

# COMING HOME

About two years ago my parents came to visit me in Guatemala. In the midst of our touring indigenous villages and shopping in open-air markets, my parents told me that First Church was beginning to consider whether to become an "Open and Affirming" congregation.

I knew it was time to tell them something that I had only recently admitted to myself -- that I am gay. They were pretty surprised. I had managed to hide this part of me from them-- and from myself--for a long time.

When I finally said that this is part of me, I felt like I had come home. After years of wondering what was "wrong" with me, of feeling like I didn't fit in, I finally decided to try and just be myself.

Our family, like First Church, has struggled with this issue. We have not always been at the same place. That's okay. The important part is that we know we love and support each other.

Many of you at First Church have been my friends since I was a little kid. You have helped raise me and instill in me a set of values that still guide me. I know that many of you, like me and my family, have wrestled with this issue of being open and affirming, and of sexuality. It is tough. I have been touched by the honesty and the willingness to look deep inside that so many of you have brought to this process. As I told my parents not long ago, this is not about "us and them." It is about all of us feeling like church is a place that we can call home.

Becoming an Open and Affirming church makes a lasting impact in people's lives. It has made a big difference in mine. The church I belonged to in Washington went through this process several years ago. It was during those meetings that I first felt safe enough to come to terms with my sexuality. The process at First Church has helped my parents and me talk more openly with each other.

By stating publicly that First Church is welcoming to all people, you may well find that some talented and gifted people who have felt alienated from the church will return. That in itself is a real gift. The church needs all of our skills.

I have made a conscious decision against attending an exclusively gay church. I want to go to a place like First Church because its membership is more reflective of the world we live in. But I want to go to a church that affirms all of me, just like anybody else. I don't want to have to hide an important part of me. I simply want to be.

The statement you approved last month is the beginning, not the end. We will all continue to discover what this means for our lives. I have recently rejoined First Church. I am happy to be officially a part of this community again. I hope that we can continue to walk down this road together.

Susan Parker (January, 1995)