

*Supporting, Educating,
Advocating ...*

*for full inclusion of LGBT
persons in the Reformed
Church in America*

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The RfA Newsletter

NATIONAL CONFERENCE A "HOMECOMING" FOR MANY



Most of this issue will be devoted to unpacking ... although by now, the 150+

people who attended part or all of "Making Room for All 2011" have returned home and put their luggage away. Some tell us they've been able to get rid of some extra "baggage" as a result of their experience at the conference: negative impressions of the church, lack of hope for change, judgment about those who think differently. Others report having taken something home that they didn't come with: a fresh perspective, new friendships, renewed appreciation for the RCA, greater commitment to working for LGBT inclusion, even deeper faith in God.

Reading through the evaluations, we can't help but notice the repetition of the word "home" and all its rich connotations: trust, welcome, nurture, celebration, affirmation, comfort, belonging, and blessing. In their truest sense, those are deeply theological words. (And although we couldn't have planned it, coming home also emerges as a poignant theme in our interview on page 7.)

We'll share more quotes throughout this issue, but thanks be to God, this one belongs on the front page:

"I never knew that it was possible to watch healing happen. It was tangible, like a presence moving around the room."

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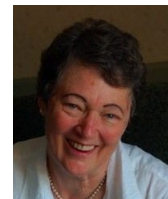
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"Nothing prepares us as parents or congregations for the child's future, except the certainty that through God's covenant of grace, our baptized child is safe in God's faithfulness."

FROM THE BOARD:

"LOVING OUR BAPTIZED CHILDREN" by Mary Kansfield



Making and keeping promises has always been important to me.

When our children were baptized, I, along with my husband, promised "to instruct our children in the truth of God's word, in the way of salvation through Jesus Christ; to pray for our child; to teach our child to pray; and to train our child in Christ's way by our example, through worship, and in the nurture of the church."

Local congregations, and the RCA as a denomination, make similar covenants with God and the child in baptism. Congregations promise "to love, encourage, and support these brothers and sisters by teaching the gospel of God's love, by being an example of Christian faith and character, and by giving the strong support of God's family in fellowship, prayer and service."

These promises were made at our daughter Ann's baptism shortly after her birth in 1975. Nothing prepares us as parents or congregations for the child's future, except the certainty that through God's covenant of grace, our baptized child is safe in God's faithfulness.

Both my own promises, and the promises of others, became challenged when our daughter Ann shared with me what she had learned about her sexuality—that she is gay. Nothing that she shared challenged my unconditional love of our daughter. But my own need to grow was clear.

With Ann's help, I plunged into a reading program and initiated conversations with other parents of gay children. Through this process I learned significant truths about myself, about the pained existence LGBTQ persons are forced

to live, and about the general reluctance of the church to be part of God's grace to them. My own personal growth was affirmed when one night at dinner my family honored me with "the most improved player" award.

As I worked to grow and to keep the promises I made at Ann's baptism, my greatest fear for Ann related to how the church would respond to her. Would church members keep their promises to this baptized child? Would the RCA seek to grow in its commitment not only to love our baptized gay child unconditionally, but to accept her, and to like her, and genuinely to enjoy her?

These questions are not totally answered. My prayer for the parents of other baptized children, and for all RCA congregations, is that one day they, too, will be in line for "the most improved player award."

With Gratitude....

Mary Kansfield is a founding member of Room for All, along with Rev. Rob Williams and Rev. Ken Walsh. All three have now served on the RfA board for two consecutive three-year terms and will, in accordance with our bylaws, step down at the close of 2011. (Board members whose terms of service have expired are eligible to serve additional terms after one year.) The Board is deeply grateful to these three friends, whose service and commitment to the mission of Room for All has been invaluable and unwavering.



AND MAKE ROOM WE DID!

Registrations continued to roll in right up until the first day of the conference, and folks who hadn't registered came and went as they were able. Thanks to generous grants from the Myers Foundation and the Carpenter Foundation, we were able to offer travel help to those who needed it. This meant that supporters from across the denomination were able to hear perspectives and stories based in other regional and cultural contexts. As one person from New York said, *"I can't imagine where else I would have the opportunity to sit down with someone from Minnesota to talk about LGBT inclusion in the RCA. Thank you."*

From the RfA board of directors, WE THANK YOU! Thanks to everyone who came and offered your stories, your gifts, your questions, your ideas.

Special thanks to Rev. Louis Lotz and his staff at Central Reformed Church, who should write a book on what hospitality looks like! Central member and volunteer chef Paul Bukaweski and his



MAKING ROOM FOR ALL: 2011 ~ at Central Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan

helpers, Church Administrator Dan Erickson, Minister of Music Brian Bartusch, Facilities Manager George Schmidt and the entire office staff all went above and beyond the contract terms to create a welcoming space in their beautiful facility.

The "flesh and bones" of the conference were carried by an amazing group of speakers, workshop leaders and other presenters. Thank you to our conference preachers Rev. Sophie Mathonnet-VanderWell and Rev. Thomas Goodhart for inviting us to



think about two very familiar texts in new ways. Citing the familiar phrase in Psalm 23, Sophie invited us to consider the possibility that feasting at a table "in the presence of my

enemies" might connote being *together at the same table* with the "other" - the one who doesn't share our perspective, who opposes our advocacy, even causes us harm. Her message was a provocative, grace-filled way to begin our time together.

At the closing worship, Tom offered I Peter 4:10 to remind us that *all* are uniquely created and abundantly gifted by



You Said...

"I grew up in the RCA... It was a 'coming home' to participate in the closing worship service and realize there are still some wonderful people in this denomination. I was also deeply saddened at the same time to fully understand the struggles of these same wonderful people who are still, in 2011, not welcomed in this faith."

"What a great way to be the church...The church can, should, and someday will do better at reflecting and living in God's amazing, abundant grace. This was a wonderful taste of that."

"I was deeply moved by Sophie's sermon, which I think captured the developing spirit in Room for All in beautiful ways."

"[The plenary session on] Friday night was absolutely phenomenal. I was so energized by Rev. Shari Brink's keynote address."

"The closing service was one of the most moving services I have participated in many years."

You Said...

[Rob Bauer] asked us to close our eyes and imagine how different our lives would be if the RCA had always been welcoming and affirming.... I hope the young LGBT people will experience in the near future what I could only imagine through this exercise."

["Alienation and Refuge"] was one of the most intense things I've ever experienced... Connection happened. I hugged a lesbian woman after she cried, and it was such a healing moment. It was like I was a piece of her history, the church that had hurt her, but I wasn't hurting her. It was a piece of reconciliation and it was beautiful."

"Dr. Kansfield's talk helped me so much in my own journey...I feel validated that I, too, can be a person of faith despite my sexual orientation. It was the most comfortable I've felt around church people in a very long time. This is HUGE!"

"If only every preacher, in every church in every state could attend [David Myers'] workshop! A superb presentation of the facts and research regarding sexual orientation."

Conference recap, continued...

God's grace, and therefore called to be lavish gifts of God to one another. Expressed in a hymn of the Iona Community, Tom summoned us to see ourselves through God's eyes, quell our fears and offer that love to others: "Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around?"

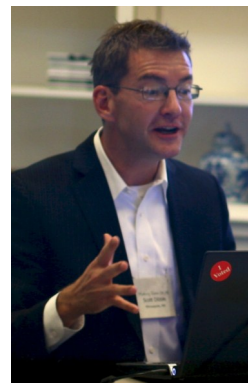


Thank you to keynote speaker Rev. Shari Brink, who did not gloss over the very real pain of living in the "not yet" in terms of full LGBT inclusion, but also helped us to celebrate the tangible signs of a coming new day that are all around us in the "now." Shari challenged us to balance both realities in our daily lives—never losing sight of either, but "living, loving and acting" within that tension.

Thank you to an amazingly gifted and diverse group of workshop leaders: Rob Bauer, LCSW (right) - "Alienation and Refuge;"



Senator Scott Dibble (right), "Organizing for Justice;" Rev. Patty Fox (below) and a member of her youth group, "Coming Out Young and Faithful in the RCA;"



Rev. Dr. Norman Kansfield (below), "An Uncomplicated Theology for Same-Sex Marriage;"



Dr. David Myers (below), "Most are Straight, Some are Gay and Why it is That Way;" and



Rev. Rob Williams (below), who led training in "Story-telling that Invites Change."



Each one of these leaders brought a perspective that enhanced our time together immeasurably!

And more gratitude ...

Thank you to those who comprised our church panel for sharing their congregational stories of milestones on the journey toward inclusion, including pastors and/or members from The Community (Ada, MI), Wyckoff (NJ) Reformed, Greenpoint Reformed (Brooklyn, NY) and Hope Church (Holland, MI).



Many conference participants and visitors expressed profound gratitude for the closing worship, and for Norm and Ann Kansfield, who served as celebrants at Holy Communion.

Thank you to Peter Subers, Lisa Bergman and Kelly Lepley for their courage in telling their personal stories throughout the weekend.

We also thank the West Michigan Gay Men's Choir for inspiring music; members of the Actor's Theater in Grand Rapids for sharing the story of the production of "Seven Passages," and finally, many thanks to photographer Jim Kast-Keat (jimkastkeat.com/photography), whose photos captured this amazing experience and grace these pages. More photos may be found on our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Room-for-All/157206860966317>

"I WANT TO TAKE THIS BACK TO MY CHURCH" was a common thread in the conference evaluations. One way to do that is by encouraging your pastor and consistory to consider signing our affirmations document to become a rostered "Room for All Church."



For some, this will be a natural step from where your church already stands on the matter of LGBT inclusion. Others may receive this invitation as an opportunity to begin a congregation-wide conversation that might take months. That's a good thing! Deciding to become fully and publicly welcoming and affirming should not be taken lightly, but should be entered into sensitively and prayerfully.

Find the roster of churches that have already signed on, as well as the affirmations document itself and suggestions and examples from other RCA congregations and the ecumenical community at the "Welcoming and Affirming" pages on our website. Please call or email us with any questions: info@roomforall.com, or 201-364-4538.

You Said...

"I was so encouraged by [Patty Fox's] workshop that there is a church that actually has an open and affirming youth group. There is hope!"

"I now feel very strongly that it's not enough to be a straight ally in a church that is not open and affirming. I also have a renewed appreciation for the RCA."

"I was with more LGBT people this weekend than I have ever been with in my whole life and it was amazing... The church cannot keep shutting out the LGBT community. We need to bridge that huge gap and bring healing."

"Words cannot express what it meant to me to reconnect with part of the RCA family in this meaningful, authentic and welcoming way. Before the conference, I felt I stood alone among my RCA connections because of this issue. After the conference, I felt as though I was surrounded by the company of angels, welcoming me..."

"We all are part of the Body of Christ. I wish to extend this grace as I leave this conference."

Room for All Receives its First Challenge Grant!

THOSE WHO ATTENDED DR. DAVID MYERS' WORKSHOP AT THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE were shown statistical proof that cultural trends are moving in support of LGBT rights. There are plenty of polls, legislative votes and studies to back that up, along with ever-increasing media attention on the subject of LGBT equality.

But as we know, and Dr. Myers observes, the church moves more slowly on social issues, and the RCA is no exception. While Room for All has seen exciting growth in the last year, the majority of RCA members still know little or nothing about us.

This translates to our base of financial support, as well. We have a relatively small cadre of loyal donors, a couple of dozen churches that fund us through support shares, one-time gifts or grants. At this point, we have received grants from a few national foundations including the David & Carol Myers Foundation, thanks to the Myers' strong roots in the RCA.

The Myers want to help our organization expand our donor base, and have generously challenged us to

do so with a MATCHING FUNDS GRANT:

THE MYERS FOUNDATION HAS OFFERED TO MATCH, DOLLAR FOR DOLLAR, GIFTS FROM NEW DONORS (or significantly increased gifts from prior donors) UP TO \$25K!!!

We have already begun to maximize this generous offer, thanks to new donors at the national conference and two regional group benefit events. The RfA development team will be approaching potential new donors in the coming months, and our website and Facebook page will offer incentives and suggestions for fund-raising at the local level.

WILL YOU JOIN OUR EFFORTS?

There are many needs and worthy ministries in our churches and communities that deserve our support., and there are other LGBT advocacy groups that do important work.

However, Room for All is unique in that we're the only not-for-profit organization whose sole mission is to "support, educate and advocate for the full participation of LGBT persons in all aspects of the life and ministry of the Reformed Church in America, as compelled by the inclusive love of God as revealed in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

The "You Said..." quotes that we've shared in this issue confirm that we're making a difference. But national conferences, regional training events, visits to churches, classis and synod meetings, printed publicity and funding a full-time staff position do not come without cost.

There is one more reason why your support is needed. When we apply for grants, we are asked for the number of individual and church donors. Foundations look for that list to go up—they want to help healthy organizations. So a growing donor base normally helps us in two ways, and thanks to the generosity of the Myers Foundation, your gift will be a triple boost for Room for All. THANK YOU!

Thank you to our faithful donors who have supported this ministry since 2006. Your generosity has enabled us to touch lives and effect change!

New gifts—however small—will qualify for the Myers Funds, along with increased gift levels from previous donors.

You may donate via Pay Pal at our website:

www.roomforall.com

If you prefer to mail checks, please note our address:

**Room for All
P.O. Box 11495
Albany, NY 12211**

Stock transfers are also possible. Please contact us for details.

4 + 1 = 2

WITH THIS 5th
ISSUE OF THE
QUARTERLY
ROOM FOR ALL
NEWSLETTER,
we open our second
volume. You have told
us how much you
appreciate having this
source of news about
our organization and
the progress being
made on the journey
toward full inclusion in
the RCA. Thanks for
the feedback, and for
helping us spread the
word. **PLEASE
FORWARD THIS
ISSUE** to anyone
whom you think
should know about us,
and check our website
for all the back issues:
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rfa-newsletters](http://www.roomforall.com/rfa-newsletters)



EDUCATOR ASKS THE CHURCH:

"LET US COME HOME."

An Interview with Dr. Ray Werking, Jr.

Dr. Ray Werking, Jr. has deep roots in a Reformed church in Upstate New York. His was one of the oldest families in the congregation. He was baptized and confirmed there, taught Sunday School and served as a deacon. "I never knew another church," he says. "Belonging there was ingrained in me; it was my life. It was home."

But from an early age, Ray's church home was also the scene of inner conflict for him. He retains a vivid memory of the Sunday morning he was confirmed with the rest of the 7th graders. "I stood at the front of the church struggling with feelings of attraction for another boy in the class," he recalls, "and telling myself on the day of my confirmation that I was going to hell."

Thankfully, the stronger message that Ray absorbed and applied to himself week after week in worship, the overriding truth that he took deep into his soul, was an unshakeable confidence that he was a child of God. This conviction was so strong that it enabled him to remain at the church as a closeted gay man, living in secret defiance of the attitudes of some of its members.

Ray came out in stages. In high school, he met the boy who would later become his partner of 23 years. All this time, Ray's family never knew he was gay. The only family member he had ever told was killed in an accident.

Ray graduated from college and then earned a Master's Degree. He taught high

school English and then went on to get a PhD., which enabled him to teach at the college level.

During these years, Ray continued to worship regularly at his church until a minister was removed under suspicion of being gay. (The charge was not made, but the rumor was allowed to stand.) Although Ray had never come out to anyone at the church, the removal of his pastor was a defining event for him; no longer able to feel safe there, he left the church with great regret.

Ray went on to serve on the local school board and was much beloved by the community and the student body. He was inducted into the school's "Alumni Hall of Fame," but things changed four years later. Ray advocated on the school board for a paid advisor for the student Gay-Straight Alliance. He felt that in order to speak with authenticity about the importance of this recommendation, he would need to come out before the school board and the community, and did so.

Although the recommendation passed thanks to an obscure case law, Ray's life changed. His home was vandalized and he received death threats. He finished out his term on the board and chose to retire after nine years of service.

Coming out freed Ray to become a public advocate for LGBT youth. He likes to quote Harvey Milk: "You gotta give them hope." Working behind the scenes with the Student Assistance Counselor and Principal, he is called in for suicide interventions as often as three times a week. "I live the struggles of LGBT youth vicariously," he says.

Ray Werking, continued.....

Ray also serves GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network), and hosts a weekly Upstate NY radio program for “A Thousand Moms,” a statewide organization that works with LGBT youth in foster care. He regularly receives letters of gratitude from LGBT youth.

Ray is most proud of his involvement with “Homo Radio,” a 4-hour LGBT-focused Sunday program aired on WRPI, the radio station of Rensselaer-Polytechnic Institute. He has served as director and co-host for seven years. The program has been rated the top college radio show in the country and receives listener comments from around the world. (“Homo Radio” is aired at 91.5 FM and also live at www.wrpi.org).

Asked what he would say to the wider church — and to what he still regards as *his church* — Ray Werking quickly replies, “Look at your LGBT youth.”

Quiet for a moment, he reflects more personally and responds to the question with a plea:

Let us come home. Accept, understand and welcome us back. I want to go home to my church. I still pass and see the light on, but now I'm outside. I might be welcomed at the door, but not embraced for who I am. The church can't just be a doorway to duck into out of the rain. It has to be an umbrella.

Regional Groups Thriving

RfA REGIONAL GROUPS PROVIDE SAFE SPACE, SHARE RESOURCES OR ENGAGE IN STUDY OR PUBLIC ADVOCACY FOR LGBT INCLUSION.

Each group is different, but the opportunity to gather periodically and intentionally with other supporters can be a life-line. If you would like to explore starting a new group in your area, or need ideas or resources for planning a gathering, please let us know how we might help!

At present, our most active regional groups are:

Pella, IA - contact Rich and Mary Glendening: glendeningm@central.edu;
Grand Rapids/Holland MI -contact Jan Koopman or David Van Heest: koopmanjl@hotmail.com, david.heest@att.net;

Northern New Jersey -contact Bob Mutch: rmutch@mutchassociates.com;

Long Island NY -contact Conrad Strauch: conradstrauch@optonline.net;

Mid-Hudson NY—contact Rob Sweeney: gallusguy@msn.com;

Albany/Schenectady NY -contact Marilyn Paarlberg: marilynpaarlberg@gmail.com

LOOKING FOR A RESOURCE TO OPEN THE CONVERSATION IN YOUR AREA?



“Through My Eyes,” produced by and available from the Gay Christian Network (www.gaychristian.net) is a 45-minute look into the lives of dozens of young gay Christians from across the U.S. and Canada. All from

strong faith backgrounds, they discuss their struggle to reconcile their faith and sexuality, their attempts to become straight, and the responses from parents and other Christians. The video is deeply personal, pastoral and hard to forget. Included with the disc is an action guide, *4 Simple Ways to Change Someone's Life*, and a special on-disc discussion version for classes and groups.

Norm Kansfield Honored with Room for All Stole

Rev. Dr. Norman Kansfield was surprised with the gift of a stole at last month's national gathering, honoring his witness which led to the founding of Room for All.

Schenectady artist Gay Doolittle designed and crafted the stole which colorfully depicts hands of support and solidarity extended to Dr. Kansfield.

The stole will be donated in Norm's honor to the Shower of Stoles project (www.welcomingresources.org/sosp).

See our website for the full story!



FALL 2011

ROOM FOR ALL CHECK-LIST:



Please consider joining this ministry as you are able:

- ☐ Help us share the newsletter electronically & in print.
- ☐ Consider a financial donation and invite others to do so—see page 6!!
- ☐ Become a “Room for All” rostered congregation.
- ☐ Share stories about what you, your church, or your RfA regional group are doing to help build this movement for LGBT inclusion.
- ☐ Spend an inspiring hour reading the RfA website, www.roomforall.com
- ☐ “Friend” us on the RfA Facebook page and “Like” us (we like you, too!).
- ☐ Foster dialogue about sexuality in your church.
- ☐ Offer to host a “Building an Inclusive Church” training event at 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 families, churches and campuses.
- ☐ Pray for the work of Room for All.

THANK YOU!



ROOM FOR ALL

P.O. BOX 11495
ALBANY, NY 12211

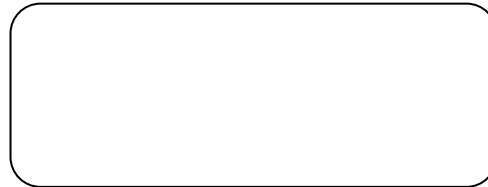
Coordinator: Marilyn Paarlberg
(201) 364-4538

Email: info@roomforall.com

News submissions:
newsletter@roomforall.com

Website: www.roomforall.com

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**THE ROOM for ALL BOARD
AIMS TO OFFER FOUR LOCAL
“BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE CHURCH”
TRAINING EVENTS IN 2012
(including one for seminary students).
WOULD YOU LIKE TO HOST US AT YOUR
CHURCH?**