



## Affirming Celebration

Madeline Morris

This is the 4<sup>th</sup> in a monthly series of minutes reflecting on the celebration of Sydenham Street United 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of being an affirming congregation.

I must first explain that it was the rainbow flag outside this building which made me decide that this was the place of worship in which to raise my family. We had lived in Kingston without a church connection for some time and didn't realize we knew anyone here before coming to our first service in November 2013 when Leo was a toddler and Rachael still in my belly. I felt that the emphasis on celebrating diversity was what made me comfortable enough to come back and for us to join this congregation.

I was going to try and explain why it is that celebrating diversity rather than claiming tolerance is so important to me but in some ways that would entail trying to explain who I am and what experiences formed my beliefs, and that would take more than a few minutes. But I will summarize by saying that my formal and informal education over the years has given me an awareness of the injustices that a heterosexually dominant discourse within our society creates and propagates, and that knowledge really angered me.

In my work as an ER physician, family physician and sexual health physician, I see often people at their most vulnerable and I am told of terrible hurts and injustices. I am aware that I am granted an honour to be in this position. It is truly humbling and I feel that my privileged position brings with it a need to encourage society to be more open, more caring, and more willing to celebrate the diversity in our society.

We are so blessed to live in a time when children are more free than ever before from the confines of heterosexuality and gender roles. I am blessed to raise children in this city and community where we can be surrounded by diversity and my children can see and know a diversity of people in loving relationships living together. That my son can wear nail polish to school when he chooses. That when a school mates' family tells us their child has chosen to be renamed and live as the gender they were not born with, both my children responded immediately with: "well of course that is who they already were". Gender identity is fluid to them at this time in their lives.

I know that this may change – with the of the pressures and influences of the school yard, the media and so on. But as a parent, I am always learning from and with my children. I am appreciative of being sometimes close enough to glimpse their perspective. I am so proud that the affirming message – that God's love is for everyone – is such an unwavering belief in them that they have no understanding that in the past (and to many still) so many people were hurt by being told otherwise and were not celebrated for who they are and for whom they love.

In closing I would like to say a short prayer:

Loving God,

May we dedicate ourselves to building bridges of love and hope where harmful divisions have been made, making equity and equality for all people our goal, while working continually for justice, so that everyone can live fully in your love. Amen



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