

A series of colorful, multi-pointed stars in shades of pink, purple, and blue are scattered across the top of the page.

# DRAW SHOW

## Q&A

Last fall the Affirm team at St. Andrews United Church arranged a panel discussion that invited the congregation to submit questions regarding a request the Church has received to rent the auditorium for the purpose of hosting a family-friendly drag show.

The panel discussion members included the person who made the request, Jonathan Luscombe, as well as Sheila Cunningham, Rev. Dave Holmes, Rick Schmidt and Candice Kikstra. The panel was hosted by Rev. Ross Smillie.

Following the discussion, some members of the congregation submitted additional questions. The Affirm team has compiled answers to these questions based largely on answers given during the panel discussion and from research drawn from trusted sources.



### Question 1:

As the panelists explained in their discussion, a drag event is an art form in which the performers generally assume a persona that is very different from the person they are in everyday life.

It is a way for performers to express themselves and their queerness, typically in an exaggerated feminine or masculine form that they do not regularly get to show because society does not welcome it or they do not feel safe to do so. As Jonathan explained, our community does not always welcome diversity or inclusion. Drag events provide a safe space that gives performers the opportunity to lean into their feminine or masculine side more fully.

A drag event typically involves acting, dancing, lip syncing, and singing. Sometimes the performers choose songs that send a certain message or address a particular issue in society. At the Lacombe Pride drag event last summer, Jonathan sang an emotional song that related to who he was when he was younger and struggled to love the person he was and the body he was given.

There are different types of drag events:

- Some are more burlesque-oriented. These are intended for an 18+ crowd and often cater to the queer community, who support and cheer for one another.
- Other drag events are more family-friendly. For example, when drag queens or kings read to children at a library. Candace explained that the drag story times she and her children have attended typically feature a performer in a big, floofy dress reading a book to the children about inclusion or self-love. She also attended one where the performer danced with the kids and led them in fun, age-appropriate actions to a mainstream pop song.
- Candice and her children also attended a monthly drag event put on by youth at a United Church in Edmonton. It was similar to a talent show and was very family-friendly. These events were fundraisers for local shelters or the church itself and were sometimes held as teas or brunches. It was an opportunity for youth to express themselves and give back to the community.
- Some drag events are more theatre-oriented, involving adult plays or plays for older audiences. Each drag event varies depending on the style and the intended audience.

Jonathan explained that the Lacombe Pride drag event is intended exclusively for an 18+ queer audience and is very different from the family-friendly event he is proposing to host at St. Andrew's.

## 02

### LGBTQIA+???

#### Question 2:

Sheila explained what the letters LGBTQ stand for:

- **L:** Lesbian
- **G:** Gay
- **B:** Bisexual

These letters all relate to a person's sexuality, or who they are sexually attracted to.

- **T:** Transgender - this refers to people who are often born male and feel female, or born female and feel male. It also includes people who are non-binary, meaning they do not feel fully masculine or feminine but somewhere in between. It also includes two-spirit individuals who feel they are both male and female.
- **Q:** Queer - is an umbrella term that includes all the identities above. It often refers to people whose gender or sexuality does not fit neatly into any single category.
- **I:** Intersex - this is an umbrella term referring to people who can be difficult to physically classify as male or female due to a mismatch or unconventional formation of chromosomes and internal or external sex organs. About one in 2,000 births is estimated to involve intersex traits
- **A:** Asexual - this describes a person who doesn't experience sexual attraction or seek out sexual contact with other people.

The + in LGBTQIA+ signifies other identities within the diverse gender and sexual orientation spectrum.

Jonathan explained that as a gender fluid person, he does not align exclusively with male or female. Some days he feels more feminine and some days more masculine. His pronouns are he, she, and they.

## 03

#### Question 3:

**IS MUSIC IN THE PARK ALWAYS CHURCH-APPROVED CONTENT WHEN PERFORMED IN THE SANCTUARY? WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THAT AND A DRAG EVENT? WHAT ARE OUR GUIDELINES?**

Music in the Park content is not always specifically approved by the church. The church does not micromanage this program and trusts that organizers will use content in the sanctuary that is just as appropriate as what is played in the park.

There would be no difference between allowing Music in the Park and allowing a drag event from the perspective that once the church has approved a rental, we trust that renters will respect the space and use it in a way that fits the purpose of their event.

The church uses our Mission, Vision, and Values to guide decisions about space rentals. If a proposed event aligns with these principles, we typically approve it.

For example, a strip club request would likely not align with our Mission, Vision, and Values and would not be approved.

Jonathan's unofficial proposal for a drag event at St. Andrew's is a G-rated event with no alcohol, featuring family-friendly music and performances without anything risqué or sexual.



## 04

### WHAT ABOUT DRAG IS IMPORTANT TO SOME IN THE QUEER COMMUNITY?

Question 4:

Drag holds deep meaning in the queer community as both an art form and a form of resistance. Its roots trace back to key moments in LGBTQ+ history, including the Stonewall riots, where figures like Marsha P. Johnson, a Black drag performer and activist, played vital roles.

Drag is political. It raises marginalized voices, challenges norms, and makes queer people visible in spaces where they are often overlooked. For queer youth, seeing drag performers thrive shows them that queer adults can live openly, joyfully, and with pride.

Drag also creates community. In a world where being openly queer can feel unsafe, drag events provide a place where people can be themselves and feel a sense of belonging.

At its core, drag is about self-expression, empowerment, and survival. It allows people to explore identity, push against expectations, and find affirmation.

## 05

### WHY THIS CHURCH?

Question 5:

St. Andrew's is the only affirming church in Lacombe. Affirming means we strive to make everyone feel welcome. While some drag events may be better suited to bars or theatres, others are appropriate for public parks, libraries, and churches.

Jonathan mentioned that events like the one proposed can help introduce the queer community to safe church spaces. Reverend Dave spoke about how Jesus brought radical messages to communities not always ready to hear them. Sheila noted that Gaetz Memorial in Red Deer would like to host drag events but has not hosted any yet.



# 06

## WHAT KIND OF GROWTH MIGHT WE EXPECT THROUGH THE CHALLENGE OF DRAG?

Question 6:

The idea of drag can make people feel uncomfortable, and that is okay. Discomfort can help us grow. When we step outside of what feels familiar, we learn to see the world differently. Hosting a drag event helps us learn about identity, expression, and community.

Through drag, we witness the beauty and variety of how people live and express themselves. It encourages empathy, kindness, and inclusion – values central to a welcoming and loving church.

For our church, this is an opportunity to grow in how we welcome others, to affirm all people, and to celebrate the diversity of God's creation.

# 07

## HOW DOES HOSTING A DRAG EVENT RELATE TO THE CHURCH'S MISSION?

Question 7:

At St. Andrew's, we come together believing that God loves all of us without condition or exception. As God's beloved community, we affirm all people in their diversity. We learn to love with God by offering a welcoming space to those on the margins.

**Mission:** To be a caring Christian Community that nurtures love of God and neighbour through worship, fellowship, learning, and service.

**Slogan:** Learning to love with God

**Values - Affirming:** St. Andrew's is committed to being a church that accepts and affirms people in all their diversity. This includes diversity in sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, as well as theological and religious diversity, age diversity, economic status, race, health, etc. We are committed to accepting people in their brokenness. This value is based in the belief that God loves all of us without condition and without exception. God's love is the beginning of our faith journey, as much as it's end.

WHAT KIND OF GROWTH MIGHT WE EXPECT THROUGH THE CHALLENGE OF DRAG?

08

## WHAT IS JONATHON'S VISION FOR THE DRAG EVENT AT ST. ANDREW'S?

Question 8:

An event that brings people of all ages together to learn about drag as an art form, reduce misconceptions, and show that not all drag is the same. The event would also serve as a fundraiser supporting community, health, and local issues.

09

## HALL OR SANCTUARY?

Question 9:

Question 9: Is the request to use the hall and not the sanctuary?  
Yes, the request is to use the church hall, not the sanctuary.

10

## DO WE EXPECT PROTESTS OR BACKLASH?

Question 10:

We may receive negative letters, emails, or Facebook comments. Jonathan noted that while Lacombe Pride often prepares for backlash, they have not yet had protesters attend their events. Sheila shared that renting space always carries some risk. Ross emphasized that while there are risks, that alone is not reason enough to avoid something meaningful. It is part of our discernment process.

Ross also said that, as a church seeking to ally with the queer community, we are only seeing a small part of the hostility they regularly face. We need to listen to those with lived experience. Rick concluded by saying that as an affirming congregation, if we don't show up to support these events, who will?

11

## WILL THERE BE DRUGS, ALCOHOL, OR NUDITY?

Question 11:

Question 11: Will there be drugs, alcohol, or nudity?  
No, there will be no drugs, alcohol or nudity.



## 12

### HOW WILL THE DECISION BE MADE?

#### Question 12:

At this point we do not have a definite decision-making process to which we have agreed. However, there are probably some parts of the process that we can count on – and the Affirm Team has some definite recommendations.

- First of all, a divided congregation is not a great support for a drag event! So however we make a decision on this, it can't be through any kind of a vote when we are still in disagreement. No one wants to see this issue creating divisions and conflicts within this congregation. That would serve no one.
- Once we have a definite proposal (we don't have one as yet) we will consider, together, the pros and cons of the proposal. As much as possible, we'll get all the arguments onto the table, suggest/negotiate necessary changes to the proposal, and so on. The object here will be to achieve congregational consensus – a path forward that everyone can either support or at least live with. Note that this consensus will not necessarily be to accept the proposal. We may decide to provide a different sort of support, we may choose to have some sort of pilot project... it all depends on the discussion we have!
- If it appears that we have achieved consensus, we will probably test that consensus with a congregational vote – probably by secret ballot, to ensure that people are free of any pressure in their voting. Given that it is a test of consensus, that vote will probably need to pass with near unanimity.
- If we do not achieve any congregational consensus, or if a consensus vote fails, then our plan is for Affirm to withdraw the proposal, and to say that St. Andrew's United Church is not able at this time to host this kind of a regular drag event.
- This decision-making process does depend on the people of St. Andrew's entering into the discussion in good faith. If even a few people in the church stay out of the discussion until the final vote, this won't work. Even if your mind is entirely made up – we still need you to be part of our conversation. Or to put it another way: if anyone with a strong opinion stays out of the conversation, we may think we have a consensus when we actually don't – and that may lead us to a premature and painful vote.