



*Supporting, Educating,  
Advocating ...*

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

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# The RfA Newsletter

## THE NETWORK WIDENS...

"THANK YOU to all who helped us with the distribution of our first Room for All newsletter!

We invited you to email it, print it, display it, recommend it – and you did all of the above! We know, because we heard from people in several regions of the country expressing thanks, some of whom hadn't heard of us before.

## RfA BOARD TRANSITIONS

At its January, 2011 Annual Meeting, the Room for All Board of Directors expressed deep gratitude to those members whose terms of service have expired. Several of these friends were part of the founding Board whose vision has led us to where Room for

Room for All is a grassroots organization, so we don't have a seamless communication network. We do email the newsletter to the classis clerks throughout the denomination, requesting that they forward it to their congregations – THANK YOU to those clerks who graciously complied!

Lots of exciting things are happening in this

All is today: THANK YOU to Jerry Harrington, Ann Kansfield, Stacey Midge, Dan Ramm, Conrad Strauch, Ron Vande Bunte, Marlin Vander Wilt.

The Board also celebrates the election

Spirit-led movement, and we're eager to share the news. This second issue is packed with more information about regional events, Welcoming & Affirming churches, personal stories and plans for the future. So we invite you to read on, and then share this newsletter in your own sphere of influence—your family, friends, church, school, office. We depend on you – and we THANK YOU!

of the following new members: Rev. Miriam Bush, Dr. Jane Dickie, and Rev. Patty Fox. Jessica Kast-Keat was elected to serve as an at-large member of the Executive Committee, and the current officers will continue to serve in the coming year.



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### *Executive Committee:*

Rev. Thomas Goodhart  
Co-President

Cyndi Boertje  
Co-President

Rev. Eric Johnson  
Vice-President

David VanHeest  
Secretary

Rev. Rob Williams  
Treasurer

Marilyn Paarlberg  
Coordinator

### At-Large:

Rev. Adriene Thorne  
Jessica Kast-Keat

Rev. Miriam Bush  
Dr. Jane Dickie  
Thomas Dibble  
Rev. Patricia Fox  
Karis Granberg-Michaelson  
Mary Kansfield  
Jan Koopman  
L. Nichols  
Rev. Ken Walsh

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*“Though there are painful and disappointing moments in our General Synods or college Trustee meetings or during congregational gatherings, I know that we are essentially faithful and gracious people.”*

## From Vice President Eric Johnson

### *IOWA PRIDE*

*I've been from Iowa all my life. Even when I didn't live in Iowa, I was grateful to be from Iowa. Since we moved back, I've been working on cultivating a more active Iowa pride.*

I've discovered that there are places in Iowa that are nice to kayak and that the farmers in our state lead the way in water conservation, which I'm proud of. I've learned that with Iowa's generous spirit we've become a destination state for global refugees. I'm proud of that. Iowa has always been known for thoughtful and educated citizens, and that makes me proud.

When in April, 2009 the Iowa Supreme Court upheld the ruling of a county court that the denial of same-sex marriage violated our state constitution's liberty and equal protection clauses, I found even more cause to be a proud Iowan. It made perfect sense to me. There may be regions in Iowa that are very socially or

politically conservative, but we're all fair-minded people. Iowa's spirit of fairness triumphed over individual biases. I bragged to my East Coast friends whose states were lagging behind.

This decision called to mind some of my hopes for the RCA. When I first read the RCA's paper from the 1978 General Synod Report of the Commission on Theology entitled, "Homosexuality: A Biblical and Theological Appraisal," I was disappointed in the theological conclusions. But I deeply respected the spirit of justice that was expressed at the end of the paper, "Approval of homosexual orientation or acts is not a prerequisite to firm support of basic civil rights for homosexual persons... While we cannot affirm homosexual behavior, at the same time we are convinced that the denial of human and civil rights to homosexuals is inconsistent with the biblical witness and Reformed theology."



This community of faith was honest and gracious enough to recognize that a denial of rights is a transgression of God's justice.

Iowa's Supreme Court Judges are retained based on popular vote. Three of the judges who signed the 2009 decision were up for retention last November and after a \$1 million campaign by same-sex opponents to oust them they were not retained. For their part, the judges chose not to campaign to defend themselves or their decision, feeling that they were simply doing their job.

Though I'm a little disheartened by this development, I maintain my Iowa pride. Of course there will be times when our best selves will not be displayed, like last November, but I deeply believe in the essential goodness and fairness of Iowans. I feel the same way

**From the Vice-President, continued...**

about the RCA. Though there are painful and disappointing moments in our General Synods or college Trustee meetings or during congregational gatherings, I know that we are essentially faithful and gracious people. This was evidenced in the paper written over three decades ago that could have been far more black and

white, and I trust it will eventually lead us to follow the Spirit of God into full inclusion.

So, people of God, keep the faith and stay proud because God who began a good work among us will be faithful to complete it.

*Eric Johnson*



## NEW ADDRESS

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](http://www.roomforall.com)

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

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

## DON'T MISS YOUR REGIONAL TRAINING EVENT!

### “BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE CHURCH”

THURS., MARCH 3RD @ 1 P.M. *through*

SAT., MARCH 5 @ 12 NOON

FIRST CHURCH IN ALBANY (NY)

*and*

THURS., APRIL 28 @ 1 P.M. *through*

SAT., APRIL 30 @ 12 NOON

HOPE REFORMED CHURCH, HOLLAND, MI

THANKS to a generous grant from the David & Carol Myers Foundation, Room for All is pleased to offer these parallel events designed for RCA pastors, church leaders, and all who want to learn how to make their congregation more welcoming and affirming of the LGBT persons in their midst. Leadership will be provided by a trained staff person from the Institute for Welcoming Resources. Registration is free; participants pay their own transportation and lodging (financial aid may be available, and you may request to stay in a private home). **FOR COMPLETE**

**REGISTRATION INFORMATION GO TO: [www.roomforall.com](http://www.roomforall.com).**

**DON'T DELAY—THE SPACES ARE LIMITED!**





*“My experience should be the norm, but it’s not. I’m reminded of Buechner’s definition of vocation, that the place God calls you is where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet. That should be the case for all who wish to serve in the church.”*

**TURN THE PAGE... for another perspective on how Pastor Patty Fox came to serve at RCHP— an interview with co-pastor Seth Kaper-Dale.**

## **A Pastor’s Story: “The Gift that Dropped into my Lap”**

**An Interview with Rev. Patty Fox**

**Patty Fox is keenly aware of her blessings. She is married and has two daughters. She does the work she loves and to which she feels called, that of youth and community ministry. An ordained Presbyterian minister, she serves as co-pastor in an RCA congregation, where she was hired with the blessing of the Consistory and the Classis. She is a lesbian.**

Patty met her life partner when both were students at Princeton Theological Seminary. The couple married shortly after New Jersey’s civil union law went into effect. Even then, Patty remembers, she was living as a closeted lesbian. There was no pressure at her jobs to come out, and her Presbytery did not push the matter.

The decision to come out, Patty says, “was not particularly conscious or dramatic; it happened naturally. If there was any catalyst event, it was our decision to adopt two infant daughters” (now 9 and 11).

After seminary, Patty worked for 16 years in non-parish ministry, including chaplaincy to battered women and at the Hyacinth

AIDS Foundation, while she tried to find a parish that would accept an out lesbian.

She was serving as a parish associate in a Lutheran church and had recently moved to Highland Park when Patty attended a community action meeting. There she met Rev. Seth Kaper-Dale, co-pastor with his wife, Stephanie, of the Reformed church in town. Seth mentioned that the church was looking for a third pastor, and Patty applied, fully open about her sexual orientation.

Patty was thrilled that her interview was about her gifts for ministry; she felt no need to prove herself as qualified “even though” she is lesbian. Hired in 2009, Patty serves in a part-time contract position along with the Kaper-Dales. Her responsibilities include shared worship leadership, preaching, and oversight of the Christian education program for children and adults.

Patty believes that her orientation is a non-issue for the parishioners, and she does not bring it up intentionally. However, there are several LGBT teens in the youth group, and she surmises that they are there because it’s known and

accepted that she is lesbian. Her vision for the youth group is to create a safe space for youth, including LGBT, to invest in their spiritual journey.

What is LGBT- intentional about Patty’s ministry is the plan for a summer camp. A youth group member had seen a documentary film, “Camp Out,” about a camp for Christian LGBT teens, and asked, “Why can’t we do that?”

The result of long planning will come together this July. Room for All Christian Camp is billed as an opportunity for youth ages 14-17 “who identify as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgender to discuss and understand sexuality alongside their own spirituality.”

Looking back, Patty reflects, “I am continually and constantly grateful for the gift that dropped into my lap. My experience should be the norm but it’s not. I’m reminded of [Frederick] Buechner’s definition of vocation, that the place God calls you is where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet. That should be the case for all who wish to serve in the church.”

**FOR INFORMATION ABOUT ROOM FOR ALL CAMP, call The Reformed Church of Highland Park at (732) 249-7349.**



## The Reformed Church of Highland Park Statement of Inclusion

*The Reformed Church of Highland Park is a welcoming and affirming congregation of the Reformed Church in America which affirms the gifts and ministries of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender members, and shall keep faith with this affirmation in carrying out its responsibilities.*

*We hope that all members, in the spirit of Christ's teachings and example, will treat each other in regards to sexual orientation as in all other matters, with care, respect, faithfulness and love.*

*We are called to the same sexual ethic of mutuality, respect and faithfulness, whatever our sexual orientation, and we ask that all members adhere to this shared ethic.*

## A Church's Story: *An Interview with Rev. Seth Kaper-Dale*

Seth and Stephanie Kaper-Dale came to the Reformed Church of Highland Park as co-pastors at the end of 2001. Both were deeply concerned about the lack of LGBT inclusion in the RCA. Seth refers to a "personal epiphany" on the matter when he was a student at Hope College which left him "troubled to the core."

At their interview with the RCHP search committee, they were very open about their beliefs on the subject. Seth regards this as the start of a "healthy culture" from the beginning of their pastorate.

The Kaper-Dales did find that many parishioners, knowing gay people in other contexts, had never talked about LGBT equality at church because it was a "non-issue" for them. They simply had never thought to bring it up at church, and were even a bit surprised that their denomination would regard it as a problem. "We realized," Seth recalls, "that church people are way ahead of church leadership on this issue."

In the fall of 2004, RCHP sought to hire a seminary student for a one-year

internship. After interviews, the co-pastors recommended a highly-qualified candidate to the consistory, and were clear about the fact that she happened to be a married lesbian. The consistory responded that while they appreciated being told, they did not regard the student's sexual orientation as a factor, and offered her the position. During the course of the year, the congregation wholeheartedly affirmed her gifts for ministry. (The intern was Jennifer Aull, who now serves the Greenpoint (Brooklyn) Reformed Church with her wife, Pastor Ann Kansfield.)

By 2008, the church was ready to hire a third staff person. Seth recalls that Patty Fox had the most impressive resume and references; she and her partner were already well known for their active community involvement through a soup kitchen and counseling service. He confirms that Patty was open about her orientation at her interview, and that the discussion focused on the gifts that she brought for ministry. The search committee hired her on a contract basis, and the classis approved the hire.

After Pastor Patty joined the staff, the consistory and pastors thought the congregation should have a public statement to reflect

who they already were regarding welcoming and affirming LGBT persons in membership and ministry. The congregational Statement of Inclusion (see sidebar) was the result.

Seth also agrees that Patty's orientation is not a factor in her ministry. When the church's history is told to prospective members at inquirers' classes, the account of Patty's hiring is included, and the Statement of Inclusion is shared. Although a prospective member occasionally decides not to join the church for this reason, most people join *because of* – rather than *despite* – the church's open stance.

Seth Kaper-Dale concludes, "*It's important – and fun – to be completely honest about who we are. That is part of being the church, and this is a major justice issue.*"

The Reformed Church of Highland Park "does justice" in the area of LGBT inclusion by modeling it, with significant and positive results for their faith community.

[Ed. Note: Since this interview took place, Pastor Patty Fox has joined the Room for All Board of Directors.]

## NEWS FROM OUR REGIONAL GROUPS

### NY CAPITAL DISTRICT GROUP HOSTS "SHOWER OF STOLES"

The Albany area Room for All group recently held a special event featuring the "Shower of Stoles" project. Many in the group attended the 2009 "Making Room for All" conference in Grand Rapids, and were moved by the stoles display. The collection represents the lives of LGBT pastors and church leaders, including some in the RCA, who were excluded from service because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

The local group arranged to receive 150 of the stoles and hosted a Feb. 9th reception and worship service at the First Church in Albany, where representatives of several area RCA congregations were commissioned to take 25 of the stoles to be shared with their own churches. The stoles will be returned to First Church, Albany in time to be displayed and blessed at the RfA regional training event to be held there in early March.

Area newspapers covered the display, and members of other welcoming and

affirming churches in the Albany area also attended the event.

For more information about the stoles project, go to [www.welcomingresources.org](http://www.welcomingresources.org), and click on "Shower of Stoles."



**DO YOU WISH THERE WERE A ROOM FOR ALL REGIONAL GROUP IN YOUR AREA? WOULD YOU LIKE TO START ONE?**

**If you know of others in your area who are supporters of LGBT inclusion in the RCA, we encourage you to gather in solidarity and support. Local RfA Board members can assist you, share ideas and resources. How you organize is up to you: some groups meet regularly for Bible study, story sharing, guest speakers and resource review. Others network with already-existing support groups in their area. Please consider this invitation to widen LGBT support in the Reformed Church in America!**

Contact us at 201-364-4538 or [mpaarberg@roomforall.com](mailto:mpaarberg@roomforall.com)

### Albany RfA Member Writes Column about Welcoming & Affirming Church

Room for All member Peter Subers was invited by the Albany TIMES UNION to write his story as a gay Christian in response to the First Church in Albany's recent decision to become a Welcoming & Affirming congregation. The article was published on Christmas Day, 2010. In it, Peter relates his experience growing up gay, the message of the church, his years as a rural school teacher, and his gratitude to the consistory and parishioners at First Church:



*This past March, the 20-member Consistory unanimously adopted a statement that opens First Church to all people, with specific reference to sexual orientations and gender identities, into the full life of the church. I am profoundly grateful to the people of my church. In a way I could not understand before, they have taught me God's love and the way it comes through human hands and hearts.*

To read Peter's story, go to <http://www.timesunion.com/default/article/Grateful-to-accepting-church-919856.php>.

To read First, Albany's Welcoming & Affirming statement, go to [www.roomforall.com](http://www.roomforall.com), click on "Resources" and then scroll to "Welcoming & Affirming."

## WEST MICHIGAN GROUP CELEBRATES FIRST YEAR



Holland is Ready is a group of West Michigan residents, including many Room for All members, who are working to achieve equality for LGBT neighbors in Holland. The group also supports a partner organization of Hope College students, Hope is Ready, who are advocating for change at Hope College. Holland is Ready is proud of its accomplishments, which have included

sending a petition with hundreds of names to Hope College about the policy on homosexuality. A picture of about 300 supporters was published in the Grand Rapids Press, and a video is posted on Facebook. The group has been active in working for changes in the non-discrimination policy of Holland to add same-sex and gender issues to the ordinance. Members have been attending hearings for this new addition to the

ordinance and many have spoken up at those hearings. Holland is ready has put on a movie series at a local theater, including films and documentaries dealing with LGBT experiences and challenges in secular and religious life.

Future plans include storytelling and guest speakers, as well as a well-deserved celebration of their first year.

## Church to Church: *Marble Collegiate Group is a GIFT*

**GIFTS (“G(LBT) people In Faith, Tradition & Service”)** is an inclusive community at Marble Collegiate Church in Manhattan that seeks to live out their acronym through conversation about what it means to be an LGBT Christian and by reaching out to those outside the church walls.

Carl Haan, current co-chair of the GIFTS Leadership Team, recalls, *“For years, I thought it was an unrealistic idea to find a place where I could be both Christian and gay at the same time. But when I heard about Marble and GIFTS, I decided to check it out and see if it was indeed possible. I felt welcome and knew right away that this was a place of love and acceptance. In fact, I was recently invited to speak to the entire congregation about being a gay Christian. The GIFTS Fellowship at Marble is so important because it reaches out to the entire LGBT community and lets them know that they are special, and more importantly, how welcome and wanted they are in the family of God!”*

For more information, go to [www.marblechurch.org](http://www.marblechurch.org). If you would like to receive the group’s bi-weekly e-letter, please e-mail Sammy Shecter: [sshecter@marblechurch.org](mailto:sshecter@marblechurch.org).

## SECOND NATIONAL CONFERENCE SCHEDULED!

**THE ROOM FOR BOARD IS PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THAT PLANS ARE UNDERWAY FOR OUR SECOND “MAKING ROOM FOR ALL” CONFERENCE, to be held once again at Central Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan on Thursday–Saturday, October 27–29, 2011.**

Planning groups are hard at work, and it is hoped that the event will again be underwritten so that all who wish to attend may do so at reasonable cost.

**WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT FROM THIS EVENT?** In addition to noted speakers, timely workshops, moving

personal stories and inspiring worship, the 2009 event was life-changing for so many gay, straight and transgender RCA members who caught a glimpse of what might one day be possible throughout the denomination. The 2011 event will build on that momentum; come and share in this powerful experience!

**WATCH OUR WEBSITE FOR EMERGING DETAILS, AND MARK YOUR CALENDAR NOW:**

*“Making Room for All”*

**OCTOBER 27–29, 2011**

**Grand Rapids, MI**



## RfA BOARD MEMBER RESPONDS TO HOPE TRUSTEE STATEMENT

The Hope College Board of Trustees has issued a new policy statement on human sexuality, replacing the previous statement on homosexuality. While pledging to make Hope a safe space for all students and affirming the need for intellectual freedom and debate, the Trustees stand against recognizing or supporting “campus groups whose aim by statement, practice, or intimation is to promote a vision of human sexuality that is contrary to [the RCA’s] understanding of biblical teaching.”

The RfA Board has sent a letter in response. We also affirm the concerns of Hope alumna and RfA Board member Karis Granberg-Michaelson, who has been very active in the “Hope is Ready” group. Excerpts of her comments follow:

*A reporter left me a message today looking for a response to Hope College's new statement on human sexuality: “I'm looking for people to offer feedback on Hope's reformed statement.” The word “reformed” struck me. To be sure, the new statement is the*

*product of picking apart and moving around the previous “Institutional Statement on Homosexuality.” It is in this sense a re-formed statement. One sentence in particular grabs my attention, “Sexuality, including longing and expression, is a good gift from God and a fact of our existence.” What a powerful statement. If only I could impress that upon the hearts and minds of every LGBT person.*

*The new policy with all its polished veneer and earnest invitation into sexual self-examination remains a cold slap in the face because it does not extend this blessing to all persons. Sexuality is only a “good gift from God” for some and not for all. If we conceive “reformed” to mean amended by removal of faults and abuses, then the statement fails its call to reformation.*

*While the words “homosexual” or “homosexuality” do not appear in the revised statement, the policy still cannot flee its original purpose of elevating heterosexuality as the ideal in God's creation and debasing homosexuality as the unintended, and one could say unwelcome, variance.*

*By negating the reality of diversity in sexual orientation, the college has taken serious steps backwards. Which is worse, a policy that attacks homosexuality directly or one*

*that pretends there isn't an issue?*

*Any way you cut it, the statement still forbids lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered persons from full inclusion into the life, community and ministry of Hope College.*

*We must ask ourselves: What does “affirm[ing] the dignity of every person as a creature made in the image of God and thus worthy of our earnest respect, our insistent protection, and our self-sacrificing love” look like? Who gets to make such a decision?*

*Affirming the dignity of every person, showing our earnest respect, our insistent protection and our self-sacrificing love means supporting and recognizing campus groups that work for LGBT safety and inclusion within the Hope community. It means stepping out of our belief-system comfort zone and expanding our hearts and minds towards full inclusion. We are not dealing with the realm of ideas, but with real flesh and blood human beings who belong to God.*

*Sexuality is a good gift from God and a fact our existence. Let's live in the reality of God's diversity, and not reject it.*

**For the full text of the Hope statement, go to <http://www.hope.edu/pr/pressreleases/content/view/full/29706>**

## LGBT STUDENTS at CENTRAL COLLEGE EXPLORE SPIRITUAL LIFE

### CIRCLE (Conversations In Religion Concerning Love for Everyone)

Following the 2009 “Making Room for All” conference, Central College staff member Kristin Tremper realized that Central’s LGBTQ students who attended that life-changing event needed a group rooted in spirituality where they could gather to express the emotions and build on the overwhelming support that they felt as LGBT Christians. (While there is another group on Central’s campus for LGBTQ students, it is not specifically religious.)

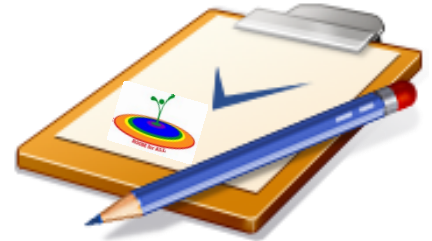
CIRCLE is the result of that initiative. The group meets once a week for biblical study, conversation about current LGBT issues in the news via the lens of faith, and other topics.

Ms. Tremper, Church Relations Coordinator at Central and a Western Seminary student in the Distance Learning program, is staff liaison to CIRCLE. Supporters from the Pella regional RfA group attend occasionally, as well as a representative from the Central chaplain’s office.



## WINTER 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.
- Register for one of the regional training events coming in March & April.
- Mark your calendar for the Oct. 27-29 “Making Room for All” 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.
- 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 THIS SPRING: MARCH 3-5 IN ALBANY, NY  
AND APRIL 28-30 IN HOLLAND, MICHIGAN. GO TO  
OUR WEBSITE, [www.roomforall.com](http://www.roomforall.com), TO REGISTER!**



***“BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE CHURCH”***