RC. But I want to recognize how these generous organizers

have spent their own funds over the years to carry the inclusive Word of God to those in need. I cannot estimate how many thousands of dollars have been donated by RCs to pay their own way to visit churches and attend assemblies on behalf of

ReconcilingWorks. The time spent in churches and assemblies is voluntary. RCs are not paid a salary or stipend for all the hours they spend traveling or speaking to a room full of people. Words are not enough to thank all those individuals who serve as Regional Coordinators.

If you or your chapter has questions about ReconcilingWorks or wants to become more involved, contact your RC or Regional Director (RD). The current RCs for the ELCA are: Region 2, Kenny Callaghan and Sean Raghailigh; Region 3, Rev. Anita

Hill; Region 4, René García; Region 5, Ruth Almén; Region 7, Jim Miller; Region 8, Scott Binde and Peter Keyel; Region 9, Wayne Morris. Regional Directors (staff positions) are Kari Lipke for Region 1 and the Rev. Anita Hill for Region 3. Karen Jolly and Paul Jolly serve as Lead RCs and also have extensive experience in Region 1. Email

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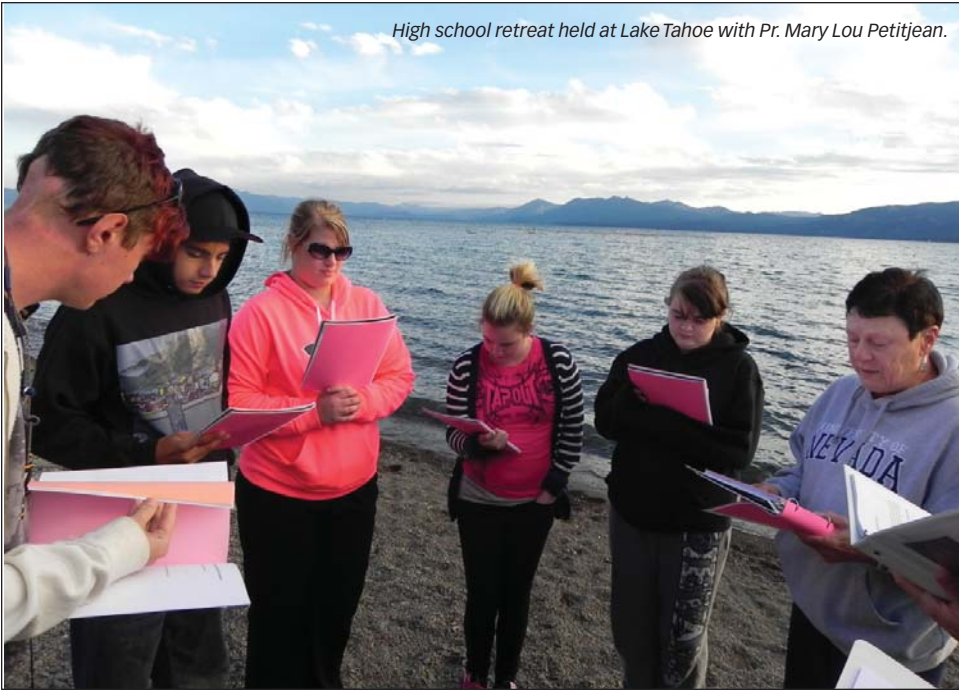
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High school retreat held at Lake Tahoe with Pr. Mary Lou Pettijean.



RECONCILING IN CHRIST CORNER

Lord of Mercy, Sparks, Nevada

Nevada’s only RIC congregation strives to make everyone feel like part of the family **BY CAROL M. DUNN**

Some pastoral interns keep a low profile, and some take on ambitious projects. At Lord of Mercy in Sparks, Nevada, the Rev. Kendrah Fredricksen, who was an intern in the 2010–2011 academic year, met with two founding members and learned that their gay sons were not currently attending church.

“They assured me their sons had always been welcome at Lord of Mercy, but they had come out in adulthood and felt that if people knew, they may not be as welcome,” explained Fredricksen.

Encouraged by the congregation’s pastor, Mary Lou Pettijean, Fredricksen began a discernment process with the possible goal of the congregation becoming RIC. She used flyers, the ReconcilingWorks document addressing the seven scriptural texts used to condemn homosexuality, films, and scientific studies, including a University of California Davis analysis. After several fall forums, mentions from the pulpit, and council discussion, the positive vote occurred at the annual meeting in January 2011.

Bob and Judy Oliphant, charter members, explain that one of their (gay) sons answered questions at a forum from his perspective. This made the issue personal for members who thought it was too abstract. The Oliphants also prepared a letter explaining how RIC was important to

their family, which was published in the newsletter and the weekly bulletin.

There were doubts, of course, including the expected “but we are already

The young people had seen our publicity, but hadn’t believed that we were as welcoming as we claimed.

welcoming.” Pastor Fredricksen emphasized that LGBTQI people hear much louder and unwelcoming voices from some congregations. She spoke of the protests on TV of people holding “God hates gays/fags” signs and how important it is to send a counter message, and that “love the sinner, hate the sin” is still a condemnation.

The result was that within four months, the congregation voted to become RIC, the first – and presently the only – RIC congregation in Nevada. A few members left because of the decision, but most endorsed it.

According to Maria Seitzinger, a member

since her infant baptism, this “is a church that feels like home and welcomes new, returning, visiting or continuous members alike. It is truly a congregation that strives to make everyone feel like part of the family.”

The question was never whether this was the right thing to do, but there was concern about a possible negative impact, such as community backlash and a loss of members. These concerns were presented in discussions and forums and voiced at the meeting where the vote was taken.

As a result, according to Bob Dehnhardt, the congregation’s president, for the first year after the RIC vote, Lord of Mercy did not say much about it publicly. There was no exterior signage added except a small window decal and a website mention and no active outreach to the Reno-area LGBTQ community.

That has changed in the last year. Dehnhardt made it plain that “hanging an RIC statement on the wall was not enough.” From the council, to his pleased surprise, there was no resistance, but rather suggestions on how to begin outreach, including at Reno’s Gay Freedom Day parade and the Gay Pride Day festival.

There have been departures and threats of “I’ll leave if this continues.” Dehnhardt said, “It hurts me that this happens. I’ve always considered Lord of Mercy as extended family, and I deeply care about everybody here. When someone leaves, they take with them a small piece of what makes this congregation special. But I respect their position and feelings, as I hope

they respect mine. While every loss has an impact, I have faith that we are on the road God wants us to travel.”

Acceptance, including by some who are uncomfortable with active outreach, he continued, is “the most promising aspect of being an RIC church: that when it gets down to the individual level, we can all see Christ in one another.”

In September, Lord of Mercy received a \$2,000 grant from Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries to fund start-up costs for Open Doors, a program for LGBTQ teenagers and young adults. Proposed by two members, Sharon Lemons and Sandy Poirier, Open

Doors is intended as a “safe gathering place” for young people; a constructive alternative to Reno’s gay bars.

Lemons and Poirier, partners for almost 19 years, came to Lord of Mercy shortly after the RIC vote and came because of that vote. They had experienced rejection in another Lutheran church but were impressed by the “open-arms” welcome at LoM. It is, they said, what they believe God wants a congregation to be – loving, caring and accepting of all God’s children.

The congregation’s current intern, Paul Gibson, is working to carry out the expansion of the welcome. He says the kick-off Halloween party received little response, but “we had more success with a showing of the documentary film ‘For the Bible Tells Me So,’ in January. Over 40 people attended – seven high school students and another



Paul Gibson, Intern, with Pr. Mary Lou Petitjean, Lord of Mercy LC, Sparks, Nevada.

nine in their 20s. Five area pastors participated to answer questions and guide discussion.”

“The young people had seen our publicity, but hadn’t believed that we were as welcoming as we claimed. They assumed we would give them a hard time once we got them in the doors. They expressed interest in a program of films and discussion,” said Gibson.

In addition to this youth program, Gibson is working to get Lord of Mercy known in the gay community and is attending meetings, social events, concerts, and ecumenical and inter-faith events in Reno and Sparks. Awareness is growing slowly, but people are starting to check out the pre-school, special events, and Sunday morning worship. The congregation has

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I N H O N O R O F...

In Honor of...	In honor of	Honored by...
Brit Barkholtz	In honor of Brit Barkholtz.	Carla & John Cornwall
Adam Bost	In honor of Adam Bost, a great son and friend	Sharon & John Bost
Joe Brown	In memory of Joe Brown	Mike Crandall
Sheri Brown	To God’s Spirit moving within Sheri Brown	Rev. Kirk E. Anderson
Michael Crandall & Shawn Hudson	In honor of the wedding of Michael Crandall & Shawn Hudson	Herman & Mary Cage; Sumner Riddick & Douglas Carl; 10 anonymous
Dennis Douglas	In honor of the work of Dennis Douglas, Director of Music Ministries, St. Stephen’s Lutheran Church, Monona, Wis.	Members of the Sanctuary Choir at St. Stephen’s Lutheran Church, Monona, Wis.
Emily Eastwood	In honor of Emily Eastwood’s commitment and hard work on behalf of ReconcilingWorks’ mission	Rev. Vicki L Pedersen & Rev. Martha Lang
Robert Matthew Eastwood	In memory of Robert Matthew Eastwood	Bob & Martha Eastwood, Deanna Eichler & Leslee Froehlich; Deborah Wilson
Gloria Feiertag	In honor of Gloria Feiertag	Tim Feiertag
Roberto Flores	In honor of Father Roberto Flores	Kenneth E. Rozek
Rev. Ginger Georgulas	In memory of Rev. Ginger Georgulas	ReconcilingWorks/North Texas
Virginia Kay Georgulas	In loving memory of my wife, Ginger Georgulas	Fred Behrmann
Rev. Anita Hill	In honor of Rev. Anita C. Hill	Jane & Michael Hagedorn
Rev. Anita Hill & Janelle Bussert	In honor of Rev. Anita C. Hill & Janelle Bussert	Elizabeth Address & Steven Solbrack
Rev. Anita Hill & Janelle Bussert	In honor of Rev. Anita C. Hill & Janelle Bussert and their work to defeat the marriage amendment in Minnesota	Jackie & Richard Kennedy
Paul & Karen Jolly	In honor of Paul & Karen Jolly for their faithful work on behalf of ReconcilingWorks	Jeannine Janson & Mari Irvin
Marie Kent	In memory of Marie Kent, one of the founders of Lutherans Concerned	Rev. Barbara Lundblad & Nicole Johnson
Ana Klement	In honor of Ana Klement-Lyens	Sharon & Jeffrey Eaton
Frank Loulan & Richard Pearce-Moses	In honor of Frank Loulan & Richard Pearce-Moses	Judy Garza & David Baram
Doyle Morris	In memory of Doyle Morris	Wayne Morris
Wayne Morris & Steve Miller	In honor of Wayne Morris & Steve Miller	Lucienne Morris
William Narrow & Douglas Kuhn	In honor of William Narrow & Douglas Kuhn’s marriage	Jane Saari
Kurt Neumann	In honor of Kurt Neumann	Mia Cook & Family
Jan Owen	In memory of Jan Owen	Bob & Martha Eastwood
Jennifer Protil	In honor of Jennifer Protil- my friend, our advocate for social justice. For truly reflecting the unconditional love of Christ and our faith. Thank you.	Sharon Kemmerer

Why the Boy Scouts of America Should Be as Inclusive as My Church

Hosting Boy Scouts can be opportunity to demonstrate welcome
BY GLENN BLACKMON

February 3 was Scout Sunday at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Snohomish, Washington, and at many other houses of worship across the country. Young men in khaki uniforms and merit badge sashes helped our ushers with bulletins and the collection basket, and we publicly thanked our troop leaders for their great work.

The only remarkable aspect of that picture is that Good Shepherd is not just the sponsor of a Boy Scout troop and a Cub Scout pack but also an inclusive congregation – a faith community that gladly includes anyone regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. We celebrated our first same-gender marriage in December after voters in Washington state backed marriage equality. We are part of a denomination that allows congregations to call gay and lesbian pastors.

Reconciling these facets of our congregational personality can create a paradox. For a congregation to be truly inclusive, it needs to be able to welcome everyone, even those who don't want to welcome everyone. While some people

to the day when our troop can express as generous a welcome to LGBT families as our congregation does.

Indeed it is hard to imagine how the national policy could actually be applied in a community that respects gays and lesbians. Are we really supposed to tell an elementary principal that he can't be an assistant scoutmaster because of his sexual orientation? Do we exclude "avowed homosexuals" whose only vow is one of marriage, sanctioned by the state and performed by a Lutheran pastor? Do we really tell a lesbian married couple that only one mom should attend the troop meetings?

and whether to include gay boys as scouts. [As we go to press, this proposal has been tabled. Ed.] This approach respects the range of conscience-bound views held by scouting families.

The Lutheran church followed a similar "local option" path in 2009 when it changed its policy toward LGBT clergy. The ELCA did not compel every congregation to accept gay or lesbian clergy, but it allowed a congregation to make that decision for itself based on where it saw God leading them.

The ELCA recognized that the sexual orientation of its clergy was not a core matter of faith for the denomination.

A local option approach for scouting puts the sexual orientation issue where it belongs. It is not a core value of scouting.

The leaders of our scout troop are emphatic in saying that they don't want to be an anti-

gay troop or a gay-friendly troop;

they want to provide the best of scouting to all the boys and their families. For some sponsoring organizations, sexual orientation may be fundamental. For Good Shepherd Lutheran and many other congregations, scouting best serves our mission to youth when it respects our welcome of all people. ■



We'll gladly take scouting, warts and all, but we look forward to the day when our troop can express as generous a welcome to LGBT families as our congregation does.

question our affiliation with the Boy Scouts of America, many of our strongest LGBT advocates see our troop sponsorship as an opportunity to demonstrate that welcome to the scouts and their parents.

Don't think that we accept the anti-gay policy of scouting's national organization, because we believe it diminishes the scouting program that we cherish. No matter how hard we work at the troop level to be inclusive, the national policy will push some families away. Since scouting is part of our ministry to youth, the national policy hurts our congregation. We'll gladly take scouting, warts and all, but we look forward

The national policy needs to change, but it need not come at the expense of other faith communities with other beliefs. That same Sunday was Scout Sunday at the Mormon church too. It is important that scouting work for many faiths, and in fact it does. Indeed, with the notable exception of the policy toward gays, scouting has been incredibly successful at encouraging a spiritual dimension of youth without endorsing any particular faith or denomination.

The national scouting leaders have proposed to accommodate these differences by letting individual unit sponsors make their own decisions about whether to include LGBT people as troop volunteers

Glenn Blackmon serves as congregation president of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Snohomish, Washington.

From the Executive Director

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indeed teaching parents how to raise all children as the gifts of God that they are, and that through our example, LGBT children, youth, and young adults will receive the gifts of Christ's unconditional love and human resilience. May the oasis of the RIC communities be extended throughout the church and beyond so that none may fear alienation, abuse or rejection for who they are or whom they love. Amen. ■

Loyal and Obedient

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How can I be true to my nephew and also obedient to the law prohibiting me from participating? How can my nephew be loyal to his gay uncle if he is also obedient to the exclusionary Scouting rule?

Some would call this ironic, but my answer to those questions comes from my faith as a Lutheran. Lutheranism began because Martin Luther wanted to change the systemic problems in the Roman Catholic Church from within, rather than separate from it. The benefits of staying together as one outweighed separating. More recently, in 2009, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) continued one of Lutheranism's founding principles by changing the system, allowing

partnered gay clergy to serve openly but not require any congregation to call a pastor they didn't want to call. This change was not easy and incurred significant debate.

Ultimately, the rules needed to be

could not serve as a rostered leader unless they were celibate. This policy created a second-class status for gays and encouraged disloyalty within church leadership for those who were partnered. The church

I urge the Boy Scouts of America board members to evolve their understanding on what it means to be loyal yet obedient



changed because the policies were unfair. Qualified leaders, the future talent of the church, were being driven away based solely on sexual orientation or gender identity. It is important to note that before 2009, the ELCA had a policy of allowing openly gay members in churches, but they

learned they had to be open and affirming to all, without exceptions, to truly be loyal to one another. In effect the church had to be obedient and change the unfair policy to allow for congregations to make up their own minds at the local level. Consequently, over the past three years, the ELCA has attracted members who would have never considered joining the Lutheran church.

I urge the Boy Scouts of America board members to evolve their understanding on what it means to be loyal yet obedient. Not only should gay Scouts be allowed, but also Scoutmasters, parents and families of all configurations. If a policy of "local option" is chosen, I will watch with anticipation as the Boy Scouts of America will undoubtedly grow as an organization. We will be greater by staying together and help instill the values of Scouting to the next generation. My nephew is waiting. ■

Kurt Neumann serves as the Operations Manager for ReconcilingWorks and lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

From the Co-Chair

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addresses for all can be found in this issue of the *Concord* or online at ReconcilingWorks.org.

I would be remiss if I did not also thank Kathy Shattuck, who was an RC for many years and who just recently retired. I want to also thank so many of the past RCs who are not named in this article. It has been your efforts through the years that have made ReconcilingWorks an internationally respected organization that is changing the church. ■

International Program Committee (IPC) Updates

Building Chapter and Personal Awareness

Last issue we suggested that chapters consider how they could build a greater awareness of international issues. Chapter members can do this individually or in a chapter context. Here are some ideas:

- Become better informed, reading more on international issues in general and articles on social and economic development.
- Add to your news-consumption diet something like a BBC newscast, or read more in-depth periodicals with a wider, international outlook like the *Economist*.
- Stay informed about what your church is doing internationally by reading its national magazine (*The Lutheran* in the ELCA).
- Visit the websites of the World Bank and other specialized agencies of the United Nations, plus the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) and the European Forum. Check out the sites of such groups as the Lutheran World Federation and Lutheran World Relief.
- Look for the intersection of oppressions—how LGBT issues need to be addressed within the context of other social issues at the local level, including health, education, gender, poverty, children, and youth.
- Attend activities organized within your synod on international issues.
- Learn about your overseas companion synods.
- Attend the summer retreats offered by ELCA Global Mission.
- Organize a chapter or congregational study group on international development and relations.
- Invite a speaker on international development to make a presentation at a chapter event.
- Contact the IPC for assistance with any of the above.

Legislation

Concerns continue in Africa, especially Uganda and Nigeria on pending legislation. The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) remains the best source for tracking developments. It is hard to know what will happen to LGBT advocates in the face of stricter laws. There is every reason to be concerned. Leaving one's country for asylum is the ultimate disruption for an individual and family.

Strategic Direction

In the last issue we mentioned the work done by ReconcilingWorks' International Programs Committee in considering a strategic direction. We have long wanted to build support for the LGBT community in Latin America. With the backing of grant funding, we would like to see a renewed effort to bring Lutherans together in a regional conference to discuss what they want to do. Our role would be one of facilitation, following the concept of accompaniment, which is basic to all the IPC would do.

It is interesting to note that there are growing indications of local interest in LGBT support in the Lutheran communion in Latin America. Having such a conference would enable exploring this development and advising the local churches from our experience. A coalition of civil society organizations in opposition to the relatively recent *coup d'etat* in Honduras has included LGBT groups as well as support from the Lutheran Church in Honduras. The IPC is seeking to learn more about changing currents in the local churches in Latin America.

—Philip W. Moeller, PhD., Director of International Programs



Bishop Ann Svenningsen, ELCA Minneapolis Area Synod, stands with faith leaders to speak against Minnesota marriage amendment at press conference.

Faith-Based Organizing for Marriage: Lessons Learned

Regional Directors report from the campaign field

Every presidential election year brings speculation about an October surprise that will suddenly shift the campaign and throw the election. October wasn't the month that brought the surprise this time. Instead it was November 5, 2012, the day of the election itself, when that night most of the results of a contentious election over civil rights and who would lead the country were revealed.

Besides sending Barack Obama, an LGBT advocate, back to the White House for another term, November's election saw four states – Minnesota, Maryland, Maine and Washington – vote in favor of same-gender marriage. In many ways, it was a surprising sweep across the country of fairness and justice for millions of LGBT people.

Having a measure about same-gender marriage on the ballot in four states at once was unprecedented, as was the role of ReconcilingWorks in campaigns on civil matters. Never before had the organization mobilized and engaged in such campaigns at that level before. Churches and religious organizations across the spectrum of denominations and faiths were active on both sides of the debate, sometimes vehemently so.

What was not surprising was that religious organizations like ReconcilingWorks and people of faith had an important role to play in these campaigns. The lessons learned by these

Sharing deeply held convictions about faith and life along with **personal experiences brought about honest and searching conversations.**

groups about the role of the faith community are still being formulated and written about, perhaps to be part of guides for the LGBT community for the next round

ReconcilingWorks staff members (l to r) Emily Eastwood, Brett Bowman, and the Rev. Anita Hill volunteer for phone banking in Minnesota.



of major civil campaigns.

Two staff members who represented ReconcilingWorks in the religious community's campaigns in Minnesota and Washington share their initial thoughts on these lessons here:

Minnesota

Faith communities played a crucial role in organizing progressive voices of people of faith in the state. Connections among Lutheran church members helped foster the deep and thoughtful conversations that were the centerpiece of the defeat of the proposed marriage amendment to Minnesota's constitution.

A Lutheran arm of Minnesotans United for All Families organized Lutherans to have one-on-one conversations with their family and friends regarding support for same-gender marriage. Volunteer teams in congregations mobilized their members. These teams led trainings for the conversations, hosted phone banks, and worked on turnout for events such as the "All Saints Day for All Families" worship five days before the election. On that evening, more than 1,000 participants filled the pews to overflowing in Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church in downtown Minneapolis for an effective and amazing

time of prayer, preaching, and music in order to encourage "No" voters to go to the polls.

ReconcilingWorks staff also worked alongside the faith team of Minnesotans United to bring together a significant body of clergy and religious leaders, who voiced their support for same-gender marriage and encouraged people of faith to vote No on the amendment.

Why was it important to get people of faith, namely Christians, to speak out in support of same-gender marriage? They are people of the story – the Holy Scriptures. The stories from their own lives and from their personal faith journeys in church communities helped to move many voters to a new understanding of the importance – not only politically, but religiously – of



Members of Fullness of God Lutheran Church (Holden Village, Washington) show their support for marriage equality.

voting against an amendment that was meant to exclude.

Those who held conversations were encouraged to listen deeply in a stance of “graceful engagement” and hospitality. One Lutheran who made phone calls for the Vote No campaign spoke in tones of awe about a conversation she had with a woman from a more evangelical congregation. She said although she did not likely move the woman to vote No, it was by far the most respectful listening and sharing of viewpoints and faith she has experienced in her 25 years of life. There is hope in faithful conversations of graceful engagement.

Lutherans in Minnesota found their voices in the process and stepped forward into roles they had previously not envisioned. Sharing deeply held convictions about faith and life along with personal experiences brought about honest and searching conversations. Hundreds of Lutheran and other clergy wrote letters to editors and appeared in very public and secular forums, like the Minnesota State Fair, where the Rev. Ann Svennungson, Bishop of the ELCA Minneapolis Area Synod, spoke at a press conference. In these actions, Lutherans gained visibility with the public in the state and confidence to speak out on important issues.

—The Rev. Anita Hill, who directs the work of ReconcilingWorks in Minnesota and the Dakotas

Washington

The biggest lesson learned is related to the supportive tension that exists between movements and campaigns. Denominational welcoming groups have been working to open doors and hearts

toward people of all sexual orientations and gender identities for decades, primarily by nurturing long-term relationships within which the sharing of stories and personal experiences – alongside the study of scripture, social sciences, and related disciplines – transform opinions and change minds.

This kind of work has helped prepare the soil and plant the seeds for the legislative, judicial, and ballot-measure processes that are bringing marriage equality to more and more states each year. Campaigns are more



Members of Central Lutheran Church (Seattle, Washington) participate in faith-based conversational training.

of a harvesting entity: Working with a speed and precision that some find dizzying, campaign workers swiftly organize different supportive segments of local populations to raise money, volunteers, and votes with an eye toward a particular, short-term victory.

Of course, each campaign advances the goals of the movement by broadening the local audiences who hear positive messages about LGBTQIA people, energizing new people to become involved in equality work,

and creating momentum moments around which to rally and from which to move forward. So my advice to supportive people of faith who live in states that are likely to consider marriage equality in the near future is to get ready to shift into high gear!

Reach out to anyone who has ever been involved in the movement and ask them to prepare to spend concentrated time, energy, and money for the duration of the campaign. And don’t forget to continue your financial and prayerful support of the movement-building institutions and groups that have prepared and planted the soil, many of whom are lending staff and resources to campaigns while trying to keep their own budgets and missional directions solvent at the same time. Be generous, be engaged, be graceful, and have fun!

In terms of the role of faith communities in a civil campaign, it’s very clear from phone bank and canvassing statistics that the vast majority of people who oppose marriage equality still cite religious reasons for doing so. Furthermore, there seems to be a strong media bias for over-amplifying religious voices that are opposed to marriage equality while under-amplifying the many religious voices that are supportive and for whom faith is the very source of our support.

And, we know from campaign research that even citizens who don’t consider themselves to be religious nevertheless care a great deal about how religious people and leaders view marriage equality. Voters tend to weight the opinions of clergy and lay people of faith more heavily than other

continued on next page



Members of Gethsemane and Immanuel Lutheran churches (Seattle, Washington) show their support for marriage equality.

perspectives. These factors clarify how very important it is for people of faith to be persistently and publicly vocal in our support for marriage equality. The burden of shifting the general perception that all people of faith oppose marriage equality is ours, and when we work to do so we are not only supporting positive civic change, but we are oftentimes also redeeming the church in the eyes of people who had given up on Christianity as an intolerant faith.

In Washington, supportive people of faith were extremely effective on phone bank and canvassing shifts because we are able to respond quite naturally to

of faith to meet others where they were, to share in any questions or doubts, and to journey together toward new conclusions or encourage renewed involvement in support of marriage equality.

Finally, in Washington there were many strong leaders of faith who appeared in television advertising spots, collaborated on letters to the editor, and spoke out publicly in a variety of other ways. The bishop of the ELCA Northwest Washington Synod, the Rev. Wm. Chris Boerger, testified before Senate and House committees during the legislative process that led to the initial passage of marriage equality, and he, along

a congregation has already done the work of becoming RIC, and if they have also previously participated in advocacy on missional issues (homelessness, poverty, environmental stewardship, etc.), then it feels more able to act in the timeframe of a campaign.

I found that many were motivated to act when I helped them understand just how important faith voices are on this issue to the general public – people want to know what we think, and they care about our perspectives. Our voices figure into their decisions about how to vote, perhaps more than the voices of any other segment of the population. When public attention is turned so keenly toward a mission-central issue like faithful relationships, we ought to be excited to enter the discourse in ways that reflect God’s love.

Many Lutherans I spoke with throughout the campaign were truly excited that marriage is being raised up in these campaigns as an important and relevant covenant that deserves our attention and support, and they wanted to be a part of the conversation. Others were very concerned about religious freedom, noting that even if they were not ready to host marriages in their churches, they should empower the state to allow other religions that are ready for the opportunity to do so. Equality under the law, with strong protection for faith communities that disagreed, was another important motivating factor.

—Kari Lipke, who directs the work of ReconcilingWorks in Washington and several other Western states

Even citizens who don’t consider themselves to be religious nevertheless care a great deal about how religious people and leaders view marriage equality.

reservations about marriage equality that are grounded in biblical or religious-traditional perspectives. We are able to genuinely connect with others around our shared love of Scripture and tradition, while at the same time we respectfully model different conclusions that encourage our sisters and brothers to support civil marriage equality as a matter of religious freedom and equality under the law.

Another arena in which supportive people of faith shone was in having marriage-equality conversations with neighbors, family members, friends, colleagues, other church members, cashiers, baristas, and anyone else they knew. Graceful engagement, rooted in hospitality and care for the conversation partner, allowed people

with many local pastors and lay leaders, continued to be a strong ally throughout the campaign. Fifteen ELCA congregations, four additional ELCA settings, and a host of ELCA clergy publicly endorsed marriage equality through the Washington United for Marriage Campaign, contributing to a strong faith coalition that challenged the idea that communities of faith are a monolithic block of opposition.

Congregations that are already RIC and for whom advocacy has traditionally been important found it easiest to mobilize for marriage equality in helpful ways. That’s because the short time frame of a campaign doesn’t match up well with our polity – we typically take a great deal of time to make decisions around public action. However, if

Called to Be Regional Coordinator

Creating a culture where churches can say “All are welcome”

BY RENÉ M. GARCÍA, JR.

The more I journey with members of the congregations and the synods of my region, the more I realize that God has called and continues to call me to be a Regional Coordinator. I have always been gifted with the power of listening, and I suppose that I give off an aura that causes people to start pouring out their life stories: The moms and dads who are speechless with happiness when learning of a congregation that would accept their gay son.

The mom who was in tears because her former congregation left the ELCA and made it clear that her lesbian daughter would never be welcomed and affirmed there as a child of God. The family that was

stories. Stories of pain, mourning, shame, hope, joy, and assurance. Hearing and sharing these stories of perseverance is what we are all called to do. We must tell the story of God’s unconditional love for all of

In the span of twelve months, I was blessed to be able to present the RIC Certificate to four congregations in Missouri and Texas.



called a “product of Satan” directly from the pulpit. The teen who was literally dragged into a house for a “deliverance” and beating in the hope that the homosexuality would be pounded out of her. The woman who after 27 years has returned to church thanks to the work of ReconcilingWorks. This is ministry! This is proof that reconciling works!

This is what it is all about. This is the bottom line. In this post-policy change world, this is the work of turning policy into practice. Such a transformation starts with

Your Congregation is Reconciling in Christ—Now What?

RIC congregations and organizations frequently ask for suggestions regarding ways they can expand their ministry of reconciliation and faithfully carry out their welcome. To respond to that need, we have produced a new, updated version of “Your Congregation is Reconciling in Christ—Now What?” This document is designed to assist RIC ministries in living out their welcome to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. The document includes ideas that come from the varied experiences of Lutheran RIC congregations, organizations, colleges, and RIC synods across the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCiC). It is available at www.ReconcilingWorks.org/resources/downloadable-resources.

creation. We need to create a culture where churches can say, “All are welcome” and there will not be any footnotes listing the outcasts. “All are welcome” will mean exactly that!

In the span of twelve months, I was blessed to be able to present the RIC Certificate to four congregations in Missouri and Texas. The three certificates presented in Texas were not located in the typical urban settings where there is often a higher “tolerance” for LGBT people. No, these certificates were presented to mission starts: congregations formed by people who refused to permit second-class citizenship in what they knew as “church.” These three congregations came to life as a result of the “original” congregations leaving the ELCA after policy change. Talk about pioneers! Talk about guts! Over 95 percent of the people of these three congregations are straight allies. One didn’t even have any active members who identified as LGBT, but they wanted it to be clear that neither sexual orientation nor gender identity made any difference—all are welcome.

Talk about a glimpse of heaven! Coming from a small community in South Central Texas, I know the reality of life and how people who are different are immediately noticed and typically not made to feel

welcome. These three congregations located in Boerne, Giddings, and Seguin, Texas, are doing wonderful things to break that stereotype.

During my presentation in Seguin, I found myself in a surreal place. This particular congregation celebrated All Saints Day at an outdoor pavilion located in the country where in the distance you could see the cattle grazing. In my introduction I talked about how I was raised 75 miles southeast of that location and how I felt that I had come home. I profusely offered thanks for the new things this congregation was doing and mentioned what a blessing it would have been twenty years earlier when I was at Texas Lutheran University to know that a community of faith would have been there to welcome me with open arms. And to offer some much-needed comic relief, I also mentioned that in my wildest dreams I would have never imagined myself discussing being gay in front of so many people wearing cowboy boots! ■

René M. García, Jr., serves as the ReconcilingWorks Regional Coordinator for ELCA Region 4 and lives in Houston, Texas.

RIC Corner

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been asked to participate in a proposed forum at their synod assembly in May explaining why RIC is still important after the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly vote.

A measure of the satisfaction in the congregation came at the January 2013 annual meeting, when the congregation voted to have an intern for the fourth year, despite the financial burden. Gibson asked the council to give special consideration to LGBT candidates, and they have agreed to do so. ■

Longtime ReconcilingWorks Supporter Wins Award

Activist Lutheran in Texas receives Human Rights Campaign award for advocacy work

Just a week before change swept across the country in historic elections last November, Dan Graney, a longtime community activist and ReconcilingWorks member, received the Chuck Jordan Award for lifetime advocacy from the San Antonio Chapter of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC). Once a pastor in the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC), a predecessor of the ELCA, he was honored for many years of activism for equality and non-discrimination, including his four-year service as President of the Texas Stonewall Democratic Caucus.

“This award belongs just as much to my beloved spouse, Roberto Flores, as it does to me,” said Graney when he accepted the award at the HRC’s annual gala and silent auction in San Antonio on October 27, 2012. Graney and Flores were partners for 36 years until Flores’ death in 2010 and worked

was a Roman Catholic priest and Dan an intern in training to become a pastor in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. After a private joining ceremony in 1975 and a few years in St. Louis and San Francisco, the couple found themselves back in Texas working with Lutheran churches.



Dan Graney (r) with spouse Roberto Flores.

marriage in Texas. Flores was a field organizer, and Graney worked with clergy and people of faith.

In October 2009, they celebrated 35 years together with a civil marriage ceremony in Vermont. Graney said that he and Flores “wanted to get married to place a capstone on our lifelong commitment to one another and make a ‘statement’ to our home state of Texas that we would not be denied marriage equality.” Less than a year later, Flores died of cancer. “As a widower who also happens to be Lutheran,” Graney mused, “I now look back on our marriage as God’s seal of approval of our many years of love for one another.” For Graney, even after decades of commitment, this brief period of legal marriage was a blessing.

In June 2012, he and other Stonewall Democrats lobbied effectively to have equal marriage placed on the Texas Democratic Party’s official platform.

In the years before Flores died, he and Graney had drifted away from the church. Discovering the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd after losing Flores has helped rekindle Graney’s faith. Good Shepherd is the only RIC congregation in San Antonio. “Belonging to an RIC congregation is important to me because I can proclaim with both pride and joy that my church explicitly welcomes persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities,” said Graney.

Graney and Flores have touched the lives of so many LGBT and allied people in Texas when their faith led them into the public arena to work for justice and equality. ReconcilingWorks congratulates Graney on his award and is proud to have him among the ranks of the organization’s membership and of Lutherans. Graney and Flores have inspired us with their faith and work. ■

My faith in a Christ who stood on the side of the poor and oppressed fueled my passion for politics.



as a team to fight for justice, particularly for the LGBTQ and immigrant communities.

The award is named after a pioneer gay rights activist in San Antonio and Texas who in 1991 helped establish the HRC’s National Board of Governors and served for two years as a National Governor for HRC. The San Antonio HRC Steering Committee established the award after his death in 1997 to be given annually to a deserving member of the community.

When Graney and Flores met in 1974, their lives were steeped in faith: Roberto

In 1979, Graney was elected as an AELC bishop, after which he had to disclose his relationship with Flores. Although he offered to withdraw as bishop and requested a church-wide study on homosexuality, church officials worked to remove him from the roster of ministers. After a protracted battle, his clergy status was terminated in 1983; soon after, the local Roman Catholic bishop revoked Flores’ faculties as priest.

After working in law and counseling, Graney and Flores joined a group of local LGBT activists in 2000 and founded the Stonewall Democrats of Saint Antonio. They served on multiple leaderships levels, were delegates to every state Democratic Convention, and helped register LGBT people to vote. When asked how his faith shaped his work with the Stonewall Democrats, Graney replied, “My faith in a Christ who stood on the side of the poor and oppressed fueled my passion for politics... elections matter when it comes to advancing equality and justice for the poor and marginalized.”

In 2005, the couple participated in the campaign against a constitutional amendment banning same-gender

Here’s how reconciling works in Leavenworth, Washington



Pr. Alex Schmidt (center) led the congregation of Faith Lutheran (Leavenworth, Washington) in a celebration of marriage for Thomas Barnett (left) and Keith Taylor (right) in December 2012.