



## Assembly Headliners Announced

Top LGBT faith leaders to present at *Until All Are Free* assembly

Once again, you are invited to participate in *Until All Are Free*, ReconcilingWorks 2015 Assembly and Reconciling in Christ Conference. *Until All Are Free* will be held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, July 31–August 2, 2015. Pre-events will take place July 30. Most sessions will be held on the Augsburg College campus near downtown Minneapolis.

We are excited to announce **Sharon Groves** and the **Rev. Rodney McKenzie** will be our featured speakers. Sharon Groves, the keynote speaker, is the former director of Faith and Religion at the Human Rights Campaign and Rev. McKenzie, the Bible study leader, is the Faith Work Director at The National LGBTQ Task Force. Please see their separate biographies on page 7.

### Pre-Events July 30

Pre-events will occur on Thursday, July 30. These events provide opportunities to go deeper into particular aspects of the LGBT movement. The \$100 pre-event fee (*separate from the regular registration fee*) includes programming and lunch. As of this

writing, the pre-events will include:

- Building an Inclusive Church Training
- Worship and the Arts
- Are You My Pastor? Presented by Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries



Celebrating the legacy of our leaders  
Looking to the day when all are free

### Friday Night Gala, Celebration, and Silent Auction

The ReconcilingWorks Gala and Celebration is a time to assemble together, enjoy great company and good food. This event takes place on Friday evening, July 31,

and will include a silent auction, a three-course dinner, and a program highlighting the successes of ReconcilingWorks and the people who have made this organization what it is today. Also, there will be music and funky dancing!

The program will include hearing from Emily Eastwood and a showing of appreciation and thanks for her work and dedication to ReconcilingWorks and the movement.



The Courtyard Marriott ballroom in downtown Minneapolis will be our host for this joyful evening and is the same hotel ReconcilingWorks has partnered with to offer a housing block. It is just a mile from Augsburg College. For those coming from the Friday Conference activities, there will

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AUBREY THONVOLD

# A Renewed Sense of Love and Commitment

**A**s I sit down to write this article, I find myself taking a deep breath in thanks and gratitude for the work and commitment of ReconcilingWorks’ staff, Board Members, Regional Coordinators, RIC settings, volunteers, and donors. It has been a fast-paced ten months since arriving last June. It has been a time of renewal, refreshing, and visioning as ReconcilingWorks continues to be the leader ensuring that church and society not only name a welcome to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people and families, but also ensuring it is a lived experience.

In April, ReconcilingWorks gathered its dedicated Regional Coordinators from all around the U.S. to identify the work that remains undone. The Regional Coordinators are bridge builders who know all are God’s beloved, who believe the Spirit gives a diversity of gifts, and who feel called by Jesus Christ to work for justice.

Over the three days we spent together, we named the work of how to make welcome a lived experience for LGBT people and families in alignment with ReconcilingWorks’ two-year strategic plan. “It’s a new day with inspired vision, enthusiastic leadership and clear mission

(values and goals) at Reconciling Works,” said Kenny Callahan, Region 2 Coordinator from Los Angeles, California. “Initially, I came to the Regional Coordinator’s Retreat to see if I would continue serving or resign my volunteer role within the organization. Re-connecting with friends, meeting the new staff and board members, sharing personal experiences and passion for the work of building bridges of welcome for LGBTQ people within the ELCA has brought a renewed sense of love and commitment for this important life-changing ministry.”

I do not believe Kenny is alone in his wonder and trepidation about where ReconcilingWorks is and about the path we

communication, and norms. Second is **Systems**: we have examined our structure, processes, technology, and strategies. And third is **Hearts and Minds**: we have explored our purpose, beliefs, emotions, and belonging. Through this time of reflection, examination, and visioning, the staff, Regional Coordinators, and Board Members have worked in partnership to ensure we are bringing our best to meet the needs of the church and society. We are committed to the success of this organization and the hundreds of thousands of lives who have encountered its work. Staff is working from their gifts and skills to ensure we provide a high level of professionalism and integrity.

“I am truly grateful we have such a passionate and committed team of staff and volunteers at ReconcilingWorks,” said Leo Bancroft, Region 1 Coordinator from Portland, Oregon. “So many awesome folks are working for justice and inclusion for all. I’m really excited about the vision of our strategic initiatives and the opportunity to

**Our mission and vision only exist through our ability to be in relationship with each of you.**

are creating to live out the mission and vision of over 40 years of history. Change can be challenging, as it raises questions of purpose, beliefs, and belonging, all wrapped in emotion.

ReconcilingWorks has spent the last ten months examining three key elements of our identity. The first is **Behavior**: we have taken a deep look at our skills, habits,

live out my faith, work for justice, and share the good news of the Gospel. I am encouraged, energized, and inspired! Thanks be to God!”

I hope all of you will be able to join us at the assembly *Until All Are Free* this summer in Minneapolis. Our mission and vision only exist through our ability to be in relationship with each of you. Your time, talent, resources, and personal story are how ReconcilingWorks will continue to be a driving force for how the church is church to all God’s beloved! Come and share in the excitement of meeting and building relationship with staff, Regional Coordinators, Board Members, and others who are also committed to the work of welcome, inclusion, and equity for LGBT people. You are welcome, you belong, and together we are ReconcilingWorks. ■

## RIC Settings Added to the Roster since last issue

- Bethel Lutheran Church, Portland, Oregon
- Bridge of Peace Community Church Lutheran Church, Camden, New Jersey
- Christ Lutheran Church, Cheyenne, Wyoming
- Edmonds Lutheran Church, Edmonds, Washington
- Emmaus Lutheran Church, Eugene, Oregon
- Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Westborough, Massachusetts
- Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, Lincolnshire, Illinois
- Klamath Lutheran Church, Klamath Falls, Oregon
- Lamb of God Lutheran Church, Anaheim, California
- Luther House at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut
- Lutheran Church of the Resurrection, Prairie Village, Kansas
- Messiah Lutheran Church, Washburn, Wisconsin
- Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Marlton, New Jersey
- Salem Lutheran Church, Lenexa, Kansas

- St. James Lutheran Church, Chicago, Illinois
- St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, North Versailles, Pennsylvania
- St. Paul Lutheran Church, Villa Park, Illinois
- The Lakes Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, Nevada
- Transfiguration Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Minnesota
- Trinity Lutheran Church, St. Petersburg, Florida
- Valley of Peace Lutheran Church, Golden Valley, Minnesota
- West Linn Lutheran Church, West Linn, Oregon
- Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, Cobleskill, New York
- Zion Lutheran Church, Finland, Minnesota

For the complete list of RIC congregations, synods, and organizations, go to our website at [www.ReconcilingWorks.org/ric](http://www.ReconcilingWorks.org/ric).

**CHERYL STUART**

## Looking Ahead While Giving Thanks

It's a privilege and a daunting challenge to have this space in Concord to talk with you. The blank page stares at us, yet there are so many things we could share with you. Just in the ten days before this column was written, one or the other of us has been asked: How do I help my congregation have a conversation around marriage? (Short answer: slowly.) What are these so-called "religious freedom" bills and why are they so bad? I mean, don't we all want to be "free" to practice our religion? (Very short answer: discrimination in the name of religion is still discrimination.) We are a newly married gay couple, but there is some unspoken unease in our congregation. How can we help change that? (Short answer: by being you, and congratulations!) I think I understand "gay" and "lesbian," but I don't understand "transgender." Are transgender people made in God's image too? (Short answer: absolutely yes!)

The "short answers" above belie deep conversations. Moreover, the questions drive home an undeniable fact: that the

"same old" questions or issues get re-packaged and asked in new ways. This notion of "religious liberty" to justify homophobia is a prime example. There are lessons we can learn from the great lengths it was, and still is, used to justify racism. Old arguments are packaged in new ways. The message that God's radical, fully inclusive love is really for all continues to be a response that can never be said often enough. The ministry of reconciliation, entrusted to us, is urgently needed.

So while we are unwavering in our message, we must be nimble as an organization to be effective evangelists in a changing church and world. The ReconcilingWorks Board of Directors realized that we must closely align our resources and energies with the mission we believe God is now calling us to do. We are profoundly grateful for those who have laid the groundwork for the path on which we boldly continue. We are thankful for the vision of those who led ReconcilingWorks through extraordinary times. Keeping the concept of graceful engagement at the

It is with great joy that **we welcome Aubrey Thonvold as the new Executive Director of ReconcilingWorks!**

mission and ministry of ReconcilingWorks still matters. While our context has changed dramatically since the 70s, the need for a Lutheran voice for full inclusion and participation in the church and society is as important now as it has ever been. Some of the questions may seem "old" or clunky—or both. Some issues may feel all but settled: we await a US Supreme Court decision on marriage equality; an ELCA Task Force is in conversation about how the church can authentically minister to same gendered couples and their families; and LGBT pastors are slowly being called to congregations. Isn't our work "done"?

While progress is to be celebrated, we are a long way from "done." Sometimes the

forefront, giving people the support and encouragement to tell their stories, listening deeply to those who see the world differently—it's all part of our DNA now. And it's oh-so Lutheran!

As our sister in Christ, Emily Eastwood, stepped down as Executive Director, the Board searched for someone who understood from whence we came, but who could also see a path ahead and lead us in this new context. So, after prayerful consideration, it is with great joy that we welcome Aubrey Thonvold as the new Executive Director of ReconcilingWorks! Aubrey has served as our Interim Executive Director since June. We have experienced her energy and passion, her deeply rooted

faith, and her grace. Aubrey is a Lutheran and a Minnesota native, having most recently worked with faith communities in marriage equality campaigns in Hawaii and Oregon. Aubrey is married to Heather Thomason, who is a hospice chaplain with Allina Health in the Twin Cities. Aubrey brings networking expertise and an intuitive strategic focus to our work.

Speaking recently with Board officers, Emily Eastwood said, "I am pleased for Aubrey and for ReconcilingWorks as she becomes Executive Director. She leads with grace and gratitude, both essential when

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### Publication Information

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# Fight for Equality Far from Over

#Transgenderlives, #BlacklivesMatter  
BY NICOLE M. GARCIA, MA LPCC

Creating Change 2015, the largest gathering of LGBTQ activists in the United States, was held in Denver this year. I live in a little town just to the west of Denver, so I enjoyed a bus ride each morning and evening as I commuted to the event. I attended this huge conference as a member of the 2015 Trans Seminarian Cohort, a development experience sponsored by the Pacific School of Religion, the Freedom Center for Social Justice's Transgender Faith and Action Network, and the Institute for Welcoming Resources at the LGBTQ Task Force.



LORI PHOTOGRAPHY

Transgender people of color demand an end to the discrimination and oppression that contribute to the violent deaths of our sisters.

As a member of the cohort, I hope to build relationships with new and known colleagues, and journey deep into the meaning of what leadership means and feels like for people of faith who also identify as transgender or genderqueer. I spent a considerable amount of time interacting with my fellow seminarians. We were able to share our experiences of what it is like to be transgender or genderqueer in predominately cisgender seminaries. I must admit that it was wonderful to connect with people who share the experience of seminary without having to educate them on what it means to be transgender.

This was the fourth Creating Change conference I have attended. This year was as incredible as years past. It was wonderful to renew friendships with people I have met over the years as a speaker and facilitator at many national conferences and training opportunities. I was impressed by the high caliber of young people who attended and facilitated workshops this year. I was also gratified that the status quo was challenged.

On Thursday evening, the plenary session was interrupted by transgender activists who demanded to be heard. At the time of the writing of this article, six transwomen of color have been murdered in the United States. The deaths of these women have not been reported by major news outlets, but their deaths are having a dramatic impact upon the transgender community. Transgender people of color

demand an end to the discrimination and oppression that contribute to the violent deaths of our sisters. During the Friday plenary, representatives from Ferguson, Missouri took the stage to vent their frustration at the deaths of young Black men.

There was a call for people to vent their feelings using #translivesmatter and #blacklivesmatter. Within a few hours, there were people stating that #alllivesmatter should be used to underscore the sanctity of all life. I agree all of God's creation is sacred, but not all people are being targeted. People of color, especially transgender women and Black men, are being killed for merely existing. As a transgender Latina, I am extremely concerned: while the transgender community may receive vocal support, often the words do not turn into action or, more importantly, financial support.

ReconcilingWorks started the Reconciling in Christ (RIC) program in 1984. Initially to be considered RIC, a congregation had to publicly declare people of all sexual orientations were welcome. Since July 2002, the RIC congregations have been asked to include people all gender identities and expressions in the welcoming statement. Does your congregation include gender identity and

expression in your welcoming statement? Does your congregation have gender neutral restrooms? How welcoming is your congregation to transgender people?

Many people believe the fight for equality is over, but that is far from the truth. Cities, counties, and states are now focusing on the transgender community. The right to use a public restroom is becoming a civil rights issue. No, my friends, the fight for equality and justice is still going on and we need to pull together to ensure all people can be true to themselves and be who God meant them to be. ■

Nicole Garcia is a registered psychotherapist and a candidate for ordained ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. She serves as Vice-Chair on the ReconcilingWorks Board of Directors.

## Upcoming "Becoming an Inclusive Church" Trainings

May 15-16, 2015  
Kingston, Pennsylvania

June 5-6, 2015  
Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania (Southeast PA)

September 25-26, 2015  
Lenexa, Kansas (Kansas City metro)

# Gettysburg Seminary Becomes RIC

Half of All ELCA Seminaries Are RIC



# Gettysburg SEMINARY

**T**he Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, a seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) located in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, has been designated as Reconciling in Christ (RIC)

On April 22, the institution's board of directors unanimously adopted a welcoming statement grounded in John 13 ("Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another") and Galatians 3:28 ("There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus"). The board's statement acknowledged that the seminary "affirms

God's love for persons of all gender identities and sexual orientations, and protects all persons against discrimination and abuse in its policies and equips them to be faithful leaders in the church."

In addition to the board's affirmation, the seminary's Student Association overwhelmingly voted to encourage the board to consider RIC, with the faculty also adding their strong endorsement.

Gettysburg Seminary is the oldest of the eight seminaries of the ELCA, tracing its start to 1826.

The RIC roster now stands at over 600 settings, including over 500 congregations and half of all ELCA seminaries. Along with Gettysburg Seminary, RIC seminaries include Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, the Lutheran School of Theology Chicago, and the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. ■

## From the Co-Chair

*continued from page 3*

organizing to create the changes of heart and action needed to foster full inclusion. Her Lutheran foundations as well as her experience make Aubrey an excellent choice for leadership, especially at this

place in the journey of both our organization and the movement in church and society."

We are confident of Aubrey's ability to lead ReconcilingWorks forward through the lens of our new strategic plan. Where our focus was once primarily on sanctuary

for LGBT people, it is now on faith-based advocacy for full participation in our church and in society. The strategic plan focuses on four key things:

- deepening and expanding our Reconciling in Christ programs;
- building and strengthening relationships within the ELCA and the ELCIC;
- dismantling injustice based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, race, ethnicity, and other social categories through a Lutheran faith lens; and
- sustainably funding the mission.

I know I speak on behalf of the entire board of directors in expressing a hearty welcome to Aubrey in her role as executive director. And I can think of no better way for you to take part in that welcome than by coming to Minneapolis this summer to attend Until All Are Free, ReconcilingWorks' 2015 Assembly in Minneapolis, Minnesota, July 31–August 2. Hope to see you there! ■



The ReconcilingWorks Board of Directors is thrilled to announce that Aubrey Thonvold has been named Executive Director. Please see the Co-Chair column beginning on page 3 for more details.



This Religious Freedom Restoration Act bill infringes on **ethics and our love of neighbor.**

Council. “This RFRA [Religious Freedom Restoration Act] bill infringes on ethics and our love of neighbor.”

The Rev. Flippin also said, “We are here united for a common purpose. Religious freedom is a deeply resonant American principle. In fact, it is one of the most fundamental rights as Americans. From the first Puritans who arrived in Massachusetts

## Georgia Clergy Unite to Oppose Religious Refusal Bills

Despite prophetic testimony, bill passes in Senate

A diverse group of Georgia faith leaders gathered at the Georgia State Capitol on Tuesday, January 14, to call on state legislators to oppose divisive religious refusal bills being proposed and introduced in the upcoming session of the state legislature. If passed, these bills could be used to refuse goods, services, and employment to LGBT people based solely on their sexual orientation, identity, or expression, granting business owners unprecedented latitude to refuse service to LGBT people.

The clergy announced the release of a letter signed by more than 60 religious leaders from across the state, warning state lawmakers about the dangerous potential for an increase in discrimination against people of all backgrounds.

“We strongly oppose giving for-profit corporations religious rights that could allow them to discriminate against employees based on any characteristic –

from their religious practices to their sexual orientation. This principle harkens back to the civil rights movement and our nation’s core values of equality and justice,” the letter reads, in part.

“We believe that love of neighbor guides our standing today,” said Rev. William Flippin, Jr. (pictured above), pastor of Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Atlanta, Georgia and member of the ELCA Church

because of religious persecution, we are protected in the Constitution on religious freedom and expression. We all know that freedom is a great responsibility – to protect, to uplift, to enlighten. But, also, it is the responsibility of freedom that we not harm others. That’s why I stand today opposing House Bill 29. As a Lutheran pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, I share with these great faith leaders their universal values. Our ethics of the way we treat others should reflect the way we want to be treated based on the universal love of our creator. Laws that are created or interpreted that go against that principle in harming any group, goes against that principle, hurting us all.”

Sadly, despite the testimony of the faith leaders, the Georgia State Senate passed its version of the so-called “Georgia Religious Freedom Restoration Act” by a vote of 37-15 on March 5. The bill now moves on to the Georgia House. ■

*ReconcilingWorks thanks Pastor Flippin, and all the clergy who participated, for their work and witness.*

## I N M E M O R I A M



Rev. Lloyd Heroff	In memory of Pastor Lloyd Heroff	Virginia T. Duval
Rev. Lloyd Heroff	In memory of Lloyd Heroff	Vern Almlie, Polly A. Fassinger, Marshall J. Hambro, Chester F. Nettetstad, Rebecca Novak, Donna Pezzuto, Glenda L. Sanford, Raydon L. Workin"
Rev. Lloyd Heroff	Memorial for Lloyd Heroff	Lynn Mickelson
Rev. Lloyd Heroff	In memory of Rev. Lloyd Heroff	Jane Mueller
Rev. Lloyd Heroff	In loving memory of our friend Lloyd Heroff	Edwina Nagahashi

## Assembly

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be shuttle services to the hotel and back.

**If you can't make it for the whole weekend**, but still want to join in the fun and gather with friends, you can register for the Gala and Celebration without registering for the entire conference. The Gala-only price is just \$40 and includes your ticket for the entire evening, including the silent auction and dinner. To register for the Gala only, please see the Register tab at [assembly.reconcilingworks.org](http://assembly.reconcilingworks.org) for full information.

## Silent Auction

Always a popular event, this year's silent auction items include:

- A trip to New York City for two (includes hotel, dinner, tour of the city, Broadway tickets and more).
- Gift baskets from ReconcilingWorks chapters
- And many other fabulous items!

## Assembly Workshop Tracks

**Extending LGBT Welcome in Multiracial Settings:** see how we can create caring communities of faith; learn how to be allies for, and minister with, all people of color in racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse settings

**Public Engagement:** explore how Lutherans can make their voices of faith heard in the church and the public square.

**Reconciling In Christ:** explore ways individuals can help expand and deepen the RIC program in their community and throughout North America.

**LGBTQ:** take a close look at definitions and terminology for sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression and explore new resources on how congregations can be prepared and encouraged to call LGBTQ clergy.

## Registration

Full registration cost is \$285, which includes workshops and activities, provided meals (lunches on Friday and Saturday and the Gala dinner on Saturday), and one ticket to the Friday evening Gala. Pre-Event registration for Thursday is separate and includes lunch. Separate one-day-only registration and Gala-only registrations are also available. Scholarships available upon request as funds allow. *Please see the Register tab at [assembly.reconcilingworks.org](http://assembly.reconcilingworks.org) for full info.*

## Lodging

Two lodging locations will be available. University dormitory-style housing is available at Middlebrook Hall and Tower, which is on the University of Minnesota campus near Augsburg College. The other option is the Courtyard Marriott Minneapolis Downtown (although the hotel is located within walking distance, a shuttle service will also be provided). Note: ReconcilingWorks will not be assigning roommates. *Please see the Lodging tab at*

[assembly.reconcilingworks.org](http://assembly.reconcilingworks.org) for full information and to reserve your housing.

## Meals

Meals are provided with a full registration include cafeteria lunches on Friday and Saturday and the Gala dinner on Saturday. Pre-Event registration for Thursday is separate and includes lunch. If you are staying at the Marriott, a continental breakfast is provided with your room registration. ■

## Dr. Sharon Groves, Keynote Speaker

**D**r. Sharon Groves works at the intersection of faith, LGBTQ equality, and social justice. She is currently working with Faith and Public Life to forge new dialogues between evangelicals and the LGBTQ community. Sharon is the former Director of the Religion and Faith Program at the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), a post she held from 2005–2014. Through her leadership, Sharon oversaw breakthrough conversations with conservative and moderate religious leaders nationwide to advance dialogues around faith and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender equality. She guided the mobilization of faith organizers in statewide advocacy work, including marriage efforts in Oregon, Illinois, Rhode Island, Maine, Maryland, and Washington State. She has also overseen the development of many training tools and resources for advocacy efforts as well as efforts to increase understanding of LGBT family and friends from a faith perspective. Among such resources that she spearheaded are *A La Familia*, a bilingual guide for Latino/a families struggling with the Bible and LGBT family, and its accompanying film, *Before God: We Are All Family and Triumphs through Faith*, a tool for faith leaders organizing for justice. She has also created a Summer Institute for Religious and Theological Study, which invests in the next-generation of LGBT and allied faith scholars. Prior to joining HRC, Sharon served as editor and managing editor for *Feminist Studies*, an interdisciplinary



scholarly journal housed at the University of Maryland. Throughout her career, Sharon has been guided by the belief that none should have to choose between who they are, who they love, and what they believe.

Sharon received her Ph.D. in English Literature from the University of Maryland in 2000 and has furthered her theological education through extensive course work at Chicago Theological Seminary, Wesley Theological Seminary, and the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation. She is an active lay member at her local congregation, All Souls Church in Washington, D.C.

## Bible Study Leader, Rodney McKenzie

**R**odney McKenzie, Jr., Faith Work Director, is an out person of faith, community organizer, and a reverend. Over the last thirteen years, he's worked for organizations fighting for grassroots political power in marginalized communities. From being a Field Organizer at the Task Force in 2002 to most recently being the Spiritual Director and Co-Creator of Expansion Church, his work focuses on the intersection of community organizing and radical spirituality in the public square. Rodney is currently a Master of Divinity candidate at Union Theological Seminary. By putting James Baldwin, Audre Lorde, Essex Hemphill and the Apostle Paul in conversation, he is constructing a liberation theology that challenges how theology and LGBTQ politics



approaches the intersection of race, class, and sexuality. Originally from Dallas, Texas, Rodney currently resides in New York City, New York.



## Faith and Justice Call Us to Court

Lutheran couple first to challenge Arizona marriage ban.

BY JOSEPH CONNOLLY

*In January of 2014, Joseph Connolly (above right) and Terry Pochert (above left) were the first couple in Arizona to file a lawsuit to remove the state's ban on same-gender marriage. In October of that same year, U.S. District Judge John W. Sedwick did just that, declaring Arizona's ban on same-sex marriage unconstitutional, immediately ordering the state not to enforce it.*

Terry and I are often asked, “What led you to bring a case challenging the Arizona ban on same-gender marriage?” Our answers: God, faith, freedom of religion, equal rights, social justice, strong moral compasses, adopted children, limited parental rights. Impulsiveness.

But Terry and I credit two church communities, Faith Lutheran and University Lutheran, both in the Phoenix area, for the victory for marriage equality in Arizona in 2014. Here's how we got there....

In 1995, Terry and I met in the Detroit, Michigan, suburbs. Terry was the organist at his small ELCA congregation in Novi, Michigan. While Terry welcomed me to attend his church, I was hesitant. I joked I didn't want to be the organist's boyfriend but, in reality, I wasn't ready to go back. I was afraid I wouldn't feel welcome. I was afraid our relationship would have an impact on his position and his membership in the congregation.

By the time Terry and I met, I had walked

away from my denomination. I was raised Roman Catholic in the suburbs of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I always sensed a great loss in walking away. Terry was raised Lutheran Missouri Synod and joined the ELCA as an adult. In my departure from the Roman Catholic Church, I missed that sense of community that comes in a congregation. But I felt pushed away, not only on the “gay” issue but on women's reproductive rights, the Catholic Church's stand on suicide, not allowing priests to marry, etc....

After our move from Michigan to Arizona in 1997, we found a Reconciling in Christ (RIC) congregation, Faith Lutheran Church, in Phoenix at 7th and Camelback. Our first visit opened the door for me to

return to a faith community. It started with two men welcoming us and clearly recognizing us as a gay couple. During communion, Rev. Richard Staats instinctively communed Terry and me together, as a couple, without words ever being exchanged. Communing us together was simply a natural gesture on Pastor Staats' part. That single, simple gesture opened up the door to allow me to trust a faith community again.

We stayed there for several years. In 2000, we moved to another congregation, University Lutheran Church (ULC), which is a bit closer to our home.

Like Faith Lutheran, ULC is RIC. They had just completed the process to call a new pastor, Rev. Gary McCluskey. ULC maintains an active campus ministry to students of the surrounding colleges, drawing primarily from Arizona State University. Small in size but incredibly open minded, we fell right into place at ULC. We love the mix of seniors, young people, couples, singles, professionals, and other LGBT people. Welcoming became especially important to us here.

In this congregation there were also two teenagers, whom we watched grow up, go to college, and follow in their father's footsteps in the legal profession.

The 2003 Goodrich decision in Massachusetts, the first by a U.S. state supreme court to find that same-sex couples have the right to marry, gave us hope that maybe, just maybe, one day we would have the chance to marry. Terry and I purchased wedding rings and locked them away for safe keeping, hoping one day we would be able to use them.

In 2008, Terry and I decided to marry in California during the legal window that opened that year. We married in St. Mark's Lutheran Church in San Francisco. Out of concern for Pastor McCluskey, we chose not to ask him to perform our marriage ceremony. We could not ask Gary to risk his career for our marriage, a distinct possibility at that time. He could be censured, lose his call, or lose his retirement. Marriage was important to us, for us, in the church; but we could not ask Pastor Gary.

Fortunately, retired pastors don't have as much to risk as pastors in an active call. And so, in stepped Rev. Staats. Rev. Staats was retired and, as luck would have it, was attending a conference in California. He agreed to perform our ceremony. On July

4th, 2008, Terry and I married in California, with Pastor Staats, our friend Nancy Nipper as our witness, and the church custodian in attendance. The church was empty. It was thrilling to be married in church by a pastor we loved. Still, the empty church left a little emptiness in our hearts because our families and friends were not present.

In 2009, Terry attended the ELCA churchwide assembly in Minneapolis, as a voting member, where history was made. The ELCA voted to allow same-sex marriage in churches in states where legal, civil marriages were permitted. The vote also allowed clergy and lay ministers with same-sex partners to be rostered.

After the Windsor decision in June of 2013, where the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a major part of federal Defense of Marriage Act, Terry and I contacted a national rights organization who had offices in Arizona. We inquired about a lawsuit to fight the state ban on same-sex marriage and offered to serve as plaintiffs. The organization responded by telling us they had no interest at that time in fighting the ban. They were busy in other states with similar lawsuits and we assumed they had other issues in Arizona.

Shortly after that, we came to know another same-sex couple at ULC. The two women had five children in their household, some of whom were adopted. We learned that only one parent had full legal custody

think about that and get back to you.”

Ten days later, after an exchange of emails, Shawn indicated he did have someone in mind. Himself. He was interested in taking the case.

We met with Shawn to lay out the issues as we saw them. The ban was first a violation of our freedom of religion, denying us and other same-sex couples access to the rite of marriage in our faith. The ban enabled the state to ignore our California marriage even while it recognized out-of-state marriages of our heterosexual counterparts. Terry and I felt we were not being treated equally under the law and the Windsor decision was the event that opened the door for us.

In a very short period, we needed to find other plaintiffs with compelling stories. A call to a former member of ULC with ties to the adoption industry put us in touch with two couples with children they had adopted. One couple married in California. The second wished to marry and were contemplating a move from Arizona to another state to find better protections for their children and a state that offered two-parent, same-sex adoption. A paralegal found a fourth couple who wished to marry. A month later, three additional couples were added.

We were unprepared for the publicity that followed the filing on January 6, 2014. What we did count on, and did receive, was

**Their legal situation made us sad and angry. We realized the marriage ban affected more than just Terry and me.**

of the adopted children. Due to discriminatory Arizona laws, only one parent could have full parental custodial and decision-making rights; the other parent was technically a legal stranger.

Their legal situation made us sad and angry. We realized the marriage ban affected more than just Terry and me. Impulsively, at a Wednesday evening Advent service of Lessons and Carols in December 2013, we asked Shawn Aiken, a litigation attorney and the father of the two children who grew up to attend law school, if he knew of anyone who could help us file a lawsuit against the State of Arizona regarding the ban on same sex marriage.

A bit stunned, Shawn replied, “Let me

support from our church community, current and former. Members from Faith Lutheran reached out and congratulated us. The ULC church community congratulated us. ULC members shared how proud they were of what Shawn, his son and daughter, and Terry and I were doing. I reminded them a former member had their hands in this, too.

Some cried because they have family members who are LGBT. Others shared personal stories they didn't ever have to. We were blown away. People we didn't know thanked us. As it turns out, many of the *Connolly* plaintiffs are, or were, people of faith, and some had met through church.

For two men who have always been more



### Receive Concord by email

Now you have the option to receive this newsletter electronically by email, rather than being mailed a paper copy. This is better for the environment and saves ReconcilingWorks the cost of postage. To switch your subscription to the e-version, email your request to [info@reconcilingworks.org](mailto:info@reconcilingworks.org).

comfortable serving, being behind the scenes, being in front was an awkward experience for us. Terry and I both agree: the year 2014 was blur. One of our plaintiff couples decided they would not wait until the ruling and held a commitment ceremony that same year in October, less than a week before the ruling. At the wedding reception, a young, engaged same-sex couple approached Terry. With tears in her eyes and holding her partner's hand, she said, “Because of you, we can just get married in April.” We drove home that night and talked about nothing else. The impact of the lawsuit hit us in those ten words this young woman shared.

The question we put to Shawn Aiken was spontaneous, spur-of-the-moment: “Do you know of anyone ... ?” If it weren't for the welcome and support of two RIC communities, we may never have joined a church. We knew they had our backs and that gave us the courage. The adopted children of the other couple at church were our kick in the pants to act. Our moral compasses were re-aligned, pointing in the right direction. This was a social justice issue. This was part of our faith journey. The impulsiveness? Well, that was God in action. ■



From left: Rev. William Hamilton, Executive Director Aubrey Thonvold, Rev. Ann Tiemeyer

## Team Presents to ELCA Working Group

**LGBT singles, couples, and families need to be feel welcome, be accepted as they are.**

**O**n January 23–24, representatives of ReconcilingWorks visited with the ELCA’s Working Group for Ministry to and with Same Gender Couples and their Families at the ELCA churchwide headquarters in Chicago, Illinois. ReconcilingWorks’ Executive Director, Aubrey Thonvold, along with the Revs. Ann Tiemeyer and William Hamilton, presented to the Working Group about the continuing need for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) couples and their families to feel welcome in the church and be accepted as they are.

The mission of the ELCA’s Working Group is to encourage conversations and resource sharing throughout the church about ministering to same-gender couples and their families. According to the official charter adopted by the Working Group, they

are to “explore ministry to and with same-gender couples and their families and the impact on society and the ministry of this church in order to bring recommendations regarding next steps for conversation and resource sharing within the ELCA.”

In identifying resources and developing recommendations, the group’s charter calls for them to “address” and “attend to” “all four bound-conscience convictions regarding human sexuality” as outlined in the ELCA social statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*.

The social statement’s “four convictions,” as they have come to be called, are descriptions of conscience-bound beliefs held by ELCA members regarding same-gender relationships. The ELCA has committed to “recognize” and “respect” these four articulations. Conviction #1, the least accepting of same-gender relationships among the four, states that “same-gender sexual behavior is sinful”; therefore, LGBT people are called to “repentance” and to a “celibate lifestyle.” Conviction #4, on the other end of the statement’s defined spectrum, calls for the community to “surround [same-gender] couples and their lifelong commitments with prayer to live in ways that glorify God” and encourage them to “seek the highest legal accountability available for their relationships.” (See *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*, pages 19–21.)

The ReconcilingWorks team was not the only panel invited to present to the Working Group. The group also invited Lutheran CORE (Lutheran Coalition for Renewal) and two other panels, one made up of clergy from various convictions and the other a lesbian couple from a Reconciling in Christ (RIC) congregation, to speak to the Working Group and to answer questions. Lutheran CORE worked to defeat the 2009 social statement on sexuality and to maintain the ban on partnered LGBT clergy and laypeople from rostered service. That

## I N M E M O R I A M



Bailey (Sandy) Stuart III	In Memory of Sandy Stuart	Mr. & Mrs. Ballard, Fred Behrmann, Mr. & Mrs. Breeding, Pamela Davidson, Patricia Hurt, Joan B. Muser, Steve Robinson"
Bailey (Sandy) Stuart III	In memory of Sandy Stuart, a member of the North Texas Chapter	Bob Eastwood
Bailey (Sandy) Stuart III	In memory of Bailey Stuart III	Eileen Eliason
Bailey (Sandy) Stuart III	In memory of Baily Sibley Stuart III	Ann Friederich
Bailey (Sandy) Stuart III	In memory of Bailey Sandy Stuart	Kay Champagne, Janet Follstaedt, Gary Johnson, Sandra Knutson, Brian & Lynette Reinhardts

organization was instrumental in the formation of a new break-away denomination, the North American Lutheran Church.

Aubrey Thonvold said, “As the ELCA continues to move forward in the midst of an ever changing culture in positive and life changing ways for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and families, it is important for people and congregations to have conversations about pastoral care and ministry. Let us all strive to be bridge builders of welcome through graceful

you are with your community of faith, affirming where you feel welcomed and included, and asking for additional ministry or pastoral care wherever you find it is needed.”

The Rev. Ann Tiemeyer, former staff for the National Council of Churches, articulated how facilitating conversations around marriage and providing ministries of welcome for LGBT people and families is an important mission tool for the church at this time.

Rev. Tiemeyer said, “I believe one

families. The reality is that congregations are a mix of people, with a mix of life experiences, and a diversity of convictions is present in congregation that will shift and change as new members come and go. And so we need to engage each other in grace and care, so that we can move us past the anxieties, disagreement and uncertainties we may have about sexuality, marriage, and families and discern in conversation with LGBTQ couples and families what the pastoral care needs are. The diversity of our convictions can be a resource in and of itself, as we engage a culture that is also a mix of convictions.”

The Rev. William Hamilton, pastor of St. John’s Lutheran Church in Jacksonville, Florida, witnessed to the need for the church to welcome and include all from a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic context.

Rev. Hamilton said, “I am joyful because we as the ELCA have committed ourselves to become a more multicultural church; but I’m sad because we still struggle to accomplish that goal. I am joyful as I watch a nearby non-ELCA church provide a vibrant,

*continued on page 12*

**LGBT people and families: continue to share who you are with your community of faith ... and ask for additional ministry or pastoral care wherever you find it is needed.**

engagement. Pastors, church councils, and congregation members: please continue asking your LGBT people and families questions about what can and does make them feel welcome and included. LGBT people and families: continue to share who

important element for conversations in our church is that we find ways to have the conversation *across* the convictions outlined in the social statement, so we seek to find common ground from which we are able to better minister to the LGBTQ couples and

## International Program Committee (IPC) Updates

### Finding the Right Tools for the Vineyard: What can we do in the international context?

Faced with very limited resources, working with LGBT issues internationally can be overwhelming. For every step forward there seem to be steps sideways and even backwards. Part of the issue is finding the right tools to take into the international vineyard. From our work domestically we know that there is considerable variation within our own culture and that one must be selective and avoid responding with generic solutions that don’t fit the situation.

In the international context, the diversity is manifest. Not only does each country have its own variations, but so do all the national and international religious, political, social, cultural, and economic institutions and organizations used to manage, or mismanage, the globe. Fitting our tools to these different contexts is a true challenge. It requires having the tools and knowing which one is best when and where. Raising a candle in the wilderness may not be enough when the wilderness is, in fact, being consumed by a forest fire.

So where is the good news? Well, never before in history have LGBT/SOGI issues been so much on the table. (Note: SOGI stands for “sexual orientation and gender identity” and is an acronym often used in the context of international law.) That is itself an achievement. The United Nations, the World Bank, other international financial institutions (IFIs), and the European Union, for examples, all are discussing and debating the range of SOGI issues and its contextual applications. It is no longer an under-the-rug discussion; it is right on the table. It is good to be on the table, but the bad news is that, because SOGI is so prominent, the opposition to inclusivity is gearing up mightily to fight. They have a lot of resources and a lot of power. Their feelings on LGBT/SOGI cannot be removed because of the web of power they hold and can actually apply or threaten to apply.

And the fight is already both muddy and dirty. Let me relate the example of what is happening at the World Bank. The last half of my professional career has been focused on ensuring that the social and environmental impact of international projects do no harm but, rather, have a positive impact. A body of safeguard policies has evolved to ensure that projects have been designed and implemented in a positive way. More recently, I and others have sought to

include gender and SOGI-specific criteria as part of these policies.

A coalition of different sources, however, is proposing to dismantle the present safeguard system at the World Bank. This set of policies has been the model for most IFIs, and I find it outrageous that watering down these policies would even be on the table. Obviously, adding in LGBT/SOGI requirements is a difficult thing to advance in such a context. Yes, it’s difficult, but all the more necessary. Again, the proverbial candle is not the proper tool. Something that fits the context is required.

The debate spills over into congressional discussions in Washington, D.C. I am appalled to hear young, newly arrived staff members on Capitol Hill question whether SOGI issues have anything to do with international development. They have never heard, it seems, that if any are left out of poverty alleviation, poverty will always remain.

So what can we do as ReconcilingWorks? It does all seem a bit overwhelming. The flow of LGBT/SOGI persons from Uganda in search of refugee status has led the UNHCR (United National High Commissioner for Refugees) to close LGBT application for refugee status. In this example alone, hundreds of LGBT/SOGI persons are caught with no country, no shelter or food, and they fear for their lives.

What we can do, and what we must do, is to build on the comparative advantage that we as ReconcilingWorks have. This starts with recognition of the problem and a commitment to address the problem. I would like all the readers of Concord to consider what this means. What can and must we do in an international context? We know the power of commitment and internationality. This is the first step in moving ahead. We have moved ahead before.

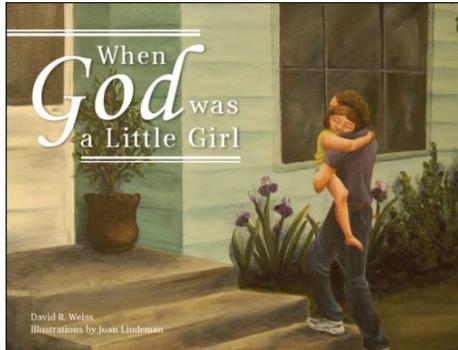
I would propose to provide some strategic guidelines in our next issue that can be used individually and collectively to address context and comparative advantage. That is my commitment to you. Should you wish to contact me with thoughts or questions, meanwhile, please do so at [International@ReconcilingWorks.org](mailto:International@ReconcilingWorks.org).

—Philip W. Moeller, PhD., Director of International Programs

# Two Writers Honored

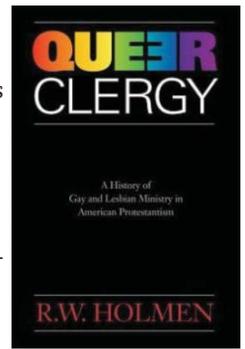
## Friends of ReconcilingWorks receive kudos for recent books

Two books by longtime friends and supporters of ReconcilingWorks, reviewed in these pages by Carol M. Dunn in the Spring 2014 issue, have received substantial kudos.



*When God Was a Little Girl*, by David Weiss, received the 2014 Silver Award in the children's picture-book category by the Nautilus Book Awards. The Nautilus Awards program honors print books that make "exceptional literary contributions to spiritual growth, conscious living, high-level wellness, green values, responsible leadership, and positive social change, as well as inspirational reading for children, teens and young adults."

*Queer Clergy*, by R.W. (Obie) Holmen, has been nominated as one of four finalists to receive a Minnesota Book Award in the general non-fiction category. Over twenty-seven years, the Minnesota Book Awards have grown in stature to become the premier literary contest in the upper Midwest, and the annual awards gala has become the region's major literary event of the season.



Congratulations to both David and Obie for your fine work! ■

### Team Presents to Working Group

*continued from page 11*

welcoming place, with multi-cultural families and singles and a variety of ages and many LGBT people; I am sad that so many of our churches don't provide what seem to be safe places, and we look to a list that tells LGBT folks where they would be fully welcome in the life of the church."

Rev. Hamilton continued, "Why is such a

list needed to navigate life and church for our LGBT sisters and brothers in Christ, or for those standing on the threshold of joining or rejoining the Christian faith? We should be dedicated to producing much needed resources to help with continued dialogue, along with resources that are inclusive of all God's people, as we seek ways to establish truly safe places, encouraging us to ask each other the tough

questions in love."

The working Group for Ministry to Same-Gender Couples and their Families meets again in June and October of 2015. The group will present its report and recommendations to the ELCA Church Council, who will decide on next steps in November. ■

## I N H O N O R O F...

In Honor of...		Honored by...
Rev. Kim Beckmann	In honor of Kim Beckmann	Ruth Almen
Paul & Cornelia Briggs	In honor of Paul and Cornelia Briggs	Heather Bachelder
Emily Eastwood	In honor of Emily Eastwood	Joseph Bauerkemper, Erik J. Strand, Thomas Taylor, Linda Thorson, Sharon C. Willsnack
Emily Eastwood	In honor of the amazing work of Emily Eastwood	John Eric Rolfstad
Tim Feiertag	In honor of Tim Feiertag for his work at Gettysburg Seminary.	Janet Montelaro
Rev. Roy Gulliford	In loving memory of the Rev. Roy Gulliford	Central Florida Chapter of ReconcilingWorks
Rev. Lyle R. Guttu	In honor of Rev. Lyle R. Guttu	Allison Guttu
Carol Kamps	In memory of Carol Kamps	Dennis A. Walker
Cara Knutson	In honor and celebration of Cara Knutson's 40th Birthday on April 22, 2015.	Mary Knutson
Lord of Light Lutheran Church and LCM of the University of Michigan	In honor of Lord of Light Lutheran Church and LCM of U of Michigan	Angus Burch
Frank Loulan & Richard Pearce-Moses	In honor of Frank Loulan and Richard Pearce-Moses	Judy Garza
Messiah Lutheran Church, Marquette	In honor of Messiah becoming RIC!	Susy Swanson
Brian Richards & Greg Jahnke	In honor of the marriage of Brian Richards and Greg Jahnke	Brian McDonnell
David Ritter & Joe Guthridge	In honor of the marriage of David Ritter and Joe Guthridge	Jennifer English
David Ritter	In memory of David Ritter	Jennifer English
Cheryl Stuart & Steve Kunst	In honor of Cheryl Stuart and Steve Kunst for their passion and work. Merry Christmas! Love, Vicki and David	Victoria L Weber
Jennie Whitehouse & Kayla McKamey	In honor of the wedding of Kayla McKamey and Jennie Whitehouse.	Anita C. Hill