

# WE ALL NEED ALLIES

by Gary Stavella

*Remarks delivered at Our Lady of Grace's 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Pride Mass – June 23, 2024*

A couple of weeks ago we commemorated the 80th anniversary of D-Day. On that day troops from the US and Canada joined forces with armies of the UK, France and the rest of occupied Europe, to eventually defeat fascism. **We were the Allies.**

Back in 1978 Harvey Milk became one of the first openly gay public officials in the US when he was elected a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors from the 5th district.

But it wasn't that simple. Milk moved to San Francisco in 1972 opening up a camera shop in the Castro. Seeing that the district needed new leadership, he ran for supervisor and lost, soundly. He realized that he had a lot to learn about politics and serving the public. He ran twice more and lost twice again.

Around that time the teamsters were considering striking against the beer distributors who refused to sign a contract with them. Milk had always been active in the local business council so the teamsters came to him to get the word out about their campaign. Milk urged his contacts with the local gay bars and restaurants to refuse to sell beer. The boycott was successful. The teamsters got their contract.

So, when it came to his next bid for supervisor, Harvey called on the teamsters for their support. He got it and this time won and was elected to office. **Thanks to his allies, the teamsters.**

One of the first things Milk did in office was to sponsor and gain support from his fellow supervisors for a bill that would ban discrimination in public accommodations, housing and employment on the basis of sexual orientation. Milk worked with each of his fellow supervisors to gain support. Eventually it was brought to a vote and won by a margin of 11-1. It was quickly signed by the mayor. **The supervisors had become allies.**

Unfortunately, after the vote, Milk and the Mayor were shot and killed in their offices in city hall by the one dissenting supervisor. He was terrified of what the allied supervisors could accomplish.

In the 80's when the AIDS crisis began, nobody knew where it came from or how it was happening, only that it was affecting primarily gay men, who quickly died after infection. GMHC was formed and quickly began to hold meetings to keep the community informed on progress in fighting the disease.

I can remember going to one meeting with a friend. After finding seats in the packed standing-room-only auditorium, I noticed that at least 1/3 of the people in the room were women. I asked my friend why he thought there were so many women in the room if AIDS didn't really affect them. A woman sitting in front of me quickly spun around in her chair and said "Your fight, is our fight."

From the beginning, **women-- gay, straight and in-between-- were allies.**

**United we stand.**

But I don't need to go on about that-- you all know that.

E pluribus unum. Nobody's free until everybody's free. Do unto others...

What I do want to do today is thank all the **Allies.**

Thank you to every Mom or Dad who, when their kid made the excruciatingly difficult decision to finally come to them and say, "I'm gay, or lesbian, or trans or just confused," hugged them and said, "I love you, and you are still my child." **You are allies.**

Thanks to every sibling, aunt, uncle, grandpa or grandma, and cousin who were there to pick up the pieces after a conversation with Mom and Dad that may not have gone so smoothly, to say to them, "I love you" and "We'll get through this." **You are also allies.**

Thanks to everyone who reacted to a friend, coworker, neighbor or relative when they came out to them with a response of "Ok, that's cool. Thanks for telling me. I love you anyway." or with just a shrug of the shoulders or even "Ok, I don't understand, and I'm not sure how I feel about it, but you are the same person I knew before so this shouldn't change that." **You are an ally.**

Thank you to those who take the time and effort to reach out to minister to and support parents of LGBTQ+ kids in some way who are having challenges understanding what is going on.

Every year I do the AIDSWalk, so thank you to everyone who supported me with their donations. **You are allies.**

**Allies** have always been important to the community. Depending on who you ask, the white stripe on the ever-evolving Rainbow Flag was added for the **Ally-ship**.

And even though the leadership of our Church often seems retrogressive, thousands of religious men and women on the ground-- priests, sisters, deacons, etc.-- have been there for us from the beginning, risking disapproval from the hierarchy. **They are allies.**

In the dark days of the 80's when the bishops literally threw LGBTQ people out of the Church, slamming doors in our faces, and worked to prevent safer-sex information from being distributed even through secular health organizations, it was the priests, nuns, sisters, etc. on the ground, along with the doctors and nurses, who courageously continued to minister to the sick.

I want to thank Fr. Gargani who, with his contacts with Cardinal Tobin, and partnering with David Harvie, made the historic FIRST Pride/Pilgrimage Mass happen in the Newark Cathedral in 2018. And Father Alex, who picked up the baton and continued the tradition here at OLG, and who, in addition to those straggly people you see protesting across the street and piles of nasty emails he has gotten from internet trolls, has had to deal the BS, ignorance, and opposition from his colleagues in Newark every year to celebrating this-- the 7th Annual Pride Mass. **They are allies.**

And to Sr. Donna Ciangio, Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Newark, who thought it was important enough for ALL voices to be heard in the Synod and asked us at OLG to conduct special LGBTQ+ listening sessions. **She is an ally.**

Survey after survey, from various pollsters like Gallup, Pew, Marist and even what has been described as conservatively-biased Rasmussen, indicate that almost 80% of Americans support the civil rights of their fellow LGBTQ+ citizens. So contrary to those who would like to keep us fearful, thinking that we are at each other's throats because it makes them stronger and richer, we are not. At least in this case, **we are a country of allies. E pluribus unum.**

Thank you to everyone who attended today. You are a demonstration to 'them' that we are united.

**Thank you allies-- we couldn't have done it without you!**