



Supporting, Educating, Advocating for full inclusion of LGBT persons in the Reformed Church in America

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The Room for All Newsletter

Welcome to our Newsletter

"I've heard of Room for All, but what is it, exactly, that you *do*?"

This new quarterly newsletter is a response to that frequently asked question.

The RfA board of directors welcomes the opportunity to let others know what we're about as an organization of Reformed Church in America members supporting the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons in the RCA.

GIVE US A NAME!

Okay, wordsmiths, we know you're out there. Help us come up with a title for our newsletter. "Catchy" is great, but "capture" is better — something that reflects our signature verse, our ministry, our logo, our

As of this writing, Room for All has a website (www.roomforall.com), a Facebook fan page which can be accessed by anyone on Facebook, as well as member-accessed sites via Facebook and Google groups.

In addition to our expanding electronic presence, we rely on word of mouth and click of mouse. Please spread the word! If you're able, print out a few copies

of this issue and place them in an appropriate location at your church. Or, share the website link in your church newsletter. Email it to your RCA friends and family; snail-mail copies to those who don't email. Whatever it takes, help us close the information gap as we work together for full inclusion!

diversity, our dreams... think about it, and submit your suggestions to:

newsletter@roomforall.com

*Semper Reformata?
Maybe... RFA Today?
Hmm, sounds familiar..*



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"We do this because we are called by God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and following Christ. We do this because our faith compels us."

From Co-President Tom Goodhart

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)

The news of the most recent tragic deaths of young teens who took their own lives after being targets of anti-gay bullying shocks and saddens us. We mourn the loss of these young people and our prayers go out for their loved ones.

In the wake of their deaths, schools and community organizations initiated efforts to combat bullying. The *It Gets Better Project* was started, an online video channel dedicated to sharing the message with young people who are bullied because of their sexual orientation or *perceived* orientation that their lives will improve.

Civic campaigns like this are valuable. ***But where is God in all this? And where is God's church?***

Understanding God in Christ, we are convinced that God is with every young person who is bullied and abused, that God's heart breaks when God's children are so filled with

despair and hopelessness that they would take their own lives. Further, we believe God mourns when the response of the church called to be "Christ's very presence and body in a lost and broken world" is to stand idly by (therefore implicitly condoning such abuse) or, at worst, joins in practicing hate and rejection.

This is why Room for All exists: "to support, educate and advocate for the full participation of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) persons in all aspects of the life and ministry of the Reformed Church in America as compelled by the inclusive love of God revealed to us by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (RfA mission statement).

We do this *not* as part of a culture war, or as adapting to societal trends, nor as being conformed by some social or political agenda. We do this because we are called by God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and following Christ. We do this because our faith compels us. We do this because we believe it gets better, that God is making it better, and even, that God invites us to participate in making it better.



And we're not alone in this. There are many people in our pews who, perhaps in feeling the movement of the Holy Spirit, sense that the church has been too quiet in advocating for all God's children. They are saddened by the results of a religion that is too often complicit in the bullying. Persons like these in congregations across our denomination are lifting their voices, asking the hard questions, and seeking to discern what is the will of God as their churches are being transformed.

Room for All invites you to join in that movement of getting better, of making room for all. What that means for you may look different depending on your particular congregation and locale. Maybe it means officially, publicly, becoming a congregation that truly welcomes all. Maybe it means merely starting the conversation, a small group or Bible study, or even something as simple and profound as sharing your story with someone at coffee fellowship. Whatever the next step is for you, Room for

From the Co-President, continued...

All wants to make itself available to assist you. Check us out at www.roomforall.com or on Facebook.

And finally, if you know someone or are someone who needs to hear and know that it does get better, it does! You are not alone.

God is here for you. We are here for you. Please, reach out to us. We have pastors and Room for All folks around the country who will be available to let you know it gets better.

In Christ's Grace and Peace,

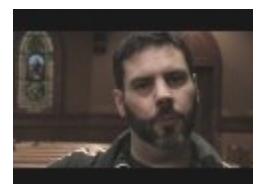
Thomas C. Goodhart

**Church to Church:**

Two Collegiate Churches Participate in the "It Gets Better" Campaign

Journalist Dan Savage asked folks to help gay teens imagine what life could be like after high school, after bullying - if they stuck around long enough to find out that *It Gets Better*.

Both Middle and Marble Collegiate churches, RCA congregations in Manhattan, taped video offerings for the campaign. You can view Middle's video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxoPeJUe-Ic>. Marble's clip is accessible at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55VXI5hZY&feature=share>



FROM TREASURER ROB WILLIAMS
"Mustard Seed Faith"

As an old English proverb has it, "From little acorns, mighty oaks grow." But even better, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you will move mountains." - Jesus!

I am in awe of all that God has accomplished with the acorns and mustard seeds of faith that launched Room for All. What began in grief has become a vital community dedicated to the transformation of the RCA; namely, that there might be room for all LGBT Christians in the life and ministry of our church!

At the end of last year, I wrote to you celebrating

the incredible experience we had in Grand Rapids at our first national conference, "Making Room for All." It exceeded all our expectations! If you were there, you know. If you weren't, you should read some of the reflections written about it on our website (<http://roomforall.com/national-conference/>).

I ended last year's appeal with the hope that Room for All might be ready for its next big step: to hire our first staff person. I asked for your prayers and your gifts that this might happen, and we received many expressions of encouragement and gifts of financial support. We believed God, and we believed you, and

we moved forward. Counseled by our mentors, we were convinced in our hearts that if our movement is to grow and our mission accomplished, we needed to take this next step.

Unless you are brand new to the Room for All communications lists, you know the story of our seeking and of our finding. Marilyn Paarlberg left her job to become the first Room for All National Coordinator, and we are thrilled. In the few short weeks that she has been on the job, she has already made an extraordinary difference in our ministry. She has enabled Room

From the Treasurer, continued...

for All to respond immediately to the spate of suicides by LGBT youth, she has spearheaded communications with our RCA colleges and seminaries around issues of bullying and of community safety. She has begun making presentations to regional synods, classes, and churches. She is hard at work coordinating our plans for two training events this spring, one in the Holland/Grand Rapids area and one in the Albany/Schenectady area. She has launched this newsletter!

I can't begin to tell you (maybe I don't need to) the difference it makes having someone devote full time to choreographing all that we can accomplish together.

God has blessed the work of Room for All over these past five years in unimaginable ways; and now God has blessed us with Marilyn. It remains for us to trust God for the funding needed to build on this momentum.

As before, I am asking for your help. **We need your support and, where possible, we need the support of your church.** We now have six congregations that are sending financial support, some in the form of full or partial mission shares. This is a list we want to grow; it will reflect the growth of the movement within the RCA. With each new church added to the list, others will be encouraged to take that step as well.

Please, explore with your church its readiness to give support to Room for All; and make a personal gift yourself. Your gift of \$1000, \$250, \$50, or any amount will help make more room in the RCA for all God's children.

You may make your tax deductible gift through the donation button on our website,

www.roomforall.org, or by sending your check to:

Room for All
26 Railroad Avenue, #341
Babylon, NY 11702

STOCK TRANSFERS ARE ALSO POSSIBLE; PLEASE CONTACT US FOR DETAILS!

"What began in grief has become a vital community dedicated to the transformation of the RCA."

2011 REGIONAL TRAINING EVENTS SET!

THANKS TO A GRANT FROM THE DAVID and CAROL MYERS FOUNDATION, Room for All is excited to offer two regional opportunities for pastors and church leaders who want to make their congregations more welcoming and affirming of LGBT persons.

These workshops will be led by Rev. Vicki Wunsch from the Institute for Welcoming Resources. Those who attended the "Making Room for All" conference in Grand Rapids will remember Vicki as one of the trainers at that event. Her presentations are lively, personal, and practical.

The details for these events will be publicized in the coming weeks—continue to check our website, www.roomforall.com.

EASTERN EVENT—Albany/Schenectady NY area: Thurs.— Sat., March 3-5, 2011

MIDWEST EVENT—Holland, Michigan: Thurs.— Sat., April 28–30, 2011



Rev. Vicki Wunsch will lead the Spring Training Events.

For sample information about IWR training events, go to: www.welcomingresources.org and click on "Community Organizing"

REGIONAL GROUPS ACT IN SOLIDARITY

More Than Ready



Room for All supporters in the “Holland is Ready” and “Hope is Ready” groups have been involved in an exciting project in Holland, MI this fall. The Holland classis (RCA) initiated an overture to the city’s Human Relations Commission to press for a clause in a city ordinance barring discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Supporters

gathered in Holland’s Centennial Park to show the city their approval of the ordinance. Many attended and spoke at the subsequent meeting of the Commission, which passed the ordinance unanimously. The measure now goes to the Holland City Council for a vote.

RfA’s Karis Granberg-Michaelson describes her feelings at the experience: “When I think about the recent Hope is Ready/

Holland is Ready GR Press photo opportunity where over 300 people gathered on a Saturday morning to send a pro-LGBT message in Holland, MI, I feel the ecstatic “Yes!” of God’s welcome fill the air. “



To read media coverage of the initiative, go to <http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2010/10/>

NY Capital District Group Steps Out

The Albany/Schenectady regional RfA group took their commitment to the next level last June when they designed a professionally-produced banner and walked in Albany’s Pride Parade.

Kim Reohr (First, Albany) commented on the visible joy and public affection in the event, while First, Schenectady’s Gay Doolittle recalls, “I was a little apprehensive. We were told there would be hecklers, and there were. But supporters, cheering us on, far outnumbered them. Everyone was welcom-

ing and joyful at the opportunity to support a cause in which we all believe.”

Miranda Rand posted the pictures of the RfA participants on her Facebook page. “I got lots of thumbs up,” she remembers,

“especially from the youth group of the church where I work” (Lynnwood, Schenectady).

First, Albany’s Hennie Kohut summed it up: “The Gay Pride parade gave me Church Pride. “



Church to Church:

Gay Teen Support Group at Greenpoint Reformed featured in NY Post

Co-pastored by Ann Kansfield and Jennifer Aull, Brooklyn’s Greenpoint Church has launched a group for LGBT teens called “Somewhere.”

“Somewhere” is a safe place – a sanctuary – where LGBTQ youth can come and recharge spiritually, learn about God’s love for them, and make friends with like-minded youth who are striving to seek after God, in spite of being told by some that they are not worthy of that privilege. “

You’ll find the Post interview with Ann Kansfield at http://www.nypost.com/p/news/local/brooklyn/believe_it_god_loves_gays_pastor_e2BHIPD5gbHez9NeZ4bT3K



From RfA Coordinator Marilyn Paarlberg

“Pride and Pain”

An elderly woman told me that she and her husband had not “dared” to have a funeral service in their RCA church for their gay son who died from AIDS. They buried him privately without telling anyone. When I suggested ten years later that a memorial service might bring closure, she still felt she could not take the risk.

A teenager active in an RCA youth group I mentored stopped coming despite my attempts to understand why. A young adult now, he explained recently that church “just got too hard” after his parents told him not to tell anyone that he was gay.

“I Wish Your Wish”

At the church of Nosso Senhor do Bonfim in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, the faithful tie silk ribbons to their wrists and to the gates of the church, and, according to tradition, their wishes are granted when the ribbons wear away and fall off. For Rivane Neuenschwander’s September installation, *I Wish Your Wish*, at Manhattan’s New Museum of Contempo-

rary Art, hundreds of ribbons were printed with wishes submitted by previous visitors and hung from the gallery walls. Arriving visitors were invited to remove a ribbon, tie it to their wrist, and replace it with a new wish written on slip of paper, continuing the project that keeps generating new ribbons and dreams.

These stories aren’t unique to the RCA, of course, but this denomination has been my context all my life, and so I hear them differently. Personally. Loyalty carries the potential for both pride and pain.

But the good news is that not all the stories are painful. I’m proud to tell you that some are stories of hope. Those of us who attended the “Making Room for All” conference in Grand Rapids last year certain-

ly absorbed harsh testimonies. But we also heard about RCA pastors and parishioners who nurture welcoming and affirming congregations in which all may worship and serve openly, including the LGBT sisters and brothers in their midst. Such churches have been intentional about fostering loving and respectful dialogue surrounding LGBT inclusion, so that all voices are heard, all questions welcomed.

That, it seems to me, represents the RCA at its best. It is the work to which Room for All is committed, and which I am now privileged to facilitate as coordinator. I give thanks for this opportunity, and welcome your prayers, your suggestions, and your stories.

This is the ribbon that I removed when I visited the exhibit an hour before what would be my first Room for All board meeting, and which has now fallen from my wrist.

I pray for that son, and for that conversation in every family waiting to have it.

Marilyn Paarlberg

I WISH I COULD TELL MY PARENTS I AM GAY



"...if these hurt and alienated people could offer gifts of healing for the church, then perhaps the church could see this witness of Christ-like compassion and give the same in response. "

SHARE YOUR STORY!

Do have a personal story to share?

What's your regional group doing? Is your congregation working toward greater inclusion? Email us!

**newsletter@
roomforall.com.**

MEMBER TO MEMBER: Personal Stories

"Celebrating for Diversity" by Robert David Sweeney

As I contemplated the approach of my fortieth birthday this past summer, I was torn between throwing a big celebration or not drawing any attention to this major milestone — after all, I don't look 40 and most of the time I try not to act older than 14!

But struck by the idea that this birthday could be used to serve God, I decided to invite a diverse group of friends for a night of frivolity, asking them to donate to ROOM FOR ALL. Once the idea came to me that my birthday party should be a reflection of my life — which is based on giving to others and service to my community — it all fit together flawlessly. Doing some good for the mission of equality within the RCA by generating donations for Room For All made the vain worry of growing old quickly fade away.

Feeling quite confident in this festive plan, I sat down to write some invitations. But as the stack gradually grew, a sharp realization hit me and tears ran down my face. The very thought that I needed to ask for donations to make the

church a welcoming and affirming place gave me such heartfelt pain it was nearly unbearable!

Give to feed the hungry, donate to clothe the poor, contribute to provide medical care or help to secure clean drinking water — all these solicitations seem to proclaim the good works of the church and its willingness to help others. But the fact I needed to ask my friends, who had often been turned out from the church because of their sexual orientation, to give money to make the church a welcoming and affirming place for all was indeed a sad and painful awakening.

I quickly resolved that it was out of this very brokenness that I needed to encourage friends to give; if these hurt and alienated people could offer gifts of healing for the church, then perhaps the church could see this witness of Christ-like compassion and give the same in response.

After the invitations went out I wondered what my friends would think of my choice of charity. Would I be criticized for being a member of a discriminatory church? By show-

ing my love and hope for the church's future, would I be pushing myself to the outside of a group already on the fringe?


My worries were unfounded. The long-awaited birthday arrived and so did many guests with contributions for Room for All. Best of all, some shared their stories of faith and one friend has even returned to worship each Sunday. In being faithful to God and seeking new ways to serve God's people I have indeed received a most wonderful birthday gift.

I encourage everyone to invite your friends to donate to Room for All in lieu of gifts on your next celebratory occasion. After all, who needs a new tie, another shirt, or a pair of socks when instead you could bring people home to God and aid the RCA in becoming the church we are called to be: one that recognizes all of God's children and welcomes them as they are sent to us.

*Rob Sweeney is a member of
Old Dutch Reformed Church in
Kingston, New York.*

THE ROOM FOR ALL BULLETIN BOARD

Fall 2010



SEPTEMBER: ROOM FOR ALL BEGAN A NEW CHAPTER WITH A FULL-TIME STAFF PERSON!

ROOM FOR ALL SIGNED ON TO A LETTER FROM NATIONAL CHURCH LEADERS, HEADS OF COMMUNITIES AND OTHERS URGING FAITH COMMUNITIES TO SPEAK OUT AGAINST ANTI-GAY BULLYING. Go to <http://ufmcc.com/ministries/global-justice/special-clergy-against-bullying-cab/>

RfA Coordinator Marilyn Paarlberg addressed the fall meeting of the Schenectady (NY) classis and facilitated small groups at the Regional Synod of New York gathering. Contact her to invite a Board member to come and talk about Room for All at your church or classis meeting: (201) 364-4538.

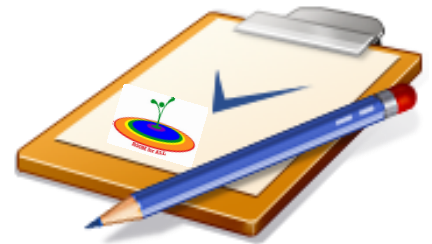
OCTOBER:
ROOM FOR ALL SENT A LETTER TO THE BOARDS OF DIRECTORS OF OUR RCA COLLEGES & SEMINARIES OFFERING OUR PRAYERS AND OUR PLEA FOR LGBT-INCLUSIVE CAMPUSES. See the full text on our website.

AN ARTICLE ABOUT ROOM FOR ALL APPEARED IN "ONE TABLE," THE (NEW YORK) CAPITAL REGION ECUMENICAL ORGANIZATION NEWSLETTER—http://www.albanypresbytery.org/CREO/Autumn%202010_2.pdf

ROOM FOR ALL SENT A LETTER TO THE RCA GENERAL SECRETARY SEARCH TEAM INVITING THEM TO SEEK A CANDIDATE WHO WILL, BY WORD AND EXAMPLE, FOSTER CONTINUING DIALOGUE IN THE RCA REGARDING HOMOSEXUALITY AND LGBT INCLUSION; WHO WILL "IN INTEGRITY AND HUMILITY TURN TO PRAYER, TO SCRIPTURE, TO THE HISTORY OF OUR DENOMINATION'S WRESTLING WITH SOCIAL ISSUES, AND TO THE WISE COUNSEL OF THOSE THROUGH WHOM CHRIST'S VOICE SPEAKS TODAY."

FALL 2010

ROOM FOR ALL CHECK-LIST:



We've invited your response in a number of ways throughout this first issue of our newsletter. Please consider joining this ministry as you are able:

- ☐ Submit a name for our newsletter.
- ☐ Help us share the newsletter electronically & in print.
- ☐ Consider a 2010 financial donation and invite others to do so.
- ☐ Mark your calendar for the spring 2011 regional training event nearest you.
- ☐ Share stories about what you, your church, or your RfA regional group are doing to help build this movement for LGBT inclusion.
- ☐ Foster dialogue about homosexuality in your church.
- ☐ Share a resource that may be helpful in the work of inclusion.
- ☐ Invite a Room for All board member to speak at your church, your classis, your regional synod.
- ☐ Pray for the LGBT youth and adults in RCA churches and campuses.
- ☐ Pray for the work of Room for All.

THANK YOU!



ROOM FOR ALL

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**DON'T MISS THIS OPPORTUNITY - TWO
REGIONAL TRAINING EVENTS HAVE BEEN
SCHEDULED FOR SPRING, 2011 TO HELP YOUR
CONGREGATION TO BECOME INTENTIONAL ABOUT
WELCOMING LGBT MEMBERS. SEE PAGE 4 FOR
PRELIMINARIES, AND WATCH OUR WEBSITE AND
FACEBOOK PAGE FOR EMERGING DETAILS!**

