

# GIFT Rap

**FAITH  
CELEBRATION**

## National Coming Out Day Service

By Jacquie Kaiser, GIFT Volunteer, and Cara Oosterhouse, GIFT Board Member



Photo courtesy of The Grand Rapids Press.

On October 11 over 170 people gathered at St. John's United Church of Christ (UCC) for a National Coming Out Day Service. A church full of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) people and allies were inspired by song and words spoken and signed. Rev. Bill Lyons from St. John's UCC and GIFT's Theresa McClellan welcomed the group. The West Michigan Gay Men's Chorus reminded us about our inner strength with the song *Something Inside So Strong*.

We acknowledged those still in pain and just coming out. GIFT board member Cara



Photo courtesy of The Grand Rapids Press.

Oosterhouse read a letter she received anonymously from a young person struggling with coming out to family and community in

the rural Midwest.

Then board member Laura Busman

shared her testimony (see page 2). Laura recounted a moving story about her coming out to family and about the job consequences of meeting her best friend and partner. In the face of family rejection and job loss, Laura's outspoken courage inspires many. Thank you, Laura, for sharing with us. We know it was difficult.

The service moved to proclaiming God's love for all. Theresa McClellan had written the uplifting song *I Want You to Know My God* as a response to a conversation with her pastor when she first came out. She and the Plymouth United Church of Christ Chorus sang it beautifully. Her song boldly proclaims the beauty of all God's children: "He made me, molds me, NO mistake there."

All eyes were glued on Katie Prins as she signed the scripture. "Listening" with our



eyes instead of our ears showed us the grace in movement and spirit which verbal communication cannot always express. Thank

you so much, Katie, for sharing your talent with the signing impaired.

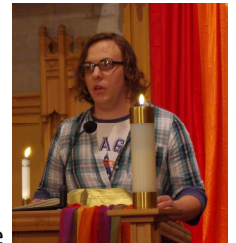
The evening continued with a moving sermon by Rev. Dr. Randal Jelks, who reminded us God loves everyone, whether black, white, red, green, LGBT, straight,



Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, etc. Even battling a cold, Rev. Dr. Jelks has a won-

derful voice and is a passionate speaker.

As an affirmation of each LGBT person's coming out, board member M Kelly invited LGBT participants to stand up if they came out 20 years ago, then 15, then 10, and so forth.



As the service came to a close, we recommitted ourselves to go out and serve. The congregation was invited to the front to select either a small rock to symbolize a commitment to walk with another on his/her journey or to select a candle as a reminder to lead and speak on behalf of those just beginning to



find their voice. People came forward during a song based on Micah 6:8: *Do justly, love kindness and walk humbly with your God*. Rev. Susan Sparta closed with a benediction.

As people enjoyed homemade treats and conversation after the service, it was hard to miss the excitement from the service and the warm fellowship of friends old and new.

This service reminded us there is much work to do. We are encouraged by the strength and grace of those who are working and praying for change.

Thanks to GIFT members and others who took the lead in planning this service for the West Michigan community as part of the "Gay Christian? Yes!" Campaign!

## FOCUS ON OUR FAMILY

# God's Call on My Life: A Testimony

By Laura Busman, GIFT Board Member



Laura Busman shares her testimony at the National Coming Out Day Service on October 11.

It's been a year since I began this journey. A journey that I never fathomed being a part of God's call on my life. It's been a year since I've come out to myself as a lesbian. It has been the most radical, heart changing, and gut wrenching year.

I grew up in a conservative Christian home, and I wouldn't change it for anything because I believe this is how I developed my strong faith as a believer in Jesus Christ. I don't remember homosexuality ever being talked about when I was a kid. In my world it was just assumed that you "knew" it was wrong. So I suppressed anything I felt and called it a "phase" I was going through. I thought I would be cured when I married the right man.

Throughout my life I felt a call to work with people. God began to develop in me leadership skills, and I served at a church for the past five years. I fell in love with this church. I was asked to serve as the middle school intern, spending hundreds

of hours with my students on mission trips, small group nights, and trips to Wendy's to talk about life. I also worked two other jobs on staff at the church.

Then I met this girl, a girl who dared to come out to someone like myself. In her I saw a passion for life and for Jesus that I hadn't seen before. This began my journey to study and exhaust every possible resource available that went deeper than saying, "Look at these seven passages. It's clear God didn't create gay, lesbian or transgender people." I can say now that I believe God most certainly did create the LGBT community. And that girl, yeah, she's now my beautiful partner, and I plan on spending the rest of my life with her.

I like to share with the people that are the closest in my life. This led me to tell the people I was working with at my church that I am gay. I heard some of the hardest words I've ever had to hear. I was told that I was loved and appreciated for all of my service to the students, but I could no longer meet one on one with them. Once I told church staff that I didn't believe I had to be single, I was let go from my internship, administration job, and facilities position—without being able to tell my kids honestly why I had to leave.

Then it came time to tell my family. I

was told I was loved, but being prayed for that I would find the truth and find my way back home.

I began asking, "God, how can I endure this?" But even in the doubt, the questions, and the pain, I couldn't resist the undeniable love of my God and creator, who wrapped me in his arms and said, "You are mine! I'm going to rock your world! Laura, I know it hurts. Now you know what my heart feels like each time one of my children is persecuted."

If I could speak to all of those people who have left me, I would say this: "I love you more than you know, I haven't abandoned my calling or changed it. I'm simply obeying God's call that has always been there. I'm finally saying, "Yes, God, I'll be who you created me to be and follow the calling that the church and society don't quite understand. I'm going to be an advocate for God's people and the LGBT community. I serve a big God who does big things far beyond our understanding."

Thank you to all of you who have surrounded me, supported me, and lifted me up in my time of need and healing.

Praise be to God!

*Note: This is a shortened version of Laura's testimony. See the full version at GIFT's website.*

## GCY CAMPAIGN

# "Gay Christian? Yes!" Needs YOU!

By Theresa McClellan, GIFT Faith Advocacy Coordinator



We need you now more than ever to join our work on the "Gay Christian? Yes" (GCY) Campaign! We need more volunteers for

the six committees that are organizing and launching various aspects of the Campaign. We need churches and other organizations to collaborate with us on the Campaign. We need your written and videotaped stories. And last but not least, we need your financial donations.

The most public launching of the Campaign will take place beginning in early April 2012. Billboards, yard signs, car clings, and other media will proclaim our message: "Gay Christian? Yes!" The mes-

sage will be reinforced with a constellation of resources. Before April we will launch the GCY website that will list and present many of these resources.

The October 11 National Coming Out Day Service was organized by the GCY **Program Committee** led by Cara Oosterhouse. We will create more events and need people to serve on that committee.

We have a need for more people on the **Education Committee** led by Lisa Dailey,

We also have a need for more help on the **Church Resources Committee** led by John Chapin.

Our plans also include a billboard campaign, Christian songwriting contest, and new website (with videos). Our **Media/Marketing Committee**, led by Rev. Susan Sparta and Dr. Matthew Clark, is working

diligently on these projects.,

To make all of these projects possible, we need your fundraising ideas, dollars and projects to finance this Spirit-driven work. The **Fundraising Committee**, led by Tom Dula, needs your help.

These committees and our volunteers are the lifeblood of our organization. In order to keep our momentum, we need to have them fully up and running. **Volunteer Committee** leader Arlene Beukema is helping to make that happen, but she needs you to join us.

Won't you contact me and let me know how you can help to create safe and welcoming churches and communities for LGBT people of faith? **Email me at [Theresa@GaysInFaithTogether.org](mailto:Theresa@GaysInFaithTogether.org) or call the GIFT office at 616-774-0446.**

## “I Don’t Feel Alone Here”

By Rev. Jim Lucas, GIFT Chaplain



New G-SAIF leader Amy Herring (left) smiles for a photo with two G-SAIF members, GIFT intern Simon Loucks (a Calvin College student), and GIFT Chaplain Jim Lucas at a meeting in early November.

“What do you like about G-SAIF?” I asked the question at a meeting of G-SAIF on the first Tuesday in November. Group members were quick to respond:

- ▼ “I don’t feel alone here.”
- ▼ “I’m more myself here than I am with my best friends.”
- ▼ “I look forward to coming. It’s a safe place.”
- ▼ “GIFT is a wonderful organization where sexuality and faith can meet in harmony instead of warfare.”

adults, and their friends. Group members are strikingly honest about the challenges they face in their lives.

Their honesty energizes me as GIFT’s chaplain. I live most of my life in a “bubble” of acceptance that can lead me to the illusion that our work is over.

It only takes one G-SAIF meeting to wake me up to the reality that we still have much work to do. Messages of rejection take a toll on young people’s mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Imagine

▼ “It’s a great backbone organization for support and love.”

I wasn’t surprised at the answers. Since early summer I’ve been leading the G-SAIF group, and I’ve heard many life stories of group members.

G-SAIF (Gay-Straight Alliance In Faith) is GIFT’s group for LGBT students, young

what it would be like to live in the fear that if you “come out” to your parents you might lose your place in the family—and your place to live. This is the kind of story that I hear as I lead G-SAIF.

Now I’m delighted to announce that the leadership of GIFT is moving into a new and exciting phase. Amy Herring recently contacted me to see if she could volunteer for G-SAIF. After meeting with Amy, I was happy to welcome her to a role in the leadership of the group. Amy is a Calvin College graduate, a former teacher, and the current youth director at Georgetown United Methodist Church. She clearly has both a heart for youth and the skills to lead them.

In addition, four GIFT board members have agreed to take turns leading G-SAIF with Amy. They have also agreed to help with group planning and publicity. Thanks to all these new volunteers!

***Pray that God will continue to bless G-SAIF as a safe place for LGBT youth.***

## CHAPLAIN REFLECTIONS

## A Dynamic Time in GIFT’s History

By Rev. Jim Lucas, GIFT Chaplain



Rev. Jim Lucas gives God’s greeting at the October 11 National Coming Out Day Service. Photo courtesy of *The Grand Rapids Press*.

What a dynamic time this is in GIFT’s history!

Several new volunteers are stepping forward to join GIFT’s ministry. Our number of board members has

jumped from 8 to 13. Six “Gay Christian? Yes!” (GCY) Campaign committees are meeting to plan various aspects of the Campaign.

Since June GIFT Faith Advocacy Coordinator Theresa McClellan has participated in ten church or other community events. Also, Theresa, board member M Kelley, and others planned this year’s Transgender Day of Remembrance service.

With all this networking, over ten pastors have expressed interest in being

added to GIFT’s list of gay-friendly churches and pastors. Wow!

Meanwhile, GIFT’s ongoing group programs—G-SAIF (see article above) and GRITS (see website article)—have been going strong. Also, many people are calling or emailing for pastoral care. Recently I counseled a mother and her gay teenage son, two women in their thirties, and a young man in his twenties.

Over the past year we have received three grants to expand our work. We are very grateful! The **Grand Rapids Community Foundation** gave us a \$10,000 grant so that we could contract with Connie Bellows to add her superb planning and facilitation skills to the “Gay Christian? Yes!” Campaign.

The **Non Profit Technical Assistance Fund** will be giving us a grant of \$5,000 to hire experts to train the GIFT board in non profit fund development.

And the **Arcus Foundation** agreed to renew our grant for the next two years for



\$30,000 each year. This grant provides a foundational piece of the fund-

ing for the “Gay Christian? Yes!” Campaign—a large portion of the staff salaries for the Campaign.

**This grant also presents us with the greatest fund raising challenge in GIFT’s history.** The Arcus Foundation grant gives GIFT about one third of the funds we need for the GCY Campaign and our ongoing programs. So that means we need to raise an additional \$60,000 in each of the next two years. We need this for the remainder of staff salaries, billboards, concerts, and other Campaign programs. We will pursue more grants, but we also need many individual and church gifts.

***That’s where our faithful supporters—and many new supporters—are essential. We need you more than ever as we are making a larger impact than ever. Thank you for your generosity!***

# When God is Invited into the Process

By Theresa McClellan, GIFT Faith Advocacy Coordinator

Whenever God is invited to the process, the results are amazing. We are seeing that with the addition of one of our newest volunteers, Rolanda Powell-Rickert.

Rolanda Powell-Rickert and her wife Jennifer Rickert-Powell recently came to GIFT via Atlanta, Georgia.

In March, Jennifer Rickert-Powell attended our "Gay Christian? Yes!" Campaign conference, where some of the ideas of our campaign were rolled out and participants brain-stormed ways to make it even better.

Jennifer went home and told Rolanda "nothing but good things" about the venture. She was intrigued with the campaign and approached us with an idea that will propel our campaign to the next level.

In addition to the billboard campaign and the website that will have scores of church resources, gay-friendly church listings, writings, sermons, essays and chat features, Rolanda proposed the idea of making videos, creating "GCY TV" that combines the beauty of TV and print to create a vibrant community of God.

Her background is marketing and videography, and this strong Christian offered to create and help others create a steady supply of materials for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community and allies.

"GCY TV is a place for LGBT individuals to build relationships and to find a sense of community. GCY TV is a website where



Rolanda (with the jacket) and Jennifer.

people can chat with other Christians in the West Michigan area, learn about events, read blogs and much, much more. What's really neat about GCY TV is the wealth of voices that were created for and by local residents," said Powell.

For example, we will have LGBT people and allies telling us what they like about their churches, or how God has moved in their lives, or how they need to feel a stronger presence from God.

The three to five minute videos are compelling because of their content and because, often, this is the first time we are hearing multiple voices of LGBT Christians

and allies who have found a church home or church members discussing the process of creating that church home for the LGBT population.

"Every video is a continued reminder of why we're doing this. While everyone's story is unique, I can find similarities with things God has taught and is teaching me. Before every video, we pray and ask God to lead it in the direction He wants it to go. When you invite God into the process, the results are amazing," said Powell.

"The videos are important because many people need to know that Jesus loves them, and people need to know that Jesus came so that they may have life and have it to the fullest," said Powell.

Our hope is that these videos will inspire you and compel you to grab your camera, tell your story or a vignette of your story so that we can see all the shining expressions of God on our pages.

We asked Powell what inspires her. "I'm inspired by lives being changed. I strongly encourage that if the videos bless you in any way, share your experience, leave a comment for others in the community and watch God grow this community."

The GCY TV videos will be available on the website of the "Gay Christian? Yes!" Campaign at [www.GayChristianYes.org](http://www.GayChristianYes.org). The website will be launched sometime before April 2012. If you would like to tell your story in writing or in a short video, contact the GIFT office today.

## What is GIFT?

### GIFT's Mission

To work toward the affirmation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons in the faith communities of West Michigan.

### GIFT's Vision

To be a beacon of hope that reveals God's love for all people regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

## GIFT Board

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*Faith Advocacy  
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## Memberships, Inquiries, and Donations Welcome!

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*Gays In Faith Together, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. U.S. contributions are eligible for tax deduction by the donor. Memberships are \$40/person or \$55/couple. Senior & student rates are \$20/person or \$35/couple. Join us! We need additional donations as well!*

For more information visit us on Facebook or visit our website at [www.GaysInFaithTogether.org](http://www.GaysInFaithTogether.org)

