

Hope College student Mallory Timmer attended “Making Room for All: 2011” and wrote a response for her “Visions of Justice” class. That reflection is excerpted here:

Room for All National Conference

...I believe the methodology of the whole weekend included deconstructing any ideas of “us” verses “them,” or in this case specifically heterosexual Christians verses gay Christians. Also, the goal of unity through worship and thirdly the simple idea of educating people on LGBT issues in the RCA. The photographs that greeted us as we walked into the conference were a great way of breaking any sort of us versus them mindset any of us may have had. The photos of families that had LGBT parents and/or children were a great way to welcome the group to the conference. These photographs put names, lives, faces and experiences to the reason why we were there and were a great way of inviting everyone to have an open mind to what they were going to learn that weekend. I think one of the most moving photographs included a story about a little boy who went to the grocery store. While at the super market this young boy explained to the cashier that he had two mothers and without missing a beat the cashier responded, “Well, aren’t you lucky!” I think the conference was trying to get this very simple message across to all who attended, the message that no LGBT person’s family should not be looked down upon because sexual orientation, instead we should admire the love that LGBT families, like the ones in the photographs, have for one another.

I really appreciated the fact that [the conference] started with a worship service. This was helpful in reminding us that though we may be coming from a variety of backgrounds and experiences that we were all there with the same creator. The worship, song choice and message really helped create a unity amongst all that were there, which includes another type of methodology they used, unification in worship. While I enjoyed the message on Psalm 23 it was really the singing that spoke to me most. It was mindful of the fact that God is not the maker of just one person or one group of people but the songs represented the idea that we have an all inclusive God. One song sung was called “A Place at the Table.” This song speaks to the idea that every single person created has a place at the Father’s table and that whether one is just or unjust, rich or poor, a man or a woman, that no matter who you are that God has a place for you. It was also apparent in the song that God is pleased in an all-inclusive table setting for like the lyrics sing, “God will delight when we are creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace.” This song set a goal for the weekend which was that all there should become advocates for justice, compassion and peace in whichever way they see that happening in their own lives.

Looking more into the RfA pamphlets I learned that their goal is to support, educate and advocate. I believe this weekend was very much on the educational side for me personally.

[For example, in the church panel] I learned that there are some churches in the country that are LGBT inclusive and that one of those is in Holland. I really enjoyed hearing the history and how Hope Church in Holland came to be inclusive, starting with the gay member turning down ordination as a consistory member with the understanding that the church would dedicate itself to a year of education about LGBT inclusion. I also thought it was great to see where the four different RCA churches, from Michigan all the way to New York, placed themselves in regards to their RfA goals of inclusiveness. It allowed people attending the conference to compare their

own congregations to the progress of these four churches and helped them see where they have come from and how far they have yet to go.

Breaking up into the breakout groups was extremely beneficial for me because I was able to hear more personal stories from each of the participants. I really appreciated one of the ladies in my group who shared her story about being a lesbian and how her job was threatened unless she either considered counseling to reverse her “gayness” or otherwise quit. She shared with the group that she had even considered taking her life because she was so completely broken down over the threat. Her story made the RfA conference much more personal to me. It helped me to better understand what the LGBT population goes through, not only in a church context but in what is supposed to be a professional environment. These break out groups really encouraged unity and created unity for the weekend.

I also had the opportunity to attend a seminar lead by Senator Dibble of Minnesota. His talk was focused on organizing for change and he provided very practical advice that one could use when desiring to make changes in a community. He taught us the importance of being pragmatic and understanding cause and effect in order to make substantive change. Because I am a political science major I especially enjoyed what he had to say and connected it to what I have learned so far at Hope. I also really enjoyed what he had to say because it was above all political party affiliations and personal beliefs and focused on ideals that everyone, no matter their background, could agree on. He was a great speaker full of practical and thought-out advice I plan to use as a political science major.

My favorite hymn is “Come Thou Fount” because of the beautiful way in which the lyrics describe the overwhelming grace of God. I also love this hymn because it never ceases to teach me things about what it means to be a daughter of Christ. My favorite line of the song sings, “...tune my heart to sing thy grace...” I asked a very good musician friend of mine to explain the tuning process of a guitar to me so that I could better understand the notion of tuning one’s own heart. He said that tuning the guitar means aligning the strings in such a way that harmonies can be produced. It is the stretching of strings for the purpose of creating melodious music. When altering the strings the guitar player has the best in mind for the instrument because the musician knows what the strings must do in order for it to sound its absolute best.

[The] Room for All [conference] was a tuning process for many hearts, mine included. I think it is a great way of looking at how they see their vision of justice. They see it as an alignment or a coming together of Christian sisters and brothers, no matter their background. The vision included worshiping amongst a rich, vast and unique congregation while recognizing that each person in the Church is a purposeful creation of God’s own doing. Many thoughts and preconceived notions were stretched, tested and pulled at by God so that each person there might become a better-aligned Christian, just like the strings of a guitar. The vision was that any jumbled up, out of sync thoughts on LGBT issues would begin to come together and God, our musician, would tune people as an instrument and help all of us become more inclusive believers, more harmonious followers.

Mallory Timmer