

Creating safe and affirming churches for our 2SLGBTQIA+ parishioners

BY REV'D NICHOLA CUMINE

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God." – 1 John 4:7



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It is important to acknowledge that the 2SLGBTQIA+ community has a long history of feeling excluded, hurt and rejected by the Church. This painful legacy has left many individuals feeling marginalized and excluded from the spiritual community. As leaders in faith, we have a sacred responsibility to heal these wounds and create spaces where everyone feels safe, affirmed and deeply loved. This is my motive in offering some guidance to those who wish to create an affirming and safe space for everyone.

It is my belief that we are called to reflect God's boundless love, extending hospitality and compassion to all, regardless of their identity. But I am very aware that this can be easier said than done. That is why our churches must be intentional in striving to be affirming spaces for 2SLGBTQIA+ parishioners, and we must embrace deliberate actions and thoughtful practices. Moreover, as clergy and leaders of communities of faith, we are called to reflect God's boundless love, extending hospitality and compassion to all, regardless of their identity. So, I would like to offer three key points to guide us in this sacred responsibility.

Cultivating inclusive language and practices

Language has the power to heal, unify and affirm. We need to ensure that our church's liturgy, prayers and

communications include inclusive language that acknowledges and celebrates gender diversity and sexual orientation. By replacing phrases that assume binary gender roles with those that honour all

identities – such as using "in wonderful diversity you created us" instead of "male and female"... (Eucharistic Prayer 1, BAS) – we can foster a more welcoming environment.

It is also important for us to review our church policies and practices to ensure they reflect inclusivity. We should strive to use pronouns correctly and invite individuals to share their own. By displaying visual cues, such as rainbow symbols or "affirming church" signage, we can signal that our community is a welcoming space where 2SLGBTQIA+ parishioners are not merely tolerated but cherished as vital parts of our church family.

Providing education and training

Education is essential for creating a safe and affirming space. We can offer workshops, Bible studies and guest speaker events that explore topics around 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion, theology of acceptance and the intersection of faith and identity. These opportunities will help us dispel misconceptions, challenge biases and deepen our collective understanding.

Likewise, we must ensure that we as church leaders, clergy and volunteers are equipped with sensitivity training to respond compassionately and knowledgeably to the needs of 2SLGBTQIA+ parishioners. An informed and empathetic community fosters mutual respect and ensures that ev-

eryone's voice is heard and valued.

Building intentional relationships

It is important for us to understand that affirmation goes beyond policy – it thrives in personal connection. Pride month is here and it is an opportune time for us to create occasions to listen to the stories and experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ parishioners in our congregation and parish community. By validating their journeys and providing them with platforms to share their faith and insights – whether it be through sermons, testimonials or fellowship gatherings – we demonstrate our commitment to inclusion.

Moreover, building intentional relationships also includes advocating for justice and equality beyond our church walls. By partnering with local 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations and participating in community initiatives, we show that our church is dedicated to living out the Gospel's call to love and justice.

By committing to lead safe and affirming churches in our diocese, we can be fitting examples for parishes in the four ecclesiastical provinces of the Anglican Church of Canada and we can be a beacon of hope and sanctuary for those who have often faced rejection. Moreover, by embracing inclusive language, providing education and fostering meaningful relationships, we can create a spiritual home where 2SLGBTQIA+ parishioners feel safe, celebrated and deeply loved. So, let us continue this holy work together, not simply as an act of inclusion but as a shared embodiment of Christ's love for all.



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Between Two Mothers

BY ANGELA RUSH



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Shalom, my name is Mary; I am the mother of The One. A virgin chosen by God himself, to give birth to a heavenly son.

"You shall call him Jesus," is what the angel said to me. He will be a carpenter by trade and a saviour by destiny.

I am the mom of this precious babe; I carried him in my womb. I gave him life; it was God's will, as was resurrection from a tomb.

Shlama, my name is Elizabeth, my husband and I are both quite old. We prayed faithfully; but becoming parents was unlikely, we were told.

Zechariah was an old priest; as his bride, I was selected with the utmost care. An aged barren daughter of a priest; devoted to God was the life we would share.

Our faith did not go unnoticed; the Lord was to bless us with a son. The angel said we were to call him John saying, "Your son will make way for the One."

"Be not afraid" said Gabriel, "I'm an angel, not a he or a she. Sent by God himself to deliver messages to a very select three.

I will speak words that are holy and divine to Zechariah, Joseph and Mary. About the upcoming birth and life of their sons; both blessed and extraordinary."

These two women were cousins, maybe not blood, but from the same tribe. Their relation isn't quite clear to us, however in the Bible it's cousins they describe.

The angel told Mary about her cousin; how she, by God's hand, would bear a son too. So she set out on a journey to Judah to visit her, she knew Gabriel's message to be true.

When Mary arrived to greet her, with a Shalom, a simple

hello or hi. Elizabeth's unborn child moved, filled with the Holy Spirit to testify.

"Blessed are you among all women," Elizabeth faithfully spoke with pride. "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb," for this is the child of God you carry inside.

Picture this moment if you can; the blessings these two mothers share. Both blessed by the Lord, both carrying a child; no moment can compare.

Mary was a sweet teenage virgin, chosen to carry God's heavenly son. Elizabeth much older, beyond child bearing years; her pregnancy half way done.

John would grow up to be a prophet; a holy man destined to lead and baptize. Followed by many to the river, a cleansing and readiness for Christ they'd soon recognize.

John standing and baptizing in the river Jordan, would turn and see his childhood friend. Jesus was walking straight towards him; with a smile and a hug to extend.

This next baptism like no other, this was a declaration from the heavens above. Jesus arose from the waters of Jordan; The Holy Spirit descended upon Him "like a dove."

One child was born to baptize; one was born to be our Saviour and King. "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased," God's voice from heaven did sing.

Imagine these two moms converse, as they watch their little boys play. "Mary, John is going to be the prophet that will baptize your boy Jesus one day."

"So very true Elizabeth and how very proud you must be. My son was never mine; Jesus was created for all humanity."

Just as Gabriel shared the messages of the sons they would conceive. They'd share in the sorrow of their child's deaths; weeping as they grieve.

Women of strength and faithfulness; no wonder God chose these two. To set in motion the plan of salvation that He had for saving me and you.