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Rainbow Flag Flies Proudly Again after Theft from St. Mark's

By Nick Marnell



A firefighter helps install a new rainbow flag.

Photo Andy Scheck

About 2,000 years ago, Jesus shocked his disciples with one of his most off-putting comments recorded in the Bible. "Do you think I have come to establish peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three." (Luke 12:51-52)

St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Orinda felt the sting of that division Aug. 12 when its rainbow flag — popularized as a symbol of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender pride and diversity — was stolen.

The church purchased the flag and displayed it at the Orinda Fourth of July parade. Afterward St. Mark's mounted the flag on the sign in front of the church on Moraga Way. Church officials wanted everyone driving by to see the flag and know that St. Mark's was a fully inclusive church.

"How sad," said the Rev. Michele Robbins, St. Mark's pastor. "How sad it is that not everyone is into inclusion."

Robbins said she went home that Friday, bummed, realizing that the thief probably had no use for the flag and that it was likely destroyed. She turned to Nextdoor, a website that connects neighbors within their communities, and posted the news of the loss.

The responses overwhelmed her:

"Awful! I pointed that flag out to my 13-year-old daughter this past weekend. She gave it the ultimate teen blessing - 'Cool.' If the flag is not found or returned, I hope the church members will raise another one."

"What a shame. If the church community decides to offer an award to catch the culprit, I'd gladly chip in money."

"I too was SO happy to see that rainbow flag in front of St. Mark's and want to see it back again ASAP! Please let us know if you are taking donations for a new one!"

"Seriously, who would steal from a church? We're sending a donation to help you put up another flag and thank you so much

for supporting the LGBT community."

On the following Sunday, Robbins and the congregation prayed for the person who took the flag. She tied in the scripture reading, explaining that Jesus knew that following his word would cause conflict and distress. "When you're disrupting and confronting you have to expect there will be division and conflict," she said, the division manifest in the St. Mark's community by the theft of the flag.

Within a week, enough donations poured in to not only purchase a new flag and assembly, but also to acquire a second, backup flag. On Aug. 31, Moraga-Orinda Fire District engineer-paramedic Jacob Airola and church trustee Brent Goetzl led the installation and the raising of the new St. Mark's rainbow flag.

Following the suggestion of the Nextdoor community, the crew positioned the flag higher on the sign than sat the original.

"I'm just happy to have it back up," Robbins said.

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