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Project Zion Podcast

**Josh Mangelson** 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

**Brittany Mangelson** 00:33

Hello, everyone, welcome to another episode of the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Brittany Mangelson. Today, we are going to bring you the first episode of a two-part series where we talk about GALA, or the gay and lesbian acceptance. We're going to then talk about Harmony, which is the organization today for the LGBT community in Community of Christ. We have on two of the founding members of GALA, and I'm excited to have them. We've been chatting a little bit and I think that their stories are going to be meaningful, and they're going to bring a lot of understanding to where the LGBT community has been in Community of Christ, and maybe give us some understanding of where we're going. We have on Allan Fiscus, as well as Ginger Farley. So, Ginger and Allan, thank you for being on today. And why don't each of you just give us a brief little overview of who you are and where you are. And we will start with Ginger.

**Ginger Farley** 01:35

I am a retired social worker of 40 years. I live in Kansas City. I was born and raised in Missouri, but I spent six years in Michigan, running a runaway and homeless youth program in northern Michigan. So that's, that's it. I'm retired, and quite happy. I have been with my partner 23 years. And I had a previous partner who I was with 14 years.

**Brittany Mangelson** 02:05

Thank you very much. What about you, Allan?

**Allan Fiscus** 02:08

I'm Allan Fiscus. I live in Lansing, Michigan. I've been a member of the Community of Christ my whole life, multiple generations in my family. I'm a registered nurse currently practicing in infusion chemotherapy, which has been a wonderful experience the last couple of years. Over my years of traveling the world within the Navy and my love of travel throughout the US and Canada, most of it I've also traveled to be around church activities in various levels of activity, which I've continued to enjoy when I'm in allowed to do that. But it's been an up and down road, which we will go into, but we keep traveling it. So that's where we're going.

**Brittany Mangelson** 02:59

Awesome. Thank you so much. So, I know that both of you have a long background with Community of Christ, so I'm wondering, in your pre-GALA years, what church was like for you? And then what was church like once you came out? Did you stay involved? And then, what was your general understanding of what it meant to be gay in the church?

**Ginger Farley** 03:24

I'm fifth generation, Reorganized Latter Day Saint, now Community of Christ. I grew up in a small church in Odessa, Missouri. It was my second family. I was always involved with Zion’s League and volleyball and camps, and was very, very connected to the church and enjoyed that. One of my greatest fears in coming out was that I would lose the church and I did. I was very fearful I would lose my family. I just was very clear that this is who I am, and I would want to be as involved in the family as I can. But if it's not, if you can't accept it . . . Because I was with my partner then, I didn't come out openly until I was with a partner because I didn't need to. You know, nobody needed to know. But when you're with someone, you want it to be valued and accepted, and so that's when I came out to my parents. I gave them time. I wrote them a letter and I gave them time. Their response was, “daughter we love you.” I was okay with that. They didn't understand and it took them a long time to accept. But I will say my mother has been a good advocate

**Allan Fiscus** 05:00

My journey with the Community of Christ/Reorganized Latter Day Saints has been lifelong, as I said before, both sides of my family, third and fourth generation. Growing up, most of my wonderful memories have always been going to church, Zion’s League [and] Zioneers. When we were at home, we had to travel 20 some miles to church. If we visited my grandparents, we were always involved in whatever was going on with the church youth at that time, whether it was here in Lansing, or up north in Alpena. So, whenever our families got together, it always included church, after church singing around the piano, whatever. So much of what we did was church related. The youth camp was very important to me growing up. The one thing I always knew, I couldn't understand growing up, is that I was very different. Couldn't figure it out. It was years later that I talked to my mom. It revolved around what was going on with the Stonewall rioting 50 years ago. I was about 12 years old then. I was talking to my mom about what's going on with this. That's when I first heard the terminology. All of a sudden, the lights went on. I'm going, oh my God, that's who I am, because I've been having same sex feelings for years, but just didn't understand them. Because of what was going on in my community life, for me, the church was the sanctuary. We were the only family in our neighborhood that was Community of Christ, when everyone else around us that was Lutheran and Catholic. So, there was some kind of feeling of religious persecution because I never fit in, I never fit in with anyone in the community. But it was when I got to church that I was safe. And that continued all the way through growing up. I was called to the priesthood when I was 15 years old to the office of Deacon. That started my priesthood journey within the church. I came out as a gay man on a mountaintop in Korea when I was in the Navy. It's my first time I told somebody. And over my time in the Navy, I was out, which was surprising in the 70s. I had a partner for a couple years and the interesting thing was, it was not a secret. People knew but because of what was going on in our work relationship, our productivity, everything was fine. And I found out later that even people at the church there on Okinawa knew what was going on, but nobody did anything about it.

**Ginger Farley** 08:02

That was before “don't ask, don't tell.”

**Allan Fiscus** 08:05

Yeah, very much so. It wasn't until I came home, from the Navy, that I started having issues with the church. It happened to be one lady, who had been after me as a young man, wanted to have a relationship with me, and I was not interested. She started pursuing that when I get out of the military. She stopped by the house one time and my front door is open. She heard me in a very emotional conversation with my partner, Michael at the time. She was very supportive and understanding that we were dealing with separation and stuff from Okinawa and Michigan. It was a few weeks later, I got a visit from my pastor asking for my priesthood. Then that got into a big, involved disaster. I ended up leaving the church for a while because every time I tried to go to church, people were angry with me because I wasn't doing things I'd always done, playing for the church, preparing things for church, youth camps, whatever. So, I was kind of driven away from the Church for several years until I was guided, how I felt spiritually guided to the people there in Kansas City, where I had my first church contact in many years, where GALA really pretty much saved my life because at that point was very close to a suicide state of mind because of not living the life I wanted to be, which is at that time, very active in church. So then that kind of throws me back into how I met Ginger and whole gang down there.

**Brittany Mangelson** 09:54

Huh, thank you both for sharing those chapters of your stories. I know that Allan, your story is in the book, *Homosexual Saints*. I just reread it again before we had this interview. I've read the whole thing cover to cover. And there were some intense things that were happening to the gay community within the church and so I can understand why GALA needed to exist. Before we get into that, I'm just curious what was the historical build up to GALA? I'm curious to know, was there any sort of support system in place before GALA? (Ginger: Nothing.) That's very isolating. I can only imagine how being told that being gay is wrong and bad in from your church, and then not being able to connect with anyone like you within the church.

**Ginger Farley** 10:56

It was hard to find people. My partner Myra was at, I think, a gathering, maybe at Arthur's house. And she met Mike and Allan. They had gotten in touch with Arthur, because they were RLDS. I don't remember whether they knew Bob Swoffer or not, but they definitely knew Arthur. And she came home and said, I met these two guys. They're also in the church. They met and said let's all get together. So, we did. And we met Bob, and we went out to Lake Como a couple of times and had picnics and we just kept getting together. It really wasn't planned, like monthly. But if something was going on at Arthur's, he would call us and invite us, and vice versa. And then around Conference time, is that the first time you met us?

**Allan Fiscus** 12:17

No, it would have been, your Conference time, probably around 1984. My understanding is when there was some contact made with the Canadian people,

**Ginger Farley** 12:28

I think so. And that was either through Arthur or through Mike and Allan, but Bob had contacted the Affirmation group from the Mormon church because there was a small group in Kansas City, and we thought we could all meet together. And we did once or twice, and that didn't seem to fit. It was just one man that came, he was the one trying to keep Affirmation going and it was just dying on the vine.

**Allan Fiscus** 13:00

Affirmation is a lesbian support group for the Mormon Church. (Ginger: Right.) And they've been in existence for a long time.

**Ginger Farley** 13:09

But it was not going very strong in Kansas City. Most of it was around Arthur who knew people and said, “Oh, by the way, we have these other people.” Myra and I were the only two women in GALA for a very long time. And you know, as a woman, even in a couple, you don't have to come out, because two women living together for financial reasons made sense to people. They've done it for years. It's easier to hide. Given my personality, I don't hide well. If I'm in love with someone, you're gonna pick that up very quick. And I don't want to hide, you know. I was I was on a gay softball team. At that point, nobody on the team knew that I was gay. But I was a good softball player. So, a friend of mine said, can you play softball with us? It wasn't too long after that, that she figured it out. I never wanted to be gay, but my feelings were for women. I liked the guys, but they were always my buds. They were my friends. They were my pals. So, it was a hard beginning to try and connect and it had to be very quiet, because at that time, people were losing their jobs if they came out because of HIV.

**Allan Fiscus** 14:57

You’re thinking of the AIDS crisis. (Ginger: Yes) And we were dealing with the church issues.

**Ginger Farley** 15:04

We were losing friends, quickly. My partner and I got trained at the AIDS service organization in Kansas City to be a buddy. We knew that some of the people we had met at GALA were HIV positive. Bob was beginning to be ill, and we wanted to be able to be there to help. It was hard, to be honest, because finding acceptance for people who were gay, and now had the gay plague, was almost impossible. And the Church didn’t want to even talk about AIDS. They did finally have a Health Consortium group and I was invited to come and talk about AIDS, but that was sometime later. I was ashamed of my church, to be quite honest. I never believed they, they had always said, you are all welcome. except you. And quite honestly, it irritated me. That's the kindest way I can say it. It was a little strong. But it was so good to find other people in the church, who were looking for support. And that's how GALA got started.

**Brittany Mangelson** 17:00

I didn't realize that it was a group of friends that just were getting together for picnics and to hang out every other month, every month. An official support group that has lasted decades, formed from that.

**Allan Fiscus** 17:18

My first experience, when I came down to Kansas City, I came with some people from Toronto, who stopped, picked me up here in Michigan. We traveled down to Kansas City together. I got to know people on the trip down, and then get down to Kansas City and here I am, now feeling like I'm the only gay person in the world, now surrounded by a couple dozen gay and lesbian people, plus advocates. We had a strong network of people that were advocating for us. And I remember that first evening coming into Mike and Allan’s home, having a dinner and everything. And then suddenly, people are gathering around the piano singing church hymns. Yeah. Oh my God, can we sing! Oh my gosh, I will never, in fact, before we started this, I sat down at my organ and played some of the hymns I remembered us singing, just to get my head ready for tonight. You know, I just felt like doing it.

**Ginger Farley** 18:26

For fun.

**Allan Fiscus** 18:27

The music we put together was spontaneous, heartfelt, emotional. We would cry during it, mainly because of the feeling of loss when we got together and talked about our stories. This huge sense of loss of something in your life that you'd grown up with could not be filled by going to other churches or other support groups from other faiths. They just didn't do it, for me. The wonderful thing about meeting the people there in Kansas City that time was that some of the people who were advocates were in church leadership, and said, “Allan, why were you even silenced? You didn't do anything wrong.” It had me start doing some investigating. Subsequently, over several years, I ended up getting my priesthood restored because it had not been a legal silencing. For me, I felt a little strange because about the time I started getting into GALA, I had also cracked the doors of going back to church in my hometown area. And so, the two things were nicely blended because as I'm doing my investigation to see why I was silenced, I was also edging my way back into my congregation. Leadership there were going well, oh my gosh, now we understand why people had never supported my silencing. I didn't know that for many, many years. For me, it was strange, because I had this undying faith that this church had a purpose in the gay community. But then, as I'm talking with some of the gay people who are so angry at the church, I felt like I was a traitor to the gay community at the same time. “Oh, I hate my church, because of what they did.” To me, it was a weird position to be in because there were times a couple of people there in the meetings would say, “Why are you even going to church anymore when they're doing all this stuff to you?” I just can't give up. And so, for me, it's just been that constant battle, I guess, to put the issue to the church.

**Ginger Farley** 21:17

God love you, because I gave up the battle after about 15 years. I just couldn't keep doing it. But my partner and I kept going to church because she had two children and we wanted to make sure they had church. I became this Singles Director of Santa Fe Stake, because that's the closest thing we matched with, singles, because there was no place for us to be a couple in the church at all. We had a commitment service. It got back to the pastor of the church, because we had friends there who were part of that congregation. He asked me, “Did you have the service at the church?” I said, “No, I wouldn't do that, the church doesn't allow that.” But yes, we had a service. We had it privately at a clubhouse where we were living and then I resigned from being the Stake singles leader, because on one hand, it was living a lie, on the other hand, it was trying to fill a void for everybody, and it just didn't fit very well. But we did some good things with it. I think that's why the need for GALA was so clear. We didn't fit anywhere. We could hide, but I don't want to hide and neither did she. There was no place to go. From the very beginning of GALA, we knew well [that] we would need straight allies. And we had a lot of them. One of my best friends where we lived was an older woman. Matter of fact, her son was in Korea that same time as Allen. Was Ruth’s son there then? Glenn?

**Allan Fiscus** 23:39

Glenn and I served together in Okinawa. (Ginger: That's what I thought.) I knew Glenn before I had gotten involved with GALA, and his mother.

**Ginger Farley** 23:52

That was one of the things we knew we needed. We needed straight allies in the church, because they were not going to be listening to us. We had to have people who said, well, that's crazy. It's crazy to be silent because of who you love. Right?

**Allan Fiscus** 24:11

One thing that came up too, Ginger, in that initial meeting we had in Michigan with the church leadership from the First Presidency, they told us that we could not use the church name in anything. But they also said, “We get it. We know that there's ministry that needs to be done” because they interacted with us enough over a short time. They said, ‘The thing is, it's got to come from the grassroots. It can't come from the top.” That was a strange thing to get wrapped around because for so long, you grew up with everything that’s important at the top of the church. Age shows you that you need to work at the ground work’s level and work with the top of the church. Their suggestion was we had to start it all rolling. Church leadership could not do it, they could not simply say, “Hey, people we’re going to start this.” It would not have worked. It had to come from the people to start the groundwork. And I think that's what we did, both with the allies and for those people that were willing to step up and say, “Hey, people, this is my church, and I want my church.” It was not easy.

**Ginger Farley** 25:45

There was a lot of resistance from the top. I went to talk to an apostle I knew, personally. And he said, “Well, you know, the standing is you can't be practicing.” And it's like, what? Would you say that to any other couple? No, you know, we're in a committed relationship, we've been in this relationship at that time, probably four or five years. We don't plan to change that. But you can't be practicing, which means you can't have sex, let's just call it what it is. And I'm a bit radical, at times. And I looked him in the eye, and I said, I'm not practicing, I know how to be a lesbian. And I walked out.

**Allan Fiscus** 26:43

It was interesting. In my beginning with GALA, and coming back to the church, after being gone for about four years, I started a relationship with a church member. He had been divorced and had three children. During the times when we were together, on weekends, when he had custody of the kids, David and his kids would come to church with me. When we went to David's congregation, I would go with David and the kids. It got to the point where if David and the kids were not with me at church, “Hey, is everything okay with you guys? Is there anything wrong?” It was a weird development, when the congregation started putting things together, supported us and wanted us to know that we were okay, which was amazing. When I stopped and looked at the congregation I grew up with and had at the time, I was very blessed with those people. It was 10 years later that another young man from that same congregation came up to me at a retreat. When I saw him, my mouth hit the ground. He said, “If it hadn't been for you, and what you did for the congregation, I could never have come out.” That always stuck with me because not knowing that here's this young man watching what's going on, changes his life. Over the years, I've heard that many times in the public speaking I've done around Michigan region. At the time, we were doing workshops called “Homosexuality in Our Faith.” It was a program that the Michigan region leadership and I put together, because we were starting a dialogue on what was really going on with the history of the gay people in the church and what the church rules were in la dee da dee da. We went around. I think we did 12 different seminars throughout the region. It was quite interesting. Every group was different, but we could always count on those that were Bible thumping against what we were sharing and then there were other people that were in the middle and then you had people who had been dying to hear some positive things about the gay community. A lot of growth went on from those programs. We were using people from GALA to fill in as some of the guest speakers on some of those events.

**Ginger Farley** 29:52

One of the ironies is, it's very hard in that Independence/Kansas City area to get a lot of support because the church has to take a certain stance. When you're farther away from the church, your congregations can do what they want. It's harder when you're here. I think the biggest irony is every time we had a conference, GALA had a gathering. We knew Conference time was coming, and we would set aside a time. We invited Seventies and Apostles and friends, who we knew who had gay children, but nobody was out. Our whole goal was to heal the brokenhearted who had been in the church and lost their church. They could be gay and open and GALA and we worshiped like the RLDS. There are other gay congregations, but they're not like us. We are a different people. That's the whole point. They just didn't know how different we were, but we used their format to make GALA work. Individual areas had their own GALA group. We had one here in Kansas City. Myra and I were the hosts of it for a long time. Then we moved to Michigan. We had a GALA retreat in Michigan, and Myra and I came down from up north and went to that. We usually had a retreat on Labor Day, because Canada had a holiday then. Sometimes it was in Canada. Sometimes it was here. It grew and grew. It grew from a very small [beginning]. When we started, we had about eight at the table who were drawing up bylaws and saying this is what we want to do. We had a post office box. We put announcements in the gay papers that if you are RLDS and you're gay, and you want to talk to somebody . . . Allan took a lot of those calls. We didn't.

**Allan Fiscus** 32:43

I would challenge you. Which Allan?

**Ginger Farley** 32:46

Oh, okay you took a lot of the calls. Not Allan.

**Allan Fiscus** 32:50

My gig I think started when I was in the Kansas City area. Yeah. It's when we switched leadership. And yeah, then it came back to me. The one thing, Ginger brought up was how we would worship together. Whenever we did get together, whether Kansas City or Toronto, we followed what we grew up learning on how to worship. It also carried over on how we developed our mini retreats, when we were first allowed to use a church facility for a retreat, mainly because we were getting too big to hold them in somebody's home. We needed more space. I took the concept to the leadership in Michigan at the time. We did get permission to use a campground, with a caveat that they were going to send someone from the church leadership in Michigan to be there to witness what was happening. That was newly ordained high priest June Freeman, and her husband, Ron, who were to be the mental overseers. It's how I had [understood] at the time what was happening. When they got there, they were not prepared for what they ended up being a part of. That retreat followed any other retreat the church did in formatting. The one thing that was a little different, we shared our stories in kind of a round circle, roundtable event. The amount of hurt and anger that came through that, kind of directed at June because she was a church leader at the time, was unreal. Except for Ginger and Myra and some female straight friends, all the other people there had been silenced gay members of the church. Women in the priesthood had just started. I think we had 14 male people that all had been silenced because they were gay and felt shoved out of their church and [felt] anger and [felt] hurt. Ron and June just loved us. They loved us. When it came down to sharing their story, they shared some amazing tragedy they had just gone through, and then, boy, how this group just rallied around now! We had an amazing experience that weekend. For me, I came home to a campground I used as a youth. I felt, for the first time, fully free because I was me, I was in my church, and I was gay, and I could be around other gay people on the campground, and I could hold my friend's hand and not be afraid. One of the other young men that happened to be there that weekend for the first time, was somebody I had gone to youth camp with. When we saw each other, we just hugged it out. Oh, if I had only known, here we are growing up together at youth camps and we didn't know, because we couldn't say anything. That was a big turning point, I think for the church and for GALA, because when Ron and June took back their stories to the church leadership, they started their own momentum support thing of what we were trying to do, sharing their stories of what had happened. I know Ron and June took so much guff from people who just could not believe that the gay people had anything to offer the church. We had no problem having the campground again. Since then, really, we've never had an issue getting church campgrounds for retreats, sometimes it's just booking issues. But I think the only other time that there was any real flak about GALA using a church campground was at Camp Bountiful, a number of years ago. Myself and Lauren and Kelly had been invited to be guests ministers at a Bountiful reunion. We also had Grant McMurray at the time there. We were able to share our stories during a regular reunion experience. In our planning, to use Bountiful for that Labor Day weekend, some flak started coming up. People were going to boycott us and not allow us to enter the campgrounds. When that word got around to the leadership for the regions that use that campground, suddenly, the church leadership all decided to come to the retreat too. It was also the retreat Grant McMurray was attending. It was the first time a church President attended a GALA retreat. Interestingly enough, no one boycotted the entrance to the campgrounds. We had three regional presidents all here to take on their people and nobody showed up but ended up having a phenomenal worship experience all weekend.

**Ginger Farley** 38:58

One of the things about GALA, there were some tenents that have lasted through the years. One is your story is important, and nobody makes fun of it. Anyone who wants to come is welcome. Even if they come with painted fingernails and gray, you know, color in their hair. We've had some pretty wild folks come and that's okay, too. We've had handicap folks who weren't gay but found that they were accepted in this group. Anybody who has ever been to a retreat has said they have received love. That's all the purpose was, to heal the folks who were broken with love, and you could be open, whatever that meant for you. And sharing our stories, it's just a testimony. It's like the Wednesday night testimonies I grew up with, except we were sharing hurt, instead of joy, and need. What we got back was love, right?

**Brittany Mangelson** 40:14

I'm sure. It’s being able to tell your stories in that safe environment with people who understand your religious background, and how deeply you want to be involved with ministry. It sounds like at this retreat, Allan, that you're talking about, realizing that there were that many men that had been silenced, that's church leadership that's been silenced, congregational, district level leadership. I think that telling our stories in that kind of environment was very, very impactful, and very healing. I really like that you have used the word healing, Ginger.

**Allan Fiscus** 40:57

Yeah, I think that's where healing began. For a lot of people, it was the fact that they could just yell and scream and be angry at the church and get their feelings out and cry and everything. Once you get that poison out of your body, the anger and stuff, then you get other people that are nurturing you and supporting you, and saying, okay, what do you now want to do or don't want to do? Over the years, there are people that have left the church but will come to the GALA retreat, because it's still what they consider their foundation of spirituality, it still is. It's bound to how we grew up in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, for me, thus, Community of Christ. They have not lost their faith. They've lost their faith in what the community can do to people, sometimes by omission, sometimes definitely commission of bad services directed towards, you know, casting out sinners. I mean. I've seen that done in the congregation after we've been in the building. People will come behind us and have an exorcism of the church. Yet, every Conference, we couldn't wait for World Conference, because every night of the week somewhere in the GALA group, [the group] is getting together somewhere in somebody's house, to meet to share together in whatever way we could.

**Ginger Farley** 43:08

Potluck, par excellence. You get gay boys together; you get good food.

**Brittany Mangelson** 43:15

RLDS through and through

**Allan Fiscus** 43:19

Reorganized Latter Day Saints definitely carried on. Our momentum was public enough that the church couldn't deny what we were doing, mainly because there were church leaders watching what we were doing quietly behind the scenes, giving us advice, and watching how it was developing. Luckily, I think in a lot of ways, Michigan has been more progressive than the World Church headquarters in Independence. We've been able to do things like the workshops of homosexuality in our faith and getting the conversation out there, getting the stories out there. One thing I heard from a church leader was how they had gone to a region to talk about the subject and came back and said, “I should have taken you with me because all I can do is share someone else's story. It doesn't have the impact when it's a face-to-face issue. I'll never do that again.” From then on, I was always invited to go with this person to share my story when they were tackling the issue wherever they were in their region. In all this journey I've never given up faith in the God that I believed in. Over the years I met many people because of the journey of being thrown out and coming back, meeting GALA, and getting the strength and support I needed to then put my face out there. I had a phone call from world church. “Hey, there's somebody that's in crisis, please go to California and see them, but we didn't ask you to do this.” It was okay, [but I asked] “how do I make this happen?” “Well, that's up to you.” So, it's like, we need you to go do ministry, but you're doing it on your own. We figured it out. We had some people get together and Dave and I took off. We went to California and met the people they asked us to meet. There [was] a whole kit and caboodle of stuff going on in California [which got] started. So, a lot of what GALA has done, very much at the beginning, was on our own and for many years. As the momentum grew, we started getting support from local leaders, and even at the higher levels, but it was more behind the scenes, suggesting meeting with us quietly behind doors to hear what we were doing, not what other people telling them what we were doing. It made it hard to do, putting yourself out there; but, when people came out and said, ‘if it wasn't for you, I would not be here today” it wipes off all the bad stuff and gives you the energy to keep moving forward. (Brittany: Yeah, for sure.)

**Ginger Farley** 46:46

I still went to the retreats. I quit going to church on a regular basis. I finally got over being angry with the church. I was so frustrated because they just lie about who they were. When they say, “All are welcome,“ and then that means all but you, I was angry, especially since I was so grounded in the church and did things in the church. Both my parents were elders in the church and pastors at one point or another. It was like, you know who I am. It doesn't change who I am. That was the whole purpose of GALA, to be able to be who you are with church people, because our church is different. I've been with Margaret 23 years, and she still doesn't understand how we believe what we believe. The golden plates have her stumped. I'm just telling you.

**Brittany Mangelson** 48:11

I think they have a lot of people stumped.

**Ginger Farley** 48:17

But she has gone to church with me when we go down to my parents. She supports what I wanted to do with the church. I was at the last Conference. At one of our GALA meetings here at our house, one of the women came up to me and said, “Ginger, when will you come back to the church?” I said, “When the church changes its stance on gays.” This is the first Conference [for which] I attended a worship service at since I left 15, 20 years ago. Now, I stayed in touch and my name is on the books because I'm telling you, they won't listen if you're not a member. I wanted to have a say in the church, I had to stay in the church and I didn't want to leave the church. I didn't feel like I left the church. I felt like the church threw me away and GALA allowed us to heal. I think for a lot of people, we were their only connection to the church in a long time. Yeah. I'm telling you we work grounded in the church, and the hymns are a big part of it. We love to sing, and we love to have fun and have campfires because we all grew up doing that and so we did it a GALA retreats. It was very healing for many, many people, whether they stayed in the church or they didn't was not our issue. My issue was never whether the church accepted it or not because at that point, I didn't think we'd ever get where we are now. It took 37 years. Yeah, I wore out before then.

**Brittany Mangelson** 50:13

Yeah, that was gonna be my question as all of this was happening and you were meeting at Conference, etc. It sounds like having back door support with some of the leadership, on a local or larger level, but did you ever imagine that the church would be welcoming? I know that the word affirming might be controversial, and we don't need to get into that, but do you? Did you ever think that the church would be accepting of gay relationships, of gay marriage, and ordination and that kind of stuff?

**Ginger Farley** 50:53

I always knew individuals in the church would be because there was a different apostle who came to our home and had dinner with us and was very accepting. There were parts of the leadership who were absolutely supportive. But did I think we'd ever get, well . . . okay, so let me say this. I don't think we're there yet. Yeah. I think we're farther along than we ever have been. But I don't think we're there yet.

**Allan Fiscus** 51:27

Yeah, I am remembering conversations at the beginning. One of our ideas was that we hoped that at some point in time GALA will not need to exist within the church (Ginger: Absolutely), and that the church would grow into what we always thought the church could be. I honestly never expected to be where we are today in the church in my lifetime. I really didn't.

**Ginger Farley** 52:02

Thank God you didn't give up. Some of us did.

**Allan Fiscus** 52:06

I carried the anger for a long time, even after my priesthood was reinstated. I still felt like I had to watch my back all the time, because when the priesthood was reinstated, the relationship I had with David had ended. Trying to be international in relationship building does not work when you can't get status to move across borders. My priesthood was reinstated, and I was single again and an Apostle was asking me, “Are you in a relationship?” I said, “Well, no, but.” He says, “I don't want to hear, but, I just want to know are you in a relationship right now?” And I said, “No, but.” He said, “Stop saying but.” And he says, “Let me sign the paperwork, and then we'll continue the conversation.”

**Ginger Farley** 53:07

That’s the don't ask, don't tell part of the church.

**Allan Fiscus** 53:10

Yeah, pretty much. He said, “Okay, paperwork is signed, your priesthood gets reinstated.” He says, “Okay, now what did you want to say?” And I said, “Well, okay. My thing was, if you're going to give me my priesthood back, that's fine, but you're never going to get it again. I have the right to have a loving, committed relationship with somebody and I hope to at some point in my life have that.” He says, “and I agree with you, you do. But it may take time.” And I agree with that. In my faith journey, [with] prayer, and faith and believing, I had been frustrated about the loneliness of relationships in my life. It came across to me, that you have a path to take. You can continue to work down the road with the church to continue the awareness, bringing us to the church, or you can have a relationship, but at this point in time, you can't have both. [I] was like, what? Then did a workshop and heard some responses from people, because they were asking me the same thing. “Are you in a relationship right now?’ I said, “no” and they said, “Okay.” Later, I asked one of the ladies why she asked me that question. She says, “Well, I've known you a long time. I can't get around the fact that you might be in bed with a man, but because you're not right now, I have an easier time hearing.” I got the message that, okay, I might have a lonely road for a while, but this is the journey that I can take, or I can take another one. Luckily, enough for me, my foundation, my support system, was the congregation that I was with at this time. I also had my foundation of GALA people that I could call and talk with and cry with, [helping me] have the strength to go on to the next workshop, [as I was] putting [myself] out there, sharing [my] story, and listening to people who [would] say that I was lying, or I'm worthless and I should be stoned and tarred. Over the years, I've heard it all, but to see where we are today, we're not completely there yet! When I talked with people who asked about my church, and they said, “Well, I live in the city. If I go to your church there, will I be welcome?” I don't know yet. I don't know those people. There were times, even within my own metropolitan area of Lansing, when we had five congregations, people would ask me that question. I [would] say, “well, you can go to this congregation or this one, but not the other three.” Well, that doesn't make sense. I feel very secure. I think our numbers are growing within the faith community now, optimistically I can say to people that our church is trying to grow into it. When I go to different churches in my travels, I have never been rejected walking in the door. There again, I don't go in waving my rainbow flag or anything. There have also been times I've walked into congregations in places I've never been before and someone comes up, “oh, I've always wanted to meet you. I've heard your story. I've read your story,” [and I’m] totally enveloped in love and caring by somebody. That's what I have hope for in the future, that our churches will simply be welcoming whoever walks in the door.

**Ginger Farley** 57:26

Yeah, and I guess I always thought they were and then I found out. My congregation that I grew up in was the second family. Everybody knew me and everybody liked me, and I was okay. I had questions about it when I first got into a relationship and Myra and I were going. We met at singles reunion, and I made it a matter of prayer. I talked to God, like I talked to everybody else. I said, “Now look, God, I need to know whether this is okay with you. I really need to know that. Now, if you tell me, it's not, I'm not telling you I'm getting out of the relationship because I don’t know that I could do that, but I need to know.” At singles reunion we were in a class together. There was a high priest who was teaching the class who was also a psychologist. The day before we were leaving, he came up to us and he said, “I want to hug from you two.” So, I hugged him, and she hugged him. And he said, “No, I want a hug from both of you.” He put his arms around both of us and said, “I have been ministered to by the love you show to each other. And I want to tell you a story. I had a man in my counseling, who had never known the passion or had never known love, period. He left my counseling, and he came back about a year later. He said, Roger, I know what love is, I'm in love.” Roger said, “well tell me and he said it's with a man. And then the way he talked to God, he said, God, how could you do this to me? And God spoke back to him and said, ‘and how are you to share my love? How, how are you to limit how I share my love.’ He said from that day to this, he'd never had a problem with it.” That was my answer. I knew I would get my answer at singles reunion. That was my answer. Who are you to tell me how I should share my love? Right? God and I've been okay, from that time to this. I was okay with God before that. I've had three miraculous healings, so I knew God loved me, but could he love me if I was in a relationship with a woman? This is the thing that early on in your gay life you don't think about. But it's like could God love me if he knew I was gay? If I knew I was gay? Well, God created you. God knows you. Guess what, he knows you're gay. It's like when that little light comes on, “oh, yeah”. But that's what a lot of folks, especially younger folks were struggling with. I have to tell you about Conference, running the booth. This time, there was a lot of healing that went on for me. This little guy from New Zealand came up and said, “What's this Harmony booth about?” I told him it was about gay and lesbian acceptance. He thought that was the coolest thing. He said, “I want to take your stuff and pass it up because I think it's just crazy that not everybody accepts it.” My thought, we have come a long way, baby. He was probably 10. Wow. Yeah. He was just on it. And it's all right. There. I have hope. Yeah, I have hope again.

**Allan Fiscus** 1:01:21

Yeah. When we were able to do Conference booths, you’d get people that would come up and harangue you because you were there, how evil you were, and all this kind of stuff. I remember several years of doing the booth at Conference. This high priest would come up every year and berate me and go on and on and on about how evil it all was. I learned over the time that I let people talk and share their feelings and thank them for sharing their feelings because arguing gets nowhere. I allow them to vent and thank them for sharing. I'll answer some questions, but I won't get into a debate. Every c

Conference for several years, this guy would come in and, boom, every single time. “Oh, you're here again.” “Yep, I'm still here.” He started his tirade. I just got used to it. “Thanks again for sharing.” The last time I saw him, it was in the entryway of the auditorium. I saw him and mentally and going, “Oh, God, here we go.” I'm looking up at the heavens and suddenly, this guy's coming towards me. He says, “Are you here again?” I said, “Yep, I'm here again.” He says, “Good, because I need you. I need you to be here to help me grow.” He shook my hand and turned and walked away.

**Ginger Farley** 1:03:07

Hallelujah! (Brittany: wow.)

**Allan Fiscus** 1:03:09

You know, you get these moments that just blow you away and in a lot of ways, reaffirm the value of people, even though their journey is much different than yours, or mine. The biggest thing that I have told people over the years, even within GALA, when people are struggling about coming out to their families and everything else, one of the things I've heard other people say is, “How long did it take you to come out of the closet?” [For] some, 10 years, whatever. I said, “Okay, your family, your friends, your congregation get the same amount of time.”

**Ginger Farley** 1:03:59

Yeah, give them a break. Yeah, they need time.

**Allan Fiscus** 1:04:03

Some people don't have the patience for that, but it's like, stop, you needed to get to a point where you felt safe, so do they. You're going to be there to make their journey easier. I think that's what we have done in the foundation of GALA, we have made and given a foundation of safety, love, nurturing, security, and confidentiality, because we still have people who are not comfortable with the church knowing. “Yeah, I want to know what's going on. I still believe in the church. I still go to church, but nobody in the church knows about me and they can't know about me. My family can't know about me.” So, we must keep them confidential within the GALA umbrella.

**Ginger Farley** 1:05:02

It's a scary walk, none of us would have chosen to be the most hated people on Earth. Yeah. None of us. You know, people say it's a choice. Your only choice is whether you accept and find a loving relationship, or you don't. And I don't want to live without love.

**Brittany Mangelson** 1:05:32

That's fair, that's fair.

**Allan Fiscus** 1:05:36

I came into it in 85 and over the years have watched a massive amount of pain and suffering, healing, growth, painful growth, angry growth. But there's always been a niche of people at the right place, the right time to give the love and support to the GALA groups that have been trying to do something in their local areas. As we continue to move up, working more openly with the church leaders, from ground levels to higher levels and higher levels, we are loved, we are acknowledged. One of the amazing things that happened for me was at a regional conference here in Michigan. I was asked to share my story. As I was done sharing, a woman got up and saying, “How could you do this to your family? How could you embarrass your family like this? I've known your family for years, and bla bla. They must be just crying and crying and crying.” I said, “Well, I really can't find this, but my family is in the front row. Why don't you talk to them?” My grandmother stood up and turned around and looked at the lady and said, “I have no reason to be ashamed of my grandson. I love him. I always have and I will always will. You can't judge him.” My grandmother was just irate. Ginger knows my grandmother. Afterwards, they sat down. She also made something about how embarrassing it is to the church, for me to share my story. Apostle Jim Slaughter was there on the dais and stood up next to me. He said, “Well, to respond to your comments about embarrassing the church (he put his arm around me and said), Allan is my brother and I love him. My family stepping up, Jim, stepping up in public, I think that was the final catalyst where I had no more anger at the church. It was probably a few months later that I was called to the office of elder. I knew I had been called, but it was just taking a very long time.

**Ginger Farley** 1:08:59

I figured I'd never be called to the priesthood because, if I was, they would just call me to silence me. It's the only way they could shut me up! That aside, my mother, who was an elder and lives in Branson. They went to the Branson congregation. She was in a Sunday school class. [possibly talking about] diversity or something. I don't even know what it was on, but the subject of gay and lesbians came up. A man there said, ”You know, they're all pedophiles. They just want little boys and girls.” My mother got irate, and she said, “I have a son who's gay, and you know, Ginger, and she and her partner come here to church when they're down here. You are talking about my children and neither one of them are pedophiles. As a matter of fact, 95% of all pedophiles are white men.” I'm going whoa, Mama, she made it. She has been outspoken about that. She said, “It's ridiculous.” She said, “My son has been with his partner over 25 years and Ginger is . . . “ At that time, I guess I'd been with Margaret maybe 13, 14 years. She said, “You know they are monogamous. They don't sleep around and they're good people.” And it's like, Oh, okay. The woman next to her said, “Well, none of my marriages lasted that long.” You do get a point where you can heal and say it's okay. It took me a long time to get over being angry with the church. I still don't understand what took them so long. It's just people. I'm a social worker. I accept people as they are, whoever they are. That's just my makeup. That's probably why I'm a social worker, because I want to help people and we're all on a journey. If we can find love, oh, my gosh, what a great gift! It just doesn't make a lot of sense to me, as good Christian to say, well, love is bad for you.

**Allan Fiscus** 1:11:29

GALA retreats have been active in some form, at least once a year, probably since 1984. They have been allowed to be on church property since 1988. They have been all over the United States and Canada, sometimes more times at one campground than another. We used to go to the West Coast, to Kansas City, to the East Coast, back to Kansas City, to the West Coast. Kind of a gambit for a while. Now it seems to be where we can find a campground where people are willing to host in people in their areas. I know that this Labor Day weekend, we are coming up on another retreat at Camp bountiful in Ohio. The retreats have been the international ones, technically, right around the Labor Day weekend more out of tradition, but there's also been regional retreats, like in the California area where they would do something mainly geared to the people that lived in the California area. Nonetheless, everyone was welcome. Didn't matter if you were out of Canada, out of California, anyone can come. We've had retreats in Michigan, where we took our people to Kirtland Temple. We've had a couple of retreat events at Kirtland Temple.

**Ginger Farley** 1:13:14

We’ve had a retreat in Toronto,

**Allan Fiscus** 1:13:16

Multiple places I think in Ontario and throughout the United States. The retreat aspect of things will continue because a lot of times it's a safe environment for people to come to who need to be inconspicuous during the Conference time. GALA has things going on multiple days during the week, evening events. A lot of times when people are traveling, they contact others and say, “Hey, I'm going to your area, can we spend the night?” and boom, you'd have a house full of people from Toronto on their way to Kansas City or vice versa. I can see people on their way to Toronto. Lansing is a good stopping spot. That was always fun, the wonderful thing about what has gone on over the years, the way GALA has become public. There's been a network of people within GALA, both gay, lesbian, now transgender, bisexual, and the allies. We've had a network of people that have been willing to go out into the church community and share their stories. You had a question about WCN, Welcoming Community Network. My activity with that has been really limited, but it was a way to teach people how to become welcoming congregations. That's a tool that is still out there. Welcoming community congregations need to how to be welcoming. The gay communities spurred this, but a lot of times the congregation takes it on. How do we come more welcoming to the ethnic communities or the divorced or whatever? It's a tool that can be used for congregations to learn there is more to it than simply saying you are welcoming. The biggest thing that you learn, as a congregation goes through this is that your friend in the same pew totally thinks the opposite of you. I know when my congregation started going through that process, I was shocked. We have a ton of support in the congregation, almost 100%. But, when it comes down to making the statements and putting flags up in the congregation, suddenly, the people weren't ready for that. All of a sudden, I had to change my mindset. Here I thought, this person is all ready to go, and she wasn't. You can't assume your congregation is ready. You have to work together. You have to train. You have to figure out if the congregation even wants to go down that road. If they're not ready, then you may have to step back and say, hey, we'll work on things, but you do it carefully, so it does not divide a congregation.

**Ginger Farley** 1:16:49

That’s also how you have to come out to friends. The friends you think may be accepting may not be the ones that are and the ones that you think are never gonna accept you have no issue, right? So, people are people. We just have to be mindful that they need their time. Right, it takes time to mull it over and say, “Where do I come down on this?” I think we have to keep pushing that acceptance, there is really the only loving thing. There are two feelings that most of us have, everything comes from love and fear and that people don't accept out of some sort of fear. We just keep responding with love.

**Allan Fiscus** 1:17:49

The people who have the fear are watching and eventually, when they feel safe, come up to you, or someone else that they know and supports a gay and lesbian person. If we want our church, we have to be in the congregations, as painful as it is. We have to be a ministry of presence, even if we do nothing but go there and sit. Attend church, [eve] if no one ever speaks to us, or does anything else. At least we’re there and eventually somebody is going to say something. And I found that this works. I've had some people in this area that have come up and have said, Allan, I've known you your whole life. I love you, I care about you, but I just can't accept that part of you. And it's like, okay, thank you for sharing. This lady said, “I can't have you in my home anymore until I get this all figured out.” I said, “Okay, fine. You have the right to your feelings and your concerns and your home. You know where I'm at when you're ready to talk to me.” It was two or three years and all of a sudden, she came up and gave me a hug. She said, “I need my Allen back.” We sat and we talked and now we're just wonderful. It's not always nice to hear someone say, “Hey, I don't want you in my life right now,” but people have the right to say that. I had to learn not to take that personally. I had to give it back to them and say, “Okay, thank you for sharing your feelings.” I give their feelings back to them. I acknowledge them. I understand that they're theirs. But I can't cure it anymore. I used to be a good one for charity. It about killed me.

**Ginger Farley** 1:19:50

It will if you hold on to it because that's part of why it hurts so bad. It's people who you thought would love you who say, no, no. I didn't change from who I was before you knew. I'm still me, but it makes a difference, sometimes for a very long time. Sometimes they never want you back in their life. And sometimes they say,” Let's go have something to eat. Who cares?” Yeah.

**Allan Fiscus** 1:20:34

I have a cousin. She and I got into very lengthy discussion. She finally she said, “Allan, I've watched you your whole life and it just scares me, what if you're wrong, you shouldn't be this way?” I said, “Elizabeth it is really simple. I believe in a loving God, not a vindictive God and at the time of judgment I expect to hear [one of] two things. ‘Well done’ or ‘At least you tried.’” And she says, “That's it?” I said, “Yeah. That's it.” I have felt very guided my whole life down the road that has brought me to this place and time. Over the years, when I have prayed and prayed and prayed to take this away from me, take this away from me and take this away from me, instead of it being taken away from me, I’ve been given more opportunities to serve the church, or heal, or share my story. And it finally gets to the point, “Okay, I get it, I get it,” and I will just keep listening. I am never surprised when I need to share my story. I get this funny sensation inside of me that I've learned to acknowledge, be ready to share my story. Sometime within the course of a day, something will happen, and I share my story. I've learned to accept that as a guidance for me. There are some times I say, “Really, right now and the middle of everything that's going on and you're gonna make me put on this mantle and share my story?” It's kind of funny, because without a doubt, before the end of the day, my story will have been shared and I get it. This is my journey, and it has not been perfect. We are all flawed human beings. I have at different times stepped back out of the spotlight, [not] doing a lot of things with GALA., especially in the last few years. The younger people are taking over, and that's fine, but I'm always back there in the in the background, [when I] get phone calls, “What do you think of this? Has this been done before?” So, I'm a background resource person more than anything else right now. And that's okay. But I'm also involved with the gay and lesbian community in my workplace. I'm part of the Diversity Committee at work. I enjoy going to different campgrounds to cater to the community during the summertime. It's a lot of fun. I'm still out there. When I am needed, whatever gifts that I can offer the church, I will do that.

**Ginger Farley** 1:24:13

I have a story about my mother and acceptance. When we finally talked about it face-to-face, my mom said, “I always thought I did something wrong.” I said, “Mom, you're not that powerful. This is my birthright from God. I have learned to accept it and I hope you can too, but you didn't do anything. This is who I was born to because I certainly tried not to be that. But you know, that's where I find love. Love always wins. Yeah, I believe that. Totally.

**Allan Fiscus** 1:24:56

(Brittany: I do too.) We [have to] put ourselves out there in faith, believing [and asking] God, “Okay, do what you want, but just let me know, don't let me go down the road by myself.” And I never have, I've never gone anywhere I've been asked to go feeling alone. I have to give up Allan being in control. I take my problem in my hands and throw it up in the air and say, “fix it” and I have to let it go and then consciously be listening for an answer coming down at some point some way down the road. Sometimes the answer may be many years down the road before you get your answer. Sometimes it's right away. Sometimes God gets a baseball bat and bashes my head saying, “will you please listen to me now?”

**Ginger Farley** 1:25:58

I've learned to say I don't need the baseball bat anymore. I will listen.

**Allan Fiscus** 1:26:03

Well, but sometimes being down some, I get wrapped up in my head. Sometimes it's like, oh, okay, sorry, I guess I wasn't paying attention.

**Ginger Farley** 1:26:14

I think when you've always had a faith, and I don't ever remember not talking to God, God talks back. It's just in different ways. I've always known when I needed to share my story and to share who I was. An interesting thing happened. I go to the pool three times a week for arthritis class, and Margaret goes. We go at separate times because I try and swim before class. There happened to be a woman in class whose husband is a Baptist minister. I was talking about Margaret, my partner and she says, “Margaret down there?” I said, “Yeah.” We talked for a while about things, and you know, it's made a difference in how she responds to us. They have lane markers, and I help her get over the lane markers. She's just turned her ideas around about who I am. For a while, she wasn't quite sure if it was going to be okay because I was lesbian. She's been very accepting. It is just showing up and being who you are. That has always been my goal since I came out. I want to be an example that they see is, “normal,” not the people they see on TV who are wild and crazy because most of us live very quiet lives. We're boring, you know. We go to work. We come home. We fix dinner. They forget that because they see the ones that are it trying to make a statement. The truth is, we're just simple people, no different than anybody else.

**Allan Fiscus** 1:28:29

I had that come up at one of the workshops. This one lady said, “Allan why is it we only see you at these workshops, nobody else shares their story?” I said, “Well, mainly because some people are not comfortable putting themselves out there yet.” She says, “But you're Allan, that gay minister now and that shouldn't be.” I said, “I didn't put that label on me. You did. If you put all my hats on the table, you know, there's Allan. I'm a male. I'm a nurse. I'm a brother. I'm an uncle. I'm a son, I’m a grandson. I play organ. I sing in a choir. I go camping.” I just kept going on and on and on. “Oh, yeah, and by the way, I'm gay.” I said, “All of those hats are on at the same time. There might be two or three all going on at the same time, but most of the time that the gay hat is being seen by most people is when I'm in these workshops. Other than that, it's very much behind the scenes in my life.” Occasionally, I get called [by someone] at work saying, “Hey, we have a crisis. We need you as a nurse, but we need you as a gay person being there to support this person and family.” [Sometimes I’m] pulled into a scenario, but I [told her], “You don't you pay attention to one hat and one hat only, you don't learn the rest of the person that's there.” She says, “I guess I'm gonna have to start looking at other hats for everybody then, right?” And I said, “Yeah, just not me. It's the whole world. We only see one thing, and we think we know everything.” She said, “and you play the organ? I didn't know that.” Then people turned and looked at her, like, who played the started this thing today? “You didn't pay attention?” And she said, “No, I guess I didn't, because I really didn't want to come to this workshop, I didn't think I’d learned anything. But I guess I have.” It was kind of hilarious.

**Ginger Farley** 1:31:01

I think that's why most of us who are open chose to be open, so that they would see regular, day-to-day, gay people. Certainly, at work, when I was open, if they needed somebody to come in and talk with someone, [I considered it to be] part of my ministry. I told you, we could talk and talk!

**Brittany Mangelson** 1:31:37

Well, we've been going for almost two hours. (Allan: You're gonna miss us aren’t you!?) I just want to thank you both for sharing from your heart. This was what I was hoping for because, as I said in our little pre conversation before we started to record, some people who are of my generation don't necessarily know the history super well, or we haven't heard some of these stories. I am new to Community of Christ, so I certainly am new to stories like yours. [The] faith tradition that I grew up in is still on a very different trajectory, so it's been beneficial for me to hear your stories and to connect the dots on a very personal level to what has historically happened. I think I mentioned that we are going to be airing an episode with Jerry Dale Jr. and then Parker Johnson, to bring us up to speed about Harmony, which is the merged organization of GALA and WCN. So, I guess I would just be curious, for our final thoughts, do you have hopes for Harmony, the organization, or hopes for the church? You have said that we haven't necessarily arrived as far as being inclusive, and I fully agree with that, but what are some of your hopes? Do you think that Harmony will carry forward the legacy of GALA? Have you seen that happen?

**Allan Fiscus** 1:33:18

Well, my first thought is, we're dealing with a time where religion itself is struggling. Churches are closing in all denominations, right and left, and unfortunately, Community of Christ is dealing with that, too. So GALA, GALA/Harmony, will still be an advocate for love, teaching, resources for the church at large, until it truly is a church in Harmony, if you want to put it that way. The other part of it is we're also growing up in a time where there are so many gay, lesbian, transgendered, by the whole gamut of letters there. I can never seem to get it right anymore. There are resources for people today that never ever existed for us back in the 60s, 70s, 80s timeframe when we were growing up. [I recently had] a dialogue with a couple teenagers who don't get this pride stuff and what it is. All it is, “is a big party, blah, blah, blah.” I said, “Well, do you realize two years ago, none of this that you're seeing today even was thought about being in existence? And now you don't know what you're talking about?” It's like they don't get it. They don't care about what happened in the past. Other people do remember, and or are willing to listen and learn. That's going to be important because things that we as a GALA community learned over the years working with the church, we've built on those lessons, good and bad. I think Harmony will do the same thing, but the biggest part of it is remembering what we did in the past, what works and doesn't work. I think that will continue. I think the nurturing, the love, and support that definitely goes on at the retreats, will continue. Every retreat is different, depending on who shows up. The needs of the people that show up dictate how retreats run. I've had retreats in the past that have an outline all set up and then the mix of people showed up. As you're listening, it's like, we need to shift here and make it focus a little more this direction, not so much that direction. And I think that works when we can do that for people. There's me,

**Ginger Farley** 1:36:11

I haven't been on the board for the last year and a half. I think it's taking a direction that is different than GALA did. I don't think it's a bad thing. I think the retreats are gonna will always need to be an integral part so you can tell your story. That's how we heal, by telling our story and having people understand and support that story. I think that's always going to be an important part. It's why, even though I'm not going to be on the board again, I have offered to be an ex officio kind of member and a history keeper to talk about where we came from. I'm 67. When I came out, there was no support and people were getting beaten up and raped so they would turn straight. They don't see that. That isn't happening in the open the way it used to. They don't know how many people died so they can sit there and tell their story and not be afraid. We need to respect that and remember that because it was not an easy fight in the church to get where we are. Those of us who were around in the beginning, who stick around, are the only ones that can tell the story. I think it's one of the important things about a podcast that can go on so they can hear the story. Allan and I aren't gonna be here forever. Another 30 years maybe, but not forever. So luckily, I have a lot of longevity in the women in my family.

**Allan Fiscus** 1:38:18

When I look back at kind of my journey through the GALA years, I have been blessed to have been able to share my story with each of the presidents of the church that have been in place in my church journey. I can't even think how many times I've been in congregations, districts, stakes all over, as a guest minister or part of a workshop team, where, when it all is said and done, when you're done sharing, you feel like you've done something, or at least planted a seed and as exhausted as you are when you're done, pretty grateful that a person like me was allowed to do what I've done.

**Ginger Farley** 1:39:23

I think the welcoming church piece might be the next big push, [where] more of us go out and tell our stories and show up as the boring people we are and the gifted people we are. When I say boring, I mean I'm not flamboyant. I am mouthy, though, but we're just folks. We're all just folks trying to deal with our own stuff and need support. It really never mattered to me whether it came from the church, as long as we had a group that we could go to and get supported in healing and love. That's it, you know? It was never as important to me whether the church accepted us. It was important to me to help heal the bruised and the brokenhearted because I was one. And I was mad.

**Allan Fiscus** 1:40:35

The crazy part of that is, our church foundation taught us how to do that.

**Ginger Farley** 1:40:42

Yes, it was the very reason we could be who we are, because we have that faith.

**Brittany Mangelson** 1:40:51

And you telling your stories, impacted the life of the church and impacted what would happen in the future.

**Ginger Farley** 1:41:00

We really didn't give up. Some of us had to step back for a while, but, you know, I've never left. I just keep checking in and say, do you have it yet? Have you figured it out? And the church is kind of starting to figure it out,

**Brittany Mangelson** 1:41:18

Well, I am so grateful for the time that we have spent together this evening. I think this is going to be really meaningful to have your stories live on and the story of GALA and WCN. We did mention WCN a little bit. We might have to get some official representation of WCN on the podcast, as well, to go over that history. I am just really grateful for the fact that you've continued to share your stories. I know that from my little neck of the woods, GALA is a big beacon of hope to what we would call Latter-day Seekers, LDS people who are interested in Community of Christ. A lot of times they are coming from the LGBT community, or they're coming from the framework that they want to raise their family in a church that will accept their kids, whoever they end up being. That's one large reason why I felt comfortable being in Community of Christ, when I learned about GALA and learned about the hard work that you all had done. I could recognize that we still had a way to go, but I could at least see that there had been movement and there had been traction. I was that that invited me to hop on board, I guess. So, I'm just grateful for what you two and many, many, many others have shared and done in the sake of Harmony, which brings us into the modern day. So, thank you. Thank you both. (Allan: Thank you.)

**Ginger Farley** 1:42:54

It’s my pleasure. Thank you for having us.

**Josh Mangelson** 1:43:07

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