

**The United Church of Canada
Conseil régional Nakonha:ka Regional Council
Lennoxville United Church**

Theological Reflection
September 2019

A Summer with 3 Prides

I have had a wonderfully busy summer. One of the highlights was celebrating Pride for the 10th year in a row, and I was blessed with the opportunity to participate in 3 different Pride Marches; Montreal, Sherbrooke and Paris. This landmark year in my own life has made me reflective of the wonder-filled living I have experienced since I embraced the person God has made me to be. It also has left me grateful for a God who always shows up to inspire and encourage me through the challenges and struggles that come from human living. People often use the word 'closet' to express the time they spend not living out their full self; I experienced this closet as a kind of tomb. It was through the Bible stories that I was raised on that I was able to experience a resurrection. As I contemplated this landmark year, I felt moved by the Spirit to share with you my summer of Priding.

I was blessed with the opportunity to come into myself and my sexual identity while living in Montreal's Gay Village; my first Pride was just a few months after I moved. I was in awe at how safe, confident and loved I felt throughout the celebration, there were so many people simply being themselves. This summer, 10 years later, I was awe-filled again. The Pride events had been moved to a new location, because it had outgrown the original gathering place. The event is so much bigger than it once was, and the crowd that gathered was far more diverse as well. The crowd was filled with a plethora of people with different gender and sexual identities and expression. The crowd was no longer predominantly white; no longer predominantly young; and there were more children with their parents than I had ever seen. All were gathered to celebrate love and diversity. On Parade Day I joined 5 other United Churches to walk together in the Parade, and some of us spent time giving out free hugs to anyone one who wanted one. Every year we manage to collect people along the way; people feel welcomed to join us. I can't help but wonder if it is Christ whispering in their ears: Come and follow. No matter who calls them to join we are always grateful to have them journey with us, even if just for a little while.

The Pride march in Paris felt chaotic. It's not really a parade, people don't line the streets to watch community groups and floats walk by. Instead everyone joins in the walk together. It was very chaotic, but it wasn't scary. People had come to be a witness to the realities of the LGBTQ2+ community, and to march in solidarity with those that society pushes to the margins. I wonder if the day we call Palm Sunday was anything like that march in Paris. It was loud but hopeful and it demonstrated the struggle of liberty. Seeing the hundreds of thousands of people together proclaiming love, is an experience I will not soon forget.

I have been participating in the Sherbrooke Pride since Jillian and I moved here, we have witnessed a growth in the celebration and march. Here in Sherbrooke there were no

crowds to hug like in Montreal, and we stayed on the right side of the street unlike the chaos of Paris. As we walked we had time to chat; I enjoyed the conversations I had with people along the way. One person wondered out loud if the cars that were honking were with us or against us, I suggested that it didn't matter and that I was glad that they were participating in our noise. Along the way I met people who were struggling, people who needed to hear that God loves them, and just like those Jesus followers on the road to Emmaus, Christ showed up and joined our walking.

We are called to journey with others, to listen to people's experience and to their hearts; we are called to be a community that reaches out and says "You Are Loved". Sometimes this looks like chaos, sometimes it is a simple walk, and sometimes it comes with a hug.

Blessings,
Rev. Linda Buchanan

If you would like to know more and the United Church of Canada's commitment to the inclusion of LGBTQ2+ community check out https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/being-community/gender-sexuality-and-orientation?fbclid=IwAR1WtNfQrm_zw-69Z0pynViC7TdwypliT4k0yPElxyWiq36ujWeHev-Jt4k