

*Supporting, Educating,
Advocating ...*

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

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The RfA Newsletter

"MAKING ROOM FOR ALL: 2011"

National Conference Registration Open

The Room for All Board of Directors is pleased to announce the details of our second National Gathering, **"Making Room for All: 2011"** to be held Thursday—Saturday, October 27th—29th, at Central Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Please see the following pages for workshop descriptions, speakers and more. If you have not yet registered, don't delay!

You may go directly to the registration form at <http://www.regonline.com/builder/site/Default.aspx?EventID=957324>, or find it at the RfA website. After you register you will receive a confirmation email with info about travel discounts and other details.

An information packet is also available at our website. The first page of the packet is a stand-alone poster, while the rest contains specifics about workshops and speakers. You can help us spread the word by printing the packet for posting at your church. Thank you!



NEW RfA LOGO Donated by Supporter

MANY THANKS to graphic artist Dave Collins, a deacon at Wyckoff (NJ) Reformed Church, for our new logo design. Dave's design was chosen out of several submissions—thanks to all who shared ideas. If you like Dave's work, his contact is dcollins@dlmedcom.com.

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Registration Questions?

After you complete your online registration, you'll receive an email with lots of details about air-line arrangements, ground transportation and other information. You can also go back into your registration to change your choices. **Still have a question?** (201) 364-4538 or info@roomforall.com

CONFERENCE TO FEATURE KEYNOTE by REV. SHARI BRINK



"Living, Loving and Acting in the Now and Not Yet"

Rev. Shari K. Brink is the Executive Minister of Marble Collegiate Church, one of New York City's most diverse congregations. She provides strategic leadership for Marble's wide range of program ministries, along with pastoral leadership to GIFTS, the church's LGBT fellowship. Prior to her ministry at Marble, Shari was Director of Development for Auburn Seminary. She has also served on the national staff of the RCA as Director of Strategic Planning and Special Assistant to the General Secretary, and as a minister in RCA congregations in New Jersey and Southern California. A native of Iowa, Shari is a graduate of Northwestern College and Fuller Theological Seminary.

CHOOSE FROM SIX WORKSHOP OPPORTUNITIES

In response to feedback from our 2009 national conference, participants at "Making Room for All: 2011" will have the opportunity to choose three of these six offerings:

Uncomplicated Theology for Same-Sex Marriage by Rev. Dr. Norman Kansfield



Those who have steadfastly stood against the full inclusion of LGBTQ persons within the life and witness of the church are our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Those who have insisted that same-sex marriage cannot be allowed within the church seek faithfully to follow Jesus Christ. They also speak and act as if they alone had the witness of Scripture and

theology on their side. In all of these things they are wrong. It is time for us to construct a simple, enduring, and useful theology that clearly shows that the life of our Savior, the Bible, and Reformed theology all understand marriage not on the basis of gender relationship, but on the basis of relationship to Christ, and upon the model of Christ and the church.



Coming Out Young and Faithful in the RCA by Rev. Patricia Fox

In their book "Coming Out Young and Faithful" Leanne Mccall Tigert and Timothy

Brown note that gay and lesbian youth need adults in their lives who can offer spiritual guidance and support. They point out that "Some gay youth live lives surrounded by love and support. Others live in constant fear of rejection and violence. Some are actively involved in their faith communities. Others have left their faith traditions behind." This specific need is what has led the Reformed Church of Highland Park (RCHP) to create a safe space for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) youth to develop community and to contemplate together their questions about life and God. This workshop will cover the history of this ministry and include testimonials from GLBT youth members of the congregation.

National Conference workshops, continued...



Storytelling that Invites Change by Rev. Robert Williams

Everyone loves a good story. This workshop will provide an opportunity to experience the persuasive power of personal stories. Stories engage the mind and the heart, connect people and foster relationships of understanding and empathy. Jesus told stories! Participants will work with a brief, simple, and effective structure for telling their personal stories pertaining to LGBT inclusion in ways that can be transformational for the hearer.

Most are Straight, Some are Gay and Why it is that Way: The Science and Future of Sexual Orientation by Dr. David Myers



David Myers will summarize research indicating that sexual orientation is a natural, enduring disposition, and that the world would be a happier and healthier place if, for all people, love, sex, and marriage went together. He will also review Americans' rapidly changing attitudes, and what they imply for the future of gay marriage and ordination.



Alienation & Refuge by Rob Bauer, LCSW

Rob will discuss his ongoing work with gay men and lesbians, both singly and in relationship. He will tell his own story as a gay man as well as share his clients' experiences living in a homophobic society. Unlike other marginalized groups who experience prejudice but grow

up in communities of people like themselves, gay people may be alienated within their own families, neighborhoods and places of worship. Not having a refuge in one's own faith and connection with God is particularly difficult, often resulting in self-hatred, low self-esteem and self-alienation. Rob will lead the group in experiential exercises as we look at this age-old dilemma.

Organizing for Justice by Minnesota State Senator Scott Dibble



In the context of a civil democracy, what is the role of people of faith and the larger faith community in affecting social progress and change in our politics and policies? Sen. Dibble will offer a practical framework to tap your own values, rooted in faith, as a source of internal power to provide a connection to the larger community and successfully expand the common good.

Can't Decide?



The content of all six workshops will be made available after the Conference!

CONFERENCE TO INCLUDE TWO WORSHIP SERVICES

Opening worship will be led by Rev. Sophie Mathonnet-VanderWell, co-pastor at Second Reformed Church in Pella, Iowa.



Of French origin but born and raised in Japan, Sophie has always had an interest in cultural diversity and believes that the Reign of God is one in which there is "room for all" in all of our beautiful variety and difference. Sophie is a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, and will become oblate at our Lady of Grace Benedictine Monastery in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Rev. Thomas Goodhart will be the preacher at the closing Communion service. Tom is the pastor at



Trinity Reformed Church in Ridgewood, (Queens) New York, and is co-president of the Room for All Board of Directors. He is a graduate of Hope College and Western Theological Seminary.

FROM THE BOARD:

“Why Do This?” by Jan Koopman



People often ask me why I bother with being on the Board of Room for All.

“This is the RCA—it took them almost 500 years to add another creed!”

“Moving the RCA to LGBT inclusion could take the rest of your life!”

“Why does this matter to you? You’re not gay, your kids aren’t gay!”

Good questions. My response is that there are Biblical imperatives and RCA/Calvinist specifics that have drawn me to a belief that LGBT inclusion in the church is a fundamental part of the process of growing God’s reign on earth.

Jesus embodied God’s plan to show people how to live; how to know God. He continually reached out to those on society’s margins—women, children, the poor, lepers, demon-possessed, Samaritans. Three years in Jesus’ company should have been enough time for his disciples to figure this out.

Still, the book of Acts portrays Peter struggling mightily. Part of him knew that Jesus said God’s realm is like a table set for all who come to the banquet; like a tree whose branches are home to all species of birds; that anyone who believes in Him will have abundant, even everlasting life. But the other part of Peter was locked in Jewish tradition. This God, *Yahweh*, is for people like me—who keep kosher, go to the correct temple, obey the Old Testament laws, etc. Separate and definitely not equal.

Jesus’ message challenged everything Peter had been brought up to believe about who

could be members in good standing of God’s beloved community. It was driving Peter crazy and he fell into a sort of trance in which he saw a blanket with “all manner of things” descending from heaven and God’s voice telling him, essentially, that God made the rules and Peter had no business trying to keep some believers out. For almost 2000 years we humans—who by nature want to be with those most like ourselves—have tried to add more rules for God’s realm, but the path of Grace keeps arcing toward God’s rules.

The Heidelberg Catechism has been a fundamental document of Reformed faith for generations; many of us memorized the first question and answer as children: “My only comfort in life and in death is that I belong... to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.” That implies that God’s imperative is for the faith community to live Jesus’ model: *All belong*. Not “we and they” but *all* who seek to follow Jesus.

Further, the Sacrament of Baptism in the RCA confirms that God’s promise of love is for “*everyone* whom the Lord our God calls,” and includes vows taken by the congregation to support the child as he/she grows up. There’s no small-print escape clause that says “...unless you happen to be LGBT.”

I believe God’s direction is clear for all Christians and the RCA in particular. That’s why I do this.

“There are Biblical imperatives and RCA/Calvinist specifics that have drawn me to a belief that LGBT inclusion in the church is a fundamental part of the process of growing God’s reign on earth...”



The path of Grace keeps arcing toward God’s rules.”

WELCOMING CHURCH ROSTER IS GROWING



How can RCA congregations make it easy for LGBT visitors to reliably anticipate an unconditional welcome? How can such churches signal to our sisters and brothers in Christ in the Reformed Church in America that they are intentionally LGBT-inclusive as an expression of their faith in Jesus Christ?

GOOD NEWS! Room for All has set up a process by which LGBT-welcoming congregations in the RCA can be publicly identified. The Board has created a document titled “Affirmations of Room for All Churches” which lists characteristics of such congregations and how these affirmations may translate into the life and ministry of those churches. Consistories are invited to prayerfully consider this document.

Those that adopt and sign it are then added to a roster on the Room for All website which lists the name and address of the church along with a link to its website. In addition, that church is posted on a state-by-state internet map that is accessed at two frequently-visited sites, *Believe Out Loud* and the *Institute for Welcoming Resources*. Rostered churches are also listed with the *Gay Christian Network*. Finally, “Room for All” churches receive a certificate suitable for framing.

Invitations have gone out to those congregations that have already indicated by statement or practice that they affirm persons of all sexual orientations or gender identities, and as of this writing, our roster includes eight RCA churches, with several more in consideration.

Congregations, like individual followers of

Jesus Christ, are always on a journey toward all that we might become with God’s help. However, if you sense that your church is being called to take this step, we invite you to visit www.roomforall.com. At the left side of the homepage, click on the “Welcoming & Affirming Congregations in the RCA” tab, where you will find much more information. Also, you may scroll to the right to find the roster, a copy of the Affirmations document, some examples and process descriptions from other RCA churches, and helps from our ecumenical partners.

More good news!

Members of four RCA churches at various stages of inclusiveness will comprise a panel at our October conference, “Making Room for All: 2011” to share their experiences along the way. **Another reason to be there!**

Photo: Members of the congregation at the ordination of Rev. Ann Kansfield, co-pastor at one of our rostered churches, Greenpoint Reformed in Brooklyn, NY.

CHURCHES RESPOND:

“Our consistory voted to sign the ‘Affirmations of Room for All Churches’ and had a good discussion. After the meeting, people mentioned that it was one of our best sessions ever.”

(Greenville Community Church, Scarsdale, NY)

“We had a good meeting of Consistory last night and adopted the Statement unanimously.

The members expressed great appreciation for this initiative of Room for All. Many felt that it will not only help to further that cause, but will also create more relationships between the local churches and Room for All. Thank you for all you have done in this regard!”

(First Reformed Church, New Brunswick, NJ)

CHURCH TO CHURCH: First, Schenectady Plans Film Series

Supporters of LGBT inclusion are often involved in their regional RfA group, but more importantly, they're strong advocates within their own local congregation.

This is the case at First Reformed Church in Schenectady, New York, where the Social Justice team held a series of study

groups on diversity last year. Out of that, the idea arose for a GLBTQUA (gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgendered, questioning, accepting/asexual) film series. The goal is to provide information and education about the GLBTQUA community and build understanding between that community and the church, thus

furthering Room for All's mission of inclusivity locally and throughout the RCA.

The first film, "God and Gays: Bridging the Gap," will be shown on August 24th at 7 pm. The film seeks to reconcile spiritual beliefs in regard to sexuality and gender through interviews with GLBT Christians.

Member to Member:

Great Ideas from RfA Supporters

Rob Sweeney, an RfA supporter in the Mid-Hudson NY group, is hosting a "Room for All Picnic" at his home. Rob bills the event as "a Spirit-filled day of food, fellowship and a time to contribute a little something to the RfA cause."

What's not to like? Here's another:

Scotia, NY supporter Dan Brudos asked for two Room for All T-shirts for himself and his daughter to wear on the day they move her into the dorm at Hope College.

Thank you!

REGIONAL GROUPS CONTINUE THEIR EFFORTS

Thanks to all who work for LGBT inclusion on the local level—in your community, church or state. Perhaps this page will give YOU some ideas!



As summer ebbs, watch the RfA website or the Facebook page for details about our regional groups. Our newest groups, located in **Northern New Jersey and Mid-Hudson, NY**, are making plans for fall meetings or education opportunities, and will be eager to share that information once dates are secure.

West Michigan supporters are busy handling on-the-ground logistics for our fall conference in Grand Rapids, but still take time to advocate in their communities, as well. Several RfA members of Holland Is Ready continue to work for diversity in the wake of a failed City Council referendum there. Thanks to Jan Koopman for making sure that

RfA brochures and newsletters found their way to a diversity event in Grand Rapids, and to Kalamazoo supporter Tom Folkert for designing and donating the brochures!

The **Albany/Schenectady** group is making plans for two exciting events: an RfA fundraising concert by the Albany Gay Men's Chorus in November, and support of a local staging of "Seven Passages" directed by Rev. Bruce Cornwell, a member of the steering committee of the Albany/Schenectady group. Bruce was active in theater in New York City before becoming an RCA pastor.

An Ally for God, Country and Equality

Meet RfA Board Member Tom Dibble



"I believe that the fulfillment of our vision for a fair and just church based in biblical ideals and Jesus' teachings, and a larger community where all can live lives of dignity, equality and opportunity is just around the corner."

My career has been divided between the military and the judiciary, two institutions that stand for democracy, freedom, equality and human rights.

I am proud to have had the opportunity to serve in the U.S. Air Force to uphold our country's ideals of freedom and democracy; ideals which made it impossible for me to reconcile the 17-year "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy. It was a sign of great progress when that inequitable law was finally repealed.

While still in the reserves, I began my next career in the judiciary. This third branch of government is where the promise of equality is literally put to the test. This principle, that we are all equal in the eyes of the law, is embedded in the very DNA of the judicial system.

Against this backdrop, I have been active in my Christian faith most of my life. However, it didn't really dawn on me that so many Christian denominations actively discriminate against LGBT people until the 2005 trial of Norm Kansfield at General Synod. I was appalled and confused that all of the pronouncements of love and inclusion espoused by the church and attributed to Jesus Christ didn't seem to apply to LGBT members and allies in our denominational community.

In the aftermath of that Synod, I was inspired to attend the ensuing four-part dialogue on homosexuality sponsored by the RCA. The insight I gained into the polarization over this issue prodded me to

action. I became active in Room for All and was honored to be named to the Board shortly thereafter, where I was energized to learn that members of nearly every ecumenical faith community are working for full acceptance and inclusion of LGBT people in the life and ministry of their congregations.

On the other hand, a significant anti-gay constituency exists in our country and in our churches, often misusing the Bible to rationalize their opposition to any laws that might be construed to confer equality of treatment and bar discrimination for LGBT persons, even as the Bible was used to justify slavery for over 300 years.

Using the Bible in this way frankly makes God too small. As a Christian, I hear the words of Scripture ("Do justice, love kindness... Love your neighbor as yourself...") echoed in our own Declaration of Independence: "...all [people] are created equal... endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; ... life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." It is the ever-unfolding story of our faith and our country—to bring life to those words so they actually mean something.

To be sure, my values and commitment have deepened and grown in my years of service in the Air Force, the judiciary, and as a church member who believes in the expansive and unconditional love of God. But there is another source for my commitment: I am inspired by my son, State Senator Scott Dibble of Minnesota.

As an openly gay member of the Minnesota Senate, Scott has fought for equality for many years in the face of staunch opposition. Recent legislative disappointments have firmed his resolve to move forward to defeat the proposed ban on same-sex marriage in 2012. Scott

RfA Board Member Tom Dibble

shares the joys of marriage with his husband, Richard.

[Ed note: Senator Dibble will be a workshop leader at "Making Room for All: 2011."]

Although churches generally want to stay out of the political debate—especially with respect to gay rights and marriage—there is a strong connection and a role for people of faith. Those with the opposite view have not hesitated, making use of their religious arguments, seeking to monopolize the

language of faith to bolster their views and foist a narrow set of beliefs onto those who don't share them. Why would those who believe in the unconditional love of God and the true founding principles of our country concede all the ground? There is so much progress for the better to point to in our churches, legislatures and courtrooms all across our country.

Room for All is playing a vital role in building a

movement within the RCA. We have a network of RCA members and churches engaged in a cooperative effort to educate others about issues of sexuality, gender, and orientation in relation to Christian life. I believe that the fulfillment of our vision for a fair and just church based in biblical ideals and Jesus' teachings, and a larger community where all can live lives of dignity, equality and opportunity is just around the corner.

FROM THE RfA MARRIAGE RESOURCE:

We believe that Christ calls all persons to covenant relationships, based on mutual love, honor and faithfulness. When that loving relationship is expressed sexually, the same holds true for those who are biologically attracted to the opposite sex or to their own. The standard is covenant, not sexual orientation or gender identity. If a couple meets that standard and wants to commit to the sacred calling of living it out in Christian marriage, that is something not only to be affirmed, but celebrated, blessed and consecrated. However, RCA pastors and congregations already have certain guidelines and policies in place regarding requests for marriage in their church, and Room for All believes those standards should be applied to all couples, gay or straight, who seek to be married in that church.

RfA Offers Resource on Same-Sex Marriage in the RCA

Same-sex marriage is now legal in six states (Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York) as well as in the District of Columbia; it became legal in Canada in 2005. This means that roughly one-third of the total congregations in the RCA are located in a state or province where same-sex marriage is legal—a reality that is increasingly on the minds of pastors, consistories and classes.



In response to questions on this subject, Room for All has posted a new resource on our website for consideration by RCA pastors and consistories. The document is not intended to be a policy statement, but simply discusses what the Book of Church Order says, and does not say, in regard to marriage and implications for the role of Elders and classes in matters of potential disciplinary action.

As we approached various pastors and theologians throughout the denomination for their input on this resource, it quickly became clear that we would not come up with a one-size-fits-all statement. Therefore, we decided to share various resolutions and votes, along with individual questions and opinions (guarding the anonymity of contributors). We would encourage those seeking further counsel to discuss this matter fully with your Board of Elders and refer to your congregation's already-existing marriage policies, keeping in mind the precedent (if any) of your classis.

HALLELU! FOR THE FIRST “ROOM FOR ALL” CAMP

Hallelu! This traditional expression of praise became the unexpected catch phrase at the first *Room for All Christian Camp* for GLBTQ teens this summer.

Five youth and five adults gathered in July at the Crossroads Retreat Center in Central New Jersey to learn more about human sexuality and discuss how sexuality informs, and is informed by, our Christian faith. The camp was hosted by the Reformed Church of Highland Park (NJ) and became an ecumenical effort when members of the Emanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church in New Brunswick, and the First Unitarian Society of Plainfield came on the planning committee, headed by RCHP pastor Patty Fox.

Youth who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender were given the opportunity to spend time with other teens and adult staff who acknowledge their own Christian orientation.



“The Room for All Camp was truly a blessing,” says Mereia, 15. “It was an enlightening experience and it helped me discover more about my spirituality and my sexuality. I can’t wait to go back!”

Workshops offered were *The ABC’s of Sexuality*; *The Bible and Sexuality*; *Spiritual Practices*; *Teens, Sex and the Media*; *Problem-Solving Empowerment*, and *Self-Expression through Poetry*. Activities included swimming, canoeing, a campfire (s’mores!), an unforgettable talent show and a ropes course.

Michelle, 17, reports, “I made a lot of friends and learned more about the LGBT community. But most of all I got closer to God, and I learned that we all are God’s children. Everyone deserves to be loved and happy, and have someone by their side for the rest of their life whether it’s the same sex or the opposite sex. Love is love, and God has love for all His children.”

The inaugural camp program was patterned after the Naming Project *Camp Out* documentary

and was the brainchild of a youth from RCHP who had seen the documentary and asked, “Why can’t we have a camp like that?” The teens who attended benefitted from this one young person’s vision.

“This camp is truly amazing!” according to Ashley, 17. “It changed my life and how I see myself. I went from being all low self-esteem with no confidence to being true to myself. It’s so much fun; you learn so much, too!”

The camp had an equally profound effect on the adult counselors. “I gained a deeper relationship with myself, with God, and with new and old friends,” says Sus Billmaier. “It was a rich and full experience.”

Brian Szura hopes that he and his fellow counselors helped the kids grow in some way; “Especially spiritually, since there are so many people out there who tell LGBT youth they can’t be good Christians.”

The camp was made possible through the generous contributions of individual and congregational donors, Room for All, and a grant from the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Baltimore Province. It is the hope of the planning committee to offer this camp every summer. Plans are already underway for the 2012 program.



2012 BUDGET PREPARATION APPROACHES

Many congregations begin budget work in September. As your church leaders consider annual benevolence gifts, please invite them to include Room for All. A growing list of church and individual supporters helps us in two ways—directly, and as we report our donor base on grant applications.

THANK YOU

to our faithful supporters who regularly send financial donations to further our ministry! You may continue to 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

SUMMER 2011

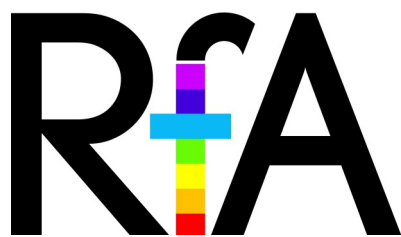
ROOM FOR ALL CHECK-LIST:



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.
- ☐ Become a “Room for All” rostered congregation.
- ☐ Register for the Oct. 27-29 “Making Room for All: 2011” national conference in Grand Rapids, MI
- ☐ 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
- ☐ Foster dialogue about sexuality 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 families, churches and campuses.
- ☐ Pray for the work of Room for All.

THANK YOU!



ROOM FOR ALL

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**“MAKING ROOM FOR ALL:
2011 NATIONAL CONFERENCE”
WORKSHOPS, WORSHIP, KEYNOTE
SPEAKER, COMMUNITY-BUILDING & MORE!
OCTOBER 27-29
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN**

<http://www.regonline.com/builder/site/Default.aspx?EventID=957324>