

9/24/2023

I/we have always felt welcomed here. My relationship to FUSIT may be unique given the fact that, my husband/partner/best friend, co-parent, Mark was the church administrator for 22 years. He was the kindest of men. Sincere. Thoughtful. Humorous. Dedicated. He embodied welcomeness.

Mark and I started coming to FUSIT sometime in the early 1990s a few years before he was hired as the administrator. We knew who we were, we had already started our family, there was no question about us only joining a community that would welcome us and embrace us.

So my view is a 30 year arc that encompasses many life events.

There are many things that defined us and our family among them: AIDS, mental illness, being gay and raising two children born in Cambodia.

We felt supported. We were seen, known and had a voice. This community was an important part of our lives. Due to the full embracing of who we were, we were able to offer back to the church from a LGBTQ+ perspective, for example, events to raise awareness, a coffee house, movie nights, speaking from the pulpit and at Adult RE, reading children's stories that highlighted families like ours.

More recently I have experienced welcoming in a different way. I was fortunate to be the highest bidder of one of Magdalen Lindeberg's wall quilts entitled "Picking Up the Pieces." As a gay man in his mid-60s who has been consciously laying the foundation for my next 30 years after some jolting losses, members of this congregation have been there to gently encourage me forward. Knowing that I have a place in this community and am welcomed here has been a key ingredient to picking up the pieces and rearranging them.

From my perspective, here are some ingredients to FUSIT being a welcome community: perception, attentiveness, kindness, sincerity, sharing stories, knowing when to ask questions and when to listen, humor and laughter. Further a sprinkling of individuals such as Fran Helmstadter, Martha Ferger, Betty Postle and Mark Pedersen goes a long way.

Rod Howe