

Delaware Pride Festival was amazing! I had only attended PRIDE in West Palm Beach, and it was not a family friendly event – fun and wonderful, but not family friendly. So, I wasn't sure what to expect. I came with 400 keychain crafts, 10 lbs of candy, and about 1000 stickers. Our double booth had a beautiful assortment of people with diverse backgrounds, of different ages, neurodiverse and neurotypical, gay and straight, but all very Episcopal and all ready to love and accept all of our neighbors.

The event started at 10:00 a.m. and by 1:00 p.m. we had had well over 500 visitors and ran out of our keychain craft. A small percentage of those who stopped by were faith family members, but by far they were strangers who were interested in exchanging some words of love and affirmation and interested in hearing more about the Episcopal Church. Thankfully, there were some amazing clergy in our booth who were able to field the more in-depth questions about our faith and give comfort to several people who had been hurt by religious institutions in the past. It made my heart so happy to see those open and loving conversations.

I'll admit I had a bit of apprehension about the possibility that those who had been hurt by religion might see our booth as an outlet for their anger and pain, but honestly, I heard absolutely none of that. A few of the youths who participated were also anxious about the possibility of "haters", but in the absence of that, they circulated around the event witnessing nothing but acceptance. I have never been to a more positive community event.

We had a business card with a QR code to the Youth page of the diocesan website, and a list of "rainbow" parishes in Delaware. In the past, Christ Church Dover has had a small table at this event and have welcomed a few new parishioners through their presence. With our larger set-up, and with support from all over the diocese, I'm hopeful that the impact will show up in little ways up and down the state. We talked to people from North Wilmington, out to North East Maryland, and down to the bottom of Sussex.

I am already looking forward to next year. We will obviously have triple the amount of craft supplies, and there was talk of expanding from two spaces to three. Our booth was packed all day and could have easily spread into a third space. We talked about adding a dog watering station (we saw a million dogs at this event proudly wearing rainbow bandanas), and maybe a polaroid photo booth station (there were so many excellent outfits that should be celebrated and remembered.)

This event is so important. It was a family friendly day, where people could walk around freely being their authentic selves; not only safe but showered with love and affirmation.

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