



NEWS RELEASE

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Heather R. White Receives 2025-26 Virginia Ramey Mollenkott Award

Research Focuses on the Parish Hall as a Space that Facilitated LGBTQ Activism in 1970s New York City

The LGBTQ Religious Archives Network (LGBTQ-RAN) today announced that Heather Rachelle White, PhD, is this year's recipient of the 2025-26 Virginia Ramey Mollenkott Award for her paper on the role of the church parish hall as an incubator of early gay rights activism.

The Mollenkott Award honors outstanding research and scholarship in LGBTQ religious history and is the only award of its kind. The review jury selected White's "Coming Out in the Parish Hall: New York's Gay Movement and the Church of the Holy Apostles, 1969–70" from among four papers submitted for the award this year.

White will be presented this award at a public event on Monday, March 16, 2026 at First United Methodist Church/Chicago Temple in Chicago, Illinois.

Heather Rachelle White, PhD, is a visiting assistant professor in the gender and queer studies program at the University of Puget Sound. Trained in American religious history, Heather's research focuses on religion and LGBTQ movements for social change.

Her paper is part of a long-term research project into LGBTQ grassroots movements and space-sharing relationships with established churches, a project that was awarded a 2025 Project Grant for Researchers from the Louisville Institute. White is the author of *Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay Rights* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015) and co-editor (with Gillian Frank and Bethany Moreton) of *Devotions and Desires: Histories of Religion and Sexuality in the Twentieth-Century United States*. White serves on the advisory board of the LGBTQ Religious Archives Network and is a steering committee member of the Queer Studies in Religion group of the American Academy of Religion.

(Continued on next page)

White's paper recovers the history of the church that served as New York City's first gay community center. The parish hall of the Church of the Holy Apostles, an Episcopal congregation located in the Manhattan neighborhood of Chelsea, supplied meeting space for gay and lesbian organizations in the late 1960s and early 1970s, during the movement growth that followed the Stonewall riots of June 1969. This moment's rise of gay radicalism has been framed as quintessentially secular—fueled by antiestablishment protest and by leading activists' rejection of religion. White recontextualizes this secular political emergence by situating it in a parish hall—a nonreligious space by church definition and a religious space by gay activist definition. The aim is not to refute post-Stonewall organizers' deliberate secularism but to question the notion that religion was absent in this development. To rephrase a well-worn metaphor: religion was not only "in the room" of these activist meetings; religion was the room.

White's article was published in *QTR: A Journal of Trans and Queer Studies in Religion* in November 2024 and is [freely available online in open access form](#).

Jury members Wallace Best, Ph.D., Rebecca Davis, Ph.D., and Gillian Frank, Ph.D. commended the paper for "being solidly historical and archival. It points to an overlooked yet key aspect of gay liberation and organizing in the spaces of local church buildings...The archival richness and careful reading of sources should be commended...The author makes a compelling case that 'even as religion stood in as a symbol of the closet, it was in a church building, that many movement participants actually came out into gay community'...The essay provides a much richer understanding of and reframing of the importance of religious space in gay liberation in the 1960s and very early 1970s." Jury members review papers without knowing authorship, thereby providing impartiality.

White is the 17th recipient of [LGBTQ-RAN's award for papers](#) since its inception in 2005 and the fourth honoree since the award was named in memory of Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, a renowned trans-feminist religious scholar, in the summer of 2022.

The Mollenkott Award presentation is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. CST on Monday, March 16 at First United Methodist Church/Chicago Temple, 77 W. Washington Street, Chicago. The event is free and will be both in-person and livestreamed. Persons interested in participating can RSVP to attend in-person or get the link to livestream at [mollenkott2026.eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/virginia-ramey-mollenkott-award-presentation-tickets-40700000000).

Submissions for next year's Virginia Ramey Mollenkott Award must be postmarked or received electronically by December 1, 2026. Complete information on submission guidelines for the award can be found at lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/vrm-award-guidelines

The [LGBTQ Religious Archives Network](https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org) is a groundbreaking venture to preserve the history of LGBTQ religious movements around the world. The organization assists LGBTQ religious leaders and groups in determining how best to preserve their records and papers; provides an electronic information clearinghouse about LGBTQ religious history for the use of historians, researchers and other interested persons; and encourages scholarship in LGBTQ religious history. Learn more about LGBTQ-RAN at lgbtqreligiousarchives.org.

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