

Why **must** we slap a rainbow on our church?

The United Church of Broomfield

Pastor Michael Blackwood

January 30, 2022

The “Grown-ups” Message for our family-focused ONA worship service

We became an Open and Affirming (ONA) congregation 18 years ago. Our church went through the process of discernment, asking ourselves, “Why should we go through the rigmarole of all of this?” “Why do we have to slap a big old rainbow sign on ourselves?”

I wasn’t here 18 years ago, but I’ve been told that the process wasn’t hard, but it wasn’t a cakewalk either. When the decision was made to officially become an ONA designated church, apparently, there were some people in the congregation who chose to leave....but many, many people stayed, declaring, “We pledge ourselves to creating a safe and loving community of faith in which ALL persons, regardless of creed, color, religion, gender, age, mental or physical health, disability, national origin, family configuration, sexual orientation, cultural background or economic status can feel respected and cherished as part of Christ and the spirit of one Creator.” Following this “grown-up’s message,” we will again join together in saying those words as we renew our pledge.

In the last 18 years the world has become a better place for the LGBTQIA+ community, so why do we continue to celebrate our ONA designation every year and recite this pledge?

Well – the world has improved for the LGBTQIA+ community, but...the fact remains that our world, here in Broomfield and to the four corners of the globe, still discriminates against LGBTQIA+ people. Our world still speaks of and treats LGBTQIA+ people as less than in both profound and subtle ways ... and the scars of violence, bigotry and oppression against LGBTQIA+ people linger.

As a gay man, I recognize how much attitudes have changed and how much society has improved, but we still have much more growth before us. While I’m married and proud of it, I still find myself in situations where I say, “spouse instead of husband,” or I play the “pronoun game,” referring to my spouse as “she instead of he.” And I will not hold my husband’s hand in public – out of fear that he or I will be assaulted either verbally or physically. In this “better world,” fear and scars still exist.

This month, the Florida State senate introduced HB 1557. It’s called the “parental right in education” bill, but many people are referring to it as the “don’t say gay” bill. Should it pass, the bill specifically says that school districts would be prohibited from “encouraging classroom discussion about sexual orientation or gender identity...”¹ in grades K-5. The bill allows parents to launch legal actions against school boards *if they believe* such policies overstep their fundamental rights as parents, which one politician said, “...can only be given to [a parent] by above.”²

Advocates for the bill say that its simply ensuring parents have the right to control what schools teach their children. Those opposing the bill are concerned that it will ban all discussions and virtually erase LGBTQIA+ students and history. “This [bill] means students not only couldn’t learn about LGBTQ history and diverse families, but they’d be prohibited from speaking about their own parents and families that may include LGBTQ

¹ [Flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2022/1557/BillText/Filed/PDF](https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2022/1557/BillText/Filed/PDF)

² <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/24/florida-republican-committee-dont-say-gay-bill>

people.”³ In response, Jon Harris Maurer, public policy director for Equality Florida, said, “We’re parents, students and teachers. We are your brothers and sisters. Conversations about us aren’t something dangerous that should be banned.”

According to a national survey, 42% of LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered suicide last year. Moreover, 94% of LGBTQ+ youth reported that recent politics negatively impacted their mental health. The study also found that LGBTQ+ youth who had access to spaces that affirmed their sexual orientation and gender identity reported lower rates of attempted suicide. In a separate report, the Trevor Project found that LGBTQ+ youth who learned about LGBTQ+ issues or people in classrooms had 23% lower odds of reporting a suicide attempt in the last 12 months.⁴

This week, the governor of Texas introduced an almost identical bill. In the last 3 years, there have been hundreds of bills introduced into every state’s legislature attempting to limit, exclude, restrict, or ban LGBTQIA+ rights and accesses related to education, athletics, housing, healthcare and religion, to name a few. Many of these bills have been passed into law.⁵

Why do we celebrate being an ONA church? Why do we regularly recite and renew our pledge? Why **must** we slap a rainbow on our church?

Because while things appear to be getting better, we must look deeper and be more vigilant to see the true reality that appearances are in fact deceiving.

Martin Luther King Jr. fought for civil rights for black people in America, but we know that his wisdom and advocacy would reach farther than only race. Dr King inspired us to fight for equality for all of humanity, everywhere. He said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."⁶ He also said, "Make a career of humanity. Commit yourself to the noble struggle for equal rights. You will make a better person of yourself, a greater nation of your country, and a finer world to live in."⁷

Human beings are all created equally in the image of God, so says Genesis 1:27.

Galatians reminds us that, “By faith in Christ you are in direct relationship with God. Your baptism in Christ was not just washing you up for a fresh start. It also involved dressing you in an adult faith wardrobe—Christ’s life, the fulfillment of God’s original promise. In Christ’s family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ” (3:26-28).

Let us pray...

³ <https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2022/01/florida-lawmaker-tells-homophobic-parent-exactly-want-say/?fbclid=IwAR2uh66QEPKOmW-CQxNWZteq51ZR9xX4WM0ly-CHKLMteYqvjlAXrxJOImE>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/24/florida-republican-committee-dont-say-gay-bill>

⁵ <https://www.aclu.org/legislation-affecting-lgbtq-rights-across-country-2021>

⁶ Letter from Birmingham, Alabama jail, April 16, 1963.

⁷ March for Integrated Schools, April 18, 1959.