

June 26th, 2020

I've been heartened these last two weeks, first to hear about the Supreme Court affirming the illegality of workplace discrimination on the basis of sexuality, and second to be reminded by parishioner Mark Hartman of a document prominently on display at St. Mark's: a framed letter in the narthex affirming the full inclusion of LGBT people in the life of the Church, and in this church specifically. This letter may not be news to many of you who were here at the time it was written, or who were engaged in the long work of advocacy that made it possible. But for those who may not be familiar, I've included the text below.

This month is "Pride Month," and while LGBT specific celebrations have been more muted than in most previous years, we've certainly been in touch with the vulnerability of human nature and the importance of affirming and protecting the dignity of human life wherever we find it. This approach is sometimes called an "ethic of life," in contrast to other, more narrow perspectives which make life a zero-sum game -- i.e., preserving it in the one instance by taking it in the other. The Church's conviction is that the more we affirm life, the more alive we will all be. So wherever we find life in danger, there most of all it ought to be preserved and protected -- because there before anywhere else we find the ground of our own. And wherever we find life most full and free, there it ought to be celebrated and shared, proudly and widely, because there before anywhere else we taste the fruit of the whole project.

I'm talking about Pride, Black Lives Matter, the Gospel, and what we're doing here on this earth in the first place. If it's not about life, what is it about? If your religion is not about life, what good is it? If your life is not about life, what's holding you back?

We all may be stuck in the closet this Pride Month, hiding from the virus -- and good thing too, because the numbers keep climbing. But I hope it doesn't prevent us from being brought face to face with the mystery at the heart of who we are: that we are loved by God, and to live in that love is to celebrate the life it creates, wherever life is to be found.

Yours faithfully,

Fr. Blake+

And now, the text of the letter:

We believe that all people are worthy of respect and honor because all are created in the image of God, and all can respond to the love of God. In our baptismal vows, we commit ourselves, with God's help, to seek and serve Christ in all persons by loving our neighbors as ourselves, respecting the dignity of every human being and striving for justice and peace among all people.

Yet we see that because of homophobia in our churches and in the society, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are not always counted among those for whom the Church seeks justice, or grants due respect as loving and beloved members of the household of God. We recognize that the fear of, and discrimination against such people is part of an oppressive history within the Church and society which distorts our relationship with God and with other people, and diminishes the humanity the humanity of our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender sisters and brothers.

Therefore, we feel compelled to make explicit our welcome of lesbians, gay, bisexual and transgender persons into the ministry and membership of this congregation, incarnating the message, “The Episcopal Church Welcomes You.” We encourage lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people to participate in all aspects of the ministry of this church; by bearing witness to Christ according to the gifts given them, [by] carrying on Christ’s work of reconciliation to the world and by taking their place in the life, worship and governance of the Church.

Where we see divisions created by homophobia and heterosexism, we will seek, with God’s help, to be a place of reconciliation, offering a love that casts out all fear. Where we see injustice and ignorance, we will offer our ministry of advocacy and education, trusting the Spirit to lead us into all truth.