

Last Saturday, setting off from Wilmington for Dover on a gorgeous summer day to participate in the Delaware Pride Festival, I did not know what to expect. We drove to Christ Church, Dover, to park. As we arrived at the church, it was wonderful to be warmly greeted by two members of Daughters of the King, Pam Lloyd and Ann Hadaway, who were at the church (open throughout the event) to pray for people who are struggling in the LGBTQ community.

We could hear the festival, held on the Green at Legislative Hall, before we saw it and then – what a brilliant array of color met our eyes! There were people of all ages and ethnicities, gay and straight, fabulous outfits and down to earth jeans, and exciting sounds of music and laughter. Some 200 vendors were set up in rows of booths up and down the Green. The main stage featured a fabulous variety of drag acts, musicians, and speakers. Around the Green were food and drink vendors, and a Kid Zone with crafts all day, and drag story times.

Many different faith-based organizations and health organizations were exhibiting, all offering support, along with the kind of vendors one sees at any summer festival – arts, crafts, natural foods, jewelry, clothes, and accessories. And hundreds of people – joyous people strolled the aisles and engaged with the vendors.

Right at the heart of the action, the Episcopal Church in Delaware (ECD) had two adjacent booths, one focused on youth organized by Cana Hartman, parish administrator at St. Thomas's Parish, Newark, and diocesan youth advisor. The ECD booths were staffed with various clergy throughout the day, including the Revs. Chuck Weiss, Christ Church, Dover; Brad Hinton, St. David's, Wilmington; Patty Downing, Trinity Parish, Wilmington; and Stacey Carpenter, Christ Church Christiana Hundred, Wilmington, who said: "Proclaiming and sharing God's love for all people is what it means to live out our baptismal covenant. Being present with fellows from across the ECD to celebrate pride, a celebration that honors and recognizes the dignity and humanity of the LGBTQ+ community, is an honor and a blessing." The Rev. Jim Robertson also volunteered in the booth, along with the Rev. Jim Bimbi of Sts. Andrew & Matthew, Wilmington.

Participant, Michelle Galdames, minister for children and youth at Christ Church Christiana Hundred, said: "I am so thankful to be a part of a church that celebrates and welcomes everyone and I'm happy to be here where all people are sharing God's love." Her colleague, Mitchell Frizzell, communications associate at Christ Church Christiana Hundred, commented: "Being here at Pride is a wonderful reminder that we are not alone. We can live in harmony and community, and we celebrate that!"

Delaware Pride began in 1997. For several years it was held in Wilmington's Rodney Square. Then it relocated to Cape Henlopen State Park in Rehoboth for ten years. Then

in 2012 the event was moved to Blue Diamond Park in New Castle County to have a rotating location for the festival. However, in 2014 the Delaware Pride Festival found its new and permanent home in our state's capital, Dover. Being located directly in front of the state capitol building allowed for a larger venue that is more easily accessible to all Delaware citizens and regional travelers and also allowed it to be offered as a free event.

This year's festival was the largest ever and this was my first experience of it. It was wonderful! There was an all-embracing feeling of love, acceptance, and happiness. I thoroughly enjoyed the whole joy filled day and highly recommend it to all for next year's festival, tentatively planned for Saturday, June 8, 2024. ECD will be there, and we hope to see you there too!

Lola Michael Russell