



Weekly Letter: Pride

The celebration is like a coming of age for humanity. It's a celebration that we have finally arrived at a place where it's simply our humanity that we celebrate. That regardless of how we choose to live and love, what we look like, or where we're from, we are celebratory, loving human beings, and just like all the fairy tales say, love wins.



CONTACT INFORMATION

County Executive

(410) 222-1821

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I didn't get the whole Pride thing at first. I always opposed discrimination against people based on their sexual orientation, who they love, what they do in their bedrooms, what they wear, whether they take hormones, whether they have surgery. And I always thought it was absurd for the government to restrict marriage to only heterosexual couples.

Live and let live, right? As long as you're not hurting anyone.

But I was naive. I haven't experienced the discrimination myself. I didn't understand the value of public displays like pride parades.

When Annapolis Pride organized its first parade in 2019, I didn't attend. I believe I had a scheduling conflict, but I was also conflicted. A part of me wanted to be there to support people who I knew were under attack, but another part of me questioned the image I'd be conveying to older, more socially conservative voters whose votes I'd need in the next election.

By 2022, when the parade returned after COVID, my thinking had evolved. I'd started to understand the movement. I'd gotten to know some of the Annapolis Pride organizers. I'd seen what they were up against, and how carefully they planned their responses. And I'd discovered that pushing back against political wedges, the kind politicians drive between people when they smell distrust and fear, is the essence of leadership.

So I marched. My office marched. Our police department, health department, firefighters, library staff, and lots of other county employees marched. We marched with faith organizations, businesses, and educational institutions.

There were thousands and thousands and thousands of people lined up on the streets of Annapolis singing, dancing, and expressing love, solidarity, community, and a bit of defiance.

I was not embarrassed to be there. I grabbed a huge pride flag and started running circles around our float as the crowds roared their approval. I used a photo of that spectacle as the banner on my campaign Facebook page for months after.

The experience was so uplifting that I returned on Saturday, for Annapolis Pride Parade and Festival 2023. It was a repeat performance with even more participation, and I spoke to the crowd on the stage at the conclusion of the parade. I said some things about love overcoming fear and thanked everyone for making that happen, but I left some things out.

I believe that the fundamental challenge facing humanity is overcoming fear of one another and learning to embrace one another. It sounds cliché, because it gets said by every religion, every philosopher, and every political movement in one way or another. But we keep letting ourselves slide into the cracks, the cracks of fear and distrust. Leaders seeking to gain or hold power drive wedges into those cracks, opening them wider for us to fall further.

The brave people of Annapolis Pride, just like the brave people of America's civil rights movement and other movements for justice, are responding to their neighbors' fear with love. They are inviting us to march with them, to celebrate with them, to party with them. And it's working.

That's the part I didn't get before. I didn't understand the healing power of a Pride parade. I didn't understand how good it felt, not just for people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer to be seen and accepted for who they are, but also how healing it is for the rest of us to celebrate with them.

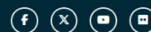
The celebration is like a coming of age for humanity. It's a celebration that we have finally arrived at a place where it's simply our humanity that we celebrate. That regardless of how we choose to live and love, what we look like, or where we're from, we are celebratory, loving human beings, and just like all the fairy tales say, love wins.

Join us next year. There's nothing to fear. You'll be grinning from ear to ear.

Until next week...

Stewart Pittman

Anne Arundel County Executive



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