

From Obligation to Blessing – God’s Plan in Action

NC Pride – September 29, 2012 – Durham, NC

I went to the NC Pride Gathering on September 29, 2012 not looking forward to an estimated 8 hour time commitment I expected to be tedious and boring. I attended out of a sense of obligation to the Diversity Committee of Amity United Methodist Church (Chapel Hill, NC) - I wasn't going out of town (darn) and had the only vehicle in the group capable of transporting our display table.



I came away from NC Pride 2012 in Durham, NC energized by the literally hundreds of people to whom our church was able to witness and affirm God’s love for all his children. The Raleigh N & O reported thousands attended the event.

My vision of Pride was the 10-second reel we all see in the local news: A parade of colorful floats and flouncily – sometimes outrageously - dressed persons. In reality, the parade itself was just a small part of the total experience. There were speakers, entertainers, and the National Anthem. Maybe one day the Boy Scouts can present the colors.



For me, the real action was the street fair (or, more accurately, the Duke Quad fair). It was a gloriously varied collection of tent city and food trucks, visited by a multitude of individuals. Row upon row of tents and tarps provided refuge from the relentless rain that slickened and muddied the ground, but failed to dampen enthusiasm. Political, social justice, research, rights, and religious organizations; law firms; candle, craft, food, and pet treat vendors; and many, many more offered information, freebies,

and items for sale.

Of those INDIVIDUALS – God’s children all – some were dressed in costumes as appropriate for the carnival-like atmosphere reminiscent of Mardi Gras or Halloween. Others, also dressed out of the mainstream, were clearly making the statement, “I’m different, but this is who I really am.” Many were just everyday folk: All colors, nationalities, family structures, ages, orientation, and outward appearance. Some came to be who they are, others to support their right to do so.



They came from all across the state: Kinston, Charlotte, Wilmington, students from East Carolina University and Appalachian, soldiers from Ft. Bragg. Everyone felt free to be as God made them. I was equally touched by the older couples who have hidden in shame for most of their lives, the younger people who, while enjoying greater access to acceptance are still targets, and our brave fighting men and women who no longer cower in fear under “Don’t ask, don’t tell.”

Under the Amity tarp we hawked our wares like street vendors of yore. “Free goodies!” we yelled to reel them in. Even with the “Free” signs, many still asked, “How much?” of our rainbow crosses, hearts engraved with “Love” on multi-colored string, and Hawaiian leis.



“No charge,” we replied. “We’re from Amity United Methodist Church in Chapel Hill. And we just want you to know that God loves everyone.”

Some pounced on the love hearts but many were visibly touched by the rainbow crosses. We heard brief stories of rejections from other churches and family members due to religion. I read in the next day’s paper about

protesters, but didn’t see any. They were actually part of our reason for being there. Just as radical fundamentalist Muslims should not define Islam as a whole, neither should hate-mongers define Christianity. We were not the only faith organization in attendance, which included Episcopalians, United Church of Christ, Roman Catholics, and others.



I have never been more proud of a minister at any church I attended than when we said, “And this is our pastor, Gloria.” Rev. Gloria Winston Harris greeted everyone with warmth, no matter how outrageously geared up (or dressed down). After hugging one young man who is a family friend, Gloria said, “He has known since he was 8 years old that he is gay.” An older man walking alone declined any neckwear, but picked up one of our Amity candles there for decoration. “Take it,” I said, glad to be able to spread the light of Jesus any way possible.

I rejoiced at this celebration of the diversity - yet joint humanity - that was Pride 2012. Although initially a reluctant attendee, I was thoroughly and unexpectedly blessed by God and, during every soggy and chilly moment, basked in the warmth only He can provide.

Kim McCahan Batson



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