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Church Together

CHRIST THE GOOD SHEPHERD, SAN JOSE: CAME THROUGH IN THE CLUTCH

On August 19 - 20, 2017, Christ the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church (CGS) in San Jose celebrated their 30th anniversary of becoming an RIC (Reconciling in Christ) congregation that affirms, invites, and fully welcomes LGBTQ persons in the life of the congregation. It was a two day celebration: a Saturday event with meal that included community partners and guests, and Sunday worship. It was a grand celebration, and appropriately so, for thirty years ago when the crisis exploded, the people of Christ at CGS came through in the clutch.



The AIDS epidemic was raging in the Bay Area in the mid-1980s. Many churches were organizing and speaking against LGBTQ persons, haughtily trumpeting that "AIDS is God's judgment on homosexuality and the 'gay lifestyle.'" But CGS responded to the devastation and heartbreak of AIDS in a very different way; following Jesus, they served those who were suffering or at risk.

CGS is now about 40% LGBTQ people, but at that time had only a few members

who were LGBTQ, some in the closet, some out, but they helped provide a personal connection to the epidemic. With the leadership of Pr. Jack Lundin, CGS entered into partnership with other congregations and local non-profits to offer a multi-pronged ministry of help and support. This collaborative health care ministry offered health care advocacy, massage, in-home health care, nursing consultants, sexual health education, and more. At the same time Pr. Lundin developed liturgies that explicitly proclaimed God's love for LGBTQ persons, and preached sermons that underscored this good news. He offered pastoral care to AIDS sufferers, and CGS became the site for some of their funerals. At that time LGBTQ persons were asking churches, "Are you for us or against us?" In word and deed CGS answered with a loud and clear, "We are for you!"

There had been none of the usual process by which congregations today decide to become RIC: no videos or printed material, no conversations or testimonies, no motion or vote. In 1987 Lutherans Concerned/ San Francisco simply saw and heard what CGS was doing, how they were serving and affirming and welcoming LGBTQ persons, how they were for LGBTQ people, and said, "You are obviously RIC! When the chips were down, when the crisis came, you came through in the clutch." CGS was the eleventh congregation so designated.



So last August, Christ the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church celebrated who they had been thirty years ago, and what they have become during this thirty year journey. And it was a grand celebration! Church members made a conscious decision to do it themselves: menu and food for 200, decorations both inside and out, invitations, children's activities (a Bounce House) - everything! They were also committed to

creating a celebration that grew out of their mission statement: To proclaim God's word and love, welcome all, and serve one another and the world. One way they "proclaimed God's love" was to decorate the church exterior with flags unique to various LGBTQ sub-groups: the usual rainbow flag, but also flags for the bisexual, transgender, asexual, leather, and bear communities. Days before the celebration a passerby, pointing to one of the flags, asked Pr. Manda Truchinski, "Do you know what that flag means?" Pr. Manda told the incredulous young person, "Yes, I do. We have some of those people in this church!" God's wide-embracing love was proclaimed!



CGS reached out to invite to their Saturday celebration community friends and partners, including groups that use the church facilities for meetings, and asked them to share their ministries. Such guests included LGBTQ Youth Space, AA groups, various support groups, and several choruses that meet at the church for practice. At the Saturday event a proclamation was read from the County Board of Supervisors; Reconciling Works (formerly Lutherans Concerned) sent two

representatives to bring congratulations; and we in the Sierra Pacific Synod were all represented by The Rev. Kathryn Gulbranson, Assistant to the Bishop.

The 30th anniversary celebration continued and concluded with a deeply meaningful and highly celebrative worship on Sunday morning with Pr. Gulbranson preaching. As they heard the amazing words announcing that Christ, in his body and blood, is for you, they gave thanks that they had, at a crucial time, been for others, and that over these thirty years they have been and are still in Christ becoming a church that is for the world.



Do you have a story that you would like to share? Send any Church Together story requests to mic@spselca.org.

Committed to being re-formed...
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