

*Supporting, Educating,
Advocating ...*

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

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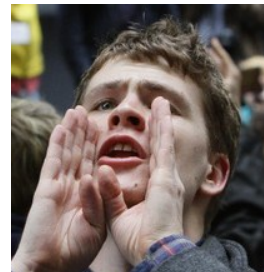


The RfA Newsletter

Lessons from the People's Mic

We've been thinking [we've been thinking] there's something to be learned from the "People's Mic."

You probably heard it in news reports about the Occupy Movement, or perhaps participated yourself: One person calls out "Mic check," and then waits until everyone nearby echoes, "Mic check." Then the speaker calls out the first short phrase of what needs to be communicated, waits for the accurate, unison repeat, and so forth until the message is complete and passed around the crowd. At that point, if someone questions the factual accuracy of the speech, or whether it represents the values of the larger movement, that person calls "Mic check" once more to express the concern—again, waiting for the repeat.



While this method is suited to large outdoor groups without a public address system, it contains elements of one-on-one methods of active listening that pastors or therapists use in counseling or recommend in situations of conflict—basically, showing a desire to understand and empathize by listening carefully, then repeating or rephrasing what you heard the other person say to make sure you have accurately represented her/his feelings or opinion before going on.

In a recent radio interview about the "People's Mic" process, one person said, *"[It] forces people to be participatory, to listen, to understand that we're in it together. You know others are depending on you, so you pay attention and wait for the whole message before you start thinking about your own response."*

How many times have we engaged in a conversation with someone whose opinion about LGBTQ inclusion pushes our buttons because it differs from our own, and we start forming a rebuttal while that person is still talking? And then, instead of first trying to understand the story behind the feelings, we come back with why those feelings aren't valid in the first place.

At "Building an Inclusive Church" training events, we learn "graceful engagement"—trying to engage someone who disagrees by hearing that person's story and being patient enough to listen. Of course it's easier said than done when strong feelings are involved, and we may never agree on anything except that we disagree. But we can't help but think that our conversations would serve the church if we tried active listening. **May God grant us the grace to do a "mic check" in the RCA, because we truly are "in it together."**

**"BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE CHURCH" TRAINING EVENTS
COMING TO YOUR AREA!
SEE PAGE 7.**

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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FROM THE BOARD:

"MORE THAN A NAME"

by Cyndi Boertje

I have been on the Room for All board for five years—co-president for two. Considering the commitment and travel involved, people I know inevitably ask what drew me to RfA. Why is this group and the LGBTQ community so important that I would spend this much energy as an ally and advocate?

My maiden name was Cyndi Dyke. It's a familiar name in Dutch communities, but in the Chicago suburbs where I grew up, it was often used by the other kids as an epithet, an excuse to ridicule. What's more, I have never been a "girly girl;" I enjoy sports or biking, hiking and canoeing. This led to all sorts of speculation and accusations. High school and college were not easy for me as a straight, athletic woman named Dyke. Even though I went to an RCA college in a Dutch town, it seemed as though it was a hurdle for some people to get to know me before they judged me by my name.

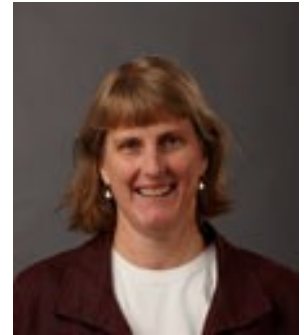
After graduation, I quickly learned to introduce myself as Van Dyke to soften the effect. It worked fairly well; I no longer got the old reactions or flat-out ridicule. A few years later, I married and took my husband's last name. At first, it

was a relief to not have to explain or ward off rude comments. But later I became more and more aware of the silence.

My experience as a "Dyke" has helped me become close friends with people in the LGBTQ community. As I came to know them, I became an ally who could empathize with being on the receiving end of the ridicule and meanness of some people. But the longer I was married, the more I began to wonder and worry about those who could not simply change their last name, as I had done. They did not have that "quick fix." They were just who they were—wonderfully made and created people who continue to be oppressed in the church and elsewhere.

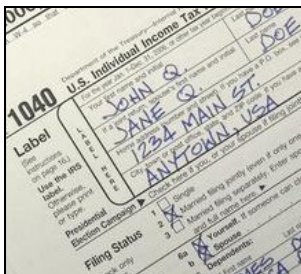
My wonder and worry brought me to events and groups like RfA. I was able to attend some of the first local meetings in Pella, IA. As RfA grew, they asked people in the different regions to consider being on the national board. I leapt at the chance to be in on the ground level of a wonderful group, and to be an advocate. It has also been a chance for me to be an example for my three children, to let them see their mom fighting for the rights and dignity of others within the church and in society.

Room for All has become much more than we envisioned and expected in those early days.



Many people have been working both as strong advocates and quiet supporters to move inclusion forward. There is still much to do, and it seems that much more yet is possible, given what has been happening in the movement. We have held two national conferences and local training events. RCA congregations are joining our roster of "Room for All Churches" in places I think we couldn't have predicted. We have a large network of LGBTQ people, advocates, supporters and allies within Reformed churches.

I continue to meet and work with delightful people who are filled with God's spirit and are longing to be welcomed into the church, longing to be loved as God loves us all. It has been my honor to work for full inclusion of LGBTQ people in the Reformed Church.



"The longer I was married, the more I began to wonder and worry about those who could not simply change their last name, as I had done."



BOARD ELECTS NEW OFFICERS and DIRECTORS

Room for All directors are elected for a 3-year term which may be renewed for one additional term. At its January, 2012 annual meeting, the Board extended heartfelt thanks to outgoing directors Mary Kansfield, Rev. Ken Walsh, and Rev. Rob Williams. All three of these friends were part of the founding Board, and their commitment, courage and vision over the past 6 years has helped to shape and extend RfA's ministry in countless ways. We are pleased that Mary has agreed to continue her service as RfA's archivist, and Rob will also continue to offer his gifts as bookkeeper and development officer. **THANK YOU!**

The Board elected the following officers for 2012: Rev. Eric Johnson, president; Jan Koopman, 1st Vice-President; Rev.

Tom Goodhart, 2nd Vice-President; Rev. Patty Fox, secretary; Cyndi Boertje, treasurer. Rev. Adriene Thorne and Rev. Jes Kast-Keat will continue their service as at-large members of the executive committee.

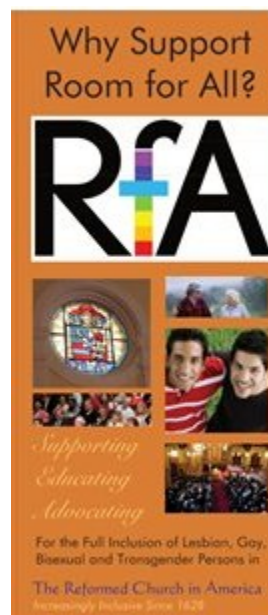
In addition, the Board elected the following new directors to serve a full 3-year term: Robert Mutch, Jr., Brad Redeker, and Rob Sweeney.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT OUR BOARD MEMBERS, there are photos and short bios on our website, www.roomforall.com. In addition, each issue of the newsletter offers a "Meet the Board" interview. (This month, we offer readers the pleasure of learning Bob Mutch's personal story on p. 5.)

RfA DEVELOPMENT TEAM SPREADS THE WORD

A cadre of supporters helps to carry the mission of LGBTQ inclusion across the RCA, and invites those who affirm RfA's ministry to express that support with a financial gift. Such giving is especially crucial in 2012, as we endeavor to meet a generous Matching Challenge grant from the Myers Foundation. **The Myers will match every dollar received from a new donor, or an increased gift from a previous donor, up to \$25K.**

The RfA board is grateful for the ongoing work of our Development Team: Rev. Shari Brink, Tom Folkert, Rev. Patty Fox, Rich Glendening, Karis Granberg-Michaelson, Rev. Norm Kansfield, Rev. Peter Theune, Rev. Marlin Vander Wilt, Rev. Rob Williams (development officer) and Marilyn Paarlberg (RfA exec. director). **IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION, YOU MAY GO TO OUR WEBSITE, OR SEND A CHECK TO P.O. Box 11495, Albany NY 12211. Stock transfers are also possible. Thanks!**



Supporters Help the Cause

WANT TO HELP US MEET OUR MATCHING FUNDS CHALLENGE IN 2012?

The ways to do that are as varied as the creativity of our supporters!

For example:

One pastor has pledged half of any honoraria she receives when she performs a wedding. What's more, by asking the couple to prepare two checks, she uses the occasion to tell them about Room for All's ministry. It's a win-win; the couple feels even better about their wedding ceremony, knowing where their money is going, and RfA benefits by new donors!

Here's another:

One of our regional groups invited the local Gay Men's Chorus to give a benefit concert. Throughout the evening, some of the chorus members told their personal story of being gay Christians, and before the free-will offering, the story of RfA was shared. The offering netted over a thousand dollars!

WHAT'S YOUR IDEA? GO FOR IT!

Tripped up by the “T”

Those who attended “Making Room for All” in October were deeply moved by Kelly, a transgender woman who shared the courageous story of her life with gender dysphoria, her deep and abiding faith in God, and her dreams for the future.

In the conference feedback, many expressed appreciation for Kelly’s presentation. Some admitted that the “L, G and B” are not hurdles in understanding a wider spectrum of human sexuality, but the “T” is more difficult. This is one reason why a good amount of time is spent at “Building an Inclusive Church” training events on what it means to be transgender.

Our ecumenical partner, More Light Presbyterians, offers an excellent, brief resource on this topic at <http://www.mlp.org/resources/MLonTG.pdf>

***LGBTQUIAWhat?* The ABC’s of Sexuality**

by Rev. Stacey Midge

Rev. Stacey Midge serves as Associate Minister of Mission, Outreach, and Youth at First Reformed Church of Schenectady, NY, and was a member of the founding board of Room for All.

When I was young, “gay” was the only word I knew to describe anything other than heterosexuality. Somewhere along the line, perhaps in junior high, the term “lesbian” popped into my vocabulary as well. A little later, the concept of bisexuality was added to my frame of reference. When I got to college, “GLBT” was common parlance in some of my classes, although there was some confusion over what the “T” stood for. Currently, depending on what context I’m in, I might hear people refer to GLBT, LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQIA...the list seems to grow continuously.

It’s no wonder, then, that when I have given presentations involving the terminology of sexual orientation and gender identity (confusing phrases in themselves), people often give me befuddled looks - even people who are advocates, allies, and members of the demographics I’m describing. But it’s important to know what we’re saying, because so much of the language used in conversations about these issues is inaccurate and often hurtful.

With that in mind, I give you this handy guide to the ABC’s of sexuality and gender. This should not be considered an exhaustive list since, as I mentioned above, the language is always being refined and new terms being coined to more accurately and compassionately describe these human realities.

Ally: a non-LGBT person who supports and advocates for the rights of LGBT people.

Asexual/Nonsexual: describes a person who lacks sexual attraction or interest in sex.

Bisexual: describes a person who is attracted to both men and women.

Closeted / “In the Closet”: describes people who keep their sexual orientation or gender identity a secret from some or all people.

Coming Out: the process of acknowledging one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity to other people.

Gay: a person who is attracted only to members of the same sex. Most commonly used for men who are attracted to men; “lesbian” is usually the preferred term for women who are attracted to women.

Gender Expression: the manner in which a person outwardly expresses gender.

Gender Identity: a person’s way of self-identifying with a gender category, such as male, female, some combination of both, or neither. Most people develop a gender identity that corresponds to their biological sex, but many do not. Some societies have third-gender categories.

Heterosexism: the attitude that heterosexuality is the only valid or acceptable sexual orientation.

Heterosexual/Straight: describes a person who is only attracted to members of the opposite sex.

Homosexual: describes a person who is only attracted to members of the same sex.

Homophobia: fear of or anxiety about homosexual persons.

Intersex: a general term for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with reproductive/sexual anatomy that does not seem to fit the typical definitions of male or female.

(continued)

The ABC's of Sexuality (continued)

Lesbian: a woman who is only attracted to other women.

LGBT/GLBTQQIA: initialism for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, sometimes with the added categories of queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual.

Openly Gay / Lesbian / Bisexual /

Transgender: describes people who publicly acknowledge their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Outing: the act of revealing an LGBT person's sexual orientation or gender identity without that person's consent.

Queer: an umbrella term used by some LGBT people to refer to themselves. In the past, this term has been considered offensive and some LGBT people still consider it so, while others have come to prefer it.

Questioning: describes people who are unsure about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Sexual Orientation: a person's attraction

to members of the same and/or opposite sex. Includes gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, and asexual.

Transgender: describes people whose gender identity does not correspond to their biological sex. Transgender persons may or may not alter their physical characteristics through medication, surgery, or other means to appear more typical to the gender with which they identify.

[Ed. note. Consistent with RfA's mission to support, educate and advocate for LGBT inclusion, this article is the first of what we envision will be occasional pieces that help us dig deeper into the implications of welcoming persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities.]



SUPPORT RfA with CONVERSATION STARTERS

RfA lapel pins, travel mugs or tote bags are great ways to advertise your support for inclusion in the RCA, and have been known to start conversations in airplanes, church coffee hours, even grocery store check-out lines! Any of these are available for a free-will donation.



Of course you can still donate even if you don't want the "merch" —
P.O. Box 11495
Albany NY 12211 or
www.roomforall.com



"ALL ONE BODY" IS LAUNCHED BY CRC GROUP

RfA's first national conference in 2009 was attended by a few friends from Christian Reformed churches in the West Michigan area, who continued to follow our progress and express their support. In the months after that conference, a small group of CRC members began meeting to discuss the status of LGBTQ inclusion in their own denomination, and to envision the possibility of a CRC group like RfA. The group was further galvanized by the CRC's General Synod vote in June, 2011 not to open a denomination-wide conversation about homosexuality. The group invited RfA's executive director to meet with them just prior to our 2011 national conference, which was attended by several more CRC members.

This past December, a name was chosen, "All One Body" (A1B) invoking Paul's symbolism to convey the indispensability of all members of God's body. The group quickly established a Facebook page, where they describe themselves as "a group of individuals in the West Michigan Christian Reformed Church working for inclusion of our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender brothers and sisters in their faith families in the CRC." Within a month, All One Body was featured in an article in the online edition of "The Banner," the CRC denominational magazine: <http://www.thebanner.org/news/article/?id=3977>.

One of A1B's members, Sheryl Rice Mulder, comments: "[We] are grateful for the leadership and support given to us by RfA and its executive director, Marilyn Paarlberg. We continue to desire to be that *gracious presence* within our denomination, modeled so wonderfully by RfA."

Room for All commends these partners in our sister denomination, and we pray for the Spirit's guidance and blessings as they move forward toward the goal of full LGBTQ inclusion in the CRC.



It's been about 7 months since we launched the roster of "Room for All Churches," and already there is clear support and energy around this initiative. As of February 1st, there are sixteen congregations listed on the roster; another fifteen pastors from across the RCA have told us that their consistories are in active conversation about it.

As we work with churches that are considering signing the Affirmations statement, they ask variations of three basic questions: *Why do this? How will it change our church? Could we (or our pastor) get in trouble?* Here are some responses:

Why do this? Because it's pastoral. Being publicly welcoming and affirming tells visitors of all sexual orientations and gender identities that their spiritual seeking, their desire to live a life of faith, their need for a Christian community for themselves and their families will be honored and affirmed in your church. We specifically name inclusion of LGBTQ persons because the church

IMPLICATIONS of the RfA ROSTER

has been exclusive in the past. As the biblical prophets, Paul and other apostles, and Jesus himself did, when certain groups of people have been singled out for exclusion or have been discriminated against, it's important to mention them by name in order to be clear that we mean to include them.

Why do this? Because it's missional. We believe (and recent studies support) that providing a "map" to a reliable welcome for LGBTQ persons and allies will build up the Body of Christ in the RCA, locally and at the denominational level.

Our rostered churches are all loyal member-congregations of the RCA who want to go on record for full inclusion in their communities **and** their denomination because they want the RCA's public face to mirror its baptismal affirmations. RfA's mission statement implies advocacy at both levels, and the roster is an evangelistic tool for carrying out that mission.

How will it change our church? After intentional journeys of congregational inquiry, members of rostered churches report that they feel stronger bonds of Christian

unity in their own church and with other churches on the roster. They are proud of their careful and hard work, proud of their church, proud of what they model to their youth, and are excited to tell others.

A week after Community Church in Colonie, NY signed the roster, a visitor explained that she was there because she saw the church's name on the national database of welcoming churches.

A helpful resource, "Taking a New Look," (<http://www.churchstuff.com/shared/docs/NewLook10.pdf>) lists several more ways that welcoming and affirming churches benefit (see sidebar).

But of course it is also possible that some members will leave because they cannot affirm the decision to become fully inclusive. However, the experience of most of the signing churches has been otherwise; as in other matters of church life, faithful Christians can covenant to "wait for the Lord" and sometimes, to disagree in love.

(continued)

HOW WILL OUR CHURCH CHANGE?

(From "Taking a New Look: Why Congregations Need LGBT Members")

A congregation that chooses to welcoming & affirming of LGBT people:

Contributes to a positive image of Christianity.

Creates an atmosphere fostering church growth.

Gains the considerable gifts of LGBT clergy, staff & lay members.

Offers safe places for LGBT youth.

Provides opportunity for LGBT members to participate fully in the life of the church.

Provides support to LGBT families & allies.

Positions itself better to offer sexuality education for children, teens and adults.

Demonstrates the kind of expansive hospitality God expects of us.

Demonstrates solidarity with advocates for human rights & justice for all people.

Frees silent allies from struggling with the disconnect between their personal convictions & their public vocalization.

Implications of the RfA Roster, continued...

Could we (or our pastor) get in trouble? Yes, possibly. Churches that seek to live out their belief that scripture is radically inclusive always run a risk of offending, and LGBT inclusion is not popular in some RCA churches. Here are some points to consider:

The Book of Church Order affirms that "the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and practice in the Reformed Church in America." During their ordination, pastors declare, "I believe the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and as expressed in the Standards of the [RCA]. I accept the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and life. I accept the Standards as historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God." Further, they promise to submit to the discipline of the classis, "always ready, with gentleness and reverence, to give an account of my understanding of the Christian faith. I will conduct the work of the church in an orderly way

and according to the Liturgy and the Book of Church Order."

Against that backdrop, nothing in the RCA's Constitution (the *Book of Church Order*, the *Liturgy* and the four Standards of Unity) prohibits welcoming LGBTQ persons into the life of the church; the issue is simply not addressed. Although not all agree about them, these documents constitute what RCA congregations and pastors covenant to follow and be governed by.

Further, faithful pastors and parishioners differ widely in their understanding of scripture and the Christian faith in this matter. Those who support LGBTQ inclusion sincerely believe that the church is "compelled by the inclusive love of God revealed in ... Jesus Christ" (RfA mission statement).

In public discourse, it is often the various General Synod position papers on homosexuality that are cited as "what the RCA believes."

These documents are intended as guides, and neither pastors nor churches are bound by them as they are the Constitutional documents. However, it is equally important to note an approved 1990 Advisory Committee recommendation "to adopt the position of the Reformed Church in America that the practicing homosexual lifestyle is contrary to scripture, while at the same time encouraging love and sensitivity towards such persons as fellow human beings" (MGS 1990: 461).

To summarize, although there is nothing in the RCA Constitution that speaks against full inclusion of LGBTQ persons, this does not mean that a charge or admonition could not be brought against a church or pastor for joining the roster. Pastors and elders should always consider the prevailing winds in their classis. At the same time, we encourage them not to lose sight of another wind—one that the church has been scrambling to keep up with since the Day of Pentecost.

"BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE CHURCH" TRAINING EVENTS IN 2012

In cooperation with our ecumenical colleagues at the Institute for Welcoming Resources, the RfA Board is committed to offering at least four regional training events during the interim year between biannual national conferences. We will be sharing details about these opportunities as they emerge:

1. A 3-hour mini-training for seminary students in the New Brunswick/Princeton NJ area is planned during the week of April 9–13. Details to come.
2. A full 2-day event is planned for pastors and church members Thursday, April 12–Saturday, April 14 in the New Brunswick, NJ area. Place TBA.
3. A full 2-day event will be held at Ponds Reformed Church, Oakland, New Jersey, (Northern NJ/Metro NY) Thursday, September 13–Saturday, Sept. 15.
4. Tentative plans also include 2-day trainings in West Michigan and Central Iowa—details TBA.

Please let us know if your church would like to host a "Building an Inclusive Church" training event



MEMBER TO MEMBER: *An Epiphany for Inclusion*

by Bob Mutch

My wife, Carol, and I met in 1981 at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City, a diverse, urban church. After marrying in 1982, I "dragged her kicking and screaming" as she likes to say, to New Jersey, where we began attending an RCA congregation—a wonderful, yet comparatively non-diverse, suburban church.

One Sunday about ten years ago, longing to re-experience a New York City church, we drove in and attended Riverside Church. I sat there in the pew, looking at the amazing interracial, multi-cultural congregation, seeing the notices about gay and lesbian support groups on the bulletin boards, listening to the African-American minister, James Forbes, in the pulpit of this magnificent church, and tears just kept rolling down my cheeks. I thought:



"This is how God wants us to worship." And I knew that at our home church we weren't worshipping in the full richness of God's creation and we were diminished for it.

I also knew it wasn't just the multi-racial, multi-cultural character of the church that was touching my soul, but the open acceptance of LGBT Christians. You see, before I was married to Carol, I was married to a devout Catholic woman who, as it turned out, was (and is) a lesbian; at that time she had not yet come to

grips with her sexual orientation. It was a difficult three years—for me, sensing that something was terribly wrong, but not knowing what it was—and for her, trying to be something that she was not. I saw and felt firsthand the pain shared by both husband and wife when one partner tries to deny or suppress their sexual orientation to conform to religious or societal "norms."

Then, about a year after my emotional visit to Riverside Church, our daughter came out to us. We didn't see it coming, but we frequently thank God that we were immediately there for her. It would not be an issue for us; we knew it wasn't a matter of choice.

A few years later, I heard about Room for All, and quickly became a supporter. I went to RfA's "Building an Inclusive Church" training event in Albany last March and then the national conference in Grand Rapids this past October. It is not an overstatement for me to say these were life-changing events. I felt so *simpatico*—so at home—with the people there, some gay, some straight, some struggling with gender identity, but all passionate brothers and sisters in Christ. I also felt the pain of those who had been ostracized from the church they loved.

It was a few months later that something truly remarkable happened. I was driving along Route 287 in New Jersey, no radio on, just minding my own business, when all of a sudden it hit me like the proverbial ton of

bricks! *God was calling me to this mission!*

I was stunned. This was something that happened to other people, not to me. I had served faithfully for many years on our church consistory, but I did so out of a sense of duty, not feeling particularly called to it. I was so shaken by this epiphany that I almost had to pull over. Images of my life flashed before my eyes and I realized that all along the way, God had been preparing me for this. God had been calling me for years, but I hadn't been listening.

I believe that all of our Christian journeys are punctuated by epiphanies. Sometimes they are just small insights into the mind of Christ, but occasionally—maybe only once in a lifetime—they are so earth-shattering that they shake us to our core and change us forever. I knew at that very instant what I was called to do, and that I would never be the same.

Bob and Carol Mutch live in Ramsey, NJ.

Bob is a consulting groundwater hydrologist and an Adjunct Professor at Columbia University and Manhattan College. He enjoys tennis, backpacking, mountain climbing, off-road running, and perennial flower gardening, and has recently joined the RfA Board.



Supporters Suggest...

There are lots of great resources that provide a starting point for discussion about LGBTQ inclusion in church settings.

A supporter from West Michigan endorses "Dignity, Dogmatism and Same-Sex Relationships: What Science and Scripture Teach Us" by Gilbert Rossing.



Rossing, a retired ELCA pastor, addresses questions of sex and gender from a biblical/theological perspective; however, he also has two gay sons (and a daughter who does not support her parents' affirmation of their sexuality). Rossing's personal experience led him to write this book which focuses not only on the psychological aspects of homosexuality but the spiritual effects it has on both the homosexual and those in his/her inner circle, as well as the broader faith community.

REGIONAL GROUPS CONTINUE EFFORTS

Holland Supporters Awarded

Many of RfA's Holland, Michigan supporters are active in Holland is Ready, a group advocating for LGBTQ equality in Holland's community life and government. In June, 2011, the group experienced the disappointment of a 5-4 vote in Holland's City Council against including sexual orientation and gender identity in the city's anti-discrimination laws affecting housing and employment opportunities. (The proposal had been supported unanimously by Holland's Human Relations commission and the RCA's Holland classis.) Last month, however, Holland is Ready received a Social Justice award for its legislative advocacy efforts on behalf of the proposal. Karis Granberg-Michaelson, one of three current RfA board members who are active in Holland is Ready (along with David Van Heest and Dr. Jane Dickie), reflects on the award:

A contagious joy filled the Holland City Hall chambers the night Holland is Ready received its Social Justice award in the category of Government and Community Relations. When Rev. Jennifer Adams (Grace Episcopal Church) accepted the award on behalf of Holland is Ready, she didn't let slip the irony, pointing out that Holland is Ready may "in fact be the only group ever who in one six month time period were first denied the rights we requested and were then celebrated by the city for our efforts in seeking those rights."

The air was very different on January 18 than it had been the night of the 5 to 4 vote. Where it had slumped in defeat, the atmosphere now lifted in laughter and resonated with celebration. As the various awards were given, the City Council invited any present members of the recognized organization to stand. When Holland is Ready was invited to do so, 80% of the room stood. We lined the steps of City Hall wearing Holland is Ready sweatshirts and smiling from ear to ear, because our movement is irrepressible.



Each person in the picture is a branch of a tree that is growing broader and stronger with each canvass, the knock on each door, each conversation that takes place (such conversations have shown that over 70% of voters support an amendment in favor of equal rights for LGBT Q persons in Holland). Congratulations, Holland is Ready!

NEW JERSEY SUPPORTERS LEND THEIR CREATIVITY TO THE CAUSE

"I think we need to celebrate the past year," suggested Board member Bob Mutch. So Bob and his wife, Carol, hosted a "Celebrate RfA" party for supporters in the Northern NJ area,



complete with a "Room for All Jeopardy" computer game created by Bob and thoroughly enjoyed by all. Bob offers the game (in Power Point) to anybody who wants to host a similar event—great idea!

Attending the gathering were Matt and Rev. Emily Ratering-Youngberg, who have composed a song for use by Room for All, titled, "God's Love is Wide." The song is suitable for many church settings; a song sheet with guitar chords and an MP3 file of the song may be found at <http://roomforall.com/resources/room-for-all-songs>. We know of one church that has already learned it.

THANK YOU, CREATIVE SUPPORTERS!

Upstate NY Groups offer resources, Scripture study

The Albany area RfA group will host a resource sharing event on Mon., Feb. 27th. "Through My Eyes," a DVD tracing the stories of a group of evangelical gay Christians, will be shown & discussed.



On Mon., March 19, the Mid-Hudson group will host Rev. Cari Keith, who will lead "Overcoming Fear through Transformative Bible Study" at Old Dutch Church, Kingston NY.

For details about these events, check the RfA Facebook page or website or email info@roomforall.com.

RfA IN THE NEWS

Executive Director Marilyn Paarlberg was interviewed by the Albany (NY) TIMES UNION about her work with RfA and her support for LGBT inclusion: <http://www.timesunion.com/local/article/Diverse-congregation-strengthens-church-2518863.php>

WINTER 2012

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.
- ☐ Wear a RfA lapel pin, use a travel mug or tote bag.
- ☐ 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.