

Banning 2SLGBTQ conversion Efforts

Presentation to Regina City Council

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I am Russell Mitchell-Walker, minister of Eastside United Church. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today and for your initiative in supporting the creation of a bylaw which will move us toward a more inclusive city. Banning Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer(2SLGBTQ) Conversion Efforts is an important step to communicate to the 2SLGBTQ community in Regina that we are welcomed and accepted as we are in all communities within this city. You will note that I used the word efforts and not conversion therapy, as given what we know about these practices therapy is a misnomer.

Eastside United Church, is an Affirming Ministry, which works to be intentionally welcoming of all, including 2SLGBTQ folk. We also seek to live out that call publicly and explicitly. It is not enough to name that we are welcoming but we need to continually work to understand how we can be inclusive and welcoming of all. This is intentional. We speak out on issues such as we are today. This is public. We name what is needed to be welcoming, this is being explicit. As such Affirming Ministry churches stand out as different from the traditional churches who often hold traditional views on issues such as sexual orientation and gender identity.

Today we celebrate that this work to ban the harmful practice of seeking to change one's inherent identity is supported by a number of congregations and communities of faith. You will have received a letter that we have written to the City Council that has been signed by close to 50 faith leaders from not just Christian churches but also of other faiths having Faith Leaders signed from the Jewish, Muslim, Sikh faiths. There were a number of others from the Anglican and Catholic traditions who would have signed if they were allowed to by their hierarchy.

As a Christian, I believe I am called to a life of love and compassion, following the teachings in the gospels of Jesus, whose message was one of love, compassion, standing with the marginalized and oppressed, and creating a community of

inclusion, for the outcast, the lepers, the oppressed in society. 2SLGBT conversion efforts are neither loving nor compassionate as they work to go against one's inherent self identity and being. Those who engage in these practices often base them on a superficial reading of scripture, and not on the cultural and social context of the readings of the few passages that are believed to refer to homosexuality. Indeed, in all of Jesus' teachings and admonishments against behaviours and practices that were offensive and against God, he does not address homosexuality at all. Not once in any of the gospels is it addressed.

The message that the church has offered over the years that homosexuality is sinful, and needs to be changed has caused great pain, spiritual abuse, and leads to suicide rates for LGBTQ folk to be up to 4 times higher than their heterosexual peers. A good recent example of this spiritual abuse is in the movie *Boy Erased* with Nicole Kidman. I encourage you watch it to get a sense of the realities of the damage these kinds of spiritual practices do to an individual, who in this case willingly went for such so called treatment. We need to resist any attempts to allow this kind of practice to anyone, whether it is by choice or not, because it is abusive.

In looking at the proposed by-law I would like to make a few comments and suggestions. With regard to point (a), the inclusion of "the offering or provision of counselling or behaviour modification techniques", while this is important, following discussion in our group about it, and in consulting with Dr. Kris Wells, an expert in the area of 2SLGBTQ conversion efforts, he suggests including "behavioural or aversion therapies". With this change, it would read: "the offering or provision of counselling or behaviour modification techniques, behavioural or aversion therapies."

We also recommend (again after consulting with Dr. Kris Wells) that in order for the definition to be more comprehensive that the words "repressing, or discouraging" be added so it is changed to read:

*"Conversion Therapy" means the following when used for the purpose of changing, **repressing, or discouraging** a person's sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, or for the purpose of repressing or reducing non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviour"*

The addition of repressing or discouraging are also important elements of Conversion Efforts that need to be banned.

Finally under fines, it would be important to add more strength to the by-law by adding a clause that would restrict the use of grants, funding, facilities, or other contributions, financial or otherwise, to organizations or individuals that practice or promote conversion efforts.

All of these changes are important to ensure that this practice does not continue within the city, and would send a clearer message that the City is truly committed to supporting the 2SLGBTQ community under its jurisdiction.

Thank you again for your time and support.