

Liturgy for Gender Transition – Honoring and Celebrating Karen

Brenda (pastor): Besides being a community who likes to party, tonight we have gathered with a special cause, to honour and celebrate Karen and her transition, her crossing over time into a new life as a new person. Four years ago, a person came to our faith community having first checked us out on our website, attracted by our affirmation of persons who identify as LGBTQ. A year later as part of a transgender education series, this person shared with the community their spiritual journey as a transgender person, the joys, the pain, the fears, the relief of being true to oneself. Today, on behalf of TOGETHER and CIM, Corey, Gary and I want to pay tribute to the gifts that person we now know as Karen has brought to us and our faith community. Karen, when you shared your story with me at the Joshua Tree Café, I was moved by your honesty, courage and vulnerability. I felt as if I had been handed a precious treasure.... which was true. From that experience and as I have come to know you, I realize that I and CIM had been greatly honored by your trust in us, your belief that we were up to being your community of faith. As you sorted through how you would tell your children, your father and your siblings, I was aware how carefully, that is how full of care you were approaching these people whom you loved with news that might surprise and distress them. You did this disclosing with such integrity, for example, sending a letter to your dad so that he had time to process a bit before you arrived at the family gathering. Finally when you ended your talk to us, three years ago, with your wonderful dry humour, you gave us a “heads up” and said, “The next time you see me, you may not recognize me.” When Art and I attended the Day of Remembrance ceremony at Outlink November 2014, I saw how you had found a place of belonging and service in the transgender community and in the broader Calgary community, and noticed the love and respect you were shown there. Thank you, Karen, from all of us, for trusting us enough to take us along on your journey with its challenges and joys. It has been a privilege and a delight to witness your transformation. You have blessed us with your grace and your dignity. You have found a place in the CIM faith community and in our hearts.

Corey’s Blessing: This is a celebration tonight and, exactly because it’s a celebration it is also a holy evening. We want to take a moment to specifically we felt that rooting tonight’s celebration into the ancient/future faith we try to be part of and embody would be very appropriate.

The ancient Hebrew community had a series of 18 daily prayers called the

berekah each of which would start with the formula, in Hebrew,
בְּרַךְ אֶתְּהוָה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

(Blessed are You, Lord our God sovereign of the universe)

Each specific prayer after that was intended towards gratefulness for who the individuals and the community were as well as gratefulness towards the God who had brought them to each milestone on their journeys toward becoming. I will read just a couple of these out and when I pause I would like for us as a community to respond with an “amen”...

Blessed are You, Eternal One, our God, Ruler of Time and Space,
the Transforming One for those who transition... for being powerfully
present
during Karen’s transition (amen)

Blessed are You, Eternal One, our God Ruler of Time and Space
who has made each of us, as we truly are, in God’s image...
for making Karen in your image, she reflects you beautifully (amen)

Blessed are You, Eternal One, our God Ruler of Time and Space
who has kept us alive and sustained us and helped us to arrive at this mo-
ment who has helped Karen arrive at this moment (amen)

For the gift of who Karen has been, is, and will be amongst us as a commu-
nity
we say... (amen)

Corey: Karen, we have a gift for you to mark this milestone in your life and your spir-
itual journey. As you know, every year in January we celebrate our life in
community, with stories, symbols, songs and rituals. This year as our ritual
we chose rocks, stones which were gathered from a river bed. Reflecting the
OT practice of building stone altars when and where they experienced God,
together we built a stone altar – a collective milestone and touchstone which
reflected our thoughts and feelings and added them to the community. We
took time to reflect upon and paint the stones. Then we added words describ-
ing what we had received at Calgary Inter-Mennonite Church. Some of the
stones have been here tonight for people to see and think about.

Brenda: Our gift to you is a pair of amethyst geodes made into book-ends. Geodes are
ordinary looking rocks, often spherical in shape and hollow-sounding when

you tap them. They are rough and ordinary looking on the outside but when you crack them open they have crystals inside, which have been formed when mineral-rich water fills the cavity of a rock.

Corey: As you might guess, besides its natural beauty, we chose it also for its symbolic value. Amethyst comes in shades of purple, an important color in the LGBTQ community, particularly in the western hemisphere, a color which symbolizes magic, mystery, spirituality, the sub-conscious, creativity, dignity, royalty.

Brenda: Here is some of the mythology surrounding this beautiful stone. Whether factual or not, there are some lovely and intriguing possibilities...Amethyst is a stone which from the earliest known Greek tradition has been worn to guard against drunkenness and to instill a sober mind. The word amethyst comes from the Greek meaning "without drunkenness." It is also used to help insomnia and create good dreams.

Corey: The amethyst is known as the Bishop's Stone and is still worn by Catholic Bishops. The amethyst symbolizes piety, humility, sincerity and spiritual wisdom.

Brenda: Amethyst is considered a royal stone and features prominently, for example, in the British Crown jewels.

Corey: A gemstone often worn by healers, amethyst purportedly has the power to focus energy.

Brenda: What was compelling for us was the reality that this geode appeared to be an ordinary stone and yet when it was cracked open, its hidden beauty and treasure were revealed.

Corey: Karen, we want you to take this to your home as a gift from Calgary Inter-Mennonite, a milestone and a touchstone for this important time in your life and a reminder that you are a valued member of this faith community.

Brenda: Now, for the community piece. We will pass these stones around and as each person holds one of the stones, silently please offer a blessing for Karen. The stones will carry these blessings to Karen's home.

Brenda Dyck and Corey Herlevsen (Canada) From *Along the Arc*. ©2017 Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBTQ Interests.

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