

## An Open Letter by Barb Robertson, Member of Light of the Hill UMC

When I hung up the phone that day, after talking to my daughter, I cannot say that I was surprised. I was not shocked and I did not feel any type of disapproval. My daughter had just gathered what must have been an enormous amount of courage and called me to tell me her story. She and her husband of five years had decided to divorce. She continued to explain, telling me that she had come to realize that she was a lesbian.

Although I felt no disapproval, I did have concern for my daughter. How would others treat her? Would she be discriminated against? Would life-time friends, or even family members, turn their backs on her, judge her, or try to change her from the beautiful person she was and is?

In 1997, a lot of people were not as open and accepting as they are today, at least not the people that I knew. My husband and I were fundamental conservative Christians and we were very familiar with what "the church" taught regarding homosexuality. I had never felt or thought anything negative about diversity in sexual identity. I always thought that it was perfectly normal for some people to be attracted to the same sex or identify differently from the body they had been born with. It just made sense to me. What didn't make sense to me was why God would disapprove. I would hear scriptures quoted and Christian speakers talk about the sinfulness of homosexuality and I always knew that I didn't agree with what they were saying and teaching. But I kept quiet. That was wrong but I just wasn't brave enough at that point to speak up and say anything.

After my daughter came out, it didn't take long until I realized that I couldn't sit in the church pews and listen to the anti-gay preaching that I was hearing. Even when no one was saying anything, I knew what they believed and I knew that they just assumed that I believed it too. I couldn't sit silently and listen any more. It had become too personal for me. Now they were talking about my daughter.

I stopped going to church, but the desire to have a place to worship, fellowship, learn and grow would draw me back to try again. I even gathered enough courage at one church to say that I didn't agree with what the church taught about same sex relationships. I was told I would not be able to serve there if that was what I believed. My answer was that there was no point in my being there, and I never went back.

During this time I was doing some reading about Christianity and homosexuality. I attended PFLAG meetings and they gave me more reading material. I came to discover that not all Christians believed what I had been taught. I was under the mistaken impression that no matter what Christian church I walked in to, I would encounter the same teaching. What a joy to realize that was not the case. However, I had been taught everything I knew about my faith from conservative teaching. I was very concerned that if I found a church that did not condemn homosexuality it would be so liberal in it's teaching that it could threaten the foundation of my faith. My faith was and is precious to me, and I wanted to protect it. My fear became that there was not a church for me. I felt hopeless.

Again, that desire to have a church home drew me back to try again. I searched on the internet for "gay friendly churches" and in my hunt found myself on the website for Light of the Hill United Methodist Church. I had no idea what Methodists believed but my husband and I talked it over and decided to give it a try. We were delighted to discover a worship service very similar to what we were used to with great music and praise songs. We jumped right into an in-depth bible study, with the goal of learning what this church taught and what some of it's members believed. Somewhere along the way my focus shifted from what others believed to what I believed. I learned. I grew. I stayed. I had found a place where it was okay for members to believe different things about the same subject. I had found a place where I could safely bring my fundamental roots and slowly look at them and study and see where I had some pruning to do.

I had also found a place where I felt safe. As I learned about the openness of Light of the Hill to diversity, the welcoming of all persons, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, I finally felt at peace that this was a place I did not need to be on guard. I could relax and freely enter into a deeper relationship with God. And, I can comfortably invite my daughter to come to church with me when she is in town, and know that she will not be judged, but will be welcomed.