

September 12, 2021

I sit here this morning with the images from yesterday's observances of September 11th fresh in my mind. How has it been 20 years? In my classes this week, we looked at that day and its aftermath through the lens of incredible writings: President Bush's speech that night and the moving poem "The Names" by Billy Collins, our nation's Poet Laureate at the time. I mention this because, as we still face our own nightmare of death and fear in the Covid pandemic, it is so very important that we try to see the goodness within the horrific. I told my students about the incredible boat rescue of people trapped in lower Manhattan. Again and again, until the job was done, hundreds of boats, both commercial and personal, rushed to pluck frightened and injured New Yorkers from the Hell they were experiencing. We talked about Gander, Newfoundland, Canada: A small town of just a few thousand that, due to its history as a refueling spot, happened to have a runway long enough to handle the 38 planes and 6122 frightened passengers who were denied entry to US airspace. The people of that small Canadian town took those passengers into their homes, gave them food, shelter, clothing, medicine, whatever they needed. We talked about the First Responders who ran into the chaos, never to return. Today, while our nerves are frayed, and our anger tries to overcome us, we MUST remember these lessons. There is so much good to be found amid the horror. It is there, probably closer than you realize. Perhaps (probably) in your own house.

PFLAG Pittsburgh was supposed to be back to in-person meetings today. But we aren't. I am both frustrated at our inability to comfort and support one another one-on-one and, to be honest, angry with those whose stubbornness gives this virus the fuel it needs to continue and grow. But, I am also inspired: by those who step up to help us not just continue, but improve, our mission. (More on that below) By those in our, and other, organizations who refuse to allow a pandemic to stop them from caring for and supporting members of the LGBTQ community. There is goodness. It is all around us. We can see it if we push through the fog of our moment to moment emotions.

I welcome Pastor Kimberly Greway, the pastor at St. John's Lutheran Church in North Versailles, a Reconciling in Christ congregation. Pastor Greway has volunteered to be a part of our support system by facilitating a breakout group on religion and its effects on us as we support our LGBTQ loved ones. She will be with us for our September Support meeting, and hopefully, many more in the future.

A few other notes:

- Your contributions allowed PFLAG Pittsburgh to send support packages to every school district in Allegheny, Westmoreland, and Washington counties. The packages included literature, postcards, and a lot of other information to help these districts support their LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff.
- PFLAG Pittsburgh is hosting a panel at the [2021 TransPride Pittsburgh Health and Wellness Conference](#) on October 16th from 2:45-3:45. We are looking for parents and/or family members who are willing to share their stories of how support, from PFLAG or elsewhere, helped them better support and understand their LGBTQ loved one. It is virtual and low-stress. You will not be pressured to share more than makes you comfortable. I will be facilitating. Please consider being a part of it. It is so very important that we get the word out about the importance of support for not just members of the community, but for those who love them. Reach out to me at dwest@pflagpgh.org if you are able to volunteer or have any questions.
- Our Speakers Bureau is still up and running thanks to Johanna Burnett. Please consider volunteering to be a part of it. Again, low stress. But extremely important.

Be safe and be kind to one another. Enjoy the upcoming beauty of the Autumn season!