

Remarks at the Raising of the Pride Flag

Santa Barbara County Supervisor Joan Hartmann

Wednesday, August 10, 2022

St. Mark's-in-the-Valley, Los Olivos

It was just a few weeks ago that we celebrated the Valley's first-ever Pride Parade. My group was marching behind a colorful float, with catchy tunes, sponsored by Allen Hancock College. They were chanting "Safe and Free at AHC" and we all joined the chant, clapping and stepping in pace. Everyone *IN* the parade was laughing and smiling and people *ALONG THE ROUTE* were waving, clapping, and joining in the good cheer. It was a happy occasion with children and pets draped in rainbow regalia.

Thinking back, I wonder, exactly WHY were we all so happy? The spirit was really captured in that simple chant, freighted with meaning: SAFE and FREE. We were all participating in an event that said "you are safe, you are secure, no harm will come to you. Because, we are all looking out for each other."

AND you are free, free to be who you are, how you want to be and you will NOT be merely tolerated or accepted but *celebrated* for having the courage to be you, the authentic wonderful self that you are. In being yourself, you make our community, and further, our world, a richer and more vital and fascinating place to be. That day of the parade, we were all engaged together in creating that kind of Valley and that kind of world.

In contrast to the joy of that day, this day we have had Pride Flags stolen, burned, and desecrated from several places across the Valley, most prominently from here at St. Mark's. For LGBTQ+

people, this happens against a backdrop—a history marked by denigration, bullying, banishment, threat and terrible torture & violence. So, the flag burning awakens fears about a return to those circumstances. Our LGBTQ+ community members don't feel safe and secure. Just the opposite. [PAUSE] To all of our LGBTQ+ friends and allies, I extend my deep sympathies for the hurt rendered by these appalling acts and the reawakening of fears they engender.

Hateful divisive acts are not only hurtful to the targets, but to all of us who stand here in solidarity. We not only regret seeing our LGBTQ+ friends and neighbors subject to such hurtful behavior. WE SUFFER TOO because instead of living in a welcoming, open, happy place, these acts pose the risk that community members will be tempted to retreat and pull inward to avoid confrontation. It creates a chilling effect/a hostile environment instead of a friendly open-hearted one for all of us. It divides us. We all start wondering, who did this? Who sympathizes with this act? It undermines trust and a sense of well-being that we are all in this Valley together, supportive of one another, able to count on one another.

And for the people who have done this, I have to ask, how does this make YOU feel? Being judgmental, self-righteous, angry and just plain mean—those are not life-affirming feelings that make people feel good. It sends the cortisol, not the

oxytocin, coursing through the body. It eats away at you.

Since we are at a church, I am especially aware of my own Sunday School lessons. If there is to be a judgement, that is for a higher being. Jesus taught US human beings to love one another, to care for one another.” To “love our neighbor as our self.” THAT is our job, and it is also what makes us feel good, worthwhile, and like we belong and contribute something positive to the world. Loving-kindness not hateful vengeance.

One of the great gifts of Christianity to the world is the idea of **redemption**. People make mistakes. We aren’t always good. That doesn’t mean we have to live forever in guilt and shame. We can repent, atone, be redeemed and rejoin the community. In the County we are actively pursuing this concept through restorative justice programs. This process redresses the harm and restores the harmony. THAT is my fervent hope surrounding the desecration of the Pride Flag—and All it stands for.

One of my favorite Bible stories is the Good Samaritan. As a child, it was just a story about one stranger helping another, injured by the road. Later, when studying the law, I learned that we have no *legal* duty to act. We can just walk-on by—as did the two others who passed the injured person *before* the Good Samaritan arrived. This contrasts sharply with the MORAL IMPERATIVE to help that can’t be enforced by law, but is a call of our own conscience—and the social norms and mores of our community. We want to live in a community that upholds the value of caring for each other.

The thing I learned later about the Good Samaritan, though, was that he and the injured man weren’t just strangers. They were from rival groups—like the Hatfields and the McCoys or that Jets and the Sharks. The story is really about reaching out and **lending a hand even to—ESPECIALLY TO—someone different than you.** The parable illustrates how to live a rewarding life, a good life through a life of service, even to those who think differently than we do. Why? Because that is what makes ALL OF US better, safer, more trusting, more able to rely on one another, creating a virtuous circle that grows trust and fellow feeling—and that both sustains us through life’s challenges and hardships *and* allows us to flourish and contribute our talents. Simply—being kind—caring for one another whatever our differences— makes for healthier and happier people and a healthier and happier community.

So as we raise the flag today, I would like us to reframe Allen Hancock’s PRIDE Chant, “Safe and Free at AHC” to Safe and Free in **SYV**. Safe and Free in **SYV**.

Safe and Free, Free to be you. And Free to be me

Here in OUR Beautiful Santa Ynez Valley!