

Our bishop says that our stories matter and need to be shared. Just prior to the start of PRIDE month, I invited LGBTQIA+ members and allies at Emmanuel (Episcopal Church, Webster, Groces, MO) to share their stories, their joys and pains, how this church and THE church has supported or injured them. The first to share their PRIDE month story is – me. I am your priest, and I am also the mother of a lesbian daughter.

I remember knowing that my daughter was gay when she was little. When she came out to me in high school, I could honestly tell her that I already knew, that I'd know for a long time, so she could let go any worry about my reaction to her news. I loved her as she was and would support her as she came into the fullness of herself and her love.

As a parent, I did grieve when she came out, because it was official. The future I was taught to hope for my child was gone, so were my hopes for grandkids – in the way I was taught to expect them - and I had to let myself grieve all that. As God always does, in the ashes of what was gone, a new hope was born, and it brought me freedom.

Soon enough, I realized that my hopes for my daughter hadn't changed much at all. I hoped for a future where she would know love and build a family, where her gifts could find expression and provide her a comfortable living, where she could become her fullest self. She is living this dream today: teaching music and playing in orchestras in South GA, legally married to her love, and raising my two grandsons, who were born by IVF.

After years of progress toward LGBTQIA+ inclusion, we, as a family, now face the threat of their loss of freedoms and rights, but not only them. I recently was made my grandson's legal guardian for the second time in my life. The first time was prior to the legalization of gay marriage. This time it's in the event their rights to marriage and adoption rights are repealed. I pray for all people – gay, straight, and otherwise - who may lose the option for in-vitro fertilization at all, and for adoption due to their sexual identity.

As a mom, I've always worried about my daughter's safety. We raised our kids in deep South GA where my daughter lives again, and where guns are rampant, and anti-gay Christians are the majority voice. But now we also live in a culture where just about anyone can get a gun, where people shoot and kill those who offend them or their beliefs. I pray daily for the safety of my daughter and her family.

When I interviewed to come here to serve with you, I told the search committee, as I tell every discernment committee, that my daughter is gay and if this church couldn't fully welcome her as she is (meaning, e.g., that she could hold hands with her wife in the pews), that was fine, but then I am not the priest they want or need here. I haven't had a church admit to being welcoming in concept only, but I have served in them, which is why I add the example when I make this statement now.

As we celebrate PRIDE month, I thank you for being a parish where I can share my story as the mom of an LGBTQIA+ person. I celebrate the love and real acceptance of LGBTQIA+ people here at Emmanuel. This love reflects the God we worship, and it can change the world. Thank you.