

COMMENTARY

Revealing our sexual orientation and possible consequences

During my time as a columnist I have on numerous occasions mentioned the difficulties surrounding “coming out” and so revealing our sexual orientation. I would like to go into more detail and perhaps make it a bit easier for our young people to be at ease and their parents to be more understanding.

It is a difficult and very confusing issue that must be treated with care and sensitivity. The very nature suggests a complicated venture, depending on parents’ attitude about sexuality and understanding of the various aspects of orientations such as, homosexuality, bisexuality and heterosexuality. Coming out can be a strenuous time.

I can attest to that in my own journey as I questioned my orientation at a time when it was unwise to reveal oneself as anything else but “straight.”

One’s sexual orientation can be traced back prior to birth. Most extensive scientific and medical research has concluded this in much of the western world. However, we must not dwell on the studies as the important issue is that we, as individuals, are who we are, unique in our own way. The fact that we are gay, straight or bisexual does not affect our personal-



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ities, but it does mean that we love and are sexually attracted to the person we choose, not as our families and friends have in mind for us. We may not wish to reveal this and stay in hiding rather than take the chance of being rejected by families, friends, the workplace or the church.

The decision to reveal one’s orientation as gay or bisexual can be a dramatic and extremely complicated issue. Of course, each of us must do this in our own time and not be pressured. To be so-called straight is easy enough, without retribution by peers and so life is much less complicated.

Not everyone is afraid to reveal who they are, but they must be afforded time, a safe environment and be comfortable with the person they may wish to speak with about their sexual orientation. Under no circumstances push someone to come out of hiding as this will cause further conflict and

may influence one to stay in the proverbial closet. It is a serious situation that must be handled with extreme care.

Remember that many obstacles remain a reality, such as religious beliefs and other factors. There are various ways to come out to one’s family. For instance it is not wise to suddenly announce, “Hey guess what, I’m gay!” Parents or siblings may not appreciate the timing, or the venue for breaking this news. To avoid conflict and embarrassment on the part of all, decide on an appropriate moment to begin a discussion on this subject and then slowly get to the point. It is also desirable to have all concerned in a great mood.

Revealing our sexual orientation is extremely important to our mental health and future happiness. Above all, be firm and determined to live your life as it is meant to be lived. Sometimes that means letting go of those who reject you and sadly that remains a common occurrence, yes, even in Canada!

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Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesday in The News.

Town lowers Pride Flag to half-mast after shootings

BY AMANDA JESS

THE NEWS

NEW GLASGOW

Several Pictou County citizens gathered in memory of the victims of the Orlando shooting at the riverfront gazebo on Tuesday morning as the town flew the Pride flag and lowered it to half-mast.

Gerard Veldhoven, who has long been an activist for the LGBTQ community, spoke before the flag was lowered about the attack at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Fla., resulting in 49 people killed and 53 injured on Sunday that has been named the worst mass shooting in United States history.

He called the attack horrendous, senseless and cowardly, and said it was an act of aggression against the LGBTQ community.

"We must and we shall keep up the good fight so we may prevent another Orlando. Our love goes out to our LGBTQ brothers and sisters," Veldhoven said, adding that the fight must continue to educate and raise awareness in order to eliminate hate and discrimination.

Coun. Henderson Paris, who chairs New Glasgow's UNESCO Race Relations and Anti-Discrimination Committee, noted that he was recently in Winnipeg and took in the city's Pride Parade, which thousands participated in and even more watched and supported. He said there was so much joy and excitement.

"Then a few days later, we come into a period of complete grief," he said, asking people



AMANDA JESS/THE NEWS

New Glasgow Coun. Henderson Paris, activist Gerard Veldhoven and Mayor Barrie MacMillan (back) put up the Pride flag beside the riverfront gazebo and lower it to half-mast in memory of the victims of the Orlando shooting.

to pray for the lives that were lost, their loved ones, the community of Orlando, the LGBTQ community and our community.

"Because we really need to be more united and so far, too often, we look at outside areas ... We need to reach out that hand of fellowship and brotherhood and be loving and be understanding and work through things and together we can certainly make a difference."

Mayor Barrie MacMillan said he hopes that the knowledge of communities around the world offering their support and solidarity can provide a small comfort during a time of tragedy, mourning and disbelief.

"As a town that celebrates diversity and respect for all, we recognize this is a time of great

sorrow, loss and we are ever mindful to be even more vigilant to assure respect, dignity and inclusiveness for all.

"No one should ever be harmed or be discriminated against based on gender, age, cultural background or sexual orientation. Although strides have been made, there is so much work to be done worldwide."

Trinity United Church Minister Donna Tourneur said, "I recognize that for generations, churches have been a part of the oppression. It's my intention by standing here in solidarity with those who grieve to be a part of the change. Any religion that has hate at its core needs a new focus."

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Human rights versus religious teachings: LGBTQ citizens

Allow me to make it quite clear that I am a true believer in equality, be it those who belong to the LGBTQ community, have religious beliefs, regardless of country of origin, variations in the colour of skin, or any other aspect we possess as unique individuals, we are all, each one of us, members of the human race. As such, we are entitled to be equal and that is our human right.

As an atheist, looking in from the outside of any religious affiliation, I understand that over the centuries negativity has been overwhelming in that "homosexuality" has consistently been criticized and rejected outright as an identity that is true to our very being. Now we must add true gender identity and expression to the list of discriminatory attitudes.

Followers of religion only accept one as being "normal" if one falls in love with a person of the opposite sex and so must procreate to extend the membership in Christianity, or any other religion in this world. Most churches, especially in the hierarchies, tell us to take a stand against members of the LGBTQ community. Pope Francis and the Vatican, and right-wing evangelical groups are adamant in pushing for the rejection of the aforementioned members of the population.

As I mentioned, religious freedom is a human right, but is it also a human right to discriminate? In many countries that is the case, even in Canada where religious beliefs are protected under the laws of the land. This is as it should be, but as hate of a certain group is evident then this is discrimination and that is also against our laws, which in turn are supposed to protect all of us.

We live in a society that is constantly at war, where violence is the norm, where power hungry leaders are successful in controlling their citizens, where jealousy and hate reign supreme. This is reality. Do we give in and let ourselves be



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intimidated by the constant hateful rhetoric from the likes of Donald Trump? No, we cannot lay down our defences. If religious doctrine, in whatever church or organization, continues on the path of rejecting LGBTQ people then dialogue will not be of any benefit, in which case discrimination will continue and proceed to go into future generations.

In order to unite, all groups and individuals must come to terms with the diversity of the world's population. The huge problem is to initiate dialogue, productive inclusive talks with church officials at the highest level.

I am certain that this is a futile exercise and success unattainable at present. In our quest for equal rights, equal treatment and opportunity, changes must be forthcoming with religious organizations willing to converse with the LGBTQ community world-wide. If leaders are unwilling to take part in such talks then governments must take action to make discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, or gender identity and expression a violation of human rights.

The fires are being stoked continuously by Pope Francis and others such as a pastor in New Westminster, B.C., who objects to transgender rights.

I believe love still makes the world go around, LOVE being the operative word. Celebrate our differences, don't destroy them.

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Trudeau declares Pride Month

Canada's LGBTQ community is being recognized by Ottawa in an unprecedented move in an effort of national recognition. The Pride flag was raised on Parliament Hill on June 1, making it the only other flag to fly there other than the Canadian or British flag when the Queen visits.

This is of great significance and decidedly a huge step by the Trudeau government to emphasize equality for all. As a nation, Canada triumphed among the first world-wide, along with The Netherlands, Belgium, Norway and Spain, to rewrite the laws to give equal rights to LGBTQ citizens. Others soon followed.

The rainbow flag, the international symbol for members of the LGBTQ community, has been in the spotlight for decades. American artist Gilbert Baker designed the flag and it has been hoisted throughout the world. Baker's flag was first used in the San Francisco Freedom Parade in 1978, one of the first in the U.S. The colours are described as follows: Red for Life; Orange for Healing; Yellow for Sunlight; Green for Nature; Blue for Harmony; Violet for Spirit. All across this country and in many nations around the globe Pride Celebrations display this flag of unity.

I view this move by Justin Trudeau's government as an historic event that has not previously been initiated by previous Canadian leaders. This is a tremendous opportunity for all Canadians to express the importance of equality, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other uniqueness we may possess as individuals. As part of human kind we are equal to all others. Trudeau has given us a reason to celebrate Pride on a national level by raising the flag on the Hill and he also announced he would take part in the Toronto Pride Parade later this month, another first for a Canadian Prime Minister.

Celebrations around the



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world have been recognized by many leaders, but not in this capacity. The rainbow flag may be seen as a strong symbol for unity. However, it also is a means of bringing attention to the everlasting discrimination that exists in many countries where LGBTQ citizens are imprisoned and even face death. Perhaps Trudeau's initiative will be noticed by other leaders and positive progress will be forthcoming for those who live in constant fear.

I cannot over-emphasize the importance of this development and as a member of the LGBTQ community I salute Prime Minister Trudeau and I thank this government for having the insight to bring this about. As the first government to show this initiative it is important to realize that the huge impact of this action must be celebrated. Each positive step forward is a step in the right direction and will impact the future relationship between citizens.

The former Harper Government had contrary policies of equal treatment as a number of bills regarding the rights of LGBTQ citizens passed in the House, but only supported by 16 Conservative MPs. The lack of support from MPs such as Stephen Harper and Peter MacKay was duly noted, however, this latest move was attended by opposition parties.

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LGBTQ equal rights, then and now

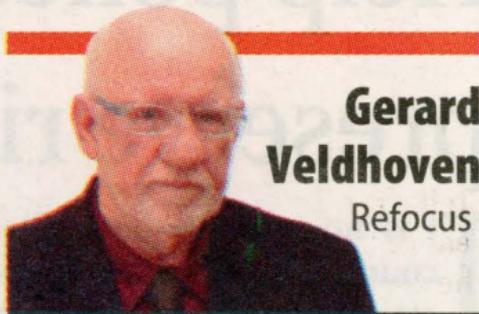
How many have fought for equality for all? History is filled with stories of people being killed, accosted, ridiculed and imprisoned for being different from what was deemed “normal.”

Of course, as far as equality was concerned, it mainly belonged to a class system, as the rich and the poor were drastically at odds. Through the centuries we learn that people were becoming more concerned with their welfare and consequently realized all was not well in our society. The wealthy and powerful ruled, others were merely slaves in a world where equality was simply not part of a daily existence. Many people became aware that this is not as it should be and so began the thought process of equal rights.

This was the beginning of uprisings and challenging authority in a manner that was dangerous and indeed punishable. Once forward thinking took hold, society also realized the beginnings of revolutions.

In the case of gays and lesbians, who were generally regarded as mentally ill and perverts, a movement was set afoot to fight for equality in a world where religion was dominant and powerful. Nevertheless, there was no turning back and as time progressed it became clear that the road ahead was slowly being paved with possible changes.

Sexual orientation was not discussed publicly, and those who were gay or lesbian were rooted deeply in the closet, for obvious reasons. As the 1900s approached, some were brave to come out and be heard. Irish author Oscar Wilde was a dominant figure in Britain and belonged to a group of people who vocalized their demands for equal rights. Others on the European continent and North America refused to be further intimidated by either authorities or the church. In many countries in Europe, sexual orientation



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slowly but surely was no longer a term to be ignored.

We must remember that over the centuries the term “sexual orientation” was not in existence. The fact challenges were now in progress caused the term to become more popular and indeed relevant. Each and everyone must be self-identified as far as sexuality is concerned, and that should be respected. That was, and is not the case, and even as our fore fathers and mothers fought for equal rights, it was not to be an instant recognition.

Going forward, we have experienced some positive answers to this difficult question of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. New York’s uprising decades ago and across the water many countries were determined to change course. Canada and nations such as Norway, The Netherlands, Belgium and Sweden were realizing changes at a slow pace.

The fight has not been in vain. While many governments have adopted laws of protection, the vast majority have not, and this strongly indicates the need to fight on. Some, as in Canada where our prime minister makes an honest attempt to raise awareness, the journey must continue on a path of eradicating indifference, paying attention to the serious issue of suicides and so much more. Governments can do more and must do so.

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Two openly gay mayoralty candidates in N.S. town

Truro, the so-called hub of Nova Scotia, has the distinction to be the first town to have two openly gay citizens vie for the mayor's chair.

Keltie Jones, who ran in the 2012 civic election against Mayor Bill Mills, came close to defeating him by only 300 votes.

A second candidate, Albert McNutt has joined the race, which also includes councillor and social activist, Raymond Jones.

Jones and McNutt, are well-known in Nova Scotia's LGBTQ community and each will most certainly be a strong contender for the mayor's chair.

Dr. Jones is the assistant dean of students and academic administration at the faculty of agriculture of Dalhousie University.

Albert McNutt is the director of the Northern Healthy Connections Society, (formerly Northern Aids Society) in Truro.

He has been on a number of boards nationally and one of the organizers of the recent Pride parade in Truro that garnered much attention as a result of previous conflicts with Mayor Mills.

Beyond the platforms, which are essential to the future success of any attempts for a better future, these candidates believe that sexual orientation, gender identity and expression



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are not a hindrance to success, but a definite asset in promoting equality, diversity and raising awareness, regardless of one's sexuality or any other unique quality we may possess.

In our political world, steps taken and accomplishments realized are of tremendous significance and essential towards a more positive and inclusive world.

Federal, provincial and civic leaders have the responsible task to tackle the issues laid out before them and listen to legitimate concerns of their respective constituents.

Each candidate must assure voters that personal beliefs will not interfere with the opportunity to fight for all and recognize the futile attempts at separating citizens, as in the case of Mayor Mills, whose religious beliefs prevents him to embrace members of the LGBTQ community. Jones and McNutt, who happen to be gay, will surely and actively represent all citizens.

The fact remains that if a gay person is successful in the bid to

become mayor in this Nova Scotia town, it will be of phenomenal importance. In Canada, as in many western nations, leaders have made their mark on equal opportunity. Senators, members of parliament, premiers and mayors or councillors in other jurisdiction proved extremely successful.

Truro is providing us with an historical event, with two gay candidates in the running who will have an enormous impact and influence on our young LGBTQ citizens who feel rejected. Many are at odds with family and friends, sometimes resulting in separations and suicides.

Truro, with a population of approximately 12,000 people makes it not only more unusual, but indeed celebratory to have two members of the LGBTQ community in the running.

This is a wonderful development that emphasizes the fact we do live in an era that is witnessing change.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; it's the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead

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International challenges for LGBTQ citizens

We, in Canada and some other Western nations, are relatively assured of being protected by laws established following years of challenges and demands of equality. For our transgender community, the wait is not over until the Senate reviews the protection bill and signs it into law for equal protection.

The fights, the arguing, the constant abuse and being ignored by lawmakers in the past have been tremendously complicated by ignorance and lack of fairness. Attitudes were extremely difficult to change and even today we are not quite there yet. Religious domination has traditionally shown to be non-conforming in acceptance of LGBTQ citizens.

Slowly, the tides are changing in certain denominations, but there is little light at the end of the tunnel, very dim at best. Rights such as equal marriage, equal pensions and benefits and equal opportunity are ours to keep. We love the freedom of choosing the one we love, regardless of sexual orientation – reflecting more acceptance in a western society and more understanding as time progresses. Ideas on what is correct, according to others, must be ignored and we must not give in to those who pronounce us as abnormal.

Various issues have not been



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rectified and will take years, decades and perhaps centuries to solve. This may sound defeatist, but all indications are that we must remain realistic, vigilant and remove the rose-coloured glasses.

In some cases within our own country, law enforcement folks are at odds with equal rights and equal treatment. This is the case with the various police departments in our nation. As has been mentioned in previous columns, Toronto, Halifax and Vancouver departments either have been banned from Pride parades, or have voluntarily withdrawn their participation. Cape Breton Pride has now decided that police are welcome to participate. In a surprise move, the Gay Officers Action League of the New York Police Department has invited police from our cities to join them in the New York City Pride March.

We are in the midst of Pride celebrations everywhere and we must come together and celebrate our place in society. Further division is not in the best interest and discussions must

take the place of separation. The end result must be co-operation and healing will follow.

On an international level, in many countries, we do see the divisions as police and other law authorities have the power to arrest, interrogate, torture and in many cases even kill gays at their choosing. This is allowed and conducted under the umbrella of the law. The death penalty still exists in seven nations. In Russia, Uganda and Saudi Arabia, among others, LGBTQ citizens have no recourse but to stay in hiding. Those who are open about their sexual orientation will experience unbearable consequences.

Donald Trump recently visited Saudi Arabia and lavishly praised the King for being such a wonderful host and they signed billions of dollars in business dealings. No mention of human rights and it has been well advertised that Trump has no respect for most minorities, including LGBTQ rights. So, on an international level, the challenges continue and in many cases human rights do not exist. Indeed, we see an increase in brutality on a world-wide scale.

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LGBTQ rights: United Nations and Canada on the same page

The United Nation's first independent expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity – that Global partnership is needed to end discrimination and violence against the LGBTQ community.

Vitit Muntarbhorn, the first-ever UN independent expert on LGBTQ issues, told an international conference in Bangkok that, "Resolute action is required to stop the violence and discrimination affecting not only the LGBTQ communities but also the human rights defenders working with them." The conference was held on Nov. 30, 2016, and indicates a strong willingness by the UN to work toward a more peaceful, inclusive society that must



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encompass all humankind, bar none.

The recent appointment of Randy Boissonnault as special adviser to the prime minister for LGBTQ issues will certainly be on par with the UN appointment. A working relationship between the two would certainly be of great benefit to all concerned. It would be wise to study the situations carefully and proceed with cautionary and precise ideas that will work to bring us closer to a posi-

tive end result. This will take, months, years and even centuries to evolve.

We should not look through the proverbial rose-coloured glasses and expect immediate results. This venture is an enormous undertaking. And the centuries of discrimination and hatred has taken its toll on our society. Hopefully other countries will follow suit and appoint experts to tackle the problems faced by LGBTQ citizens throughout the world.

Canada's Boissonnault has a solid background in that he is a member of the LGBTQ community and recognizes the shortcomings that have existed and do so today. These two men may work in separate ways, but are allies in working towards a unified society. A global part-

nership is the only solution in that it will be stronger and more powerful in approaches to someday lessen the shameful and discriminatory manner that envelops our citizens. This is true in all sectors of our society.

Boissonnault has promised to analyze, contact, discuss and seek advice from the community across Canada. This is a huge step towards some kind of eventual healing. Muntarbhorn said of the World Conference of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association that, "All people were invited to open their hearts and minds to the beauty of diversity, including in the areas of sexual orientation and gender identity."

Canadians are sometimes

viewed as respecting diversity, but that depends on the educational and social background of individuals. This is true in other countries as well, except of course places such as Russia, Saudi Arabia and many others in the Far East and beyond. In the United States, human rights issues are in question again with a coming Trump administration.

Thankfully, Canada and the United Nations are taking positive steps in an honest attempt to squash discrimination and work towards equality.

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READER'S CORNER

Don't discriminate

Howard Heyman's Oct. 1 article was a heartbreaking reminder that discrimination is alive and well. Mr. Heyman is Jewish and gay. As he correctly points out, Israel's LGBTQ citizens are making great strides towards equal rights. Politics between nations has no bearing on his orientation or the fact he is Jewish.

If a proposed resolution on Israel is accepted by Halifax Pride, it will lose credibility as an all-inclusive organization. This is a tragic development and I call on Halifax Pride to remove this resolution immediately. It is undeniably discriminatory and further divides. Israel is the Jewish homeland and Howard is a descendant of that nation. I am a Dutch-Canadian and if my background were ordered to be hidden because of political strife I would view it as discrimination of the highest order.

Strife in Israel and Palestine is not of Mr. Heyman's making and is a non-issue for his identity as a Jewish gay man. His Israeli background must not be denied.

**Gerard Veldhoven, LGBTQ activist for equality,
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Discriminatory hiring practices in educational facilities

Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression is against the law in Canada. Is it that simple? Apparently not, and the proof is in the actions taken by some courts recently regarding some universities that continue to deny employment to gays and lesbians who are open about their sexual orientation.

A number of universities and private schools have this policy in place across Canada. These are evangelical Christian places of learning where prospective applicants are denied employment because of their sexuality and married gay couples need not apply, nor should single gays who are open about their sexual orientation.

The most famous of these places is Trinity Western University in British Columbia. At that particular university students who wish to study there must sign a document that forbids sexual relations outside a marriage between a man and a woman. Trinity has been chastised by many legal organizations across the country and thus far a few courts have sided with the university. The discrimination is blatant, yet some courts seem to feel it normal to refuse entry.

A law department is in the works for this university and most feel that future lawyers who graduate will infuse their ideas and ideology learned here, thereby promoting homophobia. The Canadian Association of University Teachers filed a motion to intervene in two appeals involving Trinity. The case will be heard in the fall by the Federal Court in Ottawa.

Other schools are also refusing to comply with human rights, which is the core of our existence. The Baptist-based Crandall University in Moncton, N.B., whose policy is anti-gay hiring policies, also has been in the news again lately. A father of a bisexual teen is criticizing the Anglophone School District South following its proposal to set up a partnership and promotion to send its teach-



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ers to Crandall to upgrade and enter a Masters of Education program. This is a university with an employment policy that doesn't recognize same-sex marriage and, like Trinity, discriminates against the gay community. The teen's father, Matthew West, said, "I am not criticizing Crandall here. I am criticizing the school board for promoting Crandall."

The district's subject co-ordinator for literacy, Greg Patterson, said the partnership has been put in place. Crandall has been in the news for some time and has been criticized for its anti-LGBTQ stance, following strict Christian beliefs. At one point Dr. Bruce Fawcett, Crandall's president, offered an apology to the LGBTQ community for excluding them. Such an apology rings empty as no changes followed.

Where do we find any kind of conciliatory dialogue and do we really expect changes to these anti-gay policies? Perhaps the evangelical type of Christian denomination does not feel the need for accepting and respecting those not thought of as noteworthy. In other words, these universities, schools and their organizers will not budge.

So, here we have it, blatant discrimination with total protection under Canadian law. If the law protects discrimination, as is evident by some rulings recently in our provincial courts, then the light at the end of the tunnel is dim at best.

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Equality, a human right

We are exposed to a tremendous number of stories daily that strongly indicate our world is not about to go through a dynamic change to be inclusive. On the contrary, we are in the midst of a crisis that only promises to escalate, especially with the Trump presidency south of our border.

The Republicans are well known to instigate and promote discrimination with minorities being targets of separation and hateful rhetoric. Trump joins a group of leaders who carelessly and deliberately instigate old values that are hurtful and certainly cause further rejection of those who are the most vulnerable. Discrimination of blacks, indigenous people, LGBTQ persons, women, the poor, the disadvantaged, or those living with mental illness or physical disabilities is deemed unequal in our society. Some improvements have been noted, but generally it is a continuing problem.

Our rights are compromised, regardless of location in this world. We are told in convincing tones that progress is steady and improvements are coming at a faster pace than ever before. There are a small number of advancements and there are indications that this may be true, but the light at the end of the tunnel remains very dim. This is not to say that the fight is futile, but all indications point towards a slow healing that will take years and centuries to accomplish.

In last week's column I mentioned the United Nations' and Canada's new appointments in an effort to work towards some stability and improvements to the plight of the LGBTQ community everywhere, but let us not forget the individuals and groups involved in the process. They were the pioneers in the fight for equal rights, equal treatment and equal marriage. Many were and remain at the forefront in our communities.



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Our existence as human beings is not guaranteed to be safe and, to be sure, is filled with challenges.

These obstacles may be small and of no consequence, but could be challenging in so many ways. Challenges may very well include rejection by families, religion, schools, at work, the playground and medical care. Many teachers, clergy, doctors, politicians and others have displayed discrimination at various levels. We may well ask, is this how we must be treated, or are we entitled to human rights? This question is raised often and we should not have to question our rights because we are all part of humanity.

How wonderful our lives would be if judging, criticizing, violence and all other atrocities ended soon. Each of us has the right to live as our lives should be lived without hassle, without conflict. If we are to succeed, we must step up and be counted as equals, not accept that we are not worthy.

It is a huge challenge we face. As equals to all others, we are obliged to press forward with positivity that will take us into the future and in doing so have the confidence to embrace freedom of thought and feelings of contentment. Yes, equality is a human right and the Trumps, Putins and others who deny these rights will not join us in the fight for social justice, but fight on my friends.

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Holding hands with the LGBTQ community

Those who choose to distance themselves from various parts of Canadian society are missing sections of our rich culture that have so much to offer. As a member of the LGBTQ community, I am thankful to be a citizen of this nation where we have come a long way to embrace diversity.

Unless we have leaders who back all Canadians, the journey would be more challenging and add years, if not centuries, to attaining equality.

As humans, we have the capacity to love, but so many choose to do exactly the opposite and take on hateful and intolerant attitudes.

In recent years, we have experienced a variety of leaders in our country with opposite views. Former prime minister Paul Martin believed same-sex marriage should be implemented, even as he is a devout Roman Catholic. He insisted, "It is the right thing to do." Quite the opposite of the leader of his church.

When Stephen Harper came to power, a right-wing religious individual, the existing same-sex marriage law was in jeopardy as he attempted to have it overturned, but parliament voted him down. He was silent on equal rights for the LGBTQ community and voted consistently against transgender protection.

Enter Justin Trudeau, viewed by many as a newcomer, not experienced, but has nice hair. Of course, we soon learned that this young man was eager to change directions in this country.

As soon as Trudeau took the helm he practised what he preached to a large extent, especially regarding social issues. This is a refreshing change from the right-wing Harper agenda.

Half the Liberal cabinet consists of women – long overdue. The prime minister is showing



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extraordinary support to the LGBTQ community as well as other minorities. He was the first sitting first minister to raise the Pride flag on Parliament Hill and marched in two Pride parades in Toronto and Vancouver. The government also passed legislation to give transgender people equal rights to all others. On a few occasions he has been vocal about the treatment of LGBTQ folks in other countries. Some will view this as insignificant while others are celebrating this inclusiveness.

Embracing all minorities, bar none, is the only way to be a successful nation. The federal cabinet is a collection of ministers of diverse backgrounds in every way. Presently, we are in good hands with Justin Trudeau and his Liberal government because of the recognition of all minorities.

We welcome the government's sincere attempt to hold hands with the LGBTQ community in this fair and inclusive nation.

Our neighbours to the south are not so fortunate, and indeed a Trump government would severely damage the freedom and equality that minority Americans so desperately need. We must engage in positive tones and work to unify instead of tearing apart our people regardless of unique individual makeup. Let's hold hands.

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■ COMMENTARY

LGBTQ: our continuing journey after the Orlando massacre

To make sense of the massacre and the injuring of so many LGBTQ citizens in Orlando has brought to us the reality of what is happening in our efforts towards social justice and the tremendous amount of work yet to be accomplished.

In the wake of the recent horrific attacks, I feel as if our celebration takes on a special meaning and a better look at what lies ahead. We have accomplished much, but in retrospect our work is beginning to take on more urgency. We must and we shall, for a long time to come, remember what has occurred and digest the serious consequences of such a loss of life.

As a nation, a province and a town we cannot say, it will never happen here, certainly not in this beautiful area. I am sure the folks attending the Pulse night club were not expecting such an outrageous attack on the LGBTQ community. It did happen and we continue to pay tribute to the victims and their loved ones. We must also believe they wish for us to celebrate our gains and through sheer determination raise the prospects of a more inclusive society and attempt to eradicate homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, muslimphobia and all phobias that affect our peaceful coexistence that gains respect for all.

We can no longer ignore the negatives. They are laid bare before us around the Globe as LGBTQ citizens and others are attacked in North America, taken to prison in many countries or are killed because of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. Anti-homosexuality bills are introduced in many lands.

In the United States alone 31 states are making an attempt to introduce 160 anti-LGBTQ bills. This is happening just south of our border, our neighbours and close trading partner, but yet



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the social equality needed for a just society are at stake.

Does this mean we are at a loss? Not by any stretch of the imagination.

We fight on for total equality and acceptance as a contributing and responsible part of the world's inhabitants.

In Canada we are on the right road, but this road is long and presently unending. We embrace and we love, but not with conditions such as discrimination.

We stand firm in our efforts to unify and we stand up for who we are and what we represent.

I wish to express appreciation to the Pictou County Centre for Sexual Health where education regarding sexual health both physical and mental is of prime concern. I thank the New Glasgow Race Relations and Anti-Discrimination Committee where discussions and community awareness of diversity are the rule.

As well, thanks to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for raising the Pride Flag on Parliament Hill and participating in Toronto's Pride Parade, a first on both counts.

This journey is indeed a matter of pride and prejudice. We continue on with increased determination, challenging governments and millions of individuals who are steadfast in refusing to recognize equality and promote violence.

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Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesdays in The News.

August 10, 2016

Evangelical university allowed to discriminate by N.S. Court of Appeals

Much has been written and discussed about Trinity Western University in British Columbia. This right-wing evangelical school of learning insists it has the right to discriminate against the LGBTQ community and some courts in Canada seem to agree that these decisions are just fine and allow these institutions to further inequality in this country.

Yes, in Canada, a nation that prides itself on being tolerant and loudly affirms that discrimination has no place here.



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The courts seem to disagree, depending where decisions are being made.

First, a little background. The university requires each student to sign a document. Students must abstain from sexual intimacy "that violates the

sacredness of marriage between a man and a woman." Earlier, the British Columbia courts decided to rule in favour of the university, but Ontario has sided with the law societies. The societies have declared that the rules and regulations of Trinity Western do not align with equal rights for all.

The courts in British Columbia and more recently in Nova Scotia, have ruled that there is no discrimination. The university forbids sexual intimacy outside heterosexual marriage,

therefore excluding same-sex couples. A TWA spokesperson, Amy Robertson, insists "we should celebrate freedom," however, that apparently excludes gays and lesbians and their right to marry.

In Ontario, a panel of three dismissed the appeal by TWU and declared that while the school's religious freedom had been infringed upon, the university is discriminating against the LGBTQ community. This is an ongoing issue as Robertson says this will end up in the Supreme Court of Canada.

In an ambiguous statement TWU insist they are not criticizing members of the LGBTQ community, but protecting the "traditional Christian marriage." It is alarming that the laws do not recognize equal rights for all Canadian citizens. Religion trumps equal rights and that unfortunate thinking is detrimental to not only Canadian society, but society as a whole.

The ruling in Nova Scotia is an indication of conservative attitudes that go back decades and further places LGBTQ people under a dark cloud. We know that if an LGBTQ person criticizes, or otherwise question a religious doctrine, she/he will be reprimanded and accused of religious discrimination. Under

no circumstances must we argue with the churches or their schools and universities systems. The fact they are privately operated should not be an excuse to lawfully discriminate. Church and state are therefore intertwined and consequently LGBTQ citizens must bear the brunt of court decisions.

One must point to the fact this usually occurs when religion and sexual orientation are at odds. Privately religious run schools are constantly at war, as is the case with the Ontario Catholic School Board, which refuses to accommodate Gay Straight Alliances. This is also an issue in southern Manitoba where evangelical Christian schools also are not allowed such organizations. Public schools are not permitted such refusals.

Thankfully we do have some protection from discrimination. Unfortunately, schools such as Trinity Western and Moncton's Crandall University have free reign to practise discrimination at will. Perhaps at some future date all will be treated equally.

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■ COMMENTARY

Was attack on gay firefighter a hate crime?

A recent report that a firefighter endured abuse of all sorts when employed at the Department of National Defence because he is gay has brought forward the following question: Does the action reported constitute a hate crime?

Look at some facts. This painful story, which is certainly not uncommon, explains how the unidentified man endured insulting and humiliating comments during his employment at the Halifax Naval Base. His breathing apparatus was tampered with, which could have resulted in serious health issues and even death.

The Workers Compensation Appeals Tribunal ruled that the man suffered psychological disorders as a result of the incidents. The Nova Scotia Workers Compensation Board was ordered to access the benefit payable in relation to the claim.

These incidents happen more frequently than we may wish to believe. The potential for hate crimes remains a problem, and is indeed worrisome. There are reports that violent hate crimes against certain groups are diminishing, but still, they are continuing. However, hate crimes motivated by sexual orientation are primarily violent, according to Statistics Canada. Hate crimes remain a problem and eradication is not in the future.

What is considered a hate crime? It's described in the Criminal Code of Canada as follows: "A hate crime is committed to intimidate, harass, or terrify not only a person, but an entire group of people to which the victim belongs. The victims are targeted for who they are and not because of anything they have done. A hate crime is one which the motive can involve intimidation, harassment, physical force, or threat of physical force against a person or group." It goes on to say,



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"A hate crime includes stirring up or inciting hatred against an identifiable group based on colour, religion, ethnic origin or sexual orientation."

A transgender protection bill passed in parliament recently now awaits approval in the Senate and will be included in the Criminal Code of Canada. Attacks continue at an alarming rate on members of the LGBTQ community. This is a reality, historically, and remains an issue that needs urgent attention. The task is daunting and indeed seems impossible.

The Halifax firefighter was targeted and in danger as his breathing apparatus was tampered with, consequently placing his life in danger. Therefore, this follows the description in the Criminal Code of Canada regarding a hate crime. There was no mention in the report that this crime was committed by his fellow firefighters. The conclusion must be that a hate crime was indeed committed against this man because he is gay.

Thankfully the man will receive compensation, but that does not address those who committed the crime. This must be addressed by our court system and proper action be taken to tell the public that these crimes will not be tolerated and should be punishable, according to the description regarding a hate crime set forth in the Criminal Code of Canada.

Gerard Veldhoven is a long-time activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesdays in The News.

■ COMMENTARY

Civic candidate practises blatant discrimination

Nova Scotia's municipalities are in full swing just itching to get prospective candidates to offer themselves for the office of mayor, warden or councillor.

Many are ready and willing to enter the race and, in a few weeks, on Oct. 15, we will have a full slate of new leaders across our fair province to govern the areas assigned to them.

The vast majority are serious contenders with positive goals to make our lives easier and more exciting in a world where each improvement counts and where society embraces equality.

As we listen to our candidates via newspapers, television, radio and social media and pay close attention to the candidates, we hopefully make the choice according to what we hear as solid reasons to vote for them. Generally it's relatively easy to make the choices that will positively benefit our communities. We listen to platforms and listen closely to decipher positive ideas that strengthen our relationships between communities and sound economic endeavours.

Then, as the campaigning gets underway, a couple of mayoralty candidates, one in New Glasgow and one in Amherst, get on the bandwagon of a Donald Trump type of outrageous and indeed damaging rhetoric that is unacceptable, deplorable and discriminatory.

George Baker, a longtime councillor and former deputy mayor in Amherst, showed his true colours at a local pizza business as he told staff, "I'm not your n....."

Rightfully this was reported and is being dealt with by authorities.

In New Glasgow, Mark Firth had plenty of discriminatory statements on social media that is an imitation of Trump. During an interview with Dan MacIntosh of CTV News, Firth came



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across as careless and displayed an image that bordered on comedy at the expense members of the LGBTQ community and racial backgrounds. His racist and homophobic comments were decidedly discriminatory.

He admitted to using "ignorant and stupid comments," but later promised to change his approach. A bit late, as he has already accomplished the damage.

This is reminiscent of Trump who played up to the president of Mexico and the following day reverted to the same hateful language he is so proud to vocalize.

Political leaders should be able to organize, not divide society into sections and promote hatred and further discontent. In the case of Firth and Baker, such a future would see the defeat of all we have accomplished and the efforts of those who have fought so diligently over the years; a decline in respect for others would surely be the end result.

We cannot afford a downslide and hopefully the likes of "Mark (I'm not gay) Firth," as he signed on social media, a Donald Trump of the north, is not a positive mark on the future of this area, or Canada as a nation, that prides itself on inclusion for all.

"New Glasgow flourishes" is a well-deserved identity, so let's keep it that way.

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Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesday in The News.

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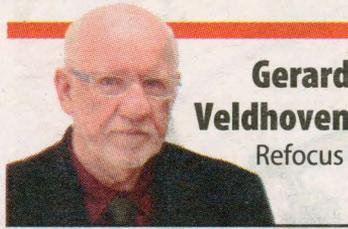
Pride celebrations must continue despite obstacles

Pride celebrations will soon begin to take place across Canada and around the world. The many events slated to take place bring together LGBTQ citizens and many others to celebrate the lives of those who traditionally have been condemned, chastised, attacked and indeed punished by governments and religions.

In a previous column I have mentioned developments that remain of great concern. As a matter of fact, divisions within the LGBTQ communities seem to be escalating. The situation at this point is divisive and threatens to lessen the positive progress made during the last few decades. If this continues, the members of the LGBTQ community in locations throughout Canada may be affected in a very negative way.

The following are the points, to date, that have brought us to this stage of concern. Firstly, last year's Toronto Pride parade was interrupted for half an hour when the LGBTQ group, Black Lives Matter, protested because of police participation in the celebration. They feel, and with good reason, that the police have been unfairly targeted blacks through profiling and other measures.

This past January Pride Toronto adopted a list of demands issued by the city's chapter of Black Lives Matter. City council may hold back financing



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because of the feud between Toronto Pride and the police. The annual grant of \$260,000 is in addition to the \$750,000 for services related to the celebrations. Pride Toronto executive director Olivia Nuamah says that celebrations will go on, no matter what.

The Vancouver Pride Society announced they have asked that police officers show up in fewer numbers and not be in uniform. The city's chapter of Black Lives Matter asked police to voluntarily withdraw from the parade as "the presence of uniformed officers makes some minority groups feel unsafe."

In Halifax, the police department has removed itself voluntarily from that city's annual Pride Parade. The fact HRM Chief Blais will take part in the parade without uniform does not diminish police presence as he will display the force's shiny emblem on his shirt.

In spite of what we are told police departments in the above-mentioned cities have not settled with the various Pride organizations and unless dialogue is established progress

will not be a reality. One or the other must make a move toward healing the rift and establish understanding to result in a more civilized coexistence. The profiling must cease as it blatantly displays discrimination and if that is not forthcoming then the issue will surely exacerbate with no positive outcome.

Another issue is the Queer Arab Halifax complaint about Israeli advertising in the Halifax parade as a welcoming place for LGBTQ visitors. The conflict between the two nations must not interfere with the equality of LGBTQ citizens. We are aware of the pure hate between the Arab nations and Israel, but that does not mean that there must be war between LGBTQ people.

As an advocate for equality for all people for 40-odd years, I am truly concerned that with all the advances, we are taking steps back in time. Converse with a positive goal in mind. Do not lay blame, but reach out to each other. I assure you by increasing tensions the road to equality is not attainable. Silence is not golden. Dialogue is the answer to unity.

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Discrimination within LGBTQ community

Halifax was the scene in October of a raucous and emotional annual meeting of the Halifax Pride Committee AGM. A resolution by the Queer Arab Halifax group that would see the abolishment of any mention of Israel's positive attitude towards members of the LGBTQ community in that country was tabled and defeated by a margin of 210 to 106.

The motion was supported by the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project, a Halifax-based LGBTQ support group. Any mention of LGBTQ folks and support in Israel would not be allowed in any of the Halifax Pride events. Fortunately, the majority see this as a successful vote that will not see discrimination being on display at Pride events in Halifax.

Even so, half of those in attendance were in favour of the motion, thereby declaring that it's quite all right to go against the Israeli LGBTQ community. The fact Arab nations and Israel are at each other's throats should not be a deterrent to support LGBTQ persons in any country.

Celebrating Pride is to recognize the gains and the long-awaited equality we are searching for, and have attained in a handful of nations. It must be prioritized. Most are well aware of the eternal struggles between those countries. Nevertheless, we must, above all, recognize the fact that all of these nations have LGBTQ citizens who must receive our support, regardless of nationality.

Human rights abuses are dominant around the world. We don't have to travel very far from our own borders to



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know that racial tensions exist in the United States where African Americans are attacked or killed. In Canada, our indigenous people live in deplorable conditions and young people commit suicide regularly.

If we follow the resolution presented to the Halifax Pride Committee as a guide then we would be failing to support those in our own neighbourhoods and no longer accept them as equals to ourselves. Governments are responsible for guiding us toward a more accepting society, but usually fail miserably at uniting us. Should we present a resolution to our Pride committees and no longer allow LGBTQ acceptance of the U.S. because of their human right abuses, or indeed those within Canada? LGBTQ people must unite around the globe and not be intimidated by on-going conflicts between countries.

Perhaps energies should be directed at other Arab nations where stoning gays to death and other terrible abuses occur. Celebrate our LGBTQ people in other countries, not destroy what we already have. Comments and information: lgbt-connections@gmail.com

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Percentage of LGBTQ Canadians

The question often arises from many people as to what percentage of the population belongs to the LGBTQ community. Many numbers have been circulated and published with the answers coming mainly from census forms.

If we pay careful attention to those figures it would seem that the results are very low. Some reports have the percentage of gays and lesbians between one and two per cent. One must take into account that these numbers are according to those who were willing to be identified and do not mind admitting to their respective orientation.

One account published has bisexuality in Canada at 0.7 per cent. We will never be able to ascertain the exact figures, but we are able to decipher and perhaps conclude that they are much higher than what is reported by stats and other means.

We must remember that even with a more open society and a solid increase in those who are more than willing and indeed find it necessary to "come out," many remain tight-lipped about their sexual orientation or true gender identity and expression. In Canada and some other western nations, folks tend to be more explicit than those in most other countries where revealing our true nature is followed by punishment, beatings and killings under the umbrella of the law.

We are a naturally inquisitive lot and wish to know what the true answers are regarding the percentage of LGBTQ people in Canada. We may also assume that the numbers are similar in most countries because sexual orientation and transgender issues are a natural human trait.

Having been involved with LGBTQ activism for over 40 years has given me the opportunity to study and meet countless folks who have opened the doors to a more positive life, as well as countless who remain silent and live in secretive existences.

Perhaps if the low numbers generally reported are viewed as



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incorrect, which in my estimation and many others are far too low to be realistic, then more folks would perhaps feel more comfortable in revealing their true identity. Living life in an enclosed environment can be mentally or physically challenging, and in many cases result in illness or suicidal thoughts. It's imperative that people be allowed to be themselves and live fulfilled lives.

So when the percentages are published we must look beyond those reports to get a more accurate picture. LGBTQ citizens of Canada and elsewhere are decidedly alive and well, so a more detailed account is required and we must look well beyond the official documents such as census forms.

I have encountered hundreds of LGBTQ folks over the years who continue to live secret lives because of society's judgments, family rejection, or peer pressure and many other negatives. It remains a serious issue, especially when these attitudes rule our lives. Census results are of assistance, but in the case of LGBTQ numbers they do not paint a canvass true in actual figures.

I am about to divulge my estimate and yes, this is also not factual but closer in truth, according to my estimation. Many others are in agreement that the percentage is about 20 per cent. That indicates that out of 35,151,728 Canadians the LGBTQ population is at approximately 7,000,000. Of course, that is an estimate, but I daresay, a close count.

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Toronto Pride versus police participation

Once again Toronto Pride, City Hall and the police are at odds over police participation in the annual Pride parade to be held June 28. This issue will just not go away and by all accounts seems to magnify the situation.

City council is about to vote on whether to grant \$260,000 to assist the event. The thorn is the issue of police and Toronto Pride not being capable of solving this problem.

Last year Black Lives Matter stopped the parade in its tracks demanding the police be excluded from any future Pride parades.

Organizers gave in to the demand and this continuing saga has not yet ended. Minority groups are often the target of police profiling, making a solution extremely difficult.

Saying the event had become exclusionary, a councillor suggested the grant should be revoked. The police union agreed and lamented that it would be unacceptable for the city to sponsor an event that shuts out certain municipal employees. Meanwhile, Mayor John Tory supports the funding and said Toronto Pride and Police Chief Mark Saunders feels not awarding the grant would not solve the issue.

Toronto Pride has stated that police officers would be welcome to take part in the parade as civilians rather than in an official capacity. No uniforms, cruisers or weapons. In that case, the participation would not represent police, but indeed ordinary citizens, similar to onlookers.

Olivia Nuamah, Pride's executive director, insists all sides have the same goal and further states, "We are going to be trying incredibly hard to dampen down the vitriolic nature of this conversation, to be honest with you, to make it more about the cohesion which we all seek."

Toronto is not alone in its fight with police. Halifax and Vancouver have similar issues. To solve these unfortunate situations dialogue is the only way to a positive solution.

Blaming each other only serves to fur-



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ther the divisions.

I have referred to this ongoing problem in previous columns. Conflicts such as these do nothing to heal, instead will add to divisions that have existed for centuries. Where are the sincere talks to lessen, or indeed extinguish the fires that just keep on burning out of control? As a society, we must continue efforts to heal.

Many of us contribute our time in order to educate, to raise awareness so that we are able to lead lives in a society that respects and appreciates the differences and the unique qualities we possess.

We are responsible, each of us, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, to enrich the lives of all.

Canadians are regarded as tolerant and accepting, but as we learn of stories where Pride celebrations and the police are at odds and determined to be divisive, we fully realize the work ahead is full of twists and turns.

We march ahead regardless and live in the hope dialogue will someday lead to understanding and a peaceful co-existence. Pride celebrations are here to recognize gains the LGBTQ members of society have garnered and also realistically realize the road to equality has not yet ended.

We continue in our efforts to bring stability in our communities and know we are, each of us, a member of human kind and remember equal rights are human rights.

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■ COMMENTARY

Churches: special permission to discriminate

The Conservative Party of Canada will be debating new policies and improving on existing ones so that Canadians will have a better existence. Among the suggested resolutions is "the removal of the existing ban supporting same-sex marriage while adding support for freedom of religious organizations to refuse to perform ceremonies or allow the use of their facilities for events that are incompatible with their religious beliefs."

Of course, that is already written into Canadian law and the Conservatives wish to emphasize that fact. Even as freedom of religion is part of the Canadian Constitution, the truth is it's also a licence to discriminate against the LGBTQ community in Canada.

The hypocrisy is self evident as the Conservatives, in their suggestion, reveal that they believe it is not acceptable to have a ban on same-sex marriage, but supports discrimination based on sexual orientation, also protected under the Canadian Charter. Remove the ban but discriminate at will.

Freedom of religious expression and the protection of gays and lesbians under that same charter are contradictory. This would seem to also apply to individuals who are of a religious persuasion and feel they will not be prosecuted. We may conclude that discrimination is here to stay, unless the religious community indicates a willingness to embrace and change doctrine, in effort to unite and not divide humankind.

We must also keep in mind the Conservatives under Stephen Harper set up an "Office of Religion" with the purpose to advance and protect religious freedom throughout the world. It mentions absolutely nothing about discriminatory action against the LGBTQ community, or any other groups in our society who may not have those beliefs.

Keep In mind that we do not



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choose our sexual orientation and so the churches could conceivably discriminate on the basis of skin colour or any other characteristics unique to individuals. The powers in Ottawa, including the Liberals, NDP, Conservatives and others, seem to be on the same page, except that the Conservative Party has a habit of not supporting equal rights for the LGBTQ members of our Canadian culture. They have voted consistently against equality for the transgendered people of our nation.

The subject is controversial, to be sure, but change must take place and one group should not have special treatment over another. Equality must be attained as the end result. Presently, the outlook is dim at best regarding this particular issue. The resolutions should be such that all are included as equal partners in an accepting society. All parties have the responsibility to rid us of divisions in our democratic society and also eliminate deliberate discriminatory actions by the religious organizations and make us all equal with a chance for respect, living lives as they must be lived according to our make up as individuals.

If change is not in the offing then one way to combat the marriage issue is for provincial governments to cease issuing licences to ministers and priests and only have civil marriages as in much of Europe. We are all the same somehow.

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COMMENTARY

Amalgamate: unity and equality

In Pictou County, a debate about amalgamating three towns and the county has been strong, divisive and decidedly filled with protectionism. As one reads the letters to the editor, or listens to a neighbour, the stories are similar and often times extremely negative.

One may compare this ongoing strife that keeps dividing society with the historically non-acceptance of those who are not deemed as equals to all others in our society. The colour of our skin, equal opportunity, rights and treatment of LGBTQ citizens, gender, spirituality, race, among many other issues reflect a division within the world order.

What does the amalgamation of these areas have in common with the social ills around the globe? Why is it so out of reach to unite and yet so successful to separate? We are in a position to better the future for our children and our future generations. All of us have choices to make. As a society we are tardy in achieving unity and a lack of respect for many. We live in a world where conflicts are rampant.

Social differences of all sorts seem to initiate arguments, violence and even death. Millions



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of years have gone by and we remain in a state of injustice, discrimination against each other and a lack of vision, bringing us to a virtual standstill.

The proposed amalgamation in this particular part of Nova Scotia has brought out the idea that the future must be dealt with in a positive manner so that an economic and a unified population will be the mainstay of an otherwise stale existence. There seems to be an inability to work together toward a more positive future. There seems to be mistrust among many, including some community leaders.

We must remember that Atlantic Canada suffers from a lack of profitable business ventures and closures seem to be the order of the day. Our young people leave us to go to "greener pastures," in Canada and abroad. How about a sober thought and intelligent deliberations that will have positive consequences and lead to a

place that enjoys not only economic benefits, but the feeling of belonging and a chance to keep young people to build a better future. Make the region into a place where doctors and other medical services will be enticed to set up and all sorts of companies that will provide employment and see a positive growth as the end result of co-operation.

This is similar to working toward a more inclusive existence for LGBTQ citizens, our African Canadian neighbours, the Indigenous and Muslim peoples of our nation. The list is long, but with positive outlooks and dialogue that is progressive and not negative our goals will succeed. Embrace, do not cast aside unity.

The world is filled with non-co-operation and it matters not if it concerns places or people. If efforts fail then we must be ready to face the consequences. Amalgamation is the route to equality and peaceful co-existence.

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Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesdays in The News.

Italy's government approves same-sex unions, rejects marriage

Italy, a predominantly Roman Catholic country, is the latest jurisdiction to attempt to legalize gay relationships. A feat to be sure, as government leaders fought against the RC Church which is decidedly and indeed steadfastly refusing to recognize same-sex marriage.

To appease this ongoing division the government of Italy has lowered expectations and decided to allow unions of these couples. The media and other critics have lauded this decision as ground breaking, but fail to realize that this remains an unsettled issue.

Same-sex marriage is not allowed in Italy and a union is not equal to other couples who wish to have their relationships recognized as all others. For instance, adoption of children and adoption of a partner's child from another relationship are not included in the new law. Most western nations have altered the marriage laws to include same-sex couples and many have complete equality as all other married couples.

Marriage is not an option for a lot of couples and indeed statistics tell us that there is a decline in legalized marriages in the western world. Not surprisingly, given the fact a great number end in divorce.

The Italian government has caved in to the Roman Catholic Church and forbids legal marriage, but has gone against the Vatican to allow unions. Given that fact, equality remains a strong issue in that nation. It is entirely possible that with the declining influence of the church equal marriage may eventually be part of the true equal rights that should be part of the law in any case.

The point is that a couple should have the choice to legally marry, regardless of sexual orientation. In Canada, for example, same-sex married couples are completely equal to other couples, but not necessarily treated with respect because of religious interference, or other prejudices. In time, we will experience changes in at-



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titudes and with that a definite change in church domination.

Equality is a human right that cannot be rejected by religious doctrine and so must not interfere with humankind's equality. If a couple's wishes are to marry then this must be respected. On the other hand, if the choice is a union without equal benefits, also it is a personal decision that should not depend on the traditional Roman Catholic or any religious doctrine.

Many have applauded the decision by the Italian government, but critics, including myself, have concluded that this new law is not acceptable. Couples marry, or not, live in a union, or not, adopt children, or not. The government in Rome does not give same-sex couples that choice, it is decided for them.

Italy is not the only country that is predominant Roman Catholic. Spain was the fourth country in the world to rewrite its marriage laws to include same-sex couples. This nation is 85 per cent Catholic. Pope Benedict requested the Spanish president to rescind the law, but he refused. A great number of nations write their own laws to establish equality, but the church still reigns supreme and dictates.

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COMMENTARY

Colombia latest nation to grant same-sex marriage

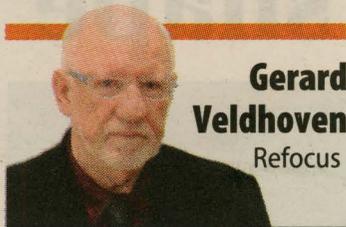
In a move that surprised even the gay community Colombia's highest court ruled that same-sex marriage is now the law of the land. This is the latest development in a predominantly Roman Catholic nation where opposition to altering marriage laws seemed impossible to accomplish.

As one looks at the countries that have adopted the new marriage laws it is obvious that a number of these jurisdictions are under the influence of the church, but perhaps the tide is changing. Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Colombia, Spain, Portugal and France are among the nations where same-sex marriage has been legalized and where the Catholic Church dominates.

A few years ago when Pope Benedict visited Spain he made it clear he journeyed there with a heavy heart because of the government's decision to legislate gay marriage.

His attempt to persuade the president of that country to change course was futile. In Colombia, gay rights activist Luis Felipe Rodrigues said, "We are super happy."

This is a victory against all the conservative political parties, against the Catholic Church and everyone else who tried to block equal rights. This decision tells all that equality is unstoppable."



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must be the end result, not because a certain church tells us to only love a person of the opposite gender. We live in a large world where folks experience arrogant orders that really suppress individuals into a part of society that accepts traditional families only and in the process ignores and indeed bully many into an existence that on a great many occasions have negative effects.

There is space for all and we must learn to stake a stand and find our own happiness in order to live fulfilled lives, without criticisms and judgements. The Pope, the Vatican, the Church of England, among others such as, the evangelical movements, must refrain from judging, but I have a hunch that is far off into the future.

Love is all it takes to make a family.

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Equality in all its forms must be the goal if society is to survive. Respect for others should be the ultimate goal. Success must be measured on our abilities to embrace diversity, not to act as judges of others who may seem to be "different" in some way.

Religious beliefs are part of our world order, but influence of the various religions is decidedly waning and the cause is that more people are thinking for themselves and not influenced by those in the church hierarchies who make constant attempts to separate us one from another. Each of us is unique.

The person we love should not be an issue other than deciding if that love is real. Our gay brothers and sisters date, fall in love, cohabitate, perhaps marry because now the law says we are able to do so.

Children are born into many same-sex families and all these things make us a contributing and sustainable part of our society.

Human kind must determine their future and each individual has the ability to choose the person he/she will love. This

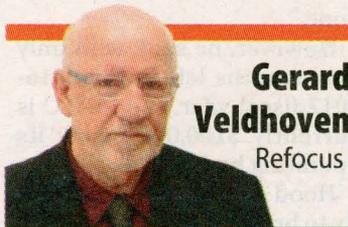
Pope approves declaration banning gay men from priesthood

On Dec. 8, Pope Francis approved a declaration that bans gay men from the priesthood and this includes those who support “gay culture.” This a reiteration of the original document that was approved in November 2005 by Pope Benedict XVI.

Some additions have been noted in this latest action by the Roman Catholic Church. In this new document we learn that Francis, who uttered the words, “Who am I to judge?” when questioned by reporters about gay priests, is making it crystal clear where he stands on this issue.

This again, is an attack on the gay community and remains on a continuing path that leads to further division, not only in the religious community, but the world at large. The Roman Catholic Church in its endeavour to “cleanse” gay men and the ongoing condemnation smacks of intolerance, homophobia and blatant discrimination by the church and its biblical interpretations.

I muse on the idea that man is made in the image of the Christian God. If that is so, the Bible should be altered to say that exceptions exist, such as a person’s sexual orientation. Is



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one’s sexuality not a gift from the same God? We are who and what we are and that is our birthright, regardless of our sexuality or orientation.

Francis and his church continuously see this situation as a bright future that allows the destruction of a united society. The declaration strongly suggests the pope, as was the case with his predecessors, has no intention of changing direction and to date has the distinction of being the most vocal in his opposition to the very existence of LGBTQ people and equality. The future looks dim at best.

When we consider that wars are being fought with power struggles, injury and death common occurrences, jealousies, abuses against those deemed “not normal,” we know that discrimination is a human condition, a reality supported by religion and writings such as the Bible. So it is with the Roman Catholic Church, which

is the most vocal in its opposition to gay priests and the entire LGBTQ population, and in so doing attempts to destroy whatever positive love we are able to muster up in our world.

To be inclusive means we embrace the entire population, bar none. It is curious to note that when I discuss this issue with my Catholic friends, and believe me I have many, most do not agree with this new declaration.

Since I am atheist, readers may well ask why I tackle this issue. First, I am concerned about my fellow LGBTQ brothers and sisters within the Roman Catholic Church as their pope condemns them and deems them unworthy. Second, it does impact the world condition condemning certain people because of the way they were born.

Pope Francis contradicts at every turn in statements he makes about the LGBTQ community and went so far as to say the church owes an apology and then condemns. I wish all my Christian readers a loving and joyful Christmas and to my friends of other religions and those in the secular world, happy holidays.

March 1, 2017

LGBTQ Canadians and the Ottawa connection

In a previous column I mentioned the appointment, last November, of Edmonton Centre MP Randy Boissonnault, as the LGBTQ special adviser to the prime minister. This is a huge step by our prime minister to give the LGBTQ community a voice in Ottawa.

Before the appointment I had written to Justin Trudeau, Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould and Central Nova MP Sean Fraser suggesting a federal department be established, or some sort of committee to deal with issues facing the LGBTQ citizens in this country. I pointed to the need to have dialogue with those inside and outside the LGBTQ community and the ongoing strife with homophobia, biphobia and transphobia, resulting in discrimination nation-wide.

We have made gains and we celebrate the changes in the laws of the land and appreciate those who support us. Our allies, friends and families are our support and on many occasions join in raising awareness to recognize the diverse society of which we are all part, human-kind. This is not to say that the government paid any attention to my questions, but nevertheless, I did hear from Mr. Tru-



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deau's office, as well as Minister Wilson-Raybould, indicating strong support for the LGBTQ community.

On Feb. 10, I received a call from Mr. Boissonnault, seeking some ideas, concerns and suggestions that may be of some assistance to him. In this new role as LGBTQ adviser, he will be travelling across this country to gather information, on a local and national level, that are of daily concerns.

Kudos to the Liberal government for establishing this new position in the government, the only one in the world that deals with LGBTQ issues. Mr. Boissonnault told me he will be conferring with groups and individuals across the country, gathering ideas and words of advice from members of the LGBTQ community. Another promise is to issue an apology to gay and lesbian members of the Canadian Armed Forces who were booted out on the

basis of sexual orientation. As well, many gays and lesbians were imprisoned just because it was a criminal offence – also worthy of an apology.

Much has to be accomplished and I am more optimistic than ever before that with federal representation we will realize increased awareness. I am of the opinion that as we move forward, our human rights will be respected, even with the knowledge that the battle is an uphill effort. It will take years and centuries, but we must forge on with as much positivity as we are able to muster.

I am proud to be in this country where I moved in 1954 from The Netherlands, at a time when "heterosexuality" was the only sexual orientation considered "normal" and anything aside from that was deemed criminal. We live in a world where discrimination reigns supreme against so many, such as the Muslim community, here and around the globe, as attacks and killings occur regularly.

When will it end? lgbtconnections@gmail.com.

Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesday in The News.

Trump presidency, equality at risk

The United States, a country that prides itself as a world leader, has decided to elect a president who will, according to his own words, bring out the guns to destroy peace, social equality and justice.

The American voters have spoken and now Donald Trump, along with the Republican-dominated Senate and Congress, has the power to initiate the promises he so adamantly and hatefully spoke about during the ever-lasting campaign. Trump made it quite clear he plans to overturn the Federal Supreme Court ruling that same-sex couples be granted the right to legally marry. Vice-President elect Mike Pence also vehemently opposes equal marriage.

This is one of many policy changes voiced by Trump that



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portrays him as a bullying, bigoted and discriminating individual who will set back the clock of time by a hundred years. The world will be less safe for all who cherish freedom, not just in the U.S. but around the globe, for equal rights, equal treatment and equal opportunity.

During his campaign he made it quite clear that the only folks he really acknowledges as his equals are white. This is reminiscent of Adolf Hitler's attempt to only preserve a "perfect"

white population, just kill off Jews, gay men, certain religious groups and others. This is tragic for all those seeking equality, a peaceful existence and go beyond the violence that exists today.

Regarding LGBTQ rights and same-sex marriage, Trump has indicated he will work to overturn the court's decision to allow equal marriage across the U.S.

This would entail appointing a new conservative judge to the Supreme Court and a court case that has to be brought against *Obergefell V. Hodges*, the decision that ruled in favour of same-sex marriage. If Trump is successful, gay marriage would be a state by state law and then remains discriminatory.

On his statements about depriving Muslim Americans and

women their rights one has to be prepared for more negative action. Donald Trump's nasty comments about women and his obvious impression that he is perfectly within his right to sexually assault them, which is sexual abuse, is obnoxious and sexist.

As the U.S. future president he has the obligation to unite, but that is not in the cards. The United States citizens who voted for him must now cope with the consequences, along with the Clinton and independents supporters, to face reality that Trump is the racist and sexist future leader of the so-called great American society.

Minority groups, the environment, economic issues and may other concerns are in jeopardy. His platform told us so. The lies,

the discriminatory outbursts and rudeness from his twisted mind will be felt the next four years.

Will he soften his stance? If he does, he will prove to be a liar and if he indeed goes back on his promises the United States has a chance of being a world leader in equal rights, equal opportunity and equal treatment.

Do not complain America, you voted for Donald Trump and the world will be watching; you made the choice that "makes America great again."

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Police will not participate in Halifax Pride parade

The Halifax Police Department has given notice to Halifax Pride that they will not march in the annual LGBTQ Pride parade come July. The disclosure by Chief Jean-Michel Blais raises questions about the distrust between the HPD and Halifax Pride.

This issue came to a head last year in Toronto when the LGBTQ group Black Lives Matter, stopped the Pride parade dead in its tracks. They demanded the Toronto Police Department not take part in the annual parade because of discrimination by the TPD. BLM member Hashim Yussuf stated, "Obviously the police as an organization, as an institution, have been homophobic and racist to the community members within Pride Toronto."

Halifax Chief Blais com-



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mented in a recent news release that the police will not take part in this year's parade, but will be on hand to keep order during other Pride events during the last week in July. Meanwhile, Halifax Pride chair Adam Reid said he supports the HPD decision to not take part and insists, "Halifax Pride works with all of the community partners to discuss how they wish to participate in the Pride Festival and we are very happy that the Halifax Regional Police Department is committed to growing

and strengthening our relationship."

Blais will be marching in the parade, regardless of the strife. However, he will be in plain clothes, but the force's shiny emblem will be worn on his shirt. This brings me to the question, why an emblem signifying that this is a police officer is so different from a uniform? The meaning is the same.

We have not been exposed to any facts that indicate serious, positive talks have taken place or are planned for the immediate future between Toronto Pride and the Toronto Police officials, or Halifax Pride and the Halifax police. Curiosity develops as to the reason for silence regarding communication between the parties. We are aware that discrimination is a huge issue and needs im-

mediate attention in order to solve this ongoing situation. Why delay the process to heal?

As a society we must not delay any efforts to bring people together. The police, if guilty of discriminatory attitudes, should have mandatory sensitivity counselling regarding homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. This can be accomplished through workshops led by LGBTQ educators who are aware of the situation and are part of the black community.

The demand that police not take part in Pride parades will only exacerbate the situation. Immediate action is required.

Develop strong determination to fix this problem, educate police officers and develop a positive relationship with the LGBTQ citizens regardless of

race or any other unique quality a person may possess. We are all very aware of racial profiling and that must stop. Discrimination is an ugly reality and exists across this nation. We live in a world where conflict and discrimination reign supreme. We cannot afford to increase social injustice, but must fight to minimize it. Dialogue must begin.

Unite, not separate, communicate and not be silent, work towards a peaceful solution and not increase tensions. We are all the same somehow, but each with unique qualities.

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■ COMMENTARY

Truro celebrates pride, mayor remains opposed

After a long and very public battle, the Nova Scotia Town of Truro recently gave approval to celebrate Pride Week with a flag-raising ceremony and a parade to honour the victims of the Orlando Massacre.

In 2007, an application by the town's LGBTQ community to raise the flag was denied and hotly debated by town council as Mayor Bill Mills said he was opposed because of his religious beliefs. This attitude has torn the town in various directions and the LGBTQ citizens of this hub town were severely criticized by Mills. Nevertheless, this year's approval was forthcoming and celebrations were robust and clearly indicated the support of the people of Truro and Colchester County.

Much has been made about Halifax Pride, which has the distinction of being the fourth-largest in Canada, but we must recognize those who celebrate Pride in rural Nova Scotia and beyond. News coverage only seems to recognize the importance of the larger celebrations and minimize the smaller locations.

In the case of Truro, the media decided to give it a try and so we learned that no matter the size the importance of Pride remains the same. City and town officials have the obligation to serve the constituents who voted them into office and regardless of personal beliefs must support the people, regardless of sexual orientation, transgender identity and expression, or any other unique, wonderful qualities we may possess.

Mayor Mills has not given his approval, but council did, making it possible to hold Pride celebrations with the full support of the Town of Truro officials.

Keltie Jones has indicated she will run again for mayor and with the last vote four years ago showing a lot of support for her,



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chances are high she may be the first openly gay woman to become mayor of a Nova Scotia city or town. Jones is a member of the Faculty of Agriculture at Dalhousie University.

The late Bob Stead was mayor of Wolfville, another openly gay politician. We have Premier Kathleen Wynn of Ontario and Premier Wade MacLauchlan of P.E.I. who are gay leaders and we count MP and Treasury Board President Scott Brison among countless others.

Mayor Mills could take a lesson from the above mentioned, open his mind and heart and embrace Nova Scotia and Canada's LGBTQ citizens. Perhaps at some stage in his life he will cease the practice of discrimination, include instead of excluding those who are a contributing, sincere and whole people in a nation that boasts equality and equal opportunity for all.

Truro's LGBTQ community has succeeded in their quest for celebration and take their place beside other communities where Pride is for everyone, bar none. Equality is for all, not just a chosen few and with a population of about 900,000 inhabitants Nova Scotia is a wonderful place to exhibit this tremendous show of unification. It is able to strongly indicate that here, in Atlantic Canada, including New Brunswick, P.E.I. and Newfoundland, we are all the same somehow, each with unique qualities.

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■ COMMENTARY

Anglican Church OKs same-sex marriage

A recent vote by members of Canada's Anglican Church has the majority giving same-sex couples approval to marry within this nation's third largest religious denomination. Following a "no" vote earlier the result changed due to a voting glitch.

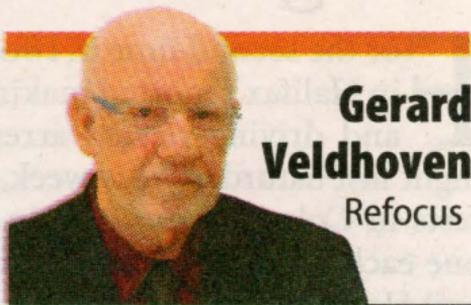
This decisive result, which is a huge step for an religious organization, indicates a willingness to lessen discrimination while at the same time risks other Church of England followers to break away, in Canada or elsewhere. Feelings are strong in either direction.

The point is that Christian followers have the opportunity to marry within their church, regardless of sexual orientation. To those of us who do not adhere to a religious affiliation this decision is a major step towards equality. Even as this decision will not become official church policy until 2019, it will give bishops the opportunity to go ahead with performing same-sex marriages.

One must remember this is a mainstream church in Canada and this result will bring the Anglican Church in Canada on equal footing with the United Church of Canada. This leaves others such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church and the Baptist churches out of reach for same-sex couples who wish to marry within their church.

At this stage it seems unclear if each congregation across the country must vote to allow such marriages within their jurisdiction. Each United Church of Canada congregation is allowed, under church rules, to decide whether or not to perform same-sex marriages. That ruling in itself does not entirely fix the issue of totally embracing the opportunity to be able to marry in the church, even as the doctrine has changed at head office.

I well recall the issue was voted on at Trinity St. Stephen United in Amherst when a "no"



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vote seemed to have resolved the matter. As an activist for equal opportunity I approached the church for a re-vote and the church readily agreed and then the issue was settled with a "yes" vote. In a democratic process we may see positive results. However, many chose to vote against having same-sex couples marry within their particular church.

As I am atheist I am concerned for all citizens to have the opportunity to marry if they choose, be it performed by a clergy or a Justice of the Peace. Any step taken with sincerity that proves to be positive is a step in a direction that will lessen discrimination because of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. All phobias must be erased through time.

The willingness for people to open their minds and transform those minds with embracing and loving qualities, then the world will be in a position to boast an improvement to realize equality. The religious community is asked to change doctrines and be inclusive and end the insistence of separation of people because of sexual orientation, true gender identity and expression. The Anglican Church of Canada and The United Church of Canada have taken positive steps toward unifying. Those who wish to marry within the church should be granted equal opportunity.

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COMMENTARY

LGBTQ community needs to unify

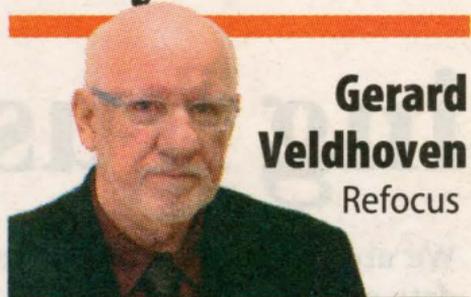
The recent tragedy in Orlando with the mass killings of 49 LGBTQ citizens and injuring 53 others by a gunman terrorist is a prime example of a sudden incident that has caused panic and confusion. No warning, just instant slaughter in a so-called “safe space” for members of the LGBTQ community.

The Pulse night club was by all accounts a well-attended venue where people gather to feel at home and be protected in a welcoming environment. That brings to mind that “safe spaces” may not be as we wish, or indeed expect and are vulnerable to these attacks. The message we receive tells us that we must take more action and be more vigilant.

Incidents such as this come out of nowhere and it's extremely difficult, if not impossible, to predict. That gives us little room to prepare. There is no alternative but to increase our educational endeavours to attempt to erase the discriminatory attitudes and have guns and all sorts of weaponry out of the reach of the public. In other words, make gun ownership a crime. Our voices will be heard and our written words read.

Multi-media should be used to influence acceptance and not be a way to glorify devastating occurrences where lives are lost and people crippled because of excessive violence against the LGBTQ community and other groups in our society. In order to achieve results we must be patient and work towards carefully crafted solutions.

Discrimination is not a new phenomenon, but has existed throughout time and in many cases is supported by religious teachings and actions. Homophobia, biphobia and transphobia have been widespread through the centuries. Gays and lesbians in earlier days were subjected to ridicule, rejection, violence, imprisonment and



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death, not unlike today. There were a number who attempted to “normalize” sexual orientation.

Countless individuals and groups fought diligently over the years to acquire equal rights, opportunity, benefits and equal marriage. The developments to those gains have much opposition and that thinking may lead to violence, such as we have experienced over time. The time to unify is now and we must take control of our destiny, our desires, our rightful place in this world and we are obliged to fight on, diminish the angst that exists.

We do have families, friends and allies in all walks of life. Governments must take action and get to work on the terrible tragedies that are the result of violent and discriminatory behaviour. Our work is not yet done and with the courts handing out more severe sentences that suit the crime, positive education that will deter violence of all kind, ridding our society of guns, then our existence may become peaceful and loving. Let us also recognize the millions who support us and because of that we have made gains. For that we are grateful.

Laws must prevail for our protection and those who are responsible for the hideous attacks must be weeded out of our society.

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LGBTQ acceptance, United Church of Canada vs. Roman Catholic Church

Most of my readers are well aware of the fact that I am atheist. That is not to say that I do not respect those who follow a religious existence. My opposing view has to do with judging and hate-filled rhetoric that exists in many faiths.

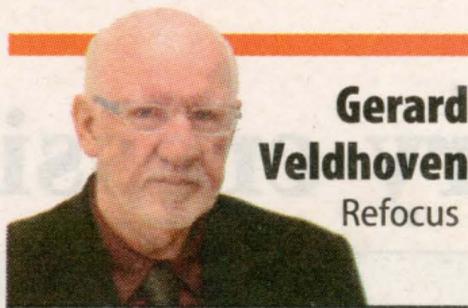
In the Roman Catholic hierarchy we find that to be true more so than in other mainstream churches. Pope Francis in a recent statement said the following, "The church should apologize to members of the LGBTQ community for not being respectful or accepting." In a recent change in Italian law that will recognize same-sex unions, but forbids marriage, he said, "There can be no confusion between the family God wants and any other type of union."

Again, this man who was thought to be a shaker and a mover for his church is really mouthing conciliatory words that are empty and certainly ambiguous.

If change is warranted, which is of the utmost importance, act and make it happen. This Pope has no intention of changing doctrine and this is in agreement with other Roman Catholic leaders, who have voiced their opinions on many occasions.

A few weeks ago, someone passed me a United Church of Canada pamphlet that is immediately eye-catching with the Pride flag and other images that indicate a strong support for the LGBTQ community. Inside we find a list of 12 affirming messages in complete support. Among them is the following statement, "We affirm that religious and non-religious people and groups alike share acceptance for the climate of hate and fear that continues to be directed at the LGBTQ community."

When same-sex marriage was debated in the Supreme Court of Canada the United Church was there in complete support. As the law was changed and the



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provinces all were in accord with changing the existing marriage law, the United Church was ready to implement policy that would be in accordance with federal law. One setback is the fact each congregation across the country must vote independently whether or not to perform the ceremony, however, the majority have voted in favour.

The Roman Catholic Church and most other denominations do not and seemingly will not follow others in accepting gay couples and their civil right to marry. The fires of intolerance keep burning brightly and will do so for centuries.

The Pope, once again, is speaking in discriminatory terms and one may well ask why world religions are so adamant about not embracing those who do not choose their sexual orientation, gender, skin colour, or any other uniqueness one may possess. Francis was the main opponent of same-sex marriage in his homeland of Argentina when the government introduced such legal ceremonies. There is no reason to believe he will alter his strong opposition.

Here we have The United Church of Canada versus the Roman Catholic Church, and we learn that Christianity is also divided within its own boundaries.

Each of us has the right to love the person of our choice.

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■ COMMENTARY

The LGBTQ world around us

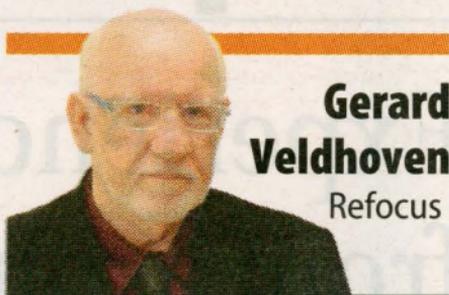
Years ago a movie named “Around the World in Eighty Days” was the story of a few people making an attempt to fly a balloon in record time and land in London during Victorian times. Then, air travel was unheard of as we know it today.

As the years progressed aircraft travel and mail service was at our fingertips and with today’s social media news spreads within seconds. I remember coming to Canada in 1954 via a ship that was hardly considered luxury, but managed to deliver us to the other side of the Atlantic safely. Mail was sent with the knowledge that it would take weeks to be delivered to its destination. I say this with tongue in cheek as this type of service remains an issue.

I am 76 years of age and I am amazed at the progress that has many of us stumped and indeed forces us “older folk” to be stepping up to the plate and follow present-day activities. News items are readily at our disposal and I, for one, am very grateful for the immediate articles and other media concerns that informs me of what is going on in other parts around the globe.

In my particular case I follow the ongoing strife that exists in many nations including the treatment of LGBTQ people who are beaten, ridiculed, imprisoned and killed because of who they are on a daily basis. I am able to learn of these atrocities within seconds and relay this information immediately to my readers, as well as having the opportunity to react quickly in response. I keep informed with issues that arise daily.

The LGBTQ world around us paints a bleak picture, especially in the Far East and points beyond. Equality issues are just not in favour of this segment of the population. Tyrant leaders as we find in Uganda, Rus-



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sia, the Arabic nations such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where we learn of stoning gays to death, are increasingly opposed to LGBTQ rights in their prospective countries. India has anti-gay legislation and so have the majority of countries around the world.

In the West all is not as it should be with negative religious influences telling the population that being gay and lesbian, or re-assigning one’s gender identity, is against their god’s will. That remains a huge hindrance to equality for many.

Until we see a movement in that community and a leadership that is willing to take action to rid the world of discrimination, regardless of religious beliefs, sexual orientation, the colour of our skin, rich or poor, country of origin – the list is long – we will not experience equality in all its forms.

I do not discriminate, but I do call for unity that is all-inclusive and until that is accomplished the road will be paved with continuing angst, power, control of all sorts, wars, resentment and jealousy. In today’s society, which remains uncivilized to a large extent, we must move on for change.

Around the world in 80 days is now in reach within minutes. Let the healing begin.

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Continuing discrimination against LGBTQ students

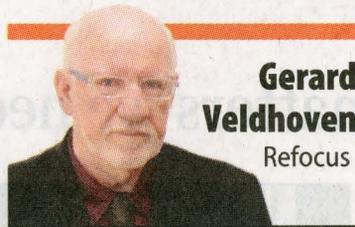
It's 2017, and we continue to learn about horrific treatment against LGBTQ students in Canada and in particular the United States.

The following development indicates how religious support for students is halted by the religious right. In the U.S., political science professor Ruthie Robertson, of Brigham Young University, was fired from her position for supporting gay pride.

The Mormon place of learning banned baptism for the children of gay parents. Robertson posted her support on Facebook and also criticized the church for fighting against LGBTQ rights.

She went on to criticize, "Love the sinner, hate the sin" rhetoric in the past, stating that she does not believe homosexuality is a sin any more than heterosexuality is a sin. She added, "Because that 'sin' is part of who that person is."

Kentucky schools may soon have a licence to discriminate against LGBTQ students. Again, the religious right's war on LGBTQ citizens in the U.S. is well



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known and publicized.

These groups do not support the realism of one's sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. They oppose church-state separation and seek political power to mandate their doctrines.

For years, fundamentalist religious-political organizations have spewed hateful venom toward LGBTQ people. They insist that same-sex marriage violates biblical mandates or indeed any religious text.

Laws should reflect equality and fairness, not the doctrine of particular churches. Education on all levels must be open to LGBTQ information and intolerance must be eradicated.

Schools have been bombarded by the religious right and try to

block policies that ensure schools will be welcoming and safe for LGBTQ youth.

Back in this country, Alberta's minister of education has ordered two private, Edmonton Christian schools to allow students to form gay/straight alliance groups. Both Baptist schools have not responded to the order and referred all inquiries to legal counsel.

The education minister, David Eggen, stated, "The order demands that they follow Alberta law. Students deserve to be supported in their schools and our government will do everything in our power to do that."

There is hope in Canadian attitudes within the education system. A large study last year headed by the University of Alberta found that 141 school districts in rural, urban and Catholic divisions indicate that support towards LGBTQ students is growing.

Researcher Dr. Catherine Taylor states, "This suggests that the time has come to end the official and unofficial "don't say the word

gay rule that still exists in many schools and introduce specific supports to ensure the wellbeing of LGBTQ youth."

A large number of teachers approve LGBTQ-inclusive education. It also found teachers in Catholic schools are only slightly less likely to approve, but much less likely to practise LGBTQ-inclusive positive education.

Two per cent of respondents cited conflict with religious beliefs as holding them back and 18 per cent said teachers should be able to opt out for religious reasons.

Of course, the Christian right educational facilities will not participate and that must change. All students must receive an education without prejudice, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. Negative religious influence has no place in the classrooms of any nation. Unite, learn and be safe.

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The world welcomes gay leaders

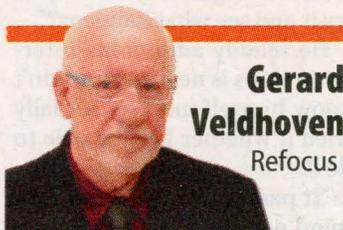
Sometimes we growl and show our discontent with how our world is not inclusive. In the case of politicians, the outcry for showing more support has been loud and constant.

There are those countries where one's sexual orientation or one's true gender identity and expression are severely frowned upon and that is not about to change or even be contemplated. In Canada, 50 percent of Justin Trudeau's cabinet in Ottawa are women and that in itself is a huge indication of inclusivity not previously experienced.

Openly gay Members of Parliament are Scott Brison, Randy Boissonnault, Rob Oliphant, Seamus O'Regan, Sheri Benson and Randall Garrison. The British Parliament boasts 32 LGBTQ MPs, more than anywhere in the world. In the Netherlands and Sweden 10 gay parliamentarians occupy seats in government respectively.

Changes are obviously necessary in order to give the LGBTQ community a voice around the globe.

Recently, the G20 countries met in Italy with leaders accompanied by their respective "first ladies." For many around the world the eyes were upon the "first gentleman," the husband of Luxembourg Prime Minister Xavier Bettel. To be sure, not all present were com-



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fortable with this wonderful display of diversity and acceptance by that country's citizens. Gauthier Destenay looked very comfortable in the presence of the wives of other world leaders. The former Belgian Prime Minister, Elio Di Rupo and Iceland's former Prime Minister, Johanna Siguroardottir, were the first openly gay leaders in the world.

By the time this column is printed, Ireland will have sworn in its new prime minister. Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, 38, is the youngest and the first openly gay person to head the Irish government. These heads of governments are making history and establish that one's sexual orientation or gender identity have little or no bearing on how voters think and decide on the best person to lead their countries.

This is great news and our LGBTQ communities throughout the world will see these developments as positive advancements.

Will we experience an influx of LGBTQ leaders and are we ready to vote in a person who identifies as LGBTQ? It appears

so, but we must remember that in these cases we are dealing with the West, not in the rest of the world. The voters have spoken in many countries and we may take from the results that with members of parliament and recent heads of government identifying as LGBTQ, our vision of equality is at work. The future looks decidedly brighter and more inclusive.

However, as I pointed to before in my column, the rest of the world lags sadly behind as inclusive nations and indeed punishes those who make attempts at fighting for equality. In Russia, where the vast majority of citizens reject gays as deviants, the future looks dim at best. This is also the case in most other countries in the Eastern hemisphere where beatings, killings and prison terms are common for LGBTQ citizens and that includes attacks being committed by the general population. Yet, in our attempts to unify, we do see positive advances with pride and hope for the future. Our LGBTQ leaders in governments give us that hope. It's up to the voters to make that happen.

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Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesdays in The News.

COMMENTARY

Scheer not an LGBTQ ally

A cute Howdy Doody grin and dimples, a devoted family man and an evangelical right wing ideology “do not necessarily a good politician make”.

I am referring to Canada's newly minted Conservative leader, Andrew Scheer. In true Stephen Harper fashion, he has consistently voted against equal rights for the LGBTQ community and abortion rights. Indications are strong that he will carry on the same principles as his predecessor. Harper and the vast majority in the Conservative party have historically not been on side with the LGBTQ community. Most of the leadership contenders are anti-LGBTQ.

Likewise with our Republican neighbours in the United States, negative religious influence penetrates the minds of many resulting in a sweep of violence and discrimination and halts, or indeed slows positive action. Mr. Scheer has indicated that he will not revisit the same-sex marriage issue and is no doubt related to the fact Mr. Harper was not successful in reversing the marriage laws to be only between a man and a woman. However, this is not carved in stone and if Mr. Scheer feels strongly enough about the issue he just may make another attempt. His statement may just be his way to soften his image.

A person who is anti-LGBTQ



**Gerard
Veldhoven**
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and anti-abortion will not be a friend or ally. Canadian voters, of course, will have the opportunity to choose between a person who supports and respects our individual identities, one who simply does not care and therefore indifferent to our needs, or a leader who has the capacity to take away our rights that may turn the nation into a downward spiral, as far as equal rights for all is concerned.

In interviews Andrew Scheer has made it quite clear that he is a social conservative and therefore could be influenced strongly by his religious convictions, namely, his evangelical ideology. Time will reveal the kind of direction we will experience. The fact we live in Canada does not guarantee our equality as human beings. Presently, we feel fortunate and quite confident, but we also realize how simple it is to choose a leader and his/her supporters and change direction. We are well aware that with the election of Donald Trump, the arrogant, anti-rights US president, has the capability to undo

whatever Barack Obama had accomplished. Obama even urged other nations to embrace LGBTQ equality.

Le Pen, the right-wing presidential candidate in France was defeated and in The Netherlands, right-winger Geert Wilders was also defeated by a significant margin. It was a great win for both countries. Wilders and Le Pen were ready to turn equality into a death quell. It could have over turned into right-wing conservative ideological governments. We thrive for equality, worldwide. We yearn to be treated equally. We wish to communicate in earnest for a more inclusive society, and live in a world of peace, respect and love. So far, much of this has eluded us. The Trumps, the Putins, Leaders of Eastern nations and many others, are not in favour and LGBTQ people are denied proper access to their needs and stand to be imprisoned, beaten and even killed. They do not recognize inclusivity. After all, equal rights are human rights. In Canada we are more fortunate than in most other countries. Let's keep it that way. Comments and Information: lgbtconnections@v@gmail.com.

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■ COMMENTARY

Equal rights, treatment and opportunity for 2017

A new year straight ahead and the usual fanfare consists of partying, special meals served and ringing in another 12 months with lots of resolutions and good intentions.

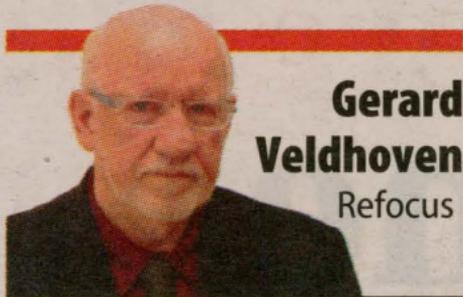
Most will agree that shortly after the celebrations our ideas as to how we plan to improve conditions and perhaps change our bad habits will be easily forgotten, or simply shoved aside. That is not to say that these good intentions were not a serious consideration. The fact remains the extreme difficulties in bringing about change is time consuming and indeed seemingly not possible.

However, let's consider the title of this column and delve into some of the consequences that each of them have on our society.

LGBTQ equal rights are difficult to obtain, regardless of where we live. Canada is among countries in the western hemisphere where equal rights are enshrined in the law. In 76 countries gay rights are non-existent and severe punishment is common, such as imprisonment or even the death penalty. Lack of equal rights is an international shame that has no chance of change, at least not in this century and beyond.

Equal treatment is an ongoing problem in our schools, religious organizations, in the workplace, in our home and, again, a world problem. LGBTQ folks are consistently treated with indifference to their needs to be a part of society, yes, even in Canada. To be treated equally, as all others, is the ideal way of life. As Pride flags are destroyed, beatings and bullying keep occurring on a daily basis around our own country. Being criticized, condemned by certain religious factions, all of these acts interfere with a peaceful and deserving way of life.

Are we, the LGBTQ citizens of this world, not entitled to be equally treated? The answer is a



Gerard Veldhoven
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resounding "yes"! This community, among many others, must be vocal in attempting to educate, raising awareness and in doing so providing some relief and a certain amount of respect that we all so richly deserve.

At times there seems to be a movement in the right direction, only to meet a wall of rejection to equal treatment. One may believe we all have the same opportunities in this life and we should not have to bow to pressure from the business world or a pope to tell us that we are not worthy as LGBTQ citizens. Equal opportunity should be available to all of us, bar none.

In a democratic nation we should be afforded equal opportunity in the entire job market. One's sexual orientation or gender identity must not be a deterrent to be qualified for a certain position. This is an issue with various jobs such as the banning of gay priests, women in the Roman Catholic Church being denied the priesthood, a transgender person's ability to qualify to be a restaurant server, access to public washrooms.

Equality for all, regardless of sexual orientation, gender, colour, beliefs and the list is endless, is ours to enjoy as a human right. Let's join in 2017 in making a global effort for equality in all its forms. I wish everyone a wonderful and INCLUSIVE New Year.

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PICTOU

Wednesday

Pride week in solidarity with Orlando massacre

By Heather Brimicombe

heatherbrimicombe@pictouadvocate.com

Pride Week in Pictou County will be bittersweet this year. Although celebrations will go on, mourning the loss of those killed in Orlando will also be a big part of the week.

"There will be a book of condolences for Orlando," said Gerard Veldhoven, a local LGBTQ activist who is involved with Pictou County Pride Week.

The week will be kicked off July 4 with a flag raising by Glasgow Square which will also feature a number of community speakers such as New Glasgow Mayor Barrie MacMillan and Central Nova MP Sean Fraser.

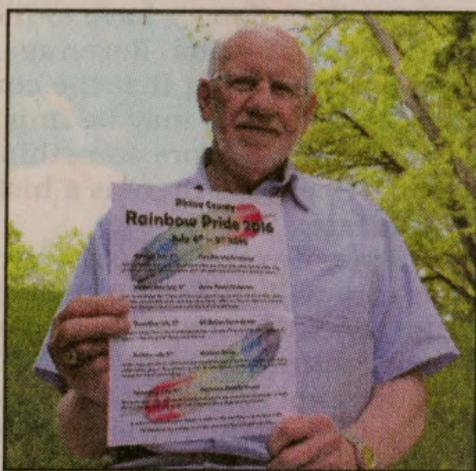
▶ On July 6, an open panel discussion will run 2-6 p.m. at the New Glasgow Library.

"We'll give answers to questions about sexuality and gender," said Veldhoven. Any questions people might have for the rainbow community will be answered as best possible.

▶ This year, the celebration has added an all-bodies swim event to the schedule, which will take place 6-7 p.m. at Trenton Park on July 7, free to attend.

▶ A kitchen party will kick off the weekend on July 8 at The Commune starting at 7 p.m. with games and a lip-syncing contest. Cover is \$5.

▶ A potluck style rainbow



Gerard Veldhoven displays a poster advertising events for Pride Week. (Brimicombe photo)

family picnic will end the week on July 9 at Trenton Park at 3 p.m.

"With what's happened in Orlando, it'll be mentioned at the flag raising," said Veldhoven. He has been involved and advocating for LGBTQ rights for 42 years and he has no plans of stopping.

"There are individuals in every society that will make an effort to be hateful," he said. "And where it will end I have no idea."

The activist shared that although it can be hard to let things like these go, he notes that Canada is much luckier than the United States in terms of LGBTQ support.

"I think pride celebrations that are going on this summer will reflect what happened in Orlando," said Veldhoven. "It's okay to celebrate, but also to bring attention to the things that have happened."

SHOOTING

Gay rights activist calls Orlando attack hate crime

THE NEWS

Local gay rights activist Gerard Veldhoven is calling Sunday's attack in Orlando a hate crime against the LGBTQ community.

Fifty people were killed and another 53 injured when a gunman opened up fire in a gay bar.

"As a member of the LGBTQ community and as an activist for equality it is with extreme sadness to think that after years of fighting, raising awareness the hate continues and even as we celebrate the rights that have been granted over time, we continue to witness these attacks world-wide."

He said that in Canada we have made great strides, but it is not an indication that similar hate crimes do not and will not occur here.

"The sheer magnitude of this terrible hate crime will surely give us more cause to sit back and contemplate our moves to increase our efforts to educate and raise awareness."

He believes there is a need to determine the causes of hateful crimes against members of the



AP PHOTO

Family members of victims of the Orlando nightclub shooting walk out of a family reunification centre set up at the Beardall Senior Center in Orlando, Fla.

LGBTQ community.

"How many times have we heard about the Pope and others rejecting the rights of this community and how often do we read about ISIS and their opposition to gays. Only last fall they threw two gay men off a high building because of their sexual orientation. We also know that many church goers do not discriminate, however, most religious teachings preach against LGBTQ people."

Over his life he has witnessed many acts of discrimination he said.

"These senseless killings are the result of hateful teachings and the exposure to terrorism around the globe," he said. "It must stop and courts must also hand out more severe sentences to try and curb these crimes of hate. I am totally in shock and my heart goes out to the victims of this attack on this LGBTQ community and their families."

January 4, 2017

World leaders as LGBTQ supporters

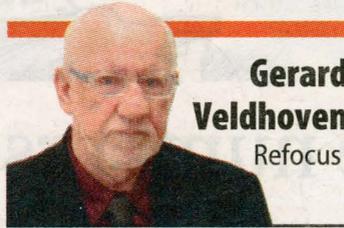
Support from the leader of any nation is of extreme importance when it comes to equal rights. Scanning the world, we realize LGBTQ support is limited. In order to have positive results the leaders of governments must be involved.

Canada has shown willingness for change and has succeeded in listening to most Canadians who seemingly were in the mood for that change. NDP member of parliament Svend Robinson fought extremely hard for equality and cared deeply for the need for recognition of gay citizens and protecting them under the laws of this nation. He was the pioneer as an openly gay man in the Canadian Parliament.

As far as our prime ministers were concerned, Paul Martin introduced a bill to include same-sex couples in the marriage laws and he succeeded. A Roman Catholic Archbishop thought he should be excommunicated.

Then Stephen Harper formed his Conservative government and immediately thought to reverse the decision. His attempt proved to be futile. The vast majority of his MPs voted with Harper to eliminate the change and in doing so would have a serious effect on equal rights in Canada.

Going back to 1969, we find Pierre Elliott Trudeau intro-



Gerard Veldhoven
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ducing a bill that would decriminalize and so legalize "homosexuality." The bill passed and Trudeau became the first prime minister in the country to be a true friend to the gay community. He famously declared that "The state has no business in the bedrooms of the nation."

Our present Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has taken his father's mantle and under his government is showing exceptional leadership in working towards a more inclusive society. He walked in both the Vancouver and Toronto Pride parades and hoisted the Pride flag on Parliament Hill. Recently, he appointed an LGBTQ Special Adviser to the Prime Minister. Edmonton Centre MP Randy Boissonnault will head this position.

In Britain, former Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron was also successful in bringing in same-sex legislation, likewise with François Hollande in France who, despite much opposition, managed to have the marriage law altered to include gay couples.

Equal rights come in many forms and there is positive action, but the majority of nations remain opposed. Johanna Sigurdardottir, Iceland's former openly gay prime minister and Belgium's former gay Prime Minister Elio di Rupo both had a tremendous influence in their respective countries in a positive way to increase awareness.

There are 77 countries where being gay is against the law and in many cases results are horrific and may be punishable by imprisonment, or death, which is the case in seven countries. In the U.S., Barack Obama became a solid backer of LGBTQ rights and made attempts to influence other countries to raise awareness and implement protection.

The outlook for this country is uncertain when it comes to equality, not only for the LGBTQ community, but others as well. President-elect Donald Trump has not even remarked on staying the course with LGBTQ rights, but has indicated he may work to reverse marriage laws and exclude gay couples. Yes, world leaders have the obligation to unite, not divide. Thank you, Canada.

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Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesdays in The News.

Pride flag designer Gilbert Baker dies



**Gerard
Veldhoven**
Refocus

The designer of the Pride Flag, American artist and LGBTQ rights activist has died at the age of 65. Gilbert Baker designed the symbol of the LGBTQ community in 1978.

The flag, with its six vibrant colours created an enduring international emblem of LGBTQ pride. Mr. Baker was found dead in his home in New York City on March 31.

Friends encouraged him to design a banner for marches and other occasions. Before a gay pride parade in 1978 in San Francisco, that city's Supervisor and gay rights activist, Harvey Milk, who was assassinated that year, asked Mr. Baker to design an emblem to represent the movement.

With the help of volunteers, trashcans were filled with dye in the attic of the Gay Community Centre and they pieced together the first flags, unveiling them in the parade on June 25, 1978.

One witness, Cleve Jones, also an activist, told the New York Times after learning of

Mr. Baker's death, "It needed no explanation. People knew immediately it was OUR flag."

That's exactly how the LGBTQ folks feel today and the flag remains the symbol of our fight for equality as human beings. We are, each and every one of us, individuals who seek to be equal in a world where inequality reigns supreme.

As the years go by and we become more aware of how diverse humankind is, we also are bound to a society that is



Baker

not always kind and accepting of minorities. This is reality. However, when we see the rainbow flag hoisted on a flagpole, regardless of location, we see the symbol that unites the LGBTQ community and tells the world that we are proud and here to stay.

It provides courage and determination to go forward. One may ask if this is but a dream. Yes, it is a dream that is on the way to become more real and indeed more challenging as the years pass.

We will not be deterred by those who criticize us, condemn us or initiate violence. The task is daunting, but if we unite and view the symbol that is universal and is loved by millions of LGBTQ people everywhere, then we know the fight for peaceful coexistence with

others is ours to grasp. Humankind deserves equality for all.

There are those who will attempt to minimize our symbol. A Pride flag was destroyed at the University of British Columbia last year. In Amherst, a Pride flag was removed from the pole during the night and slashed from one end to the other. More incidents have occurred and this will continue.

Many do not see LGBTQ citizens as equals and therefore will do their utmost to reject and punish. Pope Francis said recently that the Roman Catholic Church must apologize to the LGBTQ community for past wrongs, but will not embrace equality. That makes the statement redundant.

Perhaps world leaders should pay more attention to where and how many Pride flags grace our world. Perhaps then they will realize the power of the search for equality.

The rainbow flag is the symbol of love, peace and inclusion and the undeniable icon of a free and a peaceful existence for members of the LGBTQ community.

Thank you Gilbert Baker.

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Chechnya's shame, others guilty of crimes against gay community

Gay men in the Republic of Chechnya are being rounded up by authorities, sponsored by the government of Ramzan Kadirof. One hundred men were taken into custody, beaten, tortured and to date four were killed.

Kadirof ordered the crackdown to "eliminate" the republic's gay community by the start of Ramadan on May 26. The United Kingdom's foreign minister, Sir Alan Duncan said, "Human rights groups report that these anti-gay campaigns are orchestrated by the head of the Chechnya republic, namely Kadirof."

It is reported more than 100 men have been detained in prisons in recent weeks, also that discrimination is rampant and supported by authorities and even "honour killings" by gay men's relatives is not uncommon. Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, who has his own anti-gay agenda, does not interfere in this outrageous practice against gay men even as Chechnya is an administrative unit of the Russian federation.

Crimes against humanity must be filed against Kadirof and other authorities. This is genocide and must not go unpunished. Last year in Bangladesh, two gay activists were brutally slaughtered and a top government official said that the deceased had been working



Gerard Veldhoven
Refocus

to promote values "that do not fit in our society."

Many governments remain absolutely adamant that LGBTQ folks have no rights and therefore are expendable. In Gambia, the government targets journalists, human rights activists, student leaders, religious leaders and political opposition members; the former President Yahya Jammeh, charged that "homosexuality is anti-God, anti-human and anti-civilization." These ideas are still in practice. However, newly elected president Adama Barrow has indicated he is more accepting of the LGBTQ community in his country.

In Indonesia, despite the fact gay rights are legal the province of Aceh is ruled by the ultra-conservative Sharia law. On May 17, which is also the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia, the court sentenced two gay men, 20 and 23, to a public caning. Dede Oetomo, founder of Gaya Nusantara, an organization advocating LGBTQ rights in Indonesia, said, "I see this as

criminalization, a step back for Indonesia and human rights."

As we sit in our comfortable chairs, enjoying the equality we have as LGBTQ citizens in Canada, we would do well to remember that many countries are in shambles when it concerns equal rights. It is a travesty that these attacks on LGBTQ people continue in 2017 and this is only a sampling of atrocities committed daily.

Should we be concerned in this part of the world? Do we have a responsibility to be actively involved in attempting to be of assistance – or merely look through rose-coloured glasses and ignore the pleas? Even as LGBTQ Canadians have equal rights in place, equal treatment remains a concern.

There is no guarantee that we are safe from inhuman treatment. Therefore readers, we should open our eyes and work toward equality in all its forms, in all corners of the globe and with all people. Equal rights are human rights. If we appreciate what we have, we must also wish that for others, here and universally. Let's get to work.

Comments and information: lgbtconnections@gmail.com. Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesdays in The News.

An inclusive society, a dream worth fighting for

A recent editorial in the Halifax Chronicle Herald stated that we are in the midst of a trend to accept diversity of our citizens. The article goes on to say that we should wear rainbow-coloured glasses and see the new perspective. Excellent idea, but that's not the new realism.

Yes, we celebrate our accomplishments and, yes, we have come a long way, but that does not indicate that our dreams are fulfilled. Many of us who have been fighting for equality for many years cannot say that "inclusion is now the new norm," as the title of this editorial suggests. Oh, how we wish that to be so.

I commend those who take the initiative to take part in and promote inclusion. These are the folks who will be remembered and saluted for expressing the



**Gerard
Veldhoven**
Refocus

wish for all to accept diversity. Our present government has been a prime example on the world stage, along with a handful of others, in promoting better relations with LGBTQ community. The proof is in the participation by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau who has shown inclusivity towards the community by taking part in Pride celebrations across Canada. The latest one is his walk in the Halifax Pride Parade on July 22.

There are many stories that re-

late to the fact that more acceptance is indeed the case, but let us not forget that these are pockets of change and for change to really manifest itself much more remains to be done. It will certainly not be accomplished in this lifetime and globally perhaps may take centuries.

Canada, as I have mentioned on numerous occasions, is a leader, yet there are many wrongs in this country as well. The fact is our present government is more alert on these matters than ever before, but problems remain in the LGBTQ community, our Indigenous society, the Muslim attacks and so much more. We cannot claim inclusivity until these matters are rectified, and that, dear readers, is where we must insist on emphasizing our efforts.

Looking through rainbow

glasses gives us wonderful feelings, but not reality. We cannot lose track of our goals. Vigilance is of the utmost importance and our responsibility is to raise awareness, fight for equality in all its forms, walk the walk, talk the talk and never lose sight of the fact our work is not yet done. Future generations will thank us for our efforts that they may live according to what is right for each one in our society.

Over seven billion people inhabit this world, how many billions reject equality, how many are willing to harm or murder LGBTQ citizens within their nations and in our own country? Bullying, beatings and other attacks are not uncommon. So, we continue to raise awareness and teach those who are willing to listen that human rights must be re-

spected and celebrated. How can we otherwise realize equality?

Realism is often a terrible and confusing word, making our efforts rather arduous to make this a better world.

We rather look through rainbow-coloured glasses as a way to a safer feeling. Is that being realistic?

No, we do appreciate the gains, but by no means have we finished. I urge those who turn a deaf ear to equal rights to turn up the volume, work for change and then we will slowly, but surely, realize that we all deserve equal rights.

Comments and information: lgbtconnections@ gmail.com.

Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesdays in The News.

Aug 23, 2017

A pope's hypocrisy

Pope Francis has issued numerous statements regarding acceptance and disapproval of the LGBTQ citizens in our world. This may be interpreted as being hypocritical.

As Archbishop in his native country of Argentina, he fought the government tooth and nail against same-sex marriage and indicated his strong views on gay the "lifestyle."

He suggested "civil unions, but no gay marriage."

Then, as Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, he called the gay marriage proposal a political movement "the destructive attempt toward God's plan", and "the envy of the Devil."

As well, he said that allowing a same-sex couple to adopt children is a form of discrimination against children. He said, "At stake are the lives of so many children who will be discriminated against in advance, depriving them of the human maturation that God wanted to be given with a father and a mother."

Recently, on the other hand, he apparently sent a congratulatory note to a gay couple in Brazil as their adopted children were baptized in the Roman Catholic Church.

In 2014, he advocated that children should be raised by a mother and a father, commenting at a Vatican colloquium named, "The complementarity of Man and Woman, Pope Francis in-



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Refocus

sists children should be raised by heterosexual parents. He further stated that, "The family is the foundation of co-existence and remedy against social fragmentation. Children have a right to grow up in a family with a father and a mother capable of creating a suitable environment for the child's development and emotional maturity."

Of course, this utterly ridiculous conclusion has been outrightly rejected by psychiatrists world-wide who have stated that children raised by two moms, two dads, or a single parent are equally successful.

The point is that this pope seems to go back and forth with a confused mind and speaking in riddles, clearly rejecting the idea of gay parenting.

On July 10, 2015, Pope Francis blessed a same-sex couple, one of whom wrote the book, Why do you have two moms? The author and her partner received the pope's blessing, but as a Vatican spokesman said, "The blessing was meant for the individual only and was not in line with the church's doctrine on gender

theory, which has not changed in the slightest." The letter was not "meant to endorse behaviours and teachings unfit to the Gospel."

In October, 2015, Francis fires Monsignor Krystof Charasma, a mid-level Vatican official, for revealing that he is gay.

Then, on Dec. 8, 2016, Pope Francis signed a declaration that bans gay men from the priesthood and this includes those who "support gay culture." This is a reiteration of the original document signed in 2005 by Pope Benedict XVI.

The Roman Catholic Church under Pope Francis deserves no credit in trying to reconcile itself with the LGBTQ community. Instead it's creating a mess that signifies insincerity and a definite right wing Christian ideology that keeps on ticking in a homophobic, biphobic, transphobic and discriminatory manner. Francis will comment and sound as if he is accepting, but does not embrace equality for all, perhaps in trying to keep the pews from emptying too much. Hypocrisy is intact in the church with a pope who will not budge on equal rights as human beings.

Comments and information: lgbtconnections@gmail.com

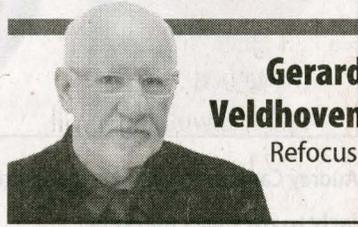
Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesday in The News.

Alberta's LGBTQ community under a possible Jason Kenney government

During Ralph Klein's tenure as Alberta's PC premier, the gay community in that province felt the wrath of his homophobic, discriminatory tongue. The long-time leader was an outspoken opponent of equal rights and was one of the most hateful enemies of the LGBTQ community, along with New Brunswick former MP Elsie Wayne, who made a habit of rising in the Commons to spew hateful rhetoric against this community. Both are now gone, but not forgotten.

Of course, a follower of this attitude was former mayor of Toronto, the late Rob Ford, who was extremely vocal in his opposition to equal rights. Alberta's Progressive Conservatives have ruled that province for many years, until the NDP and Rachel Notley defeated them in a landslide.

On July 22, 2017, the PCs and the Wildrose joined forces with the intention of beating the NDP in the next election and return to right-wing, ultra-conservative rule under either Jason Kenney or Brian Jean. Known as the United



Gerard Veldhoven
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Conservative Party, the move was to establish a party primarily made up of right-wing conservatism that, if elected, will surely set back the clock of progress towards equal treatment for the LGBTQ community in that province.

Jason Kenney, a former MP in Stephen Harper's government, will be seeking the new party's leadership, in competition with Brian Jean. Kenney, as Citizenship and Immigration Minister, blocked any reference to gay rights in Canada in a brochure, voted against same-sex marriage and consistently voted against transgender rights. As a promoter of "Unite the Right," he supports the firing of a gay teacher at a private religious college in Edmon-

ton recently.

As well, he refuses to recognize gay/straight alliance groups in Alberta schools, stating that parents must know what their child is joining, thereby outing them, regardless if that child is ready to divulge his/her sexual orientation to family. This may cause rejection from family and even could cause suicide. Kenney also supports Christian places of learning that promote an anti-LGBTQ agenda.

Jean, in a recent statement, said he supports gay/straight alliances, even as many Wildrose party members do not. Older members are certainly against any equal rights because that former party had a solid anti-gay agenda. Perhaps the younger politicians will serve to change that attitude.

Depending on the support for Kenney, the province will experience drastic changes again and return to the Klein era if he becomes the new leader. Can we expect Jason Kenney could possibly change his attitude toward the

LGBTQ community and embrace equality for all? Not likely! Either way, the results may be similar as both former party members will continue to stamp their right-wing ideology on the province of Alberta.

Who leads the future conservative government, or the NDP, is dependent on the Albertan voters. Will they embrace equal rights and treatment for their LGBTQ brothers and sisters by choosing a party that historically has supported equal rights, namely the NDP, or backtrack to an earlier era when Albertans were under the rule of a homophobic, biphobic and transphobic premier Ralph Klein?

Time will tell and meanwhile both Kenney and Jean perhaps to a lesser extent will proclaim their right-wing agenda towards the LGBTQ community.

Comments and information: lgbtconnections@gmail.com. Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesdays in The News.

■ COMMENTARY

Only government flags to fly in Stellarton

Last month the Town of Stellarton in Nova Scotia voted to only fly government flags. This decision is loud, clear and decidedly discriminatory. The mayor, Danny MacGillivray, does not agree with the ruling.

Over the years, many jurisdictions decided against raising the Pride flag, such as Cumberland County, Pictou County and many others. In 2017, humankind remains unkind, thoughtless and not in favour of recognizing the diverse nature of our populations.

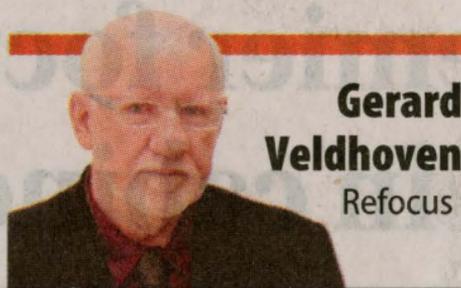
We hear about the divisions, the wars, the endless fighting between world leaders and in the process many are left behind: I would ask Stellarton town council how they justify this deplorable decision. Countless flags exist that signify the importance of a certain segment of our society and to deny them the opportunity to proudly display their symbol of pride is not only divisive, but indeed cruel.

The Mi'kmaq flag, the LGBTQ pride flag, or any flag that symbolizes the importance of being part of a society that has long been in denial of equality must change. Many cities and towns across this nation hoist flags that signify the various historical and existing diverse nature of our Canadian society. Not to allow a flag to be raised other than government flags is totally out of line and purely divisive.

Stellarton's neighbour, New Glasgow, allows flags to fly and a great example is the yearly Pride flag-raising ceremony. The support is out there and I suggest Stellarton council revisit this abhorrent ruling.

The NSCC, Stellarton campus, hoists the pride flag each year and strongly indicates support exists. To be fair, Cumberland County council also ruled that only government flags are allowed to fly. This does strongly indicate that discrimination is alive and well.

The Pride flag is raised in many jurisdictions around Canada, as it should be. The argument that only three flagpoles are allowed



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simply does not carry weight. One solution is to add a fourth pole to accommodate other flags.

Perhaps these councils will hear the wake-up call and rethink their decisions. No matter the cause, no matter the reason, flags must be allowed to fly on city and town properties. In Truro, similar to some other places across the country, homophobic Mayor Bill Mills caused quite a stir by refusing to fly the Pride flag. Last year the flag was raised for the first time. Would he have refused the flag representing one of the Indigenous nations? Imagine the outcry, and rightfully so.

Above all, our governments, federal, provincial or civic must recognize the equality we all deserve regardless of the colour of our skin, background, sexual orientation, gender equality, gender identity and expression and religious beliefs. Respect for each other must be of prime concern and our governments must take initiative to make the changes, remove stigmas and promote the fact that all are entitled to equal treatment.

In the case of Stellarton it is obvious change is not forthcoming, but appears stagnant. This is just another indication that discrimination is alive and well, at least in some of our areas. Excuses are not valid and must be replaced by speaking out in unison, a cry for change and goals that are positive and inclusive. As a matter of interest, Stellarton does not have its own flag!

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Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesdays in The News.

Sept 13 2017

Same-sex couples on the increase in Canada

Who would have thought 50 years ago that same-sex couples would be making a huge impact on Canadian society? The 2016 census has revealed that 72,880 couples have set up housekeeping.

Of course, we must remember that this number may be higher as not everyone will admit that he/she is living in a same-sex relationship, but will admit to sharing living facilities. Taking that into consideration, the number would rise dramatically. However, the true number may never be known.

The important fact to remember is that the number of same-sex families is on the rise, not only in Canada but around the globe.

This is fantastic news and a strong indication of acceptance in today's society, as well as the change in how families are perceived. The traditional family nucleus has changed during the past years and now we also find one parent and childless families more than ever before. Instead of



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a mom and dad we see dad and dad, or mom and mom. The census concluded that one-third of the couples are married.

The first same-sex marriage took place in Toronto in 2003 and as time went by other provinces followed suit. Marriages became more public with ceremonies and huge celebrations.

How did the general public react? Well, that depends on education, religious affiliation and other factors. Those with a university education are generally more in favour, whereas blue collar are more traditional and tend to reject the marriage idea and are LGBTQ intolerant.

Religious beliefs generally will prevent people from accepting that being a member of the

LGBTQ community especially in regard to gay marriage is just a fact. Depending on the denomination, reaction to the marriage act changes was unfavourable in most instances. The Roman Catholic Church, Baptist-based churches and the religious right were extremely vocal about the concept and adoption of same-sex marriage. The Anglican Church and others may recognize LGBTQ existence and some equality, but not seriously.

The United Church of Canada went to the Supreme Court of Canada when Paul Martin's government introduced a change to the marriage law and argued in favour of the change. Gay and lesbian couples may be married within this church should they chose to do so. Of course, we must remember that most get married in a civil ceremony, bypassing the churches.

Times are indeed changing and that gives us the opportunity to celebrate the positives such as the right to marry the person of our choice. Families are those who

love, cherish, commit and respect, regardless of sexual orientation. We live in a world where this is non-existent in many cases, but we do, each of us, have a choice whether to love, or be indifferent. Either way, we must live according to our ideals in a manner that does not initiate hate and discontent affecting others.

So, when in a committed relationship, in marriage or otherwise, we take responsibility to care for others whom we dearly love. The number of same-sex couples matters not as much as the quality of those relationships.

Is it necessary to legally marry or live in a common-law relationship? Just be grateful we live in a nation where this is possible. Same-sex families are on the rise, friends.

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Equality at risk for American LGBTQ community and others

The cruel, bigoted, racist and discriminatory mind of American President Donald Trump is having negative effects on U.S. citizens such as that country has never experienced. He sides with the KKK, neo-Nazis, white supremacists or any organized group that violates equal rights and refuses to criticize those who supported him in his bid for president.

This is an ugly time for the United States and its population. We hear about the rising tensions between factions, good and evil. The ones most affected by this are those in the population who are black, Jewish, LGBTQ, Muslim, or any other minority. The wrath of Trump's words and ideas that he spews forth are unbelievably capable of producing a hateful society which are reminiscent of some Eastern nations and may be historically associated with the times of Stalin and Hitler.

Perhaps he thrives on this. The point is that equal rights for all are at stake.

The horrifying attack in Charlottesville where Heather Heyer, a fighter for equality, was killed by a madman who represented the white nationalists, is a stark reminder where this may lead. Members of the LGBTQ community and countless others are at the mercy of these evil-minded



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people who gather in hate, attack and otherwise reject those they view as outsiders in this world.

Trump is a supporter in these actions and shows no signs of changing. LGBTQ citizens also have been targeted by hate, as was the case in the Orlando murders a few years ago.

Safety is not guaranteed and indeed has been lacking. As a matter of fact, attacks and hateful rhetoric have been on the rise and unless we are governed by believers in equal rights for all, change will not be forthcoming anytime soon. If voters put the likes of hate group advocates in power the unifying element we are searching for will be lost.

Trump has proven with his countless statements that he is a fan of the likes of former KKK member David Duke and other anti-social people.

Where do we go from here? Well, let's not forget that with all that is going on in the United States and with all our neighbours are experiencing, we are

not immune from such activities. We may count ourselves fortunate that we do not have such a leader, but we do experience attacks on minorities and we do know that LGBTQ folks remain a target of the religious right and conservative ideology. Our equal rights laws are being challenged daily by those who, on a continuing basis, continue homophobic, biphobic and transphobic rhetoric. Discrimination is alive and well around the world.

In the United States we may expect this downward trend to continue as long as the leadership allows it to do so. From a fractured government with a president who does not know right from wrong, or who indeed couldn't care less, we may expect a North America where discrimination runs wild, the right wing hate mongers rule.

Donald Trump's reign must end in order to achieve some success and then we may experience a fair and embracing system in a world where equality matters. The reality is that his influence spills over to this side of the border.

Comments and information: lgbtconnections@gmail.com Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesdays in The News.

LGBTQ activist Eldon Hay remembered

I met Eldon Hay many years ago when my activism for LGBTQ rights was well underway. I had heard of Eldon many times and became impressed with the hard work he was involved with attempting to change the plight of Canada's LGBTQ community.

Eldon Hay left our world on Sept. 17, 2017, in Sackville, N.B., as a result of pancreatic cancer.

His overwhelming passion for equal rights for all was so sincere and his love for humankind beyond reproach. He was a constant in his endeavour to make positive change. He was also a sought-after speaker and adviser and this became Eldon's way of contributing to the betterment of Canada's LGBTQ citizens.

He possessed the ability to understand and not unduly criticize, instead choosing to put a positive spin on things. Those of us who knew Eldon were very much aware of the gift he had of touching the lives of those who needed his wise council, regardless of sexual orientation, religious background, gender identity, or any other unique quality we may possess. Everyone



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felt his positive attitude. Strong of character and determined, he marched on the road to equality for all. I know I may speak on behalf of the LGBTQ community who want to acknowledge their appreciation of his work in our community and his activism in human rights.

Eldon Hay was a retired United Church minister and professor of Religion at Mount Allison University. He was married with seven children, including a lesbian daughter and a gay son, resulting in Eldon's determination to tackle the issues concerning equality. Son Ron describes his father as a man of passion, compassion, principle and love. "My concern about telling him was that he'd go, 'Yes, I have a gay son!'" he said. "So all those fears of telling him came true, and thank

god they did."

Eldon's passion for equal treatment goes far beyond the needs of the LGBTQ community, such as the rights for any individual or group of people. This is precisely the reason he has won the respect and love of so many. In 1997, he received the New Brunswick Human Rights Award and in 2003, Eldon Hay received the Order of Canada in recognition of his work regarding LGBTQ rights.

The following is how Eldon was described in receiving the order: "With intelligence, integrity and compassion, this human rights activist has championed a more tolerant, inclusive society."

Eldon founded the Moncton and Sackville/Amherst chapters of PFLAG Canada and was the first national president.

On May 31 past, Amherst raised the Pride flag and as I drove to the site I noticed Eldon walking slowly down Church Street, hands clasped behind his back. He appeared tired and gladly accepted the drive.

A week later, Amherst had the first ever Pride Parade in that town. Eldon, in true form, would not be deterred and joined me and Sherri Briand as part of the parade. We were asked to bring up the rear and felt somewhat out of tune. A police officer, Scott

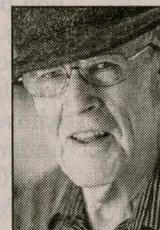
White, smiled and said, "You may be the last, but we saved the best for last."

Eldon's last appearance in a parade was in Moncton in August. I visited with Eldon a few weeks ago in his home and both of us were

aware this would be the last time we would meet. I salute Eldon Hay, husband, father, grandfather, author, educator, true to his religion, challenger, human rights activist and a champion for all. You were and will remain "A man for all seasons."

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Hay

LGBTQ acceptance in Canadian society Oct 4, 2017

Canadians who make it known that they are fully aware and indeed accept that LGBTQ citizens are a reality and are not going anywhere, remains an issue to be dealt with, especially in certain sections of our Canadian society.

We hear of studies that indicate that about 80 per cent of Canadians accept equality may not be realistic. Surveys on LGBTQ acceptance in Canadian society are not always reliable and the truth somewhat exaggerated.

Pride celebrations tend to draw thousands to the streets to watch a Pride Parade and during that process we observe folks applauding, laughing, chanting and other means of expressing the joy of a parade. Many will acknowledge they attend because of curiosity and others are there to express their support for equality and yet some will express their disapproval. Generally, the support is genuine and by all accounts a success story.

We tend to criticize rather than publicly support equal rights and for some reason express ideas of



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the ruination of society because, as many still believe, this community is after special rights. The truth is we all deserve equal rights, opportunity and respect. Accepting something we know very little about breeds contempt, as a lack of understanding and unwillingness to broaden one's thoughts is of foreign nature for some.

A recent survey, conducted by polling firm CROP, indicates that while LGBTQ citizens feel they are generally accepted in our society, about 75 per cent report they have been bullied at some point in their lives. The study was commissioned by Fondation Jasmin Roy, a Quebec-based anti-bullying, anti-discrimination and anti-violence group. The study concluded

that society is not as open about this issue as generally believed.

I concur with that statement. Less than 10 per cent of LGBTQ respondents feel Canadian society is totally open to sexual and gender diversity, while 45 per cent said they view Canadian society as not very, or not at all open, and 81 per cent feel society in this country has shown a willingness to try to integrate people from the LGBTQ community. That number is decidedly excessive and I feel that 60 per cent is closer to reality.

We remain oppressed by many religious factions, even in Canada. We like to view ourselves as open to change and accepting of others who are "different" in sexual orientation, gender identity, colour of skin, other religious beliefs, social background, or cultural origins.

Those LGBTQ people who are from non-accepting nations such as India, Russian and African countries, have major concerns about being embraced by their parents, friends, or religious beliefs. As mentioned in previous

columns, Uganda was set to pass the LGBT Anti-Homosexuality bill a few years ago and it was intercepted by that country's Supreme Court. However, politicians are indicating a retry.

We also must take into account that positive changes are sometimes met by resistance and depend greatly on political views expressed by the various parties. We cannot take for granted that we are on the road to total acceptance of LGBTQ citizens, yes, even in Canada. According to the survey, 54 per cent of respondents from the LGBTQ community said their life will be or has been more difficult than that of a person not part of a sex or gender minority. Another 81 per cent feel distress, loneliness, isolation or discouragement related to their sexual orientation or gender identity. So our work continues.

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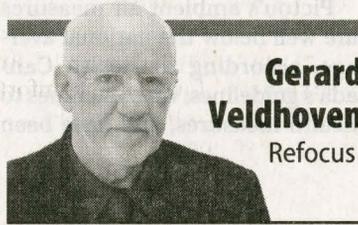
Oct 11, 2017

Long-term care worries for LGBTQ seniors

On Oct. 2, I took part in a conference regarding aging and its consequences, positive and negative in long-term care facilities, or home care.

Largely overlooked for years and practically invisible, LGBTQ seniors share the same age-related concerns as all others who need special care. They will face all of the difficulties that being dependent on others entails; but they will also struggle with a society that often lacks the knowledge and/or appreciation of their special needs. Long-term care should be dedicated to a culturally responsive and dedicated level of care. The current generation of older LGBTQ people has experienced a lifetime of discrimination and they face very specific challenges as they age.

1. They are less likely to seek health care when they need it. 2. They often do not disclose their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression to their care providers for fear of dis-



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crimination. 3. They are at higher risk for negative health outcomes later in life, including depression, suicide and substance abuse. 4. They also report more feelings of isolation from their communities. There is another factor we are concerned about, and that has to do with the age of LGBTQ seniors who are presently seeking accommodations in a long-term care facility, or at home.

Even as more older LGBTQ folks are coming out, these are the people in the age bracket who tend to remain in the proverbial closet and therefore are nervous. Some develop severe mental anguish because it may be discovered they are a member of the LGBTQ commun-

ity. Many feel they must return to the closet and live a secret life after living life as it's meant to be lived. We have to ask what kind of training is now required for people who work with seniors, who can no longer assume they are all heterosexual.

Verbal and physical abuse is a fear that is of great concern by some resulting in a life of isolation. There have been many cases of abuse in long-term care and are well documented, even as many are not made public.

Marie Robertson, the community developer at Ottawa's Senior Pride Network, runs diversity training workshops with home care workers and staff at senior facilities on how to be inclusive and considerate of LGBTQ patients. Her approach is simple: "Give them a rundown of LGBTQ history and present them with realistic scenarios". For instance, "Well why do you think Bob is so closeted?" "He grew up in a time when it was a criminal offense to be gay."

Another story about an elderly gay couple who felt they had to hold hands in the bathroom so as not to attract attention from staff or other residents. A trans woman who was brutally humiliated by staff who couldn't contain their laughter when they realized upon changing her that she had a penis. The stories are endless.

Continuing care is a wonderful support and must be administered without abuse, rejection and discrimination. Privacy must be respected and adhered to by staff and other residents. LGBTQ seniors deserve the respect shown all others. I urge competency training for all care workers and administration regarding LGBTQ residents. Abuse by staff or residents, cannot and should not be tolerated.

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Oct. 18 2017

Germany, 15th Western European country to embrace equal marriage

Some view same-sex marriage as any other legal union – as of no great importance or consequence. Aside from a legal standpoint, many couples just love the idea of being joined together under civil law, or have a wedding in a religious setting. Either way, we all have a choice to enter in some sort of legal union.

But world-wide, not quite so. Marriage between a man and a woman has been in existence for centuries and “certified” them to produce off-spring, giving them the right to bring children into this world, and so the population increases.

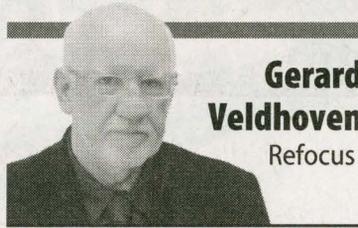
Then, slowly, but surely, another section of our world population demanded they would love the idea of marriage, namely, same-sex couples.

Not an easy task as opposition mounted rapidly, especially in conservative circles such as religious organizations and far-right political thinkers, among others.

Government all over the world quickly reacted negatively to the idea.

A few, especially in Europe, seemed more than ready to accommodate gay couples and changed the marriage laws. The first was The Netherlands in 2001, a small, but influential nation known for its tolerant views, then Norway, Sweden and others soon followed.

Canada became the fifth coun-



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try to alter its marriage laws in 2005 after each province got into the fray and so gay couples were given the choice to marry or simply set up housekeeping without the marriage licence.

Germany is the latest country to join the 27 nations where same-sex marriage has been legalized. Surprisingly, this country, which has the largest population in Western Europe, was a late bloomer in allowing gay couples to marry.

Bodo Mende and Karl Kreile, tied the knot on Oct. 1 after 38 years together.

Kreile, 59, said, “We’ve campaigned actively for decades for the state to recognize us as equals and finally we are able to celebrate a day we once thought may never come in our lifetimes.” Mende, 60, echoed that feeling and said, “It was a great honour.”

I can attest to that feeling as I was married to my late partner in 2004 in Nova Scotia and we were the first to be married in a civil and very public ceremony before television cameras in this province.

The choice was ours, after having lived together for 30 years. Just to realize that the choice is available is a step towards equality.

There are 195 countries in our world with only 27 nations recognizing equal marriage. That leaves the vast majority out of the loop and, with most, same-sex marriage will never see the light of day.

The United States, a self-proclaimed modern society, changed the marriage laws in 2015, 10 years after Canada.

Far-right religious organizations as well as mainstream denominations have indicated strong opposition to the change in many countries, but governments ignored the rhetoric and decided to embrace equal marriage.

As human beings we all deserve the same opportunities, including to bond with whomever we choose to love. Interference of that amounts to discrimination and control of our future.

No one deserves to be chastised for loving another.

Our individual happiness and our ability to live in a peaceful, loving relationship are paramount. To marry or not, it is a personal choice.

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Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesdays in The News.

Oct. 25, 2017

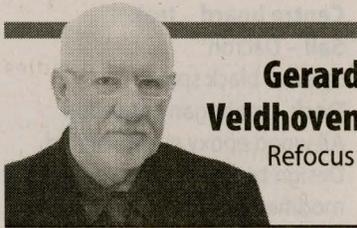
Trump and Francis: equality denied

It is ironic that two world leaders have so much in common! Pope Francis has been very vocal once again, giving transgender persons a two-thumbs down. U.S. President Donald Trump has also expressed his wrath against the same people.

The leader of the Roman Catholic Church has indicated that being transgender is not in God's plan and also observes that it is merely a deliberate biological change, ignoring the fact that it is emotional, psychological and for some a spiritual journey. The Pope feels it is manipulation and a free choice, not realizing, or simply ignoring the facts, that it can be so mentally exhausting and lonely.

This is not the first time he has spoken out against transgender persons and the entire LGBTQ community. He is not a man for all seasons, but displays an arrogant and dismissive attitude towards this part of society. Love some, but not all.

"Who am I to judge?" These are



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the words of a Pope who seemed to be a refreshing change in Rome. Of course he judges, and of course he will not embrace the LGBTQ community and allow equality.

Donald Trump has similar ideas and is set to dismiss transgender persons from the Armed Forces, a move that has been criticized severely. He also looks to follow Christian ideas that will allow LGBTQ people to be discriminated against. He is following a religious line in that LGBTQ folks in general are frowned upon by most churches and he will act accordingly.

The question is how are we able to respect those who do not respect us, but push us to the

side in an attempt to overthrow the little equal treatment we have gained? It is a serious issue and one that is approved by certain world leaders and in the name of Christian beliefs and other religious organizations.

I have mentioned these concerns on many occasions, but they must be repeated and not swept under the carpet. The likes of Donald Trump, president of arguably the most powerful nation in the world, Pope Francis, the leader of more than one billion Roman Catholics, Vladimir Putin of Russia and some others, such as the King of Saudi Arabia, have one thing in common. They are leaders of our society who, in all earnest, are able to destroy equality and do not make any attempts at solving the problem.

Where are prospective, caring heads of state and how will they be voted into governments if people continue to elect those who stand in the way of positive progress?

Trump with his hatred, his bigoted, bullying manner has the power to take away equal rights, as difficult as it may be. His Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, a longtime critic of the LGBTQ community and most others in the cabinet, follow the beliefs of their president. Pope Francis, his cardinals and bishops, are stuck in previous centuries when only those who produced many children were in good graces.

Do others matter? No indication of that. A kind smile and a few words do not indicate a sincere effort to embrace. On the contrary, every effort is made to divide, and equality is denied. Whom we choose to lead our governments, including the Vatican, as it has its own rulers as a nation, is a daunting task.

Comments and information: lgbtconnections@gmail.com Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesdays in The News.

COMMENTARY

Amnesty International and the LGBTQ community

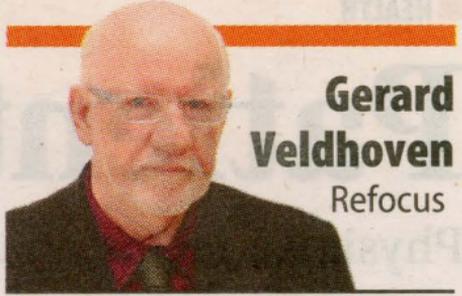
Groups, services and countless activists, allies and other supporters are fighting for justice around the world in efforts to bring attention to the daily abuses against LGBTQ citizens. Then, there are those who are determined to squash any attempts that would support equal rights, equal treatment, equal opportunity and equal marriage.

Putin, Museveni, Assad and many other leaders staunchly defend the old guard of conservatism and turn a blind eye to any abuse against members of the LGBTQ community. President Trump has yet to make it known who else he may attack, outside the Muslim community.

Right wing religious domination remains a roadblock to acceptance and indeed promotes exclusion. An outstanding organization that is at work, Amnesty International, is consistent in bringing attention to the ill treatment of millions of citizens around the globe, including LGBTQ people.

New Glasgow, N.S., resident and this province's fieldworker for Amnesty International, Gail Clark, brings our attention to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights; everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property birth or other status."

Clark directs us to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the following statement: "The protection of people on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity does not require the creation of new rights or special rights for LGBTQ people. Rather, it requires enforcement of the universally applicable guarantee of non-discrimination in the enjoyment of all rights." Further to this: "All people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, are entitled to enjoy the protections provided for by international human rights law, including, but not limited to, the rights to life, security of person and privacy; the right to



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be free from torture, arbitrary arrest and detention; the right to be free from discrimination and equality before the law; the right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly; the right to marry and found a family, and the right to the highest attainable standard of health.

"Amnesty International believes that all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity should be able to enjoy the full range of human rights, without exception. Every day around the globe sexual orientation or gender identity leads to abuse in the form of discriminatory violence, imprisonment, torture, or even execution. Persecution on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity can take a variety of forms and these contravene the basic tenets of international human rights laws."

It further states: "By highlighting instances of abuse against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals, Amnesty activists work to protest the basic dignity of LGBTQ people."

Gail Clark points to the ongoing abuses that occur daily in this world and Amnesty International works diligently to bring these abuses to light and consequently the abusers are taken to task.

It is a never-ending struggle that promises to continue, but with the forces at work we see a glimmer of hope and we look for the day when human rights will someday be the rights for all human kind.

Kudos to Amnesty International and to committed activists such as Gail Clark.

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COMMENTARY

Equal treatment for senior LGBTQ citizens in continuing care

Regardless of location, size of facility, age of residents, gender identity, the colour of skin, religious belief, or sexual orientation, all who require long-term care must be afforded equal care. This is not only a reasonable expectation, but a human right.

We are in 2017 and as we continue to fight for equal treatment we must include continuing care in our quest. We also live in a time when more members of the LGBTQ community leave the "closet" and take their rightful place in society. This is indeed challenging and at times unsafe.

LGBTQ members of our society of advanced age, 50 and up, remain cautious and are very aware of circumstances from earlier years when acceptance was not even a thought, especially in religious families. One had to be extremely careful not to upset family members and peers who were ready and willing to expel one from their lives making life intolerable.

By the same token, residing in a closet with no choice but to remain there also had its drawbacks as mentally it was unbearable as well. What to do?

Well, sexual orientation and transgender issues were not so much on people's minds, especially in the straight community. Folks were leading double



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lives, so to speak, hiding their true identity and so eventually many committed suicide due to internal homophobia, a denial of true self identity. People were not vocal about their sexual orientation or the fact that many were forced to live in the wrong bodies.

As time passed this generation of older LGBTQ people became rather nervous and indeed apprehensive what would happen if they had to enter a long-term care facility because of failing health. These types of facilities became more common as older folks were in need of care. This presented a dilemma for many in the LGBTQ community.

Many elderly LGBTQs who were open about their true identity and proud of who they are, telling stories about their past, have much to worry about. Their tendencies to be more open presented possible negativities that could affect their mental or physical well-being. For many it could mean a return to a hidden existence.

Long-term care facilities may not be as welcoming to LGBTQ people. Some staff members, as well as other residents may be homophobic, biphobic and transphobic and this has been proven the case across the country. This is a terrible existence that is unhealthy, physically and psychologically. In the end it proves that much work remains to be done. Many senior LGBTQ residents may be at the mercy of discrimination.

A few years ago I was invited to participate in the LGBTQ Elders Project, exploring cultural competency training in partnership with Northwood Manor in Halifax, conducting training sessions with care workers and personal care attendants.

It is imperative we make inroads, raise awareness in long-term care facilities and provide support for LGBTQ seniors who are destined to spend their remaining years in continuing care. The move from one's home is traumatic enough, so let's work on the comfort level for senior LGBTQ citizens. It is a human right.

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problem. All we hear and read is how one group is against the other.

The only road is for all parties to communicate with sincere efforts to unite. Obviously, Halifax Pride and the police have much interest in positive discussions. Strife begins in one jurisdiction and spreads to another.

The only valid conclusion is a mutual understanding that we are all entitled to equal rights, which are human rights. Having been involved in advocacy for the LGBTQ community for over 40 years, I find this situation disturbing and non-productive. Prejudice comes in all forms. We are aware of the profiling against blacks and other minorities and this must stop. Dialogue must be initiated without delay.

As Jordan points out, Pride celebrations are not the proper forum to show and discuss politics and grievances. In any divisive situation dialogue must be the next step and we have much time between celebrations to accomplish just that. So let the talks begin. I urge Halifax Pride to initiate immediate action.

Gerard Veldhoven, LGBTQ Activist for Equality, New Glasgow

CANADA PENSION MANAGEMENT

I was appalled to learn that less than 20 per cent of the funds available to the Canada Pension Fund are invested in Canada, (Appetite for Risk, Globe and Mail, Jan. 14). The recently appointed president of the board Mark Machim has argued for the board to have free rein over the funds, and against any political influence.

These funds are mine and those of countless other Canadians who have contributed over the past 30 years. Mr. Machim is not a Canadian citizen and has spent less than a year of his career in Canada. His salary is obscene. At over six million a year it outstrips the average Canadian compensation by over a hundred to one.

There should be an immediate review of the board's activities and a directive to ensure that at least 60 per cent of the board's available equity be invested in

DIALOGUE TO EVENTUAL INCLUSION

The ongoing dispute between Toronto's LGBTQ Black Lives Matter and the Toronto Police Department must be settled. The police are accused of homophobia, transphobia and other phobias and we recognize this to be the case, as is well-documented.

Halifax Pride announced that the Halifax Regional Police Department won't participate in the city's Pride parade in July. Chief Jean-Michel Blais will take part without his uniform. I agree with Jordan Parker's article in Friday's (Feb. 10), as he explains the case that exclusion does not fix this

LGBTQ community in U.S. has cause to be concerned

The United States' top lawyer, Attorney General Jeff Sessions, a powerful appointee by President Donald Trump, has made it quite clear that he is against any sexual orientation other than heterosexuality. His hateful rhetoric over the years has been well publicized and the scary part is that he has the support of the majority of Republicans.

The Trump era promises to be huge setback for the LGBTQ community south of our border as government support is waning with a president who seems more interested in cozying up to the likes of the king of Saudi Arabia and Russia's Vladimir Putin, both guilty of human rights violations and ignoring equal rights at home.

They're a far cry from Barack Obama who, during his presidency, became a vocal supporter for equal LGBTQ rights, even on the international stage.

A few weeks ago Sessions had a closed door, secret meeting with an organization staunchly against any LGBTQ rights in the U.S. Where does this end and how may the LGBTQ members of the United States defend themselves against the ongoing blatant discrimination that seems endless?

Politicians are difficult to reach, especially closed-minded, homophobic, biphobic and transphobic individuals. Recent events have shown that changes are entirely possible from one administration to another and any positive progress that has been accomplished can quite easily be overturned.

Donald Trump certainly has ignored the obvious need for positive change and so has positioned himself as a non-supporter.

He has the power to be more vocal and appoint those who are allies to the LGBTQ community. However, he has surrounded himself with like-minded people who see little or no value in establishing equal rights for all Americans.

It is indeed a sad situation and the fight becomes more arduous



**Gerard
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Refocus

and seemingly impossible, actually reversing any progress that has been made.

The United States government is quiet on any human rights issue, domestically and internationally.

Trump neglected to mention human rights abuses during his visit to the Far East, likely afraid to upset his hosts. He seems to be in awe of dictators and those who feel money outweighs human rights.

Four years of a Trump administration will realize not only a drop in equal rights and treatment at home, but will surely close the door to be internationally influential to rogue nations where continuous imprisonments and killings of LGBTQ folks and others are common.

Sadly, at present, America's social conservative government does not even admit that their archaic and discriminatory attitudes and ignorance for equality are hurtful and demeaning, to say the least.

We cannot ignore the idea that this type of inaction will never happen in Canada. Depending on a certain party's ideology, a sharp turn could have negative consequences here as well. Luckily, Canadians tend to vote for more equality, live-and-let-live attitudes, whereas, the U.S. seems to lean more towards evangelical religious beliefs.

Oh, if we could only get together and unite in a common goal, and that is to embrace our differences, love instead of intolerance and treating each other with respect and dignity. Imagine such a world!

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Pope Francis and Bible stand on marriage consistent but divisive

In my column of Oct. 5 I criticized Pope Francis in his stance on same-sex marriage, as I have on many occasions. In turn, I was criticized for calling attention to the fact the Pope and his cardinals fail to recognize that marriage should be the end result for those couples who wish to partake in such a ceremony.

It was pointed out that I do not understand religion and so I should not criticize it for containing unjust demands on loving relationships because of sexual orientation.

The Pope, and he has been very clear on this subject, refuses to bring the church into the 21st century, consequently objecting strongly against same-sex marriage. Last spring Italy brought in a law that permits same-sex unions, but refrained from recognizing marriage.

Pope Francis was “disheartened” by the decision. He does not support the unions. Even as he offers conciliation, he speaks out against gay relationships.

I suggest reading the recent Vatican document on “The Family” regarding sexual orientation and gender identity and expression – one immediately realizes the support does not exist. The United Church of Canada has an inclusive policy that allows same-sex marriage within the church and is a purely religious ceremony, not as was pointed out as not being particularly religious in a recent statement by a United Church member. This person is not supportive of such marriages and quotes the Bible to support his thoughts.

The majority of United Churches are in full swing with gay marriages. Those who do not follow a particular denomination may be legally married by officials such as a Justice of the Peace. Either way, the marriages are legal under the law and as such recognized around the country and 30 other nations.

Provincial governments license clergy and others to



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legally marry couples. In many countries only civil marriages are legal and church weddings are not recognized under the law. The love between two people, regardless of sexual orientation, should be celebrated and if that love is established in a religious or secular society it should be of no consequence.

I suggest all religious organizations open their hearts to all and make equal treatment, equal opportunity and equal marriage the prime target that will pave the road for a more loving and united human race. Yes, Pope Francis and other church leaders should be asked for more. The Bible, the Christian god and other beliefs are asked to be inclusive and embrace marriage between two lovers, gay or straight.

As an atheist, I am indifferent as to the need for church weddings, but for those same-sex couples who wish to marry within their church such a ceremony should be available to them. Division of any sort is wrong and will only lead to further strife and conflict of all sorts.

Pope Francis has been and continues to be outspoken on this issue setting the stage for a further decline in equality. I understand religion and the need for change is necessary in order for all humanity to live in a world where peace, contentment, respect and love reigns supreme. The pope’s stand on marriage is consistent, but divisive, as is the Bible.

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~~Article~~ 15, 2017
 Veldhoven

American politics and the LGBTQ community

American presidents have not been exactly on side with America's LGBTQ citizens.

As a matter of fact, Barack Obama was the first leader in that country to throw his hat into the ring and make equal rights a priority for all Americans. He even went so far as to announce full support for LGBTQ people all over the world. This idea was definitely not part of his predecessors' agenda. No American president had ever been so vocal, showing genuine concern for this section of society. Whenever the opportunity arose he would publicly call for equality and this much to the dismay of the Republican Party whose members have consistently voted against any equality for members of the LGBTQ community.

Enter Donald Trump, the loud mouth, hateful, bullying, transphobic, homophobic, mean-spirited, Islamophobe and someone who disrespects women, among many other



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shortcomings, who became the 45th president. In his role as one of the most powerful men in this world, Trump has the distinction of being one of the most discriminatory world leaders, along with Vladimir Putin of Russia (his great friend) and a few others who like to govern as dictators.

Recently, Donald Trump rejected a call for equal rights for transgender citizens and he does not condone same-sex marriage and other rights - which may well be thrown to the wind. America's LGBTQ citizens, among many other minorities, will soon experience a drastic change and so equal rights for all in the U.S. will

take a drastic step backwards. The United States has always insisted it is the most welcoming, accepting and socially advanced nation in the world. Recent events tell us otherwise and this is a situation that may have international implications as the Trump White House and the Republican Party will be viewed as rulers against human rights.

America has been a dominant force around the globe militarily, attempting to force its social agenda, which mostly consists of right-wing conservatism, on nations around the world. Obama had a vision of unity for all, but was overshadowed by the Republican majority. His unwavering attitude for social change for equality for all is now undermined by a Republican dictatorial figure heading a nation that, as our immediate neighbour, will have a negative influence on Canadian values of equality.

Trump's infatuation with

President Putin will eventually show us that these two men have the ability to take us back to times when people were totally at the mercy of dictators. The strength of these two nations is formidable, making us sit back and come to terms with reality.

Those who are blinded by the success of Donald Trump will come to know that power can be a ruthless tool able to set back the clock for years. We are fortunate in Canada with a prime minister who respects diversity of our citizens.

That is not to say that we are in the clear, but we do have opportunities with the Trudeau government that are sadly and dangerously lacking with a Trump government.

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Courts need to decipher motive of crime

Our world is a place that hopefully gives us food, some sort of accommodation, in some places the opportunity for an education, falling in love with the person of our choice and maybe, just maybe, to live a life of peace and respect.

There are those who will attempt to step on those values and, through hate, attempt and succeed in many instances, to shorten our lives, or commit an act of discrimination. A recent incident in New Glasgow is a strong indication of the hostilities that remain in place against certain minorities, in this case the LGBTQ community.

If we choose to ignore or minimize the seriousness of such incidents then we do a disservice to the public at large, as well as the group or individual such an attack was intended for. Strong action is needed and precise investigations must be conducted to get to the bottom of these acts and deal with them accordingly by the laws in place to protect us.

Decisive actions are required to minimize the bullying, the beatings, the killings and the destruction of such symbols as the Pride flag, or indeed a Rainbow Walk. Sexual orientation, true gender identity and expression, the colour of our skin, beliefs and customs must be protected from harm and discrimination.

The question is, how do we change a world where these actions are common, regardless if they happen in Halifax, Toronto, Truro or New Glasgow? The challenge is in recognizing and how we react to these crimes. Will communities and authorities admit to the fact that any community is prone to homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and the other wrongs that are committed towards an individual or groups?

Commonly, in situations such as the aforementioned, the facts that are presented may not be correct. We do not know if the



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New Glasgow incident was a drunken joy ride through the town, as has been reported, or did this 23-year-old deliberately destroy the Rainbow Walk because of what it represents?

I urge police and the courts to delve into this and decipher the intent. Why do these incidents occur and how do we address the situations? Many times a person under the influence of alcohol will make derogatory remarks, or choose to initiate an altercation because they lose their inhibitions and become confrontational and feel confident in their actions. Therefore, a crime because of hate towards a certain person, or group will be the end result.

The law concerning a hate crime is clear and is worded as follows: "A hate crime is committed to intimidate, harm, or terrify not only a person, but an entire group of people to which the victim belongs. The victims are targeted for who they are, not because of anything they have done. A hate crime is one in which hate is the motive and can involve intimidation, harassment, physical force against a person, a group or a property."

Hate crimes are a common occurrence everywhere and must be recognized as such and not swept under the proverbial carpet. This is serious and contentious, but must be met head-on by civic governments, the police and our justice system.

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Anti-LGBTQ Catholic bishop retires

Roman Catholic Bishop and anti-LGBTQ proponent Fred Henry has resigned as Bishop of Calgary. Henry made headlines over the years regarding his intolerant views on LGBTQ rights and equality. His adamant opposition to LGBTQ rights has been well documented and he may count himself as one of the most vocal, intolerant critics in this country.

Henry has proven during his 19-year "reign" that, when carefully orchestrated, inflammatory statements regarding the church's ideology will carry some weight within congregations. Fortunately, many of his co-Catholics do not necessarily agree with these hurtful outbursts and outdated views. Conservatism has a negative impact on inclusivity and acceptance on not only the LGBTQ community, but most minorities as well.

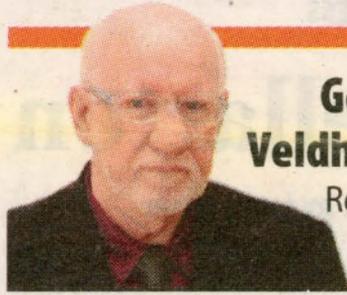
How do we combat this negativity? The following are examples of the bishop's outrageous statements and thoughts. In 2004, he severely criticized then prime minister Paul Martin, for supporting same-sex marriage and also his stance on abortion rights.

He told Martin to be true Roman Catholic or leave the church. To his credit, the prime minister stood his ground. Marriage equality became a reality, thanks to Paul Martin.

The Catholic Church document "Considerations Regarding Proposals to give Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons," released in 2003, forbade any Catholic politician from voting for even civil unions, let alone marriage. To do otherwise would be "gravely immoral."

Henry is also highly opposed to gay-straight alliance groups, which are in most schools across this country. According to the bishop "the groups are highly politicized ideological clubs which seek to cure society of homophobic and heterosexism and which accepts the idea that all forms of consensual sexual expression is legitimate."

Henry's seemingly fanatical stance serves to further promote confusion within young minds and has the potential for increased suicidal tendencies and mental anguish. The use of condoms for the prevention of unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS and other infections is viewed as a grave sin. In other words, it suggests



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that eventual hardships must be the punishment for sexual activity. Our young people are sexually active and have been throughout history. We owe it to society to protect them from unnecessary harm.

Bishop Henry is not alone in his quest for punishing those whose sexual orientation or true gender identity is how they identify. Changing one's gender is also viewed as a modern day problem by the church, but has been a hidden feeling for centuries for many individuals. Fred Henry has addressed this issue in a sombre and indeed discriminatory manner.

Why must people be so judgmental and not feel in a position to embrace and project love in this world? Do we not deserve better and why do we not make an attempt to see people for who they are?

The continuing bashing of LGBTQ folks by religious organizations and individuals will not be a way to peace, acceptance and respect.

Why must people be so judgmental and not feel in a position to embrace and project love in this world? Do we not deserve better and why do we not make an attempt to see people for who they are? The continuing bashing of LGBTQ folks by religious organizations and individuals will not be a way to peace, acceptance and respect.

If the Roman Catholic Church and other denominations refuse to come to terms with those in our world who are unique – which describes each one of us – we will be at war for eternity. Open your hearts and minds and practise your faith without judging and rejection.

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The full spectrum

Proponents view rainbow crosswalk as sign of awareness

BY AMANDA JESS
THE NEWS
NEW GLASGOW

A rainbow is now brightening up the crosswalk by Glasgow Square.

The Town of New Glasgow painted the crossing on Thursday in an effort to show support for the lesbian gay bisexual transgender queer (LGBTQ) community after the suggestion came from the town's UNESCO Race Relations and Anti-Discrimination Committee.

Gerard Veldhoven, who is on the committee and an LGBTQ activist, said he is so happy that the town would do this.

"It just feels like it's another step forward," he said, adding that it's positive and "that's what we need more of."

When he became an activist many years ago, he said this type of action would be unheard of.

Veldhoven said while some may see it as insignificant, he believes it's a strong indication that awareness is being raised and people are paying attention to equality.

He thinks society as a whole has a long way to go before complete acceptance, but that small towns can make a difference with the support of local politicians.

Committee chair Henderson Paris said painting the crosswalk in rainbow colours, which is a symbol of the LGBTQ community, goes hand in hand with the committee's mandate, and was mentioned at one of their



AMANDA JESS/THE NEWS

Members of the town's UNESCO Race Relations and Anti-Discrimination Committee and Pictou County Sexual Health Centre representatives pose beside the newly painted rainbow crosswalk in front of Glasgow Square. Pictured on the left from front to back are Gerard Veldhoven, Emily Morton-Fraser, Jesiah MacDonald and GERALYN MacDonald. On the right is Henderson Paris, Wendy Hughes, Trudy Vince, Thekla Altmann and Vania MacMillan.

meetings in June.

"I think this is just one of those feel-good, right-thing-to-do moments," Paris said, adding that he hopes all of the town's residents will view it that way.

Paris noted that while attending a conference this summer in Winnipeg, he had the chance to attend the city's Pride Parade – describing the thousands that attended, the organizations and businesses that took part and the "incredible feeling." It was also around this time that Halifax's newly painted rainbow crosswalks were publicized, which was all discussed during committee meetings – leading them to decide to investigate whether it was something New

Glasgow could do.

"Everyone spoke about how that all intermingles with what we're doing, the message of wanting our town and county to be welcoming, and inclusive and engaged..." he said.

Town staff looked into the paint they would have to use, as well as how to avoid impeding traffic in any way.

Const. Ken MacDonald of the New Glasgow Regional Police said that because the crosswalk is in a parking lot and does not cross a street, it is not required to meet the national standards for crosswalks.

It also seems fitting as the Pride Week flag raising takes place there as well as other

events, Paris noted.

The inclusive gesture comes at a price tag of under \$300, which comes out of the town's community development budget.

Recently, the Town of Stellarton received some feedback after the police chief suggested Coun. Denise Taylor's request for a rainbow crosswalk would be ill-advised.

Don Husher, speaking as the town's traffic authority, said the colour of crosswalks across the country is white.

"If we introduce other colours, we have inconsistencies and it causes confusion. I would not recommend interfering with the crosswalks," he said at the time.

Other communities across

the country have successfully painted rainbow crosswalks, though the Town of Wolfville was advised to return the crosswalk outlines to white after painting a rainbow crosswalk last year.

A Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal spokesperson said the province and municipalities all follow "national standards for traffic control devices, including crosswalks."

"Each municipality has their own traffic authority that is responsible for ensuring pavement markings meet national standards as per the Transportation Association of Canada's Manual of Traffic Control Devices," said Brian Taylor.

Glenn Cole, who manages the library at the Transportation Association of Canada, said the organization can only offer recommendations and has no regulatory authority.

"We can only make recommendations based on current practices and attempts at consistency."

The fifth edition of the TAC's Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices recommends that transverse markings – which would include crosswalks – are white, "except for gore area markings and diagonal lines in medians, which are yellow."

With files from Adam MacInnis

COVER PHOTO BY AMANDA JESS

Jeff DeYoung is shown painting the new crosswalk on Thursday

LGBTQ special adviser to the PM



**Gerard
Veldhoven**
Refocus

The recent appointment of Member of Parliament Randy Boissonnault as the LGBTQ Community Special Adviser to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is a huge step in not only tackling the present day challenges, but also take into account and address the past discriminatory actions by the Canadian government in such areas as the Armed Forces.

Many gays and lesbians were fired because of their sexual orientation, consequently becoming a part of the population that suddenly became unemployed and ostracized from our society. As one of the world's leading democracies, Canada is now the envy of other nations with this development that will further the ever so slow progress towards a more inclusive society.

LGBTQ citizens will view this as a positive appointment that will no doubt give more encouragement to those who have felt rejected and also feel threatened. Our world is complex in countless ways and divisive in human rights, and in many nations the very word "equality" is a foreign thought and so to be ignored. The wrongs committed against the LGBTQ community are not perceived as such and are meant as punishment for objecting to human rights. Those governments do not in-

tend to embrace equality for their LGBTQ citizens.

Daily reports tell us about crimes against people because of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. This creates angst, as people suffer from bullying, including physical and mental abuses. Killings are common in places such as Saudi Arabia by stoning people to death.

These terrifying acts must stop. If others could take Canada's lead then perhaps positive progress may be realized. The appointment of Randy Boissonnault, the openly gay MP from Edmonton Centre, will create positive feelings across our nation, especially within the LGBTQ community, but hopefully will be of influence everywhere. I have confidence that he will reach out to all LGBTQ citizens from coast to coast and in doing so will open the doors to a more understanding and inclusive society in Canada where the many needs and concerns must be addressed now and in the future.

Boissonnault has a huge task ahead of him that will need the assistance of LGBTQ citizens. There is an urgent need to come together, regardless of location, to make our concerns known, and with this appointment we have a strong voice in Ottawa.

Kudos to Trudeau for recognizing the need for this representation on a national level. There will be those who will be sceptical and believe this will not work, or feel it entirely unnecessary.

I beg to differ as I am certain most LGBTQ citizens welcome Randy Boissonnault as our representative on the Hill. The work will be arduous and will definitely not end discrimination, but it is a positive way to promote dialogue.

Previous federal governments have been mostly silent regarding this issue and with the special adviser to the prime minister we may look toward a brighter future. I urge that we all band together and assist Mr. Boissonnault in making a more positive and inclusive society where LGBTQ people may exist in a more peaceful existence.

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Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesdays in The News.

COMMENTARY

Education imperative on sexual orientation and gender identity



Gerard Veldhoven
Refocus

Influential leaders such as Pope Francis, Vladimir Putin and many others who do not take the time, or have the interest to educate themselves through those in the know, namely LGBTQ people, remain ignorant of the facts and continue the practice of discrimination.

Those who vocalize opposition to the existence of various sexualities and true gender identities and expression are indeed in the dark and ignore the realities of human diversities. In the process ignorance is widespread and the religious right dominates to the point where our young LGBTQ people are tossed aside and the older generations are rebuked and judged.

Christian values, along with other religions, are seen as a model of how lives should be lived, regardless of one's true identity. On Aug. 4, Pope Francis said the following: "Today, in schools, they are teaching children – children – that everyone can choose their gender."

This is only one example of a religious leader who continues to show complete intolerance of sexual diversity and true gender identity. Some refuse to recog-

nize, or accept the fact that one is not taught how to change gender, but discovers from within, thereby freeing that person to be truly themselves and saving them from internal imprisonment.

There are many who continue to truly believe gays and lesbians can be "cured," another fallacy that has occupied the minds of many religious zealots who, with strong convictions, attempt to enter the minds of others, regardless of serious consequences. Thankfully, this is outlawed in most countries.

One does not teach others how to change sexual orientation and gender identity. This decidedly leads to more intolerance and eventual suicide by many youngsters who are then rejected by families, Christian faiths and peers.

Comments by the pope and others who refuse to accept that

we are part of the human existence have dire consequences. Russia's President Putin blames "homosexuality as the cause of the decline in the birthrates," again an ignorance of the facts and a condemnation towards the LGBTQ community. Former prime minister Stephen Harper and most of his MPs voted against equality for equal rights for transgender people and same sex marriage.

These are not isolated incidents in this world where the religious right continues to vocalize opposition to truly identify ourselves and live our lives as they are meant to be lived. How do we address this conflict that is generated by those who are either ignorant of the facts or simply try to push religious teachings down our throats and in so doing support suicides and other horrific tragedies?

Education must be increased, not only in our schools, but in the community at large. Positivity will save many lives.

Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesday in The News.

Where are the safe spaces for LGBTQ citizens?

During the past few years we have heard about safe spaces where members of the LGBTQ community are able to congregate safely without harassment, to feel secure within our schools, our homes, churches in our hospitals and long-term care facilities and in the doctor's office. Efforts have been sincere and with some success.

Our schools are not immune from bullying, not only against LGBTQ students, but African



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Canadians, indigenous students, new Canadians who are in the process of learning English, short, overweight and dress variety. The list is long.

Name calling, verbal abuse of

all sorts and attacks occur regularly. At home, parents and siblings may expel a family member whose sexual orientation or gender identity is against their values. Many have been kicked out of these homes or have left on their own because rejection. Suicide rates are high as coping with being kicked out is tragic, to say the least. Because of fear, internalized homophobia, biphobia and transphobia, many teens are at risk of mental and

physical disabilities.

Our schools continue to be a sort of battleground for discrimination. Studies have shown that LGBTQ students are being bullied and feel unsafe, especially in our Canadian high schools. GSA groups are being established across the country's education systems, which are a great way to raise awareness and promote the existence of diversity in our nation. In the religious community discrimination continues at an alarming rate, as some clergy continue to speak out against sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. As long as that continues, the light at the end of the tunnel is dim indeed.

We have some doctors who remain uncomfortable with LGBTQ patients and consequently cannot, because of religious affiliation, or will not give the proper care patients deserve and are entitled to in equal care. Hospitals, as one may expect, may be a haven for unequal treatment by some doctors, nurses and other staff. How to handle a situation that may arise must be reported to administrations and be made public if no action is forthcoming. Those who are ready to be taken care off in a long-term

care facility also may face discrimination and often abuse follows. CTV's W5 has often aired reports regarding abuse for various reasons. None are acceptable and indeed are against the laws of this country.

Safe spaces are difficult to obtain. Programs have and are being facilitated to increase awareness and focus on how such spaces may be accomplished. There has been some success.

In the United States and Canada safer spaces education is in progress and anyone who understands the proper language used, and has the abilities to raise awareness, are asked to spread the word and call for meetings to talk about the serious issues. Perhaps then we will see positive progress that has so far been alluded to, but also at present not sustainable to very great extent.

Where do we find a safe space? Wherever understanding exists. The youngest person today will not experience an end to discrimination.

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Sexual orientation and religion

Much has been discussed and written regarding sexual orientation versus religion. Over time, some progress has made its way in a handful of denominations in mainstream religions, depending on location.

Countries where religious influence is high, being gay, lesbian or bisexual is condemned in the most strenuous terms. Once in a long while a member of the clergy will step forward admitting that religion has steadfastly endorsed discrimination over the centuries.

Pope Francis recently suggested the Catholic Church should apologize for the negative attitudes toward the LGBTQ community over the years. This is a hollow statement to appease some to come back into the fold and an attempt



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to sound conciliatory from the Pope and the Vatican hierarchy. This means a mere attempt to please and not to accept the world's LGBTQ inhabitants.

One cannot go half way, or less, and expect the public to celebrate. Francis has no intention of changing doctrine, nor do his Vatican princes of that church. The RC is not alone in practising homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. It remains a serious issue for those LGBTQ folks who desperately seek a change within churches.

Recently, a Nova Scotia church voted to expel a member who is in a same-sex long-term relationship. A membership vote, initiated by the clergy, was successful in kicking this devout man from the congregation. It was suggested he leave the relationship and he would be welcomed back into this church.

Why do so many churches, regardless of denomination, express such hate and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, or true gender identity? We are who we are and we are here to stay, just as all others. The colour of our skin and eyes, our background, who we love, religious or non-religious ideals, or any other unique quality we may possess does not alter the fact we belong to the same human race.

During the past few decades we were led to believe that the tide was beginning to turn, which, in fact, depending again on loca-

tion, became a reality, however small. Pope Francis for one, uttered statements that had us believe, at least for the moment, the Roman Catholic Church was on the threshold of positive reform. "Who am I to judge?" was a response by Francis a few years ago and many were of the opinion he was on the right track.

Many Catholics and those not affiliated were actually hopeful that this Pope would change direction. Not so, as time has proven his true feelings were revealed. Mexico's President Enrique Pena Nieto is proposing legislation to legalize same-sex marriage. Bishops and thousands of Roman Catholic believers took to the streets in protest.

"One cannot go half way, or less, and expect the public to celebrate. Francis has no intention of changing doctrine, nor do his Vatican princes of that church."

Pope Francis is throwing his support with the bishops and so discrimination continues. Religious obstruction to unification of all is clearly a dream and the fires of intolerance are stoked by this pope and his cohorts.

"A society which emphasizes uniformity is one which creates intolerance and hate." Pierre Trudeau

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Pride denied because of anti-LGBTQ laws

In Canada, as in many other nations around the world, celebrations are commencing as international LGBTQ citizens come together to stand up for rights and to be proud of their unique statures.

Parades, flag-raising ceremonies and other activities are being organized, but sadly not all are open to celebrating diversity and indeed we discover that some countries have laws in place where the death penalty and imprisonment are in place.

The following are examples of such rogue nations and the laws that blatantly discriminate.

In Yemen, married men who take part in gay sexual activity face the death sentence. Gay men face whipping or a year in prison and women may be sentenced to seven years in prison.

Iran has the death penalty, according to sharia law, or Islamic law, for gay sexual activity and people can be flogged for lesser acts such as, kissing.

In Mauritania, Muslim men engaging in same-sex activity can be stoned to death and women face prison.

Nigeria's federal law states "homosexual behaviour as a felony punishable by imprisonment, but several states within that country have adopted sharia law and imposed a death sentence for men. It is also illegal for gay people, countrywide, to hold a meeting or form a club.

Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan laws are in place that gay acts are punishable by stoning to death.

In Somalia the death penalty exists in some southern regions. Many nations have some sort of discriminatory laws in place.

Russia, Uganda, Kenya, some states in the U.S., and the list goes on, have blatantly acknowledged anti-LGBTQ sentiment and in turn many citizens are openly homophobic, biphobic and transphobic.

Russian President Vladimir Putin stated a few years ago that



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"homosexuality is the cause of birth decline."

Pride parades are forbidden in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other cities in that country.

Gangs search continually for LGBTQ people and threaten them, including beatings and other kinds of attacks that are ignored by authorities. So, as we in the West celebrate Pride, others are not so fortunate and indeed suffer drastic consequences around the globe.

Considering that most of the population exists on the other side of us, it paints a tragic picture. The world population stands at 7.5 billion and we may estimate that, according to my belief, at least 15 per cent belong to the LGBTQ community worldwide. That tells us the equal rights we have in this part of the world are enormous in comparison and we do not have equal treatment in many parts of the West.

The work ahead is ominous and requires our immediate attention. We must show our support across the nations as a necessity and we must join in the fight for LGBTQ across the world by vocalizing our support in any way we are able. Let us not forget our brothers and sisters. Many feel isolated and live in constant fear. Our fight for equality begins at home, but we must extend that fight in an effort to support those who have no way to heal and are at the mercy of archaic laws.

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COMMENTARY

LGBTQ rainbow walk destruction a hate crime

Early Friday morning on Remembrance Day, someone took an all-terrain vehicle and destroyed the Rainbow Walk at Glasgow Square in New Glasgow. This attempt to discredit and indeed intimidate is successful to a certain extent, whether we like it or not, and has a way of working to get others on side.

This is not indicative of the Town of New Glasgow as a centre for attacks such as this. The town is a great place to live and work, making it no different than any other successful and progressive area.

What we do realize, and this must be emphasized, is that there is no place immune from such acts of destruction and hate toward a minority, in this case, the LGBTQ community. An act of hate is a societal condition that seems to rear its ugly head, again and again. This incident awakens us to the fact that the struggle towards acceptance, to rid us of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia is an eternal road that we must travel.

The realism lies before us as acts of discrimination are a fact that is globally recognized. Canada is no exception and even with more equal rights and opportunity, equal treatment is not yet ours to enjoy.

The case in question brings home that a 23-year-old adult, allegedly, is quite capable to take things in hand. He took a wild ride through the Town of New Glasgow, driving his vehicle through a couple of one-way streets and in the final blow decides to take a run at the Rainbow Walk, purposely destroying a symbol of pride that celebrates the LGBTQ citizens everywhere, yes, including in the Town of New Glasgow.

As we study the tire marks one is aware that it was done with a vengeance. One con-



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cludes that this was a vicious way of destruction.

I have witnessed a number of attacks in my more than 40 years of activism. A few years ago, when I was chair of the Cumberland Pride society, the night following Pride Week flag raising ceremony – the Rainbow Flag, a symbol of determination and pride – the flag had been removed from the pole and slashed from one end to the other. The culprit was never arrested and we determined that this also was a hate crime against the LGBTQ community, not only in Amherst, but an attack against any community where it takes place.

At the University of British Columbia last year a Pride Flag was taken down and burned to a crisp. These are acts of discrimination and are indicative of intolerance and hate.

We must band together, community members, the police, municipal leaders, the law, and fight for the rights of all and alleviate the hate and destruction that we find around the world. This call has been the centre of our road towards freedom and respect.

This journey can be heart-breaking, discouraging and indeed seems endless. I see this journey as a must toward equality in all its forms, in Canada and around the world.

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■ COMMENTARY

Cumberland County celebrates Pride

On May 24, Amherst came alive with the annual Pride flag raising ceremony. This event has been part of the town's scene since 2008.

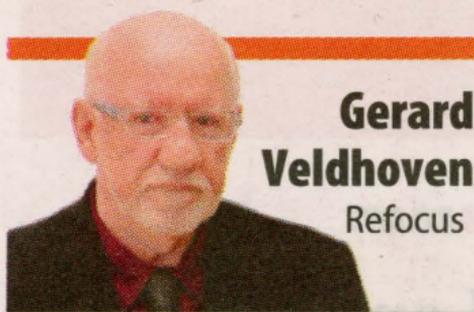
The former Cumberland Pride Society first made the request to fly the flag in front of Amherst Town Hall hoping for a positive response. Officials readily agreed and plans were made to initiate this event. As well, the group organized a full week of Pride events that were well attended and brought out the folks of Cumberland because of curiosity and a serious interest in the LGBTQ community in their jurisdiction.

Four years in a row Amherst celebrated Pride Week with the flag raising ceremony, gay parenting workshop, panel discussions, dinner and dance, plus family picnics. We celebrated a full array of events that demonstrated the co-operation of all citizens with positive and inclusive results.

Unfortunately, Cumberland Pride ceased to exist due to several circumstances. The latest flag raising event was a great success thanks to Dawn Ripley, Emma Brown and dedicated others, as it was attended by an estimated 100 people. Guest speakers, including yours truly, spoke of the successes and the need to continue to raise awareness, as we are not there yet and the work ahead is indeed arduous and time consuming.

Slowly, and I stress, slowly, we make positive gains. June 3 and downtown Amherst became a beehive of activity. The Pride parade was setting up on Victoria Street and I was amazed at the number of folks lining up to participate in this first Pride parade in this area. Officials estimated the crowd at about 800. Most of us love a parade, but this particular one had a special meaning as it was the very first in Cumberland County.

Personally, it was a scene that brought tears to my eyes as I was witnessing an event that would not have been possible just a few years ago. I have been an activist for LGBTQ rights for



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well over 40 years and Amherst was my home from 1969 until 2012 and to be a part of this celebration was rather emotional.

I have been involved for many years and now I am able to witness positive results. The fact I faced many challenges and frustrations with politicians, religious beliefs, as well as some family members and friends, I carried on with a determination to make even a dent in a discriminatory world. When I was notified that Amherst would hold its first Pride parade I was ecstatic. After a short period of decline, a positive and inclusive move by folks not members of the LGBTQ community, but terrific allies, took the high road to success. As I was lining up and looked around, I noticed the smiling faces and the range in ages of participants and it became apparent I was in the midst of a phenomenal occasion.

My passengers were Sherri Briand and the inimitable human rights activist and Order of Canada recipient, Eldon Hay. We spoke of the tremendous opportunity to be involved in this positive celebration.

Years ago politicians would not take part, but here we see Member of Parliament Bill Casey and Amherst Mayor Dr. David Kogon in the midst of this glorious day that even the rain could not dampen.

Thank you Amherst, you have made me proud. Perhaps next year Pictou County will follow suit.

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The proverbial closet, a continuing story

Coming out of the closet is an age-old phenomenon that continues to plague members of society, most commonly in the LGBTQ community. One grows into some sort of maturity that seems to tell that coming of age gives one the opportunity and indeed the human right to live life as it should be lived.

Opposition to revealing our most dark secrets remains at a high and needs to be addressed in positive ways.

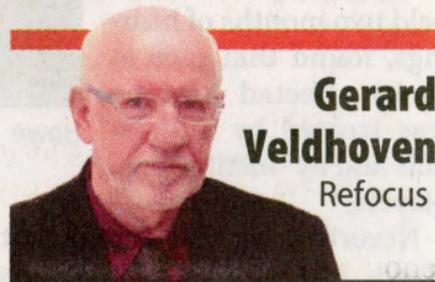
“Michael” feels he should finally come to terms with the fact that he is gay and decides to share this news with his family. Most commonly this secret is first shared with a sibling or a dear friend. He feels more confident that their reaction will pave the way to make this revelation to mom and dad. The process is dramatic and Michael has internal homophobia whereby he feels some guilt about his sexual orientation.

He makes the first step and approaches his older sister. Mary tells him that this is not a great surprise to her because of some things he’s said in conversations such as, “Oh, I met a new friend today and I really like him, we like the same things and he has great looks.” It’s a dead giveaway to someone close to you and a sign of perhaps one’s attraction to the same sex.

We cannot and should not judge according to how one looks, or how one speaks. However, content in one’s conversation may be telling.

Mary asks Michael if he wants her to tell the parents and he readily agrees. It may simplify the shock, if indeed mom and dad are not on side. Luckily for Michael they take the news in stride and assured him of their continuing love and support.

This is not always the case and the consequences may be dire. For many people, even today – though we may think sexual orientation and true gender identity or expression are no longer an



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issue – it remains a serious problem. Parents, siblings, friends, schoolmates and possible places of employment may keep an individual from “coming out of the closet.” Homophobia, biphobia and transphobia continue to be the causes of much discrimination in this world. One must believe in one’s right to be as one is meant to be, whatever the situation. To get to that point is a sometimes horrendous experience because of social rejection.

It is of tremendous importance how one approaches this sensitive subject. Make certain the timing is right, along with the mood of those you wish to reach. Also remember that once you have made the move you will not automatically reach a positive conclusion, but in mind and body one knows the right decision was made and respect yourself for that. Stand firm and be decisive that this is you and you have established your existence, be it sexual orientation or gender identity.

Many people feel that their sexual orientation is fluid and may at some point discover they are bisexual, a reality where physically and/or emotionally, one is attracted to either gender. Whatever the outcome, be true to your feelings and life will certainly be happier and fulfilling. Do not accept to be identified by others; identify yourself. Only you know who you are and be happy!

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Equality and peace for all, a wish for all time

Looking back over the past year I have noticed a definite variation of news items that do not give me a great deal of hope for 2017 and beyond. Always attempting to put a positive spin on world conditions it seems that whenever some wonderful news comes our way, such as the great work organizations are taking part in to feed the world's hungry and provide clothing for them, we are reminded of the reasons that this is so.

Each year, we make wonderful resolutions that seem out of reach. This all sounds so negative and I fully agree.

The world, in its present state, stands to lose thousands of its inhabitants. The reason, or rather, reasons, is the con-



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stant struggle for survival of the peoples in countries such as Iraq, Syria and others in the region where daily slaughter occurs and people dying of starvation seems the norm.

Members of the LGBTQ community in those countries are also at great risk and despite the efforts to be recognized are grounded in fear for their lives. When tyrants like President Assad of Syria and others wage war against their own people from all walks of life we realize

that peace is not at hand and equality for all is not attainable in the foreseeable future – perhaps someday when society learns the benefits of peace and equality.

Of course, let me not dwell only on other parts of the globe as we have lots to learn on this side of the Atlantic and Pacific. South of our border a new president-elect is taking office on Jan. 20. This is of tremendous concern as Donald Trump and company will occupy the White House as a new U.S. government takes control.

We may ask how it is possible that a man with the attitude of Trump managed to be voted into office, considering his arrogance, lack of knowledge and leadership, disdain for minor-

ities such as Muslims, African Americans and the LGBTQ community, among others, lack of respect and threats to conduct war on those who oppose him.

This future president and his discriminatory cronies will surely bring the United States, its people, allies and trading partners to an abrupt sense of isolation from the rest of the world. Now we learn that he plans to increase nuclear capacity and in doing so has Russia's Putin telling the world that he plans a similar action.

The world we will occupy in future years is not and will not be one of peace and stability. Trump is a tyrant who purposely antagonizes, speaks as a president before he enters office

and only respects himself.

As a member of the LGBTQ community I fear for my brothers and sisters in the United States as he has already indicated he plans to reverse the marriage laws and exclude gay couples. Equality and peace are not included in a Trump presidency, which also prolongs efforts to end wars and poverty.

In Canada we cannot be complacent as we also should be concerned about our neighbours and indeed all of humanity.

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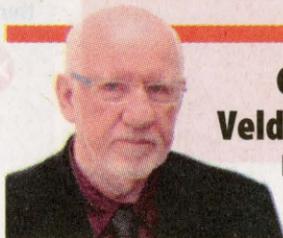
COMMENTARY

Pride in ourselves, the road to contentment

When we think of pride all sorts of ideas come to mind such as having pride in one's country, the people we respect, our language, our colour, religious beliefs, the way we speak, our sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

The list is long and depending on where we live in this world, our feelings of pride, whatever is important to each individual, must be celebrated and respected. So it is with LGBTQ Pride celebrations that are now in full swing, but alas, not everywhere.

As I have mentioned on numerous occasions, Canadians welcome celebrations with many festivals that give us an insight to the various backgrounds that exist. We learn that not all countries or all people are the same



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and even with discrimination being rampant, we remain mostly an accepting society in our country. This is quite an accomplishment taking into consideration that Canada became a confederation only 150 years ago.

Of course, we must take into consideration that our indigenous brothers and sisters were settled here for thousands of years. Folks came from all over the world since Europeans came on shore many years ago. Acceptance was not a word that

was respected and only became somewhat of a positive a few years ago. Gay men and women became more vocal in a search for equality, just as all others.

The arduous and seemingly impossible task of success was complicated by diehard religious beliefs and conservative views. In the case of members of the LGBTQ community, the fights were on and in doing so some progress was realized around 50 years ago, but remained a struggle that minorities are subjected to even in 2017. We celebrate our advances in the West and we do so by remaining steadfast in our efforts to make a difference.

Recent Pride celebrations in Atlantic Canada, with examples of Amherst and New Glasgow, both in Nova Scotia, where at-

tendance was fantastic, especially with rather small populations, were hugely successful. Later this month Halifax will join the yearly festivities. Problems remain, especially with police participation in that city, Toronto and Vancouver being challenged. A step decidedly backwards, but hopefully things will be sorted out by next year.

In the aforementioned towns of Amherst and New Glasgow, police participated in full uniforms and this gave a meaning of solidarity. Our lives are filled with challenges, regardless of causes, and in order to combat the turmoil we are obliged, for our own well-being, to take charge. One cannot and must not give in to the negatives, the feelings of rejection and the general feeling of worthlessness. Stand up, be counted as an

equal to all others, make yourself heard, vocalize your feelings and be proud of who you are.

Our Pride celebrations give us the support and the opportunity to come together as one voice. The road to success is ours to grab and live our lives as they are supposed to be lived.

A stable existence is our positive future and will result in living with inner peace and contentment. Enjoy all who are your closest allies, be it family or friends. It matters not, as we are all part of this world. Above all, we must be true to ourselves.

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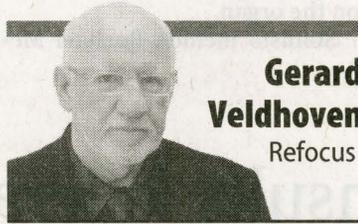
LGBTQ and other minorities remain marginalized

In this vast world where living creatures must share the space and work together to make a successful existence, much has to be learned. The minorities, who equally contribute to the economy, to places of learning, the growing of sustenance, to assisting those who cannot cope alone, and generally share whatever is available to them, are no less part of this society than the majority of citizens.

Though not recognized as such by most of our world population, the so-called minorities are to be reckoned with, and make no mistake, they are extremely capable of attaining great success, just as all others.

Knowing these facts does not indicate equal respect, as we are fully aware of the discriminatory actions experienced daily around the globe.

We generally accuse those who are not educated, or those under family influence in the practice of discrimination as an ongoing horrifying practice. We must remember that many of our govern-



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ment leaders are also very much involved in turning a blind eye to this desperate situation and indeed will promote violence.

Many of us have written and spoken about foreign heads of state who are involved in the promotion of such hatred. Among them are Vladimir Putin, other Eastern European leaders, Museveni of Uganda, and most leaders on the African continent, except for South Africa, and let's not forget President Donald Trump of the United States. Separation of citizens from white communities and the recent attack by Trump on the transgender community are only samples of the horrific times we endure on a constant basis.

Violence is the order of the day,

and again, we only have to watch the news and read our daily newspapers and other media to realize how badly people of minority groups are treated. Let me assure readers that this is not only in nations overseas, but also on this side of the world. Blacks attacked by white extremists, Indigenous people living in inhumane conditions, Muslims who have come to this side to escape the torturous existence in their homelands, LGBTQ people who are discriminated against, even as some progress has been realized – these are some of our brothers and sisters who are severely affected by these actions against humanity. Majority always seems to rule and that must be eradicated.

We may well ask how we may accomplish this arduous task. The answer is that we must continue with positive education, elect our government leaders with care, and carefully listen to their platforms on how they intend to promote equality. All of us, bar none, should have the opportunity to fully develop our cultural differ-

ences and place them alongside those who seem determined to squash our equal rights. Do we sit idly by while world leaders and the millions of others practise horrific judgements and attack our equal rights in sometimes violent ways?

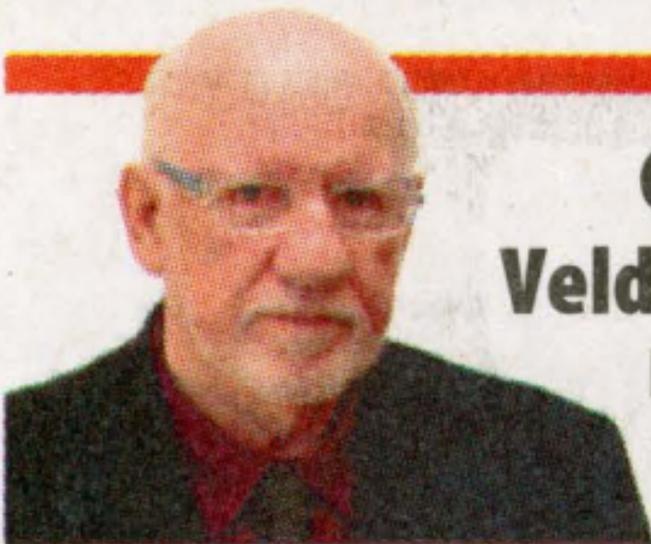
Police and the justice system are not always on side, to be sure. Minorities, visible or not, have historically endured, and remain the target of discrimination. We are not assured that the future will see a lessening of such attacks. We are all the same somehow and all are entitled to equality, as it is a human right. Canada has its own problems, especially with our Indigenous population, but at least we are attempting for reconciliation. Minorities must no longer be viewed as such.

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■ COMMENTARY

Outing LGBTQ students by teachers outlawed in Alberta



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Rachel Notley's Alberta's government has accomplished a task that will further provide protection for LGBTQ students in that province.

A great number of schools in Canada have Gay/Straight Alliance groups, which make it possible for LGBTQ and straight students to come together, discuss issues pertaining to their well-being, and generally support each other. Many school officials feel they have a duty to tell parents when a student joins such a group.

Alberta passed Bill 24 on Nov. 16, which states that a student's privacy must be protected. Reaction was immediate, especially from the Alberta Catholic School Trustees Association. They raised the following concern citing that this new law will diminish the role of school boards and superintendents, and feel it is the responsibility of a school principal to inform parents if a child joins a GSA group within the school. They also feel the new law will affect the relationship between the school and the parents.

In an effort to protect the religious influence on the subject of LGBTQ issues and not respect the very existence of laws to protect sexual orientation and true gender identity, the ACSTA made the following statement: "A blanket refusal to communicate information to parents without some assessment of the child's best interest in a particular circumstance should be avoided."

In other words, this may lead to a child's rejection by parents and may consequently be the cause of losing that family or, as research shows, a cause of suicides, a phenomenon completely ignored by the ACSTA, although studies have revealed this occurs on many occasions.

The importance of the passing of Bill 24 cannot be overstated, and kudos to the Alberta government for having the insight to recognize the respect LGBTQ youngsters are entitled to in this ever-discriminating world society.

The United Conservative Party in Alberta under leader Jason Kenney, a well-know opponent of equality for all, had already warned that his party would vote against Bill 24. Education Minister David Eggen said, "Our government has made it very clear that no child will be outed. We just want students to come out to their family and friends when they are ready, and we recognize that GSAs and QSAs help in this very important process."

The time is here when all organizations, governments, education systems, medical care givers, individuals and world religions join forces and rid us of this curse that we know as discrimination against human society.

Is that a realistic expectation? Most of us wish the very best for our children, grandchildren and future generations. We look for a future where religious-based thinking may find that there is a joy in accepting those who are not exactly on the same page but, nevertheless, positively contribute to society at large, a future that puts an end to this discriminating, hateful rhetoric.

Daily stories contain anti-LGBTQ thinking — and it mainly originates from the religious community — is hurtful, dangerous and infiltrates the minds of many, and in so doing keeps the fires of intolerance burning brightly. Our young people are concerned about identifying themselves as members of the LGBTQ community, but are at the mercy of adults who are determined to order their offspring as to the person they must love, and the road they should follow. Let our children be true to themselves, and welcome their true identity. I praise the Alberta government and may other provinces that will shortly follow.

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In today's world, equal right abuse remains a serious problem

Through the ages we have learned that all citizens around the globe experience horrific consequences as a result of unfair dominance and misguided leadership.

It has been clearly recorded that not all inhabitants suffer unimaginable attacks and murders because of their places in minority situations. Africans were shipped to foreign nations and sold into slavery, enduring hardships difficult to imagine. The stories are endless.

The history of our indigenous people, whose lands were brutally taken by European settlers, who were conquered and diminished to second-class citizens in their own domain, is well-documented. Gays, lesbians and bisexuals were harassed and otherwise endured treatment that was considered normal behaviour over the years. Then, transgender and other gender identities came under fire and that continues to this day.

Those who had nothing but their name were and are ridiculed, in endless poverty, yes, even in a



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nation such as Canada, supposedly one of the richest countries in the world. When, where, and how will it end? Is there light at the end of this proverbial tunnel?

Equal rights have been ignored through time and the problem will not be easily disposed of, if ever. World leaders are determined to rule with iron fists and archaic attitudes. We do not have to search far to learn of present-day ignorance, especially in the Far East, Africa, Asian nations and other tucked away countries, such as Uganda and many others. In Chechnya, recent round-ups of gay men resulted in murders, all under the auspices of leaders like Russia's President Vladimir Putin, and his gang of thugs.

We may also glance to our

south where want-to-be dictator President Donald Trump attempts to make rules to suit his fundamental belief that being discriminatory is just fine and should be promoted.

Even as we work toward equal rights and treatment for all, the end result is far into the future. We continue our quest and we educate, raise awareness that we are all citizens of this world, respect diversity and in so doing we will, at some point, experience some movement in a positive outcome.

Canada is so fortunate to have a leader who works at commitments to make improvements. His support toward the LGBTQ2 community has been exemplary and a first world-wide. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and his special adviser, Randy Boissonnault, has accomplished so much with the apology to the LGBTQ2 community.

Trudeau has marched in Pride parades, raised the Pride flag, the LGBTQ2 symbol, on Parliament Hill and promotes this effort

around the globe.

We do make progress and we constantly attempt to fill the gap that separates society, regardless of background. This is 2018, and perhaps we will experience a downslide in human behaviour, or witness some sort of progress that rids us of inequality. It is a daunting task that will take years, and even centuries to realize.

We will not know, but we cannot give in to the social unrest that has been the order of the day throughout history. The positivity we are looking for is in our grasp, but not in the immediate future. At times, we get frustrated as the news items contain daily messages of more hate toward those who are the minority. It is the responsibility of all of us to promote equality. After all, it is a human right to be equal.

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Though not recognized as such by most of our world population, the so-called minorities are to be reckoned with and, make no mistake, they are extremely capable of attaining great success, just as all others. Knowing these facts does not indicate equal respect, as we are fully aware of the discriminatory actions experienced daily around the globe. We generally accuse those who are not educated, or blame family influence in the practice of discrimination as an ongoing horrifying practice. We must remember that many of our government leaders are also very much involved in turning a blind



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We are all the same somehow and all are entitled to equality, as it is a human right. Canada has its own problems, especially with our Indigenous population, but at least we are attempting for reconciliation. Minorities must no longer be viewed as such.

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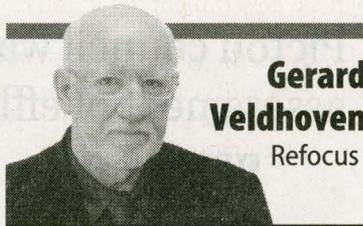
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Trudeau apologizes to LGBTQ community

Tuesday, Nov. 28, and in our nation's capital, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stood up in the House of Commons and apologized to the LGBTQ community over past wrongs, and the "gay purge" that was committed against gays in the Armed Forces, the RCMP and civil service.

These horrific actions took place from the 1950s until early 1990s. People were literally kicked out because of their sexual orientation. This apology has been in the works for some time and is hailed as a huge step toward reconciliation. Over \$100 million has been earmarked for purposes that include compensation and programs to educate the general public, and raise awareness that discrimination must end.

Many in the LGBTQ community are elated by this development and see this as the beginning of a more promising future. Others are making it clear that it took the government too long in recognizing this action. We must remember that previous governments were just not interested



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and thought the "gay purge" was a normal way to get rid of "undesirables" in our country.

Former prime minister Pierre Trudeau was recently criticized for not being inclusive enough in his approach to the LGBTQ community. Earlier, as justice minister in the Pearson government, he felt homosexuality should be decriminalized and that "The state has no business in the bedrooms of the nation." Later that year, in 1969, homosexuality was indeed decriminalized.

Canada was one of the first nations in the world to make it law. It did little to protect members of the LGBTQ community at that time, as indicated by the firing of gay Canadians serving in the Armed Forces, the RCMP

and the civil service. It took many more years to be included in the Canadian Charter and other legal areas to gain some equal rights.

How do we conclude that this apology will fare into the future? We will surely discover that with the best of intentions, some loopholes always surface. That is to be expected, as not all will be satisfied with this apology. It is imperative that we keep focussing on the positive and address the shortcomings over time. Perfection is not guaranteed, and this will certainly be discussed for years to come. As human beings, we are never satisfied and we love to criticize, but we'll work on it.

Interviews with those who were incarcerated and otherwise punished, are heart-breaking, and indicate the angst and blatant discrimination that occurred in those years. Of course, the discrimination continues and that must also be addressed.

A friend of mine is a former Armed Forces member, and she has detailed the horrors of those years and remains a vic-

tim. Hopefully the apology will work for her. She attended the ceremony in Ottawa. I had to decline an invite by the special adviser to the prime minister for LGBTQ issues, Randy Boissonnault, as were other activists for the LGBTQ community. I would love to have been in attendance. Boissonnault was instrumental in, and guided this apology.

Kudos to Justin Trudeau, the first prime minister in our history to throw his support to the LGBTQ community in this country, for being sincere in his efforts. Trudeau delivered a very sincere, lengthy and meaningful apology, covering all the points necessary for us to ponder. Let's band together for a more positive future where the possibility of the horrific wrongs committed by governments of the time will not be repeated.

Comments and information: lgbtconnections@gmail.com. Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesdays in The News.

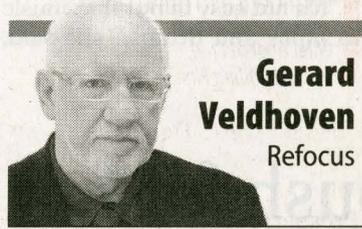
Nov. 28, 2017

Hollywood's shame and arrogance – sexual assault accusations

Sexual assaults are not a new phenomenon, but as of late, many victims have come forward to name the accusers. Many of us have heard of the infamous phrase, “the casting couch,” which was commonly a way to describe Hollywood brass who made attempts to assault a performer by promising a juicy role in an upcoming movie.

This is a well-known fact and often involved directors and producers who arrogantly, and shamelessly, made sexual advances towards prospective young actors and actresses. These advances took place since the beginning of Hollywood's and Broadway's history. Many gave in to these advances in the hopes for a start to stardom, while others gave in to avoid confrontation, which was taboo in the early years.

Sexual assaults were initiated with straight and LGBTQ performers. In later years, this was the talk of the town, and then silence. Lately, people have come forward and have found the courage to accuse the perpetrators in a very public and determined manner in



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order to bring them to the courts of public opinion, as well as the courts of law.

Famed comedian Bill Cosby was charged with assault on a number of female victims. His previous court appearance found insufficient evidence, but a new trial has been announced.

Harvey Weinstein, a film producer, has countless charges against him involving many women. In his arrogant reply, Weinstein announced his innocence, while challenging his accusers to produce evidence.

Academy award winner Kevin Spacey, a well-known and accomplished actor, has been accused of sexual assaults against a number of males that supposedly took place throughout the years.

He vehemently denies the accusations, and is being accused by the entire LGBTQ community for hiding behind the rainbow society while seducing a 14-year-old, because he decided to come out as being gay.

As of Oct. 29, 15 accusers had come forward accusing him of sexual misconduct and attempted rape. Among the victims was the son of actor Richard Dreyfus when he was just 18. Now the elder Dreyfus is also under the microscope for sexual misconduct.

The sexual assaults on youngsters are alarming, and will no doubt increase as time progresses. This is not to say that all accusations will be proven, or all are guilty, but this will certainly bring to light the severity of these charges. We have not seen the end of this type of conduct and charges should be laid against perpetrators in our courts.

Sexual assaults committed by women are also coming to light. Men usually are quiet about any unwanted sexual advances as this affects their so-called mascu-

line status. Charges are being laid against female sex offenders at an increasing rate. Whatever the gender, the abuse is the same, and for anyone guilty of these horrid offences, proper action must be taken. A slap on the wrist is not a deterrent, but stiffer sentences may have more positive consequences.

Education and raising awareness with the determination to see an end to sexual assaults will produce better results. The abusers must be stopped to rid us of such attacks on young innocent persons, and adults as well. We must protect the vulnerable in our schools, the workplace, the entertainment industry, the religious institutions, in our homes, and other venues. Give them a chance to have a fulfilled life without interference from abusers.

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LGBTQ rights at stake in United States

Nov 2017

The United States is digging deeper into chaos regarding the rights and protection of its LGBTQ citizens. President Donald Trump, in his dictatorial manner, had pledged his total support to evangelical and other right-wing religious organizations, in the process taking away rights from the LGBTQ folks.

As has been previously mentioned and on many occasions, religious beliefs “trump” equal rights and in this instance Attorney General Jeff Sessions has ordered guidelines to be implemented that are meant to stifle equality and promote the idea that U.S. society has the right to discriminate at will on the grounds of religious beliefs. Protection for religious leaders and all others who profess that sexual orientation, gender identity and expression are merely societal wrongdoings will further stall the work towards equality. Religious beliefs are protected, but human rights are indeed thrown to the wind.

A Christian-based law firm in



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the U.S., the Alliance Defending Freedom, told the press that this is “a great day for religious freedom.” In turn, The Human Rights Campaign, an American LGBTQ-rights organization calls this “an all-out assault on civil rights and a sweeping licence to discriminate.”

The consequences of this action by the Trump administration have the potential for a crack-down on human rights, which will surely be contested in the courts. As is the case in Canada, Christian places of learning require employees and students to follow the moral codes set forth in regulations and guidelines. Sex outside marriage and same-sex activity are banned. This is so at Cranston University in Moncton, N.B., and Trinity Western

University in B.C. It is a travesty that human rights are completely ignored and the courts agree with these institutions.

The United States has an administration that harvests hate and intolerance, this in a nation that proudly flies a banner that they are the best country in the world. Donald Trump and his discriminating cronies are determined to govern with an iron fist. The United States of America, the land of Lincoln, a patriotic song that bears the words, “America the Beautiful,” yet indicates a copy of such countries as Uganda, Russia and many eastern nations. The U.S. where guns are fired daily, causing deaths and grief for so many, a country that certainly has lost credibility in being a giant among nations and where equal rights for all is but a dream.

The rulers south of our border could certainly take a page from Canada’s tapestry where at least we attempt to recognize the differences in backgrounds, fight for acceptance, where all are equal

before the law — features obviously ignored in the U.S. That is not to say that Canada is void of intolerance and hate, but we do try to solve the issues in a civilized manner.

The manner of Donald Trump is of great concern, not only for the LGBTQ community, but for those whose sexual orientation and gender identity are squashed in other nations, especially in the Far East and Africa. LGBTQ rights are non-existent. Trump will be model for leaders there who are clamping down on rights, believing they are correct in their discrimination.

The fact all humankind deserves equality is a non-issue for the Trump administration and that is great cause for concern. Sessions and his religious right have no concern for human rights.

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Trinity Western University's gay stance to be heard in Supreme Court

A controversy has developed in the case of Trinity Western University's hearing regarding its anti-gay policies in Canada's Supreme Court the end of November. The law societies of British Columbia and Ontario will be challenged in our highest court by the university in a protest that this educational facility has the right to refuse entry to gay students.

This Christian-based organization has a policy that prospective students must sign a covenant that forbids sexual activity outside a "heterosexual marriage," in fact denouncing same-sex activity. Challenges have been very public in several provinces, but no clear decisions have been established to satisfy the university's administration. The next step is the Supreme Court.

The concern of many is the fact that one of the justices has volunteered with anti-gay organizations and as a result should recuse himself from the hearing. Justice Russell Brown, an appointee to the court by former Conservative Prime Minister Stephen



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Harper, a well-known enemy of LGBTQ rights, has the obligation to step down from this particular hearing as he will have a preconceived judgment. A fair hearing is not possible if a judge has already decided to side with TWU and against the LGBTQ community.

The problem with this case is that graduates from TWU's law school will likely discriminate against cases involving gay issues. The worries are real and will no doubt be contested hotly in Ottawa. The remaining justices are not known to be anti-LGBTQ and therefore should be fair in judgment.

Canada may be proud of the fact that LGBTQ support is one of the highest in the world and stands at around 80 per cent.

That number may be challenged, but is conceivably close to being quite factual. Be assured discrimination is continuing and Justice Brown has been vocal in support of the religious right.

Members of the LGBTQ community in Canada are protected under the Canadian Constitution and Human Rights laws, but nevertheless are usually trumped by religious beliefs. We are in a bit of turmoil in the case of TWU, fearing that the likes of Justice Russell Brown will continue to speak out against LGBTQ rights and support those who also, because of right-wing religious thoughts, will not budge.

So, how do we counteract such conflict? Above all, those who take a stand against unfair and discriminatory actions, through word or indeed, need to sit down with LGBTQ community citizens and discuss the differences, and in so doing may understand the fact that we do not choose our sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. Education is of paramount importance and we owe

it to all of us now and future generations to eradicate the hostility towards the LGBTQ population.

Influential leaders such as Justice Brown have the ability and the position to bolster discrimination. As a judge on Canada's Supreme Court he has the obligation to rule according to Canadian law and that includes support of the LGBTQ community. After all, our Constitution tells us that we are entitled to equal rights and equal treatment. If judges do not and will not support this they should not be appointed to this high office.

Stephen Harper appointed Justice Brown because of his own right-wing religious beliefs. Should Brown recuse himself in this matter? Yes indeed! It all boils down to human rights. Trinity Western University must be stopped.

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Entertainment industry, positive and negative influence on LGBTQ society

Nov 15, 2017

Throughout our lifetime, we listen to music, watch the latest in movies and television shows, search the internet for information, and generally satisfy our curiosity in so many ways. What we see and hear influences us in various ways, and that is what makes us react in a positive or negative manner.

In the entertainment industry, the influences vary, and Hollywood's idea in portraying certain characters may not be at all the best influence. LGBTQ characters, historically, have been portrayed as outcasts, placed in a comedic vein and many died in movie endings. Hollywood had been influenced by the right and could potentially lose millions of dollars. The Roman Catholic Church and evangelical Christians carried much weight in Hollywood and so, at the expense of gay characters, the industry paid attention and was game to minimize gays in films.

Discrimination was rampant and the general public sided with



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the studios, causing the onset of real portrayals to be delayed for decades. In a world where equality for all is but a dream, our entertainment people have slowly evolved into a more "daring" inclusion of LGBTQ folks into story lines.

We are by no means at the end of this fiasco. Some movies have received some sort acceptance by the general public, as was the case with the release of Brokeback Mountain in 2005. The story told of two cowboys who fell in love against an intolerant society in the "Wild West." As one watches the ongoing love story, it becomes quite clear that perhaps this tale may after all end in a positive way. No, it does not, as Jack suddenly

dies because of a severe beating. The ending has Ennis searching for a sort of "closure" to the relationship.

Many cried at the negative ending that could have been positive with the two men living their lives as a happy couple. Even with Oscar wins, this story of forbidden love left a decided negative.

Countless LGBTQ characters have been part of story lines, but most with negative endings. Television has been a little more inclusive, but had a rough start. Many may recall the program "Soap" where a gay Billy Crystal character attempts to be accepted by family and peers. Again, this story is in a comedic setting, and did very little to convince LGBTQ audiences that this was an earnest attempt to "normalize" gay characters as part of our society.

We must, however, dwell on the present, and with that we have some real progress with entertainment. "Will and Grace," the TV show that has been running for years, has the wonderful con-

cept of two gay friends, not lovers, who share their friendship with two wonderful female characters. Even as this is a comedy, the characters seem real.

The other TV presentation is a rather new addition to prime time and that is "Transparent," a moving, a potential real-life story that tells the traumatic journey of a middle-aged woman dealing with family and friends. This outstanding drama is a terrific, positive story of this woman determined to live her life as it is supposed to be lived. Outstanding performances, especially by Jeffrey Tambor in a role that transcends all previous performances by this wonderful actor, is a joy to watch. These are the stories of real people in real life situations. The positive trumps the negative.

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Majority of Christian denominations oppose gay marriage

In more than 25 countries, civil marriage has been approved and gay couples, who are choosing to marry, may take that route. This is as it should be.

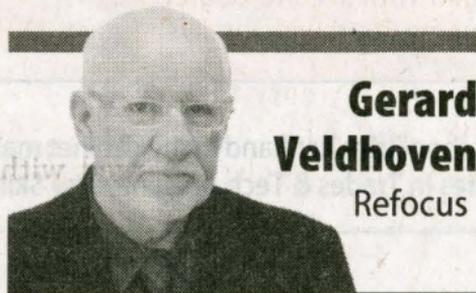
When The Netherlands changed its marriage laws in 2001, the first country to do so, others gradually followed. For the vast majority of gay couples who chose to legally tie the knot, this is perfect. Some, would prefer a religious setting to say their vows, however, Christian churches do not allow such ceremonies, except for a few.

The result largely depends on the country in which we live. In The Netherlands, for instance, only civil marriages are allowed, so the religious organizations do not need to be a part of it. The opposite is true in Canada and many other jurisdictions, as members of the clergy are licensed by governments to perform marriages. Civil ceremonies are performed by others, such as Justices of the Peace, or other government officials.

A handful of Christian denominations do allow wedding within their walls, such as The United Church of Canada, a denomination that has a number of affirming congregations in this country. Another is the Unitarian Church where gay couples are welcomed and are able to be married. The Anglican Church voted last year to embrace same-sex couples, but faces much opposition as many of its clergy and members strongly object, implying that this kind of allowance contradicts biblical teachings. The church did, however, vote in favour, but faces much opposition.

The Mennonite Church allowed a gay couple to marry in Saskatoon on Dec. 31, 2015, becoming the first in that denomination. Many members remain strongly opposed. The so-called Confession of Faith in the Mennonite Church states that "marriage is between a man and a woman for life," which is apparently not canon law, but a guide.

Seems gay marriage can be left



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to each congregation to decide, which tends to separate rather than unite. Most mainstream churches do not allow same-sex marriage and so remain in the dark to embrace equality for all.

The Roman Catholic Church has made it abundantly clear that gay marriage will never be part of that faith. Pope Francis has been adamant about this, regardless of attempting to apologize for the church's actions against the LGBTQ community. An apology does not heal without positive action. The Church of England has also issued an apology, but again, has not indicated acceptance of equal rights or treatment, which includes marriage of LGBTQ citizens.

Most churches remain strongly divided on the issue and though attempts are being made by some, this will not end anytime soon. The Anglican Church in Australia is also divided when it comes to same-sex marriage. A Nov. 15 vote on the issue, which showed 61.6 per cent of Australians in favour, had dioceses across the nation strongly divided. The Archbishop of the Diocese of Sydney donated \$1 million to the "NO" vote. Others were more in favour of change. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull was supporting the change in the marriage law. Many felt the vote was not necessary and that parliament has the mandate to make the change. The "NO" voters were generally concerned about religious beliefs in their rejection of equal marriage.

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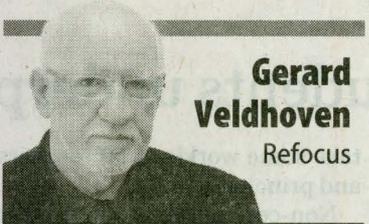
LGBTQ history in Palm Springs

During the past years we have realized that a large number of LGBTQ citizens have entered races for public office.

Much has changed since Harvey Milk became a high ranking San Francisco city official, despite the fact he was openly gay. In Canada, Svend Robinson entered politics and was chosen to be member of parliament for Vancouver suburb of Burnaby. Hailed by Canada's LGBTQ community as a defender and proponent for equal rights, he sat as a member from 1979 until 2004.

He came out as gay in 1988 and immediately fought long and hard for recognition of our country's LGBTQ citizens. As the first openly gay member in the House of Commons, Robinson became a solid representative for those seeking equality. Of course, more followed in his footsteps and were equally concerned for Canada's LGBTQ population.

We also know that Canada was, and remains, a leader on the world-stage, especially with a prime minister who advocates publicly for equality, as no head



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of government before him.

Heads of other governments were chosen on their ability to govern rather than revealing their sexual orientation. Iceland made history when openly gay Johanna Sigurdardottir was chosen as prime minister. Former Belgian Prime Minister Elio Di Rupa made history in his country. Luxembourg voted in Xavier Bettel, who married his partner and indeed made some waves on the world stage as he introduced his husband, now commonly referred to as the "first husband," to other world leaders and their spouses in Milan, Italy last year.

Ireland also chose a gay man to head its government. Leo Varadkar was hosted by Justin Trudeau and together marched in Mont-

real's Pride Parade last year.

The surprise was the election Serbia's Prime Minister Brnabic. That part of the world is generally considered unfriendly towards the LGTBQ community. The U.S. considers Serbia a "flawed democracy." The point is that more politicians are coming forward regardless of their sexual orientation or true gender identity and expression.

The United States, hardly a progressive nation regarding LGBTQ equality, especially under Donald Trump, is showing some positive movement. Palm Springs, a city in California's Coachella valley that boasts wealth and beauty, has suddenly made headlines with its political landscape. In a move that is of extreme importance to the LGBTQ community world-wide, this city of about 47,000 folks has just voted in a city council that consists of five openly LGBTQ members.

Mayor Robert Moon insists, "To tell the truth, I didn't think about it until after the election. You see, it doesn't really matter. It's not an issue here."

According to one councillor, it was not that LGBTQ candidates swept the election but that they did so with barely a mention of sexual orientation or gender identity. He continued that voters cared more about policing, homelessness and roads.

We must not minimize this amazing feat. Anytime an LGBTQ member successfully enters the political arena and is successful in a win the news is magnificent, as it indicates how far we have come, and that, my friends, must be celebrated. We cannot shrug off such success and we also must remind ourselves how hard we have fought for equality, and that includes the embrace for our political leaders, here and abroad.

I salute the folks of Palm Springs in their vision to elect an all LGBTQ council even as the mayor insists it's not an issue.

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Jan 31, 2018

Australia celebrates same-sex marriage

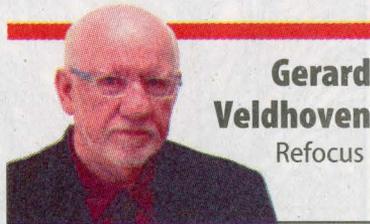
Aptly named the “day for love,” same-sex marriage is now legal in Australia, and is the 24th country in the world to have changed the marriage laws to include gay couples.

After a tumultuous few years of attempting to change the law, this country’s government had continuously denied any attempt at the change. Conservative governments have fought the gay community’s demands for change.

Former prime minister Tony Abbott fought a longtime campaign rejecting same-sex marriage. Surely, he must have been opposed to his daughter’s intention to marry her same-sex partner in the new year. However, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said, “This is Australia; fair, diverse, loving and filled with respect for everyone.” He has been a fierce fighter for equal marriage. Only four members of parliament were opposed, so the bill passed with ease.

It was not to be until January before the first marriages would take place as there is the requirement in Australia for couples to provide a full month notice of their intention to marry.

In an unprecedented procedure, the government decided to have a “mail-in” vote, a decision widely criticized, as most felt that the government could have moved on the issue. As it turned out, 61 per cent of the population voted “yes.” It was no longer a



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question of the population’s disapproval, instead an overwhelming show of inclusion.

The county’s LGBTQ community is elated by this decision, and another step toward equal rights has been established.

Slowly, but surely, more nations will be facing this issue and many will never be inclusive regarding equal rights, let alone equal marriage: Russia and countries on the African continent, except South Africa, where same-sex marriage has been in effect for a number of years. In Asia and South America, this issue will never be a reality. As a matter of fact, any type of LGBTQ demands for equality is strictly tossed aside.

President Putin, a strong opponent of any kind of equal rights for LGBTQ citizens, will certainly keep up his fight to keep up pressure to forbid equality and he has the support of the Russian people. About 75 per cent of Russians agree with Putin, who said recently that it’s his “duty” to stop gays from getting married.

Death penalties exist in some seven countries and imprisonment in others, attacks and murders are common in many

nations, indicating of course that same-sex marriage is out of the question and will never see the light of day. So, as we study the positivity of some countries and the opposite views of the vast majority of others, we can see, with certainty, that the fight will be contentious, arduous and without doubt divisive around the globe.

Marriage is certainly not for everyone and common-law relationships are common everywhere.

The importance is the fact a couple should be able to choose how they wish to celebrate their relationship and not be banned from legal marriage if they wish.

We will not experience a wave of same-sex marriages worldwide any time soon. Be assured that this is reality and, wish what we may, equality in all its forms will not be in the immediate future. Meanwhile, we do see some countries that are embracing equal marriage, 24 in all so far. Out of 195 nations that is a very small number, but we must never stop the fight.

As for Australia, congratulations in your success for another step in equal rights and a happy new year!

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LGBTQ parenting controversy, governments support adoption and foster care

This question remains an issue that is controversial and must be addressed in a positive manner. Recently, an Alberta couple was denied the opportunity to adopt a child because their religious beliefs were against homosexuality and gay parenting. The Alberta government, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, were in agreement that the prospective parents would not provide a home of inclusion and indeed would preach that LGBTQ folks should not be allowed to be parents.

The evangelical Christian couple is accusing the Alberta government of discrimination, insisting their application to adopt was rejected because of their religious views on gay marriage and homosexuality. Having passed the required course for potential adoptive parents, they ran into trouble when questioned about sexuality, saying that they “don’t support gay marriage and believe homosexuality is wrong.”

Asked how they would deal with a child who questioned his/her sexuality they said, “Sexuality should not be experienced or explored until a person is an adult



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and is married.”

The decision to reject adoption was the proper conclusion. In 2015, the Nova Scotia Government urged LGBTQ families to be foster parents in an attempt to involve such families and individuals in our society. A long-awaited decision, this was a step in the right direction.

There was much opposition by various individuals, especially by those within the religious right.

Hundreds of youngsters are in desperate need to find foster homes, and to deny children to be placed in LGBTQ foster homes denies them also the opportunity to be loved, feel secure and happy. We are ready and willing to take in foster children and provide the care needed to give them a home and lessen the burden that threatens those who are most vulner-

able. Adoption or foster families, the love, care and security is imperative to the well-being of individuals, and brightens the outlook for a more productive and secure future that would otherwise be denied.

Governments across this country allow adoption and foster care by LGBTQ people, and rightfully so. The religious evangelical right continues opposition to all aspects concerning the LGBTQ community and in doing so keeps the fires of intolerance burning brightly. They ignore the fact, or simply imply, that we do not choose our sexual orientation, be it homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual. If one agrees with their decision then one assumes that they choose their sexuality, but will deny that fact.

Sexual orientation, according to scientific research, is well ingrained before birth. Some feel that the environment in our childhood has a bearing on our sexual identity. Regardless, we are who we are, and that my friends must be respected. If not, then discrimination will forever be part of our existence.

Those who oppose the LGBTQ

members of our society should remember that we do not choose our sexuality. Why would we open ourselves to ridicule, abuse and violence and watch as many young LGBTQ people commit suicide because of total rejection by parents, especially those from evangelical right-wing Christian families and other religious doctrines?

We stand together and invite all who respect the uniqueness of each individual to join us in the challenges toward an understanding and inclusive society. Imagine the peace, contentment and love that would certainly trump hate and intolerance. I invite the religious right to accept and embrace the LGBTQ community and discover we are all the same somehow. Adoption or foster care, it matters not as all are entitled to happiness. Love is all it takes to be a family.

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Feb 14, 2018

Horrendous conversion therapy for gays must be banned

“China officially decriminalized homosexuality in 1997, but LGBTQ people are still subjected to forced confinement, medication and even electric shocks to try to change their sexual orientation,” according to Graeme Reid, LGBTQ rights director at Human Rights Watch.

The Chinese Psychiatric Society removed “homosexuality” from the Classification of Mental Disorders in 2001, and even as a mental health law renders it illegal, the practices continue. These horrific “treatments” take place in hospitals as well as private clinics. The Human Rights Watch interviewed 17 people who were “threatened, coerced and physically forced by their parents to submit to conversion therapy, as adults or as adolescents.” Five were subjected to electrical shocks while being shown images or videos of homosexual acts. Other methods were used to change one’s sexual orientation.

These tactics are not isolated and are in use in other countries, as well. In Brazil, the government banned conversion tactics, but a judge overruled that recently and



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so the torture continues.

The only country in Europe to ban this practice is Malta where the law changed in 2016. Only eight states in the U.S. have laws in place that ban the damaging practice. A bill introduced by former President Barack Obama to ban the therapies on the federal level was stalled in Congress last year. Many right-wing religious factions approve of this ongoing wrong-doing and in many instances promote it.

Let’s have a thought of the Canadian view regarding this matter. In this country, where all citizens are equal under the law, a nation that finally has a government and prime minister standing up for equal rights for LGBTQ citizens and their rightful place in our society, conversion therapy remains a legal reality. This is despite the

long-held view that this procedure is damaging and demeaning has been supported by psychiatrists for years.

We, as a nation, must step up to the plate and outlaw this horrendous attempt to convert gays. It is inhumane, and has long-lasting negative effects on those forced to participate. Canada is a progressive nation and our health issues must be addressed, including the mental health of those who are drawn into conversion therapy. The practice is widespread and may be paid for by provincial health plans. Religious organizations, some of which propose such therapy for faith reasons, may be entitled to a tax exempt charitable status.

A few provinces have limited such procedures, but have not gone far enough. Our federal government must act to intervene and halt this terrible practice. This is blatant discrimination.

Experts and medical associations are unanimous that the therapies are bogus and cause serious harm to patients, leading to depression, self-harm and suicide. It is imperative that the

government initiate action to intervene and outlaw anti-gay conversion across the country. The lack of serious response is alarming and the longer religious influence in this matter continues more damage will occur.

We are fortunate that we have equal rights, equal opportunity and equal marriage, and the time is here for a law to be implemented to identify the culprits and charges be laid. This outlandish practice must be stopped dead in its tracks without delay.

Parents who take their gay children to be “healed” must be taken to task, as must the so-called healers who are determined to cause serious harm. Religious freedom is protected under the Constitution, but so are members of the LGBTQ community.

End this inhuman practice which has no place in Canada and elsewhere.

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Bermuda steps back from same-sex marriage, a disturbing decision

Bermuda's government has backtracked and reversed the same-sex marriage law that was in place as of May 2017. This British deeply conservative territory decided to strip away marriage from committed same-sex couples.

Only a handful of couples married during the past six months or so, in a country of 63,000 inhabitants. This is a decided step back and a world first. Apparently, the British government could have intervened but chose to instead respect the decision of Bermuda's democratically elected self-government. England's prime minister, Theresa May, said she was disappointed by the decision, but yet failed to influence a human rights issue.

The president of the LGBTQ advocacy group GLAAD, made the following statement: "As the world faces a resurgence of anti-LGBTQ activism, Bermuda just earned the shameful recognition of becoming the first national territory to strip away marriage from loving, committed LGBTQ couples."



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In a referendum in 2016, voters rejected the notion of same-sex marriage and same-sex civil unions. The voter turnout was reported to be low, but with the change the government obviously took note of those voters. As we face a world where discrimination and human rights are notoriously violated, the LGBTQ community faces a more difficult future as well. We tend to believe that we are on the road to recovery, but reality indicates that discrimination is on the rise again, Canada not excluded.

On top of that we are experiencing an increase in crimes against the LGBTQ community, as is evident in Toronto's murder of six gay men. These horrendous acts of violence against gay men are serial killings the like of which

has not been experienced in this country. We tend to believe these acts only occur in other places, but not in our beautiful nation where all is well — or so we like to believe.

The LGBTQ community does not experience equality, and is not being accepted on a positive scale. We do have equal marriage, pension benefits and other perks, but we are not even close to living peaceful lives as our eyes and ears remain vigilant. We can no longer pretend that all is well. The media reports are filled with incidents of violence against minorities, and we had better remove our rose-coloured glasses and see reality. Our families, friends and allies are on side, but we know that the majority of Canadians really do not consider the fact that discrimination is rampant in this country.

We tend to point a finger toward the U.S. hearing about the constant attacks on people, a president who does not respect anyone or anything. It's the so-called Wild West all over again, making it one of the most dangerous countries in the world.

Trump's cabinet, including Vice President Mike Pence and Attorney General Jeff Sessions, are notorious enemies of the LGBTQ community. They are extremely influential with many Americans and the discrimination is increasing in the U.S., not only against the LGBTQ community but countless others. How are we able to respect a nation that prides itself on being a world-class country and a leader in social justice when evidence of injustices is so blatant?

Canada, considered one of the best countries in which to live, has problems of its own as discrimination against LGBTQ folks remains a serious issue. Acceptance is not as widespread as we may tend to believe. The work continues and Bermuda, a tiny place, is a prime example of how a step back is so easy to accomplish. Is this possible in Canada?

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Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesdays in The News.

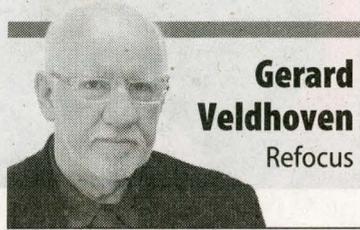
Religious right challenges LGBTQ rights and freedom of abortion choice

The religious right is once again challenging the federal government to fund their programs, believing they have their biblical beliefs to counteract any government ruling.

The human right to practise one's religious beliefs is not in question, but to ostracize others who are, by birth, or any other influence, members of the LGBTQ community, or to challenge a woman's right to choose, is totally absurd and wrong.

Summer youth programs initiated by religious communities are sponsored by government but, as is fair and right, one's rights must be protected. The Liberal government has made it clear that any organization or individual may apply for grants to operate summer youth camps, but also insists that all applicants attest to their respect for sexual and reproductive rights, including the "right to access for safe and legal abortions."

This is as it should be. The government had received complaints last year that summer job funding had been given to summer camps



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that refuse to hire LGBTQ staff and groups that distribute graphic and anti-abortion pamphlets. Employment Minister Patty Hajdu said that, "We took those complaints seriously and this is the decision that we've taken, that in order to receive funding they have to affirm that they will not work to undermine the rights of Canadians." This information is available on the government website.

Legal challenges may be in the future and, according to Minister Hajdu, the government is prepared to defend its decision in the courts to protect citizens from discrimination. We live in an age where more individuals and groups are making serious attempts to reconcile all of humanity, bringing people together

to have discussions on how to sit at the table and reach some positive conclusions. Many questions remain unanswered, except to say that discrimination is alive and well in all corners.

On a daily basis many do not consider how people are affected negatively because of what is being said, or some action that is hurtful and contributes to anger between people. Why must we be so careless and why do we not accept people for who they are, and accept the individuality of a person? To discriminate is to alienate, and regardless of the source it goes against efforts to unite.

There are people of faith who do not and will not accept those who are a member of the LGBTQ community in our country and beyond, and who do not recognize a woman's right to choose, which allows for discrimination. This is reminiscent of private schools, colleges and universities that would request funding from governments and in doing so receive monies to keep the doors open. Unfortunately, many are faith-

based institutions and that funding, if approved, would give the green light for future assistance.

The fact is, these places of learning generally speak out against the LGBTQ community, and do not give women the right to choose their own destiny. Abortion rights are women's rights. We are who we are, and that must be respected by all. If we are not allowed that freedom, then society will forever be divided with no end in sight.

Those who follow a faith must also be allowed to practise that belief, but would it not be wonderful if they embrace our differences, regardless of sexual orientation, transgender issues or women's equality? Each one of us is unique and each of us deserves respect, love and our rightful place in this world. After all, these are human rights.

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Former Irish PM and Ugandan LGBTQ advocate barred by the Vatican

The Vatican has barred former Irish prime minister Mary McAleese from attending a forum that consists of Roman Catholic women determined to have more clout within the church. The reason is that her son is gay and she has been an outspoken critic of the church's negativity towards the LGBTQ community.

Organizers are shocked and dismayed by this decision as this clearly indicates the Catholic Church is not ready to embrace the LGBTQ folks who are members of the church.

Uganda's LGBTQ activist, Ssenfuka Joanita Warry, was also told not to appear Voices of Faith, a Roman Catholic women's group event that seeks to "empower and advocate for the woman in the church to have a seat at the table of decision making."

Even as the Association of Catholic Priests criticized the announcement by Cardinal Kevin Farrell, prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, the decision stands. This development further demonstrates that the Vatican is not ready to embrace



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the LGBTQ community in all its aspects, unless Pope Francis and others intervene. That is not likely as the pope himself continually proves to be contradictory on this subject. His reform program indicates few or no decisions are forthcoming.

The Roman Catholic Church has made it clear on countless occasions that doctrine regarding LGBTQ issues and acceptance of LGBTQ people, including marriage and adoption, will not change. It's all, or acceptance is not a reality.

As far as McAleese is concerned, as a Catholic, she continues her support of her son and the LGBTQ community at large. Warry is one of thousands of LGBTQ people in Uganda who live in constant fear as same-sex relations are punishable by a

long-term prison sentences.

If the pope is serious about reforms, he would be vocal and make his opposition known to countries where prison sentences and death sentences occur under the law. There has been a deafening silence from the Vatican, apart from the occasional statement by Francis, attempting to appease LGBTQ people within his church, no doubt an attempt to keep parishioners.

Last year the French government appointed a new ambassador to the Vatican but he was rejected by Pope Francis because he is gay. Another incident, one of many, occurred when a monsignor at the Vatican came out and was immediately fired. Gay men still are not allowed to serve as priests. Similarly, women remain unequal to men.

Equality is not one of the Roman Catholic Church's strong points! Unless arms open and full recognition is accomplished in the Vatican, the struggles will continue for years to come. There are huge numbers of Catholics in the Western hemisphere who are frustrated by the lack of progress

regarding the acceptance of members of the LGBTQ community, women's rights and equality to men. Churches are emptying and buildings torn down, mainly due to the fact that the RC Church lacks the willingness to let people speak their minds; women continue to be treated as second-class citizens and LGBTQ people are viewed with disdain.

A statement from the Association of Catholic Priests reads as follows: "Our church is paying a high price in pandering to such extremes. In our efforts to reform the Church, we simply cannot afford such mixed signals," referencing to the barring of Mary McAleese, Ssenfuka Warry and the removal of pictures of same-sex couples. In a strong protest the Voices of Faith group has decided not to hold events at the Vatican again.

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Where do Canada's leaders stand on LGBTQ equality?

There is little doubt that Canada is a leader in LGBTQ rights. We are well known to millions around the globe for our tolerant society. Yes, our laws protect us, and our citizens generally accept that fact.

That is not to say that we are in the clear. There are millions in this country who do not and will not accept the fact that LGBTQ folks even exist. The religious right will assure us that change will not be accepted, and indeed will focus on the status quo. We are reminded by Christian private schools in this country, as well as by many religious denominations that LGBTQ people are "sinners" and must be chastised for their behaviour.

As has been pointed out in the past, many support "conversion therapy," a procedure to change a person's sexual orientation. Of course, that is not possible.

The question is where our leaders stand on the issue of LGBTQ equality. In past years we have experienced some harsh realities regarding this issue with prime ministers leaning to the



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right. Except for Jean Chretien, who changed his views on same-sex marriage towards the end of his term, and Paul Martin, who staunchly supported equal marriage, the picture has been bleak. The subject was not even mentioned during John Diefenbaker's tenure as prime minister, nor by Lester B. Pearson.

Stephen Harper fought to rid Canada of equal marriage, and his well-known rhetoric on the acceptance of LFGBTQ equality made it clear that his religious beliefs trumped equality. In 2013, Harper established the Office of Religious Freedom that would ensure religious beliefs were protected everywhere and would, as a result, increase discrimination against LGBTQ people.

Those were the former prime

minister's attempts to exert pressure to thwart equal treatment. Today, we have a new crop of leaders. Who are they and where do they stand on LGBTQ equal treatment?

Let's have a look at Andrew Scheer, the newly minted Conservative Leader, and his belief on this matter. Before becoming leader, Scheer had been very vocal about his opposition to equal rights and treatment of LGBTQ citizens. He made it clear that he does not support transgender rights. However, Sheer did support the apology, although he thinks it went a bit too far.

Some of his MPs were not in the House and a number of them sat on their hands during the apology, in protest. He has made it known that he will never participate in Pride celebrations.

The new NDP leader, Jagmeet Singh, has pledged full support to the LGBTQ community and is also concerned about programs for LGBTQ youth. Sheer and Singh are worlds apart when it comes to supporting Canada's LGBTQ community.

Justin Trudeau has made inroads not previously experienced in this country. From the onset, he has made it clear that his support and his sincere interest in the well-being of those who belong to the LGBTQ citizens of this nation are beyond reproach. He also appears on the international stage, and does not hesitate to call upon other countries to join in supporting equality. Trudeau, in his quest to ensure equal treatment of Canadians, has indicated strongly that he will not sway from making it a reality, not an easy feat.

The apology made in the House was a phenomenal and sincere act that was welcomed by the LGBTQ community. No other prime minister has equalled this approach for inclusion. These are the views of past and present political leaders.

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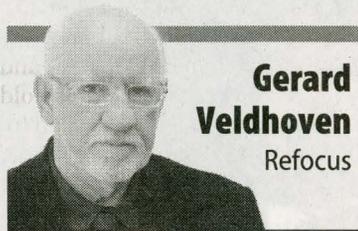
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Celebrating LGBTQ citizens around the world

Each year, millions gather around the globe to celebrate the LGBTQ community, and it is a grand way in which to raise awareness. Pride celebrations will be in full swing everywhere, the rainbow flag will be raised and displayed proudly on flagpoles and buildings, at private homes and carried in pride parades.

Of course, I am referring to most places in the Western world where these types of celebrations have been a reality for years. We, in Canada, have especially been fortunate to have laws in place for benefits and protection. We are also free to celebrate our existence as part of a free society. That's not to say that problems do not exist, or that the future will be void of problems. There will always be those who will deny our rights as LGBTQ citizens and as equals to all others. Our rights may be challenged, but our determination to succeed will never diminish.

LGBTQ neighbours to the south are constantly challenged by authorities as states introduce new laws that discriminate against LGBTQ people. Transgender



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equality is at stake constantly and lawmakers make it possible.

Canada's Conservatives tend to lack support for our community, as was the case with transgender protection. Many MPs in that party were not in favour of such protection being included in our laws. Nevertheless, protection is now a reality, but we must take notice that equal treatment remains a huge issue and will not be solved anytime soon.

Regretfully, education has not been as inclusive as it must be in order to have our children instilled with the knowledge that we all must be afforded equality, bar none. All provincial departments of education have the obligation to make certain that LGBTQ inclusiveness is part of the program.

As mentioned above, we are so

fortunate in comparison to our LGBTQ families in other nations. Pride celebrations are banned in most countries. The majority of eastern nations have laws that outlaw "homosexuality," and punishment may include prison time, stoning, beatings and even death. Desperate situations exist that cannot be imagined by countries such as Canada and others, where equal marriages are a reality. Attacks on LGBTQ people do not go unpunished, if authorities cooperate, which is not a certainty because profiling is not uncommon and decidedly discriminatory.

We cannot complain as the inroads have been quite remarkable and sustainable, depending largely on the government in power. Justin Trudeau, with all the criticism directed at him, has been steadfast in his support for equality for the LGBTQ community and other citizens of our country. More so than any other prime minister, or party leader, he has shown that it is entirely possible to view all people with respect, dignity and love. There are a few other leaders who have been sup-

portive of their nations LGBTQ citizens, but Canada seems to head the pack.

Does that mean we are out of the woods? No, not by any means, as long as we have right-wing Christian opposition, including evangelistic clergy and followers, Christian-based educational facilities and other religious faiths that prohibit LGBTQ existence, the problems will remain. Hearts and minds must be on the same track, or the train will never leave the station.

Embrace the uniqueness of each person, accept them as equals. View each of us as a complete person, yes, with faults, but as part of the human existence. We cannot change our sexual orientation, nor should transgender people have to live in a body that does not fit their minds. We are here, forever into our future.

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Members of LGBTQ community in rural and urban Canada

This subject has been discussed by many organizations and individuals. We tend to believe, through personal experiences, as well as accounts from those who have lived in urban centres and rural areas, that it is easier to live life as an LGBTQ person in larger cities where anonymity is more assured.

If one feels the need to exist in a secret environment where being an LGBTQ citizen is questioned, then indeed, city life is the answer, as people generally are not concerned with one's sexual orientation or true gender identity.

In rural settings the anonymity is not as easy to obtain and one is likely to be analysed by folks who believe a person living alone must be gay or lesbian. Curious minds and gossip soon take over. However, with all the tales we hear about rejection, brutality and, yes, taking of lives, especially in urban Canada, we must acknowledge that many small towns and other rural areas enjoy some willingness to accept LGBTQ people in their midst.



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Discriminatory attitudes remain a reality, regardless of location. It is wide ranging and affects the whole of society. I reside in New Glasgow, and previously lived in Amherst, near the New Brunswick border. Both towns are of almost equal size with just under 10,000 citizens.

Relocating to Amherst, from Halifax, was a challenge as I had never lived in a town before. I discovered that living in a town of this size in the 1970s meant that discrimination was rampant and there were a few who projected approval. However, at that time homophobia, biphobia and transphobia were still in high gear. Same-sex relationships were being discussed, but only in more or less, secretive scenarios.

It was not until 1969, that "homosexuality" was decriminalized in Canada, meaning that before that date, being gay or lesbian was against the law. Under Pierre Trudeau's watch, the law was revised, and so members of the LGBTQ community began a sort of celebration, as indicated by the beginnings of Pride celebrations across the country. However, this was mostly in major cities across this nation. Those living in smaller communities were not yet prepared in "coming out" in fear of retaliation.

Halifax, a small city, in comparison to Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, realized its first Pride march in 1988, with some walkers who hid their faces with paper bags, while others bravely marched with faces uncovered. This effort was the beginning of Halifax's LGBTQ community's pride celebrations, which are now recognized as the third largest in Canada.

As more activists and supporters became involved in fighting for equality in the 1970s, and indeed

continue to do so, we realized an increase in a slow but workable progress in equal rights across Canada. Smaller communities such as Amherst, New Glasgow and others were not quite ready to join larger centres. A same-sex marriage was announced in Amherst in September of 2004, the first such publicly performed ceremony in Nova Scotia, on Oct. 16. At that point, many changes were being realized as more activists, organizations and allies, became involved in the good fight.

The Town of Amherst made history. Pride celebrations became yearly events that spread throughout rural areas. The question remains and the discussions continue to see whether rural and urban LGBTQ Canadians are enjoying the support of most other Canadians.

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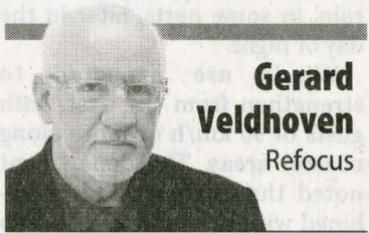
Jan 3, 2018

Equality for everyone: a New Year's gift to human kind

What better gift to humankind than to accept the diversity of all, a perfect way to practise our concern, the unique qualities we possess, and to be treated equally.

The colour of our skin, the language we speak, our gender, the way we dress, the choice of the one we love, regardless of sexual orientation and those who practise their faiths, are all part of our existence. We live in a world where wars remain a constant and have caused insufferable damage to our very being. Throughout the centuries the hardships have been phenomenal and we are witness to these horrific acts every day.

We also live in a society where it seems the order of the day to discriminate against others that hurts and separates, and in many cases, causes deaths. We hear of conflicts around the globe, and we have become accustomed to a lack of world peace and discontentment. The media keeps us informed to the world condition,



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and many witness the mistreatment of others, internationally and locally.

The constant abuse by those who sexually assault others, such as the president of the United States, who has also been accused of these crimes, along with many other entertainers, politicians, has also lashed out at minorities of all sorts. Trump's rejection of transgender persons in the armed forces, among countless other atrocities, remains constant.

Canada is consistently rated as one of the top ten countries in which to live, and we may be proud of this fact. This does not mean we are free of discrimination, or that we are a nation where

poverty, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, race discrimination and the tragic attitudes towards our Indigenous brothers and sisters does not exist. We should not be complacent.

Prime Minister Trudeau apologized to the Newfoundland and Labrador Indigenous residents who were abused terribly over the years, and also reached out to the LGBTQ community for shamefully dismissing armed forces members and civil servants because of loving those of the same gender.

I suggest this holiday season we begin an outreach, each one of us, to all our family members, friends, those who came to this land to live and work because of wars and oppression in their own countries, and so many others who need a helping hand. Imagine Canada as a country free of all these horrible actions, a place where neighbours in every corner of our great nation are able to live side by side in harmony. We must work to minimize the angst that

exists and practise this year after year, and so slowly, but surely, we will experience positive change. The holiday season seems a perfect time to reflect on these issues and we are able to do this, band together to begin the work of making positive change of making our nation, and perhaps across borders, inclusive.

Exclusivity has no place in a world where constant pain and exclusion in all its forms are the norm. We have to be free of inequality and work towards a free and content Canadian society. If we are in the top ten, we must make extra efforts to rid ourselves of discrimination and hatred and then, only then, will we be the envy of the world. Equality for all: a perfect holiday gift.

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Ranking Canada on LGBTQ rights

On a world scale, Canada is viewed as one of the most progressive countries, world-wide, as far as LGBTQ rights are concerned.

The struggles to reach this point have been challenging, and we must remember that this has been a battle for years.

Even as Canadian LGBTQ citizens enjoy protection under the law, and are generally accepted by society as a whole, discrimination continues to rear its ugly head. Bullying and attacks verbally and physically are quite common.

In Canada, in this day and age, you may ask? Yes, indeed, as equality, a wonderful and inclusive term, is not yet a reality. Those who are in our government will heap praise on themselves for being open, all inclusive and protective, are not looking at the reality of the situation.

Yes, we do enjoy a more satisfying existence as a part of Canadian society, but let's be realistic and look at the fact that many forces still attempt to negatively influence us. The many religious institutions that are constantly attempting to sway people's



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minds in a discriminatory manner are plentiful. Right-wing Christian places of learning instill young people's minds with anti-LGBTQ rhetoric, consequently continuing the discrimination that has been in existence for centuries.

Even as discrimination is against the law, it prevails, and is condoned by the law. The fact that we all belong to the same society is of no consequence and so equality is ignored. As long as this continues, discrimination will also fare well into the future.

As we take a look at other countries, we learn that we in Canada may be fortunate in that our laws will "protect" us as LGBTQ citizens. Be assured, there are other nations that have legislation in place that include LGBTQ citizens. The Netherlands, Norway,

Sweden, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, and many others also have similar protection. On the international stage, Canada excels on this front, being one of the most tolerant countries.

There is always a "but" in the equation. We are not out of the woods by any stretch of the imagination. We may well believe that Canada is the place for total LGBTQ acceptance, but that is not the case, and we constantly hear of discriminatory action. This is not only true of the LGBTQ community, but citizens who are Muslim, African Canadians, the Indigenous population and so many others.

These Canadian citizens are singled out as they are not viewed as "the norm." The reason for this thinking is simple enough for those who are the "judges," but on the other side of the attacks are those who take the brunt of brutal discrimination.

Yes, Canadians are more tolerant than countless nations, and yet we are not immune from dish-ing out hurtful and highly dangerous comments and actions. The

results can be devastating and have dire consequences. LGBTQ teens are prone to being rejected by family members and shown the door, many times resulting in suicides. Some religious schools and churches practise doctrine that forbids same sex attraction and marriages and generally reject any form of human kind other than heterosexual behaviour. The damage done by these type actions is often irreversible and totally against all that is written into our laws meant to protect, not destroy.

So, my fellow Canadians, while we may celebrate our achievements in attaining equal rights under the law, we must educate, educate some more, and raise awareness in order to erase the stigma attached to many LGBTQ and other Canadians. We are at the top of the list, but so much remains to be done!

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Barriers on our journey to equality

The journey of how we have travelled throughout history is interesting and yet rather sad, especially compared to how we are being challenged today. In years past, the term LGBTQ+ was not in existence and the usual identification was gay, lesbian and bisexual. The word transgender was not used until much later and took hold in the 1970s.

The term "gay" may date as early as the late 19th century and gradually became more common in the 20th century. In the 1960s, gay became the word preferred by "homosexual" men to describe people attracted to members of the same sex. This word is now in use in many parts of the world.

Lesbian is a term that was used in ancient times and has survived through the centuries. Bisexuality explains the physical and/or emotional attraction to either sex and has been in use for many years. As a matter of interest, there has been an increase in people admitting to being bisexual. Then, we have many other terms that explain/identify people and the list is long.



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The important thing to note is that each of us is able to identify our sexual orientation or gender identity. The other point to remember is that in early days identifying people, through their own admissions or outed by others (a dangerous and unfair practice), was a rare occurrence. Even as same-sex activity was common throughout time, it was not for public knowledge or spoken of very often. However, the male Romans, Greeks and Egyptians were notorious for engaging in sexual affairs with younger men. Many had wives and had these affairs as extra activities. Then, as over the next centuries, same-sex love was mostly hidden from the general public.

The journey was just beginning

as we enter a new age, the 1900s, a new era that was about to bring out LGBTQ folks who were determined to make a difference. The need to fight for social justice, and the fact that on an individual basis one was ready to come forward, early advocates took a stand. In Europe, during the Middle Ages, the Catholic clergy were encouraged believers to identify those who committed same-sex acts and then hand them over to secular authorities to be punished. In Spain, for example, the Inquisition tried about a thousand gay men and many were executed. These occurrences were quite common and seemed to satisfy many who were on side of the Roman Catholic Church of that era.

Thousands of gay men died in concentration camps during World War II, as did millions of others during this barbaric time in our history.

Of course, we are also aware of modern day horrific actions against members of the LGBTQ community, worldwide. Daily

beatings and other terrible crimes are committed because of pure hate.

There is debate as to what constitutes a hate crime. People, or groups of people, are attacked for a reason. If a person beats up on a gay man for instance, one looks at the reason for committing such an act. Is it because that person looks different, or acts in a manner that the attacker doesn't like, or simply that he has a hate for this person because of his sexual orientation? The fact remains the act of aggression has been committed, therefore an act of hate. One does not initiate such an action out of love.

So as we continue this journey we must be who we are, we must insist on equality to all others and we must continue to take a stand because it is our right.

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April 4, 2018

Doug Ford: Ontario's LGBTQ community gains an enemy

The new Progressive Conservative Party leader in Ontario, Doug Ford, has made it quite clear on many occasions where he stands on LGBTQ issues. A few years ago he was the sole Toronto councillor to vote against establishing a homeless shelter for young gay men. He also supported his brother, the late mayor Rob Ford, in the latter's refusal to participate in or support Pride activities.

In a recent column, I referred to the United States evangelical movement and their opposition to LGBTQ equality, outright hatred and contempt for this section of American society. In Canada, we are not immune in such thinking and consequent blatant discrimination. Doug Ford gained the endorsement from two pastors with a history of preaching hate filled with homophobia and anti-Semitism. Referring to Ford as a "faithful man," they have no qualms about supporting a man who plainly relishes his disdain for the LGBTQ community.

Charles McVety, who is president of the Canada Christian College and a former TV Evangel-



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ist, was removed from the air following complaints that he made "discriminatory comments." The Canadian Broadcast Standards Council ruled that McVety violated codes by saying "distorted facts" and contributing "abusive comments about homosexuals," and specifically "suggesting that homosexuals prey on children." He was also head of the Institute for Canadian Values, a think tank that targets the LGBTQ community.

Paul Melnichek is another Ford supporter and anti-LGBTQ. A very wealthy Canadian evangelist, he also has a well-documented hatred for Jewish people. Ford has surrounded himself with the discriminating religious right and, if he wins the provincial election, Ontarians will be faced with a solid increase in discriminat-

ing action by Doug Ford. He has already promised to remove sex education from the school curriculum and just may return anti-abortion laws to the province. Time will reveal reality.

We live in a world where we cannot take anything, or anyone, for granted. Whatever lurks in a person's mind may not be revealed until the time is right for that person to come clean, so to speak. Whatever is on Doug Ford's mind will come to light, but we do know that he gladly accepted the support of the evangelical community and that group is well known for opposing LGBTQ rights and equality, and indeed the existence of members of that section of our society.

We are regularly exposed to discrimination and one may believe that huge steps have engulfed the LGBTQ community, and all other minority groups within our society. The moves are at best baby steps and will continue on that path. Discrimination will not end any time soon. We live in a world where leaders wage war, where people are ex-

terminated by bombs and other means, chased from their homes by those who have no regard for human life, and where those deemed of lesser human qualities endure discrimination. The light at the end of the tunnel is dim at best.

Do we just give up and cease to struggle? No, that is not an option, certainly not for millions who continue the fight for equality. We may have leaders who care less about present or future generations, but it is up to each of us to vote against the Donald Trumps or the Doug Fords of this world, thereby making steps to eliminate possibilities a reality. We are part of the 7.5 billion who occupy the globe, so the work is arduous. Equal treatment, equal opportunity and equality in all its forms are ours to obtain. After all, equal rights are human rights.

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A unified attempt to fight discrimination

In order to fight discrimination and to be more effective, we must band together all those who are affected by this ongoing and horrendous situation. It is more effective to be part of a global attempt to eradicate discrimination. As individuals, we do have the power to raise awareness and fight for equality. A unified attempt to fight discrimination expands that power.

The Indigenous people, the LGBTQ community, the Black community, and all other victims of discrimination must unify to make a more positive and effective result.

I have experienced the discrimination first hand through my 77 years of life. I know the hurt and I am fully aware of the results that include profiling by police, the horrific attacks and the suicidal tendencies that are part of the discriminatory actions that befall minorities. We are able to become a more effective group and be heard in unison, be loud and clear in our determination to erase the hate, to hold positive sessions that will raise more



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awareness.

I cannot help but refer to the students who rose up and demanded to be heard after their schoolmates and teachers were brutally murdered in the United States. The sheer numbers who banded together to make their statements were heard, and hopefully will have an impact that will change Washington.

Similarly, we have the capacity and we must gather the will to unify, organize marches and have the media involved in our attempts for equal treatment. Many have made honest attempts through the years to make a difference and were successful to some extent, but we must also remember that the road is long, winding and troublesome.

I have been involved in fighting for LGBTQ rights for the

past 43 years and I have realized improvements. We must not only be concerned about our own nation, but step outside the box by including those in other countries who are subjected daily to horrible beatings, killings and other brutalities because of sexual orientation, gender identity, or the colour of one's skin, and the list continues.

Also consider other aspects that are a result of discrimination. The suicide rates are extremely high, especially within the Indigenous communities everywhere, and LGBTQ teens are prone to this horrendous reaction because of negative parental or peer pressure. We cannot, and should not place ourselves in a particular bubble. It is imperative that all who are in the midst of those who experience discrimination are of one mind. Speaking with one voice will be more effective and have more positive results.

We, as a people and we as a responsible part of society, really have the obligation to stand together and fulfil a wish to stop

the angst and all the hurt that discrimination brings to each of us. We are members of the human race, bar none, and as such we must take action without delay.

I believe that Maritimers are very capable of organizing such a venture. There are many who are affected by discrimination here, and there is no reason to believe we cannot organize with one voice. This takes leadership and I strongly urge organizational skills be sharpened and put into place. We have countless able and hopefully willing participants who have the stamina to come forward and lead such a movement. Discrimination must be eradicated and never disappear from our society.

Please consider such action, and I assure everyone that I personally will join up and do what I am able. This is a call to action. I can be reached as follows: lgbt-connections@gmail.com

Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesdays in The News.

NSCC Stellarton Campus celebrates Pride *May 2, 2018*

Spring has arrived, officially that is, and with that we enter the seasons of spring, summer and fall. These are the seasons when many cities and towns in our country and around the world take on Pride celebrations. That is to say, the LGBTQ2 community makes plans to come together and tells the world that our place in society is firmly in place and we proudly make that statement.

A few weeks ago, I received an invitation from the Nova Scotia Community College in Stellarton to speak at the first Pride event at this Pictou County College. Event organizer Bobi MacDonald is to be congratulated for putting together this wonderful exercise of staff and student participation.

Upon arriving at the school, walking towards the front lobby, one could hear the chatter and other sounds. Soon, we arrived at the location and immediately noticed the decorations, rainbow flags and countless other signs indicative of LGBTQ2 celebrations. Folks were gathering around the area and before long the place was filled with at least 200 people. The enthusiasm of the crowd was



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overwhelming and one could sense they were able and ready to celebrate the LGBTQ2 community.

These kinds of events have been held in North America since the Stonewall uprising in New York City in 1969 when police raided a gay bar and arrested gays and transgender customers. The arrests were protested, and so this event was the birth of Pride. Each year, millions gather around the globe to raise awareness, celebrate the diversity of our population, express thanks to all we have accomplished and generally stand up and live our lives with pride.

The celebration was soon underway with staff member John Atwater as the MC. First to speak was Principal David Freckelton, welcoming everyone to this event. He emphasized the import-

ance of Pride and how it promotes equality. Obviously very proud to be part of this celebration, Mr. Freckelton was the first principal in Pictou County to initiate flying the rainbow flag at an educational facility.

When I received the call to be a speaker at the event, I gladly accepted the invitation and the opportunity to spread the word that the LGBTQ2 community has evolved into a movement that is a worldwide journey to equal rights. I emphasized the need for unity as the efforts to obtain equality requires dedication and determination. I also reiterated that while we gathered to celebrate we must also realize that we must continue the work, as much remains to be done, especially on a world scale where LGBTQ people still face unbearable punishment and seven countries still have the death penalty. Many countries outlaw Pride celebrations.

The Pictou County Centre for Sexual Health conducted a trivia quiz session. Executive director Vania MacMillan and board vice-president Jesiah MacDonald were obvious delighted in asking

the questions, and the crowd was equally enjoying the challenge. The questions ranged from when the first same-sex wedding took place in Canada to when “homosexuality” was decriminalized in Canada. Next on the program was the well-known duo, drag personalities Shaun McLean and Jake Chisholm. They provided laughs and prizes as they proceeded to change John Atwater into a sort of movie legend, Mae West. Both students and staff were involved in dressing John with outrageous apparel.

The day was a successful time of coming together to celebrate, a way to give the LGBTQ2 community a voice, and the NSCC Stellarton Campus succeeded wonderfully. As a longtime activist for LGBTQ2 equality, I congratulate this place of learning for bringing together staff and students in a show of solidarity.

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LGBTQ family support

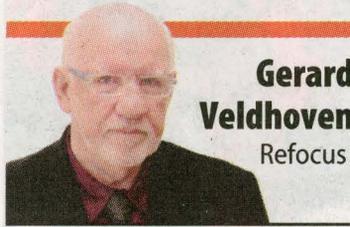
May 9, 2018

As we mature and grow into adulthood, we are encouraged by our parents to follow in their footsteps and also take on the responsibility to have children. We are well aware that parents look forward to the day when they will experience the joy of being grandparents and, as well, be assured that the family name and history continues. There are those parents who will push the issue, encouraging the process, regardless whether their offspring wish to have children.

Many reasons exist for some folks not to have children; they feel perhaps they will be limited in their future professions. Then, many realize that if they are gay, the likelihood of becoming parents may be limited and the push is on. "Oh mom and dad, I have something to tell you. I am gay and I may not become a parent, therefore, no grandchildren for you, at least not from me."

The news is shocking to some moms and dads, perhaps not realizing their child is gay, or some if they are aware push the child to find a mate of the opposite sex and simply ignore one's sexual orientation.

When we come into this world, unaware of what lies ahead, we learn soon enough how the road to acceptance by one's family will affect family connectedness. Sadly, the facts state that this problem is common, even in 2018. Statistics show that many teens continue to be rejected



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by parents, siblings and other family members. The results may be drastic as suicides remain a dominant issue among gays and second to Indigenous deaths as cause of death. Family support is crucial, and will prevent drastic measures and save lives.

We also are very aware of the bullying in our schools, churches and the workplace. This reality affects the well-being of a gay person, and extends to all LGBTQ2 individuals. Revealing to family members that one is in a body that is completely against their nature, may be a received with disappointment, and even anger. To be ousted from the family is a distinct possibility.

So, how does rejection affect those who are ejected from their families? Many need professional help, and others simply look for a friend or family member to lend an ear and just listen. Families must take responsibility and take the child's true feelings into consideration and not dwell on a notion that someday the problem will disappear. They must face the fact that their child's "condition" is not a problem, but a natural human existence. The problem

is strictly attached to the family member/members, who should seek help in solving the sometimes agonizing problem associated with LGBTQ2 acceptance.

For many parents, or other family members and indeed "friends" lacking civility towards a child who identifies as gay, transgender, or any other identity, this can be traumatic as well, and may turn into a deep-seated lifetime torment. Most of us long to be in a family where we are all treated with love and respect, and have an existence that that is lived in harmony with all others and is unconditional. A solution is difficult to obtain as this is a type of family discrimination that may have dire consequences. Statistics are stunning in content. Families are torn apart by all sorts of condemnation that parents are dishing out, which in most cases is of religious-belief origin.

From generation to generation, the influence has been ingrained in people and that must stop if change is to succeed. We question and we delve into the whys and the wherefores, but hit a stone wall with many family members. Love, respect and embrace are imperative. Strive for family support.

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Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesdays in The News.

May 23, 2018

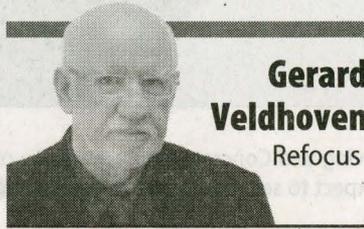
Research indicates some religions influence LGBTQ suicides

A study at the University of Texas at Austin's Research Consortium found a link between religion and gay and questioning youths. This study was recently published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine. A survey of 21,247 found 2.3 per cent identified as gay or lesbian, 3.3 per cent as bisexual, and 1.1 per cent were questioning their sexual orientation.

The study also indicates, as has been revealed in other studies, that LGBTQ youth reported that they had attempted suicide at least once in their lives, a higher rate than straight people. The rates of suicides ranged from 14 per cent to 20 per cent for LGBTQ young people compared to 5 per cent for straight youths.

They were also asked about the impact on religion in their lives, and 38 per cent said religion was important to them, compared to gays and lesbians who indicated religion is not part of their lives.

Those who are questioning and religious were three times more likely to have suicidal thoughts. The findings are disturbing and, according to reports, not surprising. If religion is thought to be



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protective, the opposite is true, depending on the religion.

The problem is that religions, generally speaking, condemn the LGBTQ community and that their sins will not be tolerated. One cannot approach religious leaders in a positive sense, if that person is already deemed a sinner.

Consequently, help will not be forthcoming unless one denies their sexual orientation or true gender identity, or expression.

Most world religions are vehemently against gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender individuals, but suggest they can be supportive. However, they will not accept LGBTQ people as who they are. This hypocritical, double-edged sword is overwhelming, give with one hand and take with the other.

One of the authors of the study, John Blossnich of the West Vir-

ginia University said, "It can be very scary to be caught in your space where your religion tells you that you are a sinner just for being who you are. Sexual minority people may feel abandoned, they may experience deep sadness and anger, and they may worry what this means for their families, especially if the families are religious too."

The feelings are real and if that sadness and anger becomes too much to cope with, anything may happen, including suicides.

The religious organizations that adhere to anti-LGBTQ exclusion should think about the damage being done to minds of young people who are attempting to be themselves due to cruel and archaic doctrine. Our young people are our leaders of tomorrow, the ones who will be travelling the long road to equality. They must be supported, and if that means separating from their religion, then so be it rather than having their world turn upside down which could lead to horrific consequences.

The questions remain, why do many religions not care about the well-being of LGBTQ members,

and why do they not care about the mental anguish that engulfs these young people?

Will the religious teachings come to embrace equality and rid us of horrendous consequences as teens, especially, come to terms with their sexual orientation or gender identities or expression?

Where will these lead for the present and the future generations, knowing that lives are in turmoil and with dire consequences?

LGBTQ people have always been on this earth and will remain. It is up to those religions that condemn LGBTQ folks and cease to make positive change, embrace instead of reject, love instead of hate, make religious beliefs inclusive for all, yes for all, bar none.

Then and only then will the suicides stop. Abandon the discrimination, save lives!

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Sexual orientation: What's it all about?

What causes a person to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or straight? This question is as original as sliced bread and not easily explained. Regardless of where we live in this vast world, this question begs an answer.

The majority of us are aware of our sexual orientation as we mature. However, to our family and friends who are not aware, or those who attempt to deny our very existence, let me relate the following. In the scientific journal, *Archive of Sexual Behaviour*, researchers from the Queen Mary's School of Biological and Chemical Sciences and the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, concluded that, "genetics and environmental factors (which are specific to an individual, may include biological processes such as different hormone exposure in the womb) determine homosexual and heterosexual behaviour."

A leading expert on human sexual behaviour, and co-author of this study, Dr. Quazi Rahman, explains, "This study puts cold water on any concerns that we are looking for a 'gay gene,' or a



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single environmental variable which could be used to select our homosexuality."

If we could choose our sexual orientation, we most likely would not opt to be gay or bisexual, as the brutality, bullying and other acts of aggression against those in our society can be horrendous in so many ways. We also do not choose the colour of our eyes, instead opting to change and choose blue instead of the brown eyes we had at birth. That is simply not the case.

The end result is that our sexual orientation does not really require an explanation. One does not ask someone why one is heterosexual, so there is no benefit to inquire if one is gay or bisexual. It matters little as the outcome cannot be changed.

Those who believe that gays can be "cured," mostly on religious grounds, have proven to be ignorant of the facts and the procedure used can be detrimental to a person's mental and/or physical well-being. We share this planet regardless of our sexual orientation. We are who and what we are and our diverse qualities make each of us unique in our own way.

Scientific and medical research have shown that being gay or bisexual are normal variations in human sexuality. Our very existence makes us all part of humanity and questioning our sexual orientation should not be part of the equation whether we are not all equal.

So, as the arguments continue between various factions, we educate, raise awareness and bring to light that members of our society must learn to embrace the diversity of all citizens, bar none. It's all a matter of human rights.

The question we should be asking is why only the heterosexual world has the answers as to why LGBTQ2 folks should be respected and entitled to equality.

We are constantly bombarded with judgmental rhetoric and other intolerant behaviour. We must learn to reject the religious right and those who oppose the very existence of sexual orientation.

It is generally a constant war between religious thought and scientific evidence that keeps the fires burning. In the end, we are here to stay, regardless of the evidence presented or in spite of the findings. Scientific research has determined that we are part of the human existence and, my friends, we have known that throughout the ages.

As well, we should not dwell on the reasons, but emphasize the quality of life we must attain, live in peace, make love our end goal, and be non-judgmental of others. Our birthright must be protected, and we do so with pride.

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Pride celebrations, straight ahead

Spring is here and Pride celebrations will soon be in full swing across this nation and around the world. The yearly events are celebrated with events that include Pride flag raising ceremonies, parades and all sorts of activities that bring attention to the fact the LGBTQ2 community is well on the road to establishing a place in society equal to all others. We stand and we demand that equality.

We have come a long way and fought hard and long to have the laws changed to accommodate equality as all others. To celebrate that fact and to bring attention to what remains to be done, Pride events are held everywhere.

The latest community to be raising the Pride flag is the Nova Scotia town of Westville. A ceremony will be held on Monday, June 4th at noon. I have approached more towns in Pictou County, and so far the only other towns are New Glasgow and the Town of Pictou will also announce a date for their flag raising ceremony. The Municipal-



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ity of Pictou County has not yet made it known if they will follow suit. New Glasgow is set to have the event on July 9 at noon. Stellarton made it known that it will only fly government flags and Trenton has yet to reply.

The busy summer includes many activities, including a flag ceremony in Amherst. A special tribute to the late LGBTQ2 and human rights activist, Eldon Hay, will be held at that event. I will be presenting a tribute to this great man who for years was a strong ally, sought after speaker and advisor. Eldon, a retired United Church minister and Professor for Religious Studies at Mount Allison University, among his countless accomplishments, was a constant supporter for the

LGBTQ2 community. His devotion to this work earned him the Order of Canada, and other accolades.

This event will be held on Monday, June 11 at 4 p.m. Then on Saturday, June 16, the Pride Parade will take place with activities beginning at 1 p.m. I am so honoured to have been chosen Parade Grand Marshall this year. This will be the second parade. Last year's was a tremendous success with floats and many participants. It was also the second last time that Eldon Hay appeared at a Pride event.

We travel through life and meet many people who leave a strong impression with the realization that their wisdom, positivity, a strong wish for equality for all and a lasting influence on us that enriches us forever. We have the opportunity to say thanks to those who influence us in such a positive manner, and in turn we are able to continue that positivity and pass it on to others. In doing so, we are hopefully able to reach those who deny us equal

rights, equal opportunity, equal marriage and equal treatment.

Perhaps this is too much to expect, but we must soldier on and be positive and raise awareness wherever we are able to reach those who do not share our values. Pride celebrations do the work and provide great platforms. Sadly, this is not possible in many countries where being a member of the LGBTQ2 community is illegal, and cause for imprisonment or even death. Does this mean we give up and let sleeping dogs lie, so to speak? Emphatically no.

We cannot, and must not give in to those who would see us as not equal because of sexual orientation, or true gender identity and expression. Our work continues and we know we can make a difference. Happy Pride!

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June 6, 2018

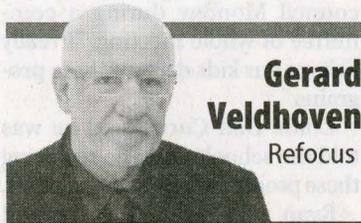
Commonwealth nations, Trudeau pushes LGBTQ equality

The Commonwealth countries, all 53 of them, have much in common, if only for the fact that they belong in a sort of united front. When it concerns equality for its citizens, for the purpose of this column, the LGBTQ community, the variations in equal rights are as different as the weather conditions.

Space will not allow me to mention each country, but I am able to give readers some idea as to the various policies and laws. Those countries that have laws of equality in place include Canada, the U.K., Australia and New Zealand. These are the places where LGBTQ folks are able to live in some sort of peace and mostly live contented lives.

Canada remains at the forefront and was the first to introduce laws of protection, pension benefits, equal marriage and other positive ways that have made the lives of LGBTQ people more tolerable and equal. That is not to say that Canada is out of the woods when it concerns equal treatment.

Other nations with equal rights written into the constitution have the same problems with



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discrimination and that remains a huge negative. The future looks more promising under the condition that awareness must be raised again, and again.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau addressed the Commonwealth summit in London recently and decided along with the U.K. to meet with LGBTQ activists to show continued support. Both countries have been pushing for LGBTQ rights to be on the agenda, but were rejected by the majority of member nations. These are the countries where same-sex relations are outlawed.

Trudeau said, "The LGBTQ issue is one of the most outstanding issues that demonstrate the Commonwealth isn't as good at bringing people together around shared values and principles as they should be."

There is huge opposition from

other leaders. Rosanna Flamer-Caldera, executive director of the Commonwealth Equality Network, said, "I can't even get close to my prime minister or president, so we need to use international platforms with leaders like Prime Minister Trudeau."

Many leaders and their countries outrightly reject the LGBTQ community, making it impossible to even seek equality, and that alone may land someone in prison, or worse. Activists are threatened and placed in custody to face trial, if they are fortunate to have that luxury – places like African nations such as Ghana, Uganda, Kenya and Zambia, among others. Others member nations such as Barbados, Jamaica, Singapore and India have strong anti-LGBTQ laws. These are just eight countries out of 53 where work to establish equality within the Commonwealth seems impossible.

If leaders continue on this path the world will certainly not realize an end to this blatant discrimination. As long as the imprisonments and death sentences are written into the law, the end is not in sight, at least not in the

near future. It is doubtful that changes will occur at all.

Seven countries still have the death penalty and that is horrific. The Commonwealth of Nations must take action against the rogue countries and declare them non-members if change is not forthcoming. Problem is of course, they will have the majority vote, and that is the democratic way, however, at what expense? The credibility of such a huge "organized" world body is surely at stake. Human rights, equality for all, are not part of its foundation, but discrimination, against the LGBTQ community, imprisonment and in some cases the death penalty have been adequately proven.

Canada, the United Kingdom and some others are pushing for change. The pressure must be consistent, perhaps introducing sanctions for violation of human rights. Equal rights are human rights!

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June 20, 2018

COMMENTARY

Pope Francis versus gay culture

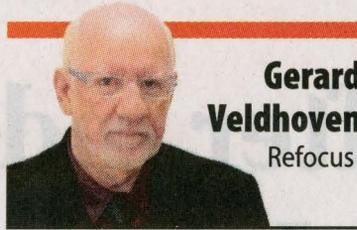
The recent controversy in Chile, where Roman Catholic bishops and priests were found guilty of sexual abuse, has found its way to the Vatican and the pope. The man at the centre, Juan Carlos Cruz, has met with Francis to explain his feelings.

As a gay man, he chose to confront his abusers and finally was invited to Rome to discuss his feelings with the head of that church. Allegedly, Cruz was told by the Pope that, "God made you like this and he loves you."

These words have not been publicly acknowledged and therefore cannot be substantiated. We may take the word of Cruz, but we must also hear from the Vatican to lend credence to the statement. Pope Francis may have said these words, but unless he exclaims so publicly, we must assume some caution.

The Roman Catholic Church's moral theologian at Rome's Pontifical Holy Cross University, Rev Robert Gahl, explains it as follows: "What the Pope was saying is, 'God loves you and made you just as you are, and therefore you must accept yourself as you are while struggling to live according to the Gospel.'"

According to a 1992 summary of Catholic teaching, gay individuals "do not choose their homosexual condition; for most of them it is a trial." The pope has spoken on this issue on many occasions and made attempts at reconciliation; however, words are empty



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unless positive action follows. Francis may be having a change of heart, but has not indicated any positive change will take place in church doctrine.

Many were impressed with Francis when he was selected to lead the church as he seemed a kind, inclusive and all-around encompassing individual. He has, however, a history of denouncing gays. He was previously known as Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio in his native Argentina. Responding to that government's approval of same-sex marriage, he said, "Let's not be naive, we're not talking about a mere bill, but rather a machination of the Father of Lies that seeks to confuse and deceive the children of God."

The LGBTQ community in Argentina were further incensed by the following comment by the future pope: "Gay adoption is a form of discrimination," and added that it is a "war against God."

A few years ago, Cardinal Ouellet of Canada reiterated the policy of the church that changes regarding women in the church, gays, lesbians and married priests will not be considered. That leads us to conclude that the Roman

Catholic Church does not anticipate any change in doctrine. Pope Francis, in an about face, seems to make some attempt at setting a friendlier tone; however, the question remains, will policy change to embrace the LGBTQ community become a reality?

To merely say that "God made you like this" does little to convince us that LGBTQ citizens are about to be completely accepted and recognized as equals to all others. On the contrary, it further confuses the issue, as Pope Francis and the Vatican remain adamant that the church will remain discriminatory in its views of the LGBTQ community. In making statements that would indicate a slight opening of the proverbial door, we are not closer to any confirmation that recognition is at hand.

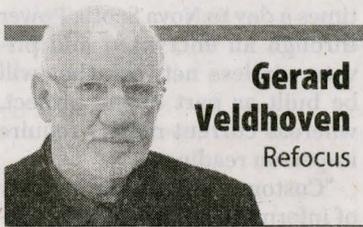
The pope has said many things since his pontificate began in 2013, but on many of those occasions he changes his tune. This latest development may be taken with a grain of salt. It is of consequence, as those LGBTQ folks within the RC church, and indeed outside, remain a target of intolerance. Discrimination is the gravest error of our time. Equal rights are human rights.

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June 13, 2018

Intolerance on the increase: LGBTQ2 in North America



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A long-awaited separation has occurred that involves the Boys Scouts of America and the Mormon Church. The church has a policy that is decidedly anti-gay and the discriminatory action to separate from the Boy Scouts has finally taken place. The reason given is that leaders in the Scouts may include gays, and that has the Mormons upset, and so the action to separate is a natural conclusion.

Following a century of “marriage,” this divorce is the result of the discrimination against the LGBTQ2 community. This is not a new phenomenon and certainly will occur again in the future.

In the United States, a movement has developed that strongly suggests LGBTQ2 fortunes are on the decline. State after state is adjusting their laws to increase bans on many social issues that hurt the LGBTQ2 citizens in that country. Adoption laws are being adjusted that prohibit gay couples from becoming parents, decidedly lessening the opportunity for parentless children to be part of a family where love could be theirs

to enjoy.

Donald Trump constantly fuels the fires of intolerance that affect the attitudes and antiquated laws of many countries around the globe, such as, Russia, Uganda and many others. Social issues are being tampered with in an unprecedented manner. A country that prides itself to be the best country in the world, with advanced technology (perhaps), the most powerful armed forces and the most destructive weapons is, without doubt, one of the most backward nations when it concerns social issues.

Equality for all is not a strong point in the U.S., and it’s high time for Americans to stand up against the ruling conservative Republican Party, and its president, who also prides himself as

a warm-hearted, perfect leader, to demand all are treated with respect, bar none.

If this trend continues, we are surely headed for a divided society and the dedicated people who desire a united world, will experience a disastrous set-back. We cannot let this happen and those responsible for divisions must be held accountable.

Society is on the verge of serious setbacks unless we stand up for equality in a spontaneous manner that will have a positive effect on our very existence. Actions by such organizations as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and many other religious sects and right-wing ideology are at the core of our inability to seek equality in all its forms. These “Christian” groups as well as other religions, who profess to love all, are really obsessed with division.

It has been my experience that many Christians are very open to equal rights for the LGBTQ2 community. At a ceremony for the LGBTQ2 victims who were massacred in an Orlando bar, a

member of the clergy told those gathered that religion was the root cause of discrimination against LGBTQ2 people, and much of that continues to this day. The minister called for this to end.

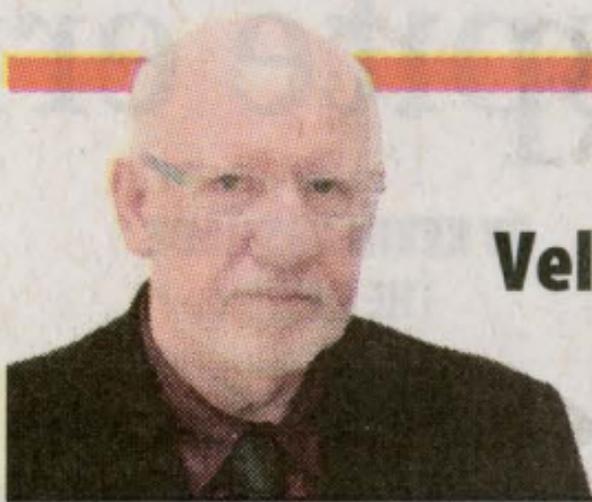
In order for equality to become a reality all forces condemning must seek to accept and respect all. We are who we are, and we come into this world in all forms and in all sorts.

By birth we are part of humankind, and as living beings we are all the same somehow. Some are born straight, many gay, some trapped in the wrong body and feel the need for change, and act on that to become a whole person. We do not choose our sexual orientation.

Who would expose themselves to the hatred, the suicides and discriminatory action if the choice was ours to make?

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COMMENTARY**Supreme Court rules
against evangelical
university's LGBTQ rules****Gerard
Veldhoven**

Refocus

Trinity Western University has lost its bid to place pressure on gay students who would enter the university's law school in 2020.

Each student must complete a document stating they will abstain from sexual activity until after marriage, which is to say between a man and a woman. This is blatant discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. Two legal associations from British Columbia and Ontario requested the hearing at Canada's top court, resulting in a ruling of 7 to 2 that the school is indeed judging on the basis of sexual orientation and that goes against this country's ideals of diversity. The ruling gives law societies the right to deny accreditation to the proposed law school.

Of course, TWU feels they are being discriminated against and that this ruling infringes on freedom of religion. Evangelical Christian places of learning are not publicly funded, but that does not mean that discrimination can be practised at will. Freedom of religious beliefs are also protected, but not if that practice discriminates. It is our human right to be equal and that must be protected vigorously, regardless of our individual differences.

In Canada, where religious freedom is protected under the laws of the land, as it should be, does not give the right to discriminate against a certain person or group of people on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, among many other unique qualities we may possess. In order to unite, all groups and individuals must come to terms with the diversity of the world's population. To accomplish this we must initiate dialogue, productive, inclusive talks that would involve religious and secular beliefs. We must come to an understanding that we are different in many ways such as, the colour of our skin, our sexual orientation, eye colour, speaking another language, gender identity and/or expression. Rejection of any of these is inhuman and grossly unfair. We come into this world with our identities intact.

Much has been written about TWU in British Columbia. This right-wing evangelical Christian place of learning insists it has the right to discriminate against its gay students and some courts, such as the Nova Scotia Supreme Court, agree and would allow these type of institutions to further inequality in this country. In a previous ambiguous statement, TWU insists they are not criticizing members of the LGBTQ community, but protecting the "traditional Christian marriage." The LGBTQ+ community in Canada welcomes the Supreme Court's decision and hopefully will send a message that other universities and private religious schools are not immune from court action.

The important message from this sort of ruling is that we must learn to live together in peace and harmony, in a world where hate and discrimination are rampant. Apparently, evangelicals feel differently and that is unfortunate. Where do we begin? When will we experience an end to the constant attacks on the LGBTQ+ citizens of this world? When will inequality end? Are we able to find it in us to eradicate the ill feelings and work towards a solution to this seemingly endless warring? Do the evangelists feel that they are completely in line to discriminate, or will they come to understand that all of us are equal and capable to love and not judge? We are who we are, and what we are. We do not change because of religious beliefs that dictate we must be heterosexual to be part of this universe. If "love" is the operative word in the Christian churches, then show us the willingness to accept that all are equal, bar none!

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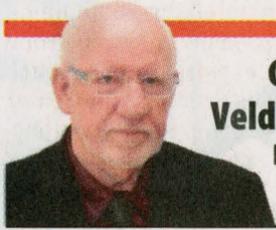
Aug 2, 2018

Ban on blood and organ donations from gays must halt

Many have written and spoken about the blood donation fiasco in our country. I have touched on the subject on countless occasions with the intention to bring to light that gay men are discriminated against by being banned from donating blood.

Justin Trudeau promised to lift the ban when he revealed his platform that would set the tone for his future government. The promise has not yet been realized.

A gay man cannot give blood if he has had sexual relations with another man within a year. This was changed from a five-year period a few years ago. This discriminatory practice must end in this country, and the prime minister would do well to halt this ban. The idea that only gay men are able to contact HIV/AIDS is, of course, a fallacy. People from all



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sexualities, gay, bisexual, straight, tall, short, blue eyes or brown eyes — it has no bearing on contracting the disease.

The gay community is singled out and this is pure discrimination. The federal government has the power to change direction, but apparently will not lift the ban. As Justin Trudeau stood in the House of Commons to apologize to the LGBTQ+ community in 2016, he neglected — or simply forgot — to address this discriminatory practice.

Blood donations are badly

needed in our society and we are constantly made aware of this fact. Organ donations are also banned, and this touches the hearts of many, as many gay men have children and grandchildren, or other family members, but are not allowed to save their lives. This is horrendous, and Canada, a nation that prides itself on being a progressive and inclusive land, must understand the bans are contrary to those beliefs. So many wrongs remain part of our existence and our well-being.

The fact that many lives may be saved is evident by the citizens who are allowed to donate and who are free to go to any donation banks knowing that someone will benefit greatly and a life will go on. The time is now to change direction and our federal government must act without delay. In our democratic society, each and

every one of us must be afforded the opportunity to save the life of another. Time is of the essence, and with each day we lose that opportunity, a life may be lost because of this outdated ban.

After all the years the ban has been in effect, the government surely has conferred with the medical experts. However, this really comes down to being equal and our individual rights to donate blood or organs to save lives. Any person who is sexually active in the last year should be banned from donations, rather than singling out gay men. We are told that blood and organ donations are at an all-time low, certainly a huge problem.

So the reason to stop the ban seems obvious — it would increase the blood and organ supply. It is also obvious that the powers that be are not that con-

cerned about the shortages. Do they not feel that saving lives is a priority? Surely not! This issue is of great concern and strongly suggests that much remains to be done to lessen discrimination. The LGBTQ+ citizens of this country must receive due equality at all levels and that begins with government, especially with the organ and blood donation fiasco, and an immediate response is of the utmost importance.

If gay men are able to save lives, then please give them the chance to participate fully, along with other Canadians.

HIV/AIDS does not discriminate.

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Politicians avoiding the rise in LGBTQ+ discrimination

I realize the next federal election isn't until fall 2019, but the need to address what the LGBTQ+ citizens in Canada need to do in order to keep our politicians on their feet and looking out for the well being of our citizens.

Many issues remain of great concern to the LGBTQ+ community, especially with recent studies indicating attacks on LGBTQ+ citizens are on the rise in Canada. We usually expect this type of behaviour taking place south of the border, where the Trump administration clearly is showing indifference to the citizens who are members of this community, and indeed have proven that the U.S. government is clamping down on equal rights and treatment.

The horrendous actions by this government are a disgrace and further prove right-wing Christian ideology is at work. Trump and his cohorts are supported



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by the religious right. Trump himself, VP Mike Pence, Foreign Secretary Pompeo and Attorney General Jeff Sessions have been extremely vocal in opposing LGBTQ+ rights.

As Canadians, we have our own concerns and our own politicians who need reminding that they must get involved in assuring more protection for its LGBTQ+ population.

We are indeed fortunate to have a prime minister who has, in a very public way, shown support for our community by attending Pride celebrations and apologizing for past wrongs. These at-

tempts are world class and have made a strong impact that has been well received and supported by the LGBTQ+ citizens of Canada.

Appointed special advisor to the Prime Minister, Randy Boissonnault has been busy gathering information from citizens across the country and hopefully will result in action that leads to a more inclusive society.

But hold on, folks. This is Canada, a nation that prides itself in being so inclusive, but we are not immune to negative actions against the LGBTQ+ community. As a matter of fact, research has shown there was a 25 per cent increase in violence against this part of the population in one year. We hear of how we are a great accepting nation, a notion that is generally believed, but that does not indicate a true picture. Having said this, Canada is known to be a "tolerant" nation. The word

"tolerant" does little to explain that Canadians readily accept, but does mean that, yes, we tolerate, not really fully accepting the LGBTQ+ citizens. In other words, we tolerate, but hopefully they will go away!

To change these negativities, our politicians must take responsibilities seriously and act on financing programs that benefit our LGBTQ+ citizens, and all who are experiencing discrimination and violence.

It will be one year until our politicians surface with promises, most of which, as we well know, never materialize. We listen, and we live in hope that the need for change will be taken seriously. Politicians' platforms rarely address discrimination, or how to combat this ongoing problem that includes family rejections, gay conversion therapy from right-wing religious groups, lack of government in-

terest, prime examples of what breeds contempt which leads to all forms of violence, mental and physical illnesses and perhaps suicide.

Suicides are occurring more often in this country. I have contacted the feds about conversion therapy which I reasoned is discrimination. The answer I received is this is a mental health issue; therefore, a provincial matter. This answer is a travesty that needs urgent attention.

Our leaders must listen and act, not lay blame! The new premier of Ontario, Doug Ford, is rescinding the sex education law; again, a slap in the face, instead of promoting positive education to minimize discrimination.

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The message has to be clear

Aug 16, 2018

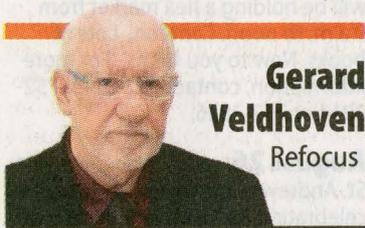
Judges and lawyers must be aware of increased violence against LGBTQ+ citizens

A recent case in Nova Scotia was rendered by a provincial court judge as “homophobic” conduct and Judge Gregory Lenehan said “it causes me great concern that such an attitude would be present in a young person in this day and age.”

The man appeared in court on charges of assault against Dr. William Winters and his partner, Jurii Senyshyn. Their property in Ketch Harbour was severely damaged with a motorcycle and there were threats of bodily harm against the couple because they are gay.

Jacob Flemming told police he would knock him out if he didn't get out of his face. The judge, obviously surprised by these actions, clearly does not keep track of the increase in crimes against the LGBTQ+ community.

This type of assault is all too common in Canada and abroad. Most of us who propose equal treatment for all are constantly



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reminded that this is but a dream. Cases of abuse are a constant and we must be prepared for additional responses against the LGBTQ+ citizens, as well as the countless others who are systematically attacked.

Minorities are at risk, and new attackers are stimulated by those who are determined to lower themselves to commit these horrific crimes. The fact a sitting provincial court judge is not on target with this national and international situation is alarming. Our laws are in place to protect.

The courts must be aware of

the increase in brutality that is far too common in our society.

The gay conversion therapy, which has been on the minds of many, is undergoing scrutiny in a manner not experienced before. Activists and concerned groups are taking this on as a serious threat to the well-being of gay Canadians.

As I have mentioned previously, our federal government views this as a mental health issue. I argued it is first and foremost a blatant discrimination issue that stands to do irreparable harm to a gay person's health. We cannot let this continue and our governments, federally and provincially, must act to ban this practice that can be mostly blamed through religious influence. It is viewed as a “sin,” therefore catch the “sinner” and turn a gay person into a healthy, straight being. This is not possible. The consequences are dire.

The fact that violence against members of the LGBTQ+ community is on the increase proves education must be at the forefront to deal with the countless incidents that occur daily. Police, lawyers, judges, teachers and our medical providers must be more aware and not see this as an effort by activists and others to merely seek attention. This is extremely serious and causes much hurt to those within the community.

In many instances, partners and children are affected by these attacks and also may lead some to suicidal tendencies. Our society seems oblivious to the fact so many LGBTQ+ members of the population have families. Many seem to take it for granted that they are single and without family members.

One must remember that according to the 2016 census, there are 72,880 same sex couples in Canada, 24,000 are legally mar-

ried and 48,510 are common-law. We must also accept the fact that many have children, to the dismay and disapproval of most religious institutions.

Taking these stats into consideration, the tapestry of the family units in this country has changed dramatically.

In order to receive equal treatment within our society at large, our law makers must accommodate the changes and protect all who are the subject of confrontation. Our sexual orientation, our true gender identity and expression, and all other uniqueness we may possess, bar none, must be protected. The judge in Halifax opened his eyes, so let's hope this is possible everywhere.

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Aug 22 2018

Bill to be introduced banning gay conversion therapy

In my last column I was pressing the issue of political support by party leaders, MLAs and MPs. It is of great concern that many are displaying a lack of interest, or simply wishing the issues would disappear on their own.

I assure readers that we have a number of politicians who do really care and will step up to support the issues that matter to members of the LGBTQ+ community. Nova Scotia's Progressive Conservative interim leader, Karla MacFarlane, will be presenting a private member's bill to the legislature this fall that would ban gay conversion therapy in this province.

I applaud Ms. MacFarlane for the initiative. She has been a constant in her support towards the LGBTQ+ community and shows leadership that will be viewed as a sincere support to ban this horrific practice.



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As only two provinces, British Columbia and Ontario, and the City of Vancouver, have a ban in place it may be difficult to get others on side. This issue stems from religious tactics to "cure" a person from being gay and become a "heterosexual."

Of course, this is a non-starter as it cannot work and only promises to turn into nightmares for those who are the subject of this practice. The reason for this program follows the idea that religious right-wing, evangelicals view gays as being perverts and must be discriminated against,

which over time has resulted in horrific feelings of guilt and other inner turmoil that the churches have promoted.

This is a matter of blatant discrimination that must be stopped. In a letter I received from the prime minister's office, his communications head tells me that the government feels this is a mental health issue, therefore the responsibility of the provinces. This ridiculous answer seems to indicate that the federal government will not get involved.

In a return letter I insisted that this is discrimination of the highest order and indeed should be the concern of Ottawa. The mental health issues that follow are a provincial jurisdiction. Perhaps the federal government wants to avoid a showdown with the religious right.

The Canadian Charter and the Human Rights Act are sup-

posed to protect actions such as this. Religious freedom is also protected, but the hate and intolerance that stems from some churches must be dealt with so that the LGBTQ+ community will not be further threatened.

Our politicians must get involved. The ongoing therapy destroys gays and will surely increase in time. Nova Scotia is set to become the third province to ban gay conversion therapy. We look for the legislature to do the right thing and legislate that the therapy be banned for all time.

I received correspondence from the premier's office as well, which in part states the following: "The province does not condone conversion therapy or the notion that anyone from the LGBTQ community requires treatment because of sexual orientation.

"In Nova Scotia, conversion therapy is not recognized as a

billable health service. The NSHA Public Health are assisting the Sexual Health Centre in Cumberland County in their response to offer a 'safer spaces' education event prior to the scheduled Pugwash camp."

The camp was cancelled. However, the response from the premier's office does absolutely nothing to assure that they would support a ban. Safer spaces are important, but the government must take responsibility and act at once to be on board and not come up with excuses and lame-duck responses.

Karla MacFarlane has promised to present the bill and I live with the hope that she and all MLAs will pass this legislation.

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Saudi Arabia's LGBTQ+ abuses

Aug 30, 2018

The ongoing altercations between the Canadian and Saudi governments are at an all-time high. Our Foreign Affairs minister, Chrystia Freeland, has rightfully criticized Saudi Arabia for its human rights abuses.

Women's rights are at the centre of his fight, and both Justin Trudeau and Ms. Freeland have indicated they will keep up the pressure for change. This is a decided switch for our country as the previous prime minister, Stephen Harper, was a close friend of this Arab nation. He called the king close ally of Canada and completely ignored the crimes against humanity that have been part of Saudi Arabia for years. The resent government must be congratulated for not closing eyes to the abuses.

Women's rights are at the forefront of our government's objection, but one must emphasize that



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abuses of all sorts are dominant in that nation. The countless human rights abuses are horrific and the future looks rather dim. The fact women were given the "right" to drive a car does not indicate that we will see revolutionary changes in attitudes, or indeed the laws.

The LGBTQ+ citizens are also deemed as second-class beings and the following are some of the inhumane treatments that exist in Saudi Arabia. Both male and female same-sex sexual activity is illegal. Being gay or transgender are viewed as immoral and indecent activities, and the law

punishes acts of "homosexuality" or "cross dressing" with punishments ranging from fines, public floggings, life in prison, torture and even death.

Saudi Arabia has the distinction as being the very worst in human rights abuses. It is a living hell for gays, if found out. In 2002, three men were beheaded for "committing homosexual acts." Many were arrested between 2005 and 2006 for attending a gay wedding. If one chooses to come out as gay, families will in all likelihood disown them. A 15-year-old boy who told his parents he was gay was kicked out of the house and his family threatened to kill him, telling him could never return home. The boy, named Roshan, committed suicide eight days later. If found out, a stoning to death may be the punishment.

Trade agreements sometime will interfere with the call for

human rights, as is the case in the United States. When Donald Trump paid a visit to Saudi Arabia, he praised the king and the government for showing huge support for the U.S. Trump, with a huge grin, and seemingly proud of the fact that support was no doubt for him personally, signed away any hope to criticize the country's human abuses. Of course, we are reminded of the Trump administration, as constant news stories tell us of officials who refuse to support LGBTQ+ equal rights. It is a travesty and sends a strong message that this administration is on the side of blatant discrimination.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who travels around the world, will not address the issue. Vice-President Pence, also a right-wing religious figure, has on many occasions spoken against LGBTQ+ equality, as has his colleague, Attorney General Jeff Sessions.

Canada also has its right wingers such as Alberta opposition leader Jason Kenney and Ontario Premier Doug Ford. Kudos to our prime minister, Freeland and other MPs in our Parliament for standing firm against human rights abuses. We have members of the legislatures in our provinces who are not afraid to speak up for equal rights. A prime example is Nova Scotia PC MLA and interim opposition leader Karla MacFarlane, who will be introducing a bill to ban gay conversion therapy.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia must learn to respect human rights, and if that means less or no trade, so be it!

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Challenge to churches to embrace LGBTQ+ community

Rev. John Boyd of First Baptist Church in Halifax suggested his congregation hold a vote to be gay friendly.

The result of that vote, in 2006, showed a 93 per cent approval for that particular church to have a gay-friendly policy, including same-sex marriage. This, to the ire of the Atlantic Convention of Baptist Churches, led First Baptist to no longer be a member of the convention.

Of the 30 Baptist churches in HRM, John Boyd's church is the only gay-friendly congregation. The majority of Christian churches struggle to be inclusive and feel the need to stay out of the controversy, therefore, if one ignores the situation it just may go away. Not so. It's not possible to sweep this under the proverbial carpet. Just in Canada alone, only a few of the Christian churches embrace equal treat-



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ment of members of the LGBTQ+ community. Transgender people are not even given consideration and are ridiculed. Many members of the clergy who perhaps are willing to call for acceptance seem reluctant to do so as church membership would dwindle away, which is a common occurrence.

So-called mainstream churches in Canada have, and are struggling with this issue. The United Church of Canada has a total acceptance policy, but leaves it to individual congregations to vote on LGBTQ+ embrace, or to

conduct same-sex marriage. A large number of them have what is called an "Affirming Congregation." These are examples of thoughts of religious beliefs that are part of Christian or, for that matter, other world religions, that influence followers. Teachings differ in all the denominations and that is where influence sway folks in many directions, one being discriminatory against LGBTQ+ citizens. Some will say that, "Yes, we will welcome them in our church, but we don't allow them to marry, or they should not be open about their relationships." In other words, acceptance is non-existent. Marriage should be viewed as a wish for two people, regardless of sexual orientation, to live together in a loving relationship. This is as it should be. If the church is not willing to marry a gay couple, then a public official will do the

legal ceremony. Churches should open their doors and welcome all who have a certain religious belief. If not, then it becomes a form of discrimination because of direct rejection on the basis of sexual orientation.

Those who do embrace are obviously very comfortable in bringing folks into the fold to interact with all others. Churches, where love is supposed to flourish like flowers in the wild, are in a prime situation to swing the doors wide open, embrace and make LGBTQ+ feel welcome in every way. See people for who they really are and accept the fact that we come in all forms. That is human nature. We do not choose our sexual orientation and that fact has to be realized by religious-minded people. We do not ask a heterosexual why he/she is that way, so one is readily accepted as such. By

the same token, a person being a member of the LGBTQ+ community should be welcomed and accepted.

Religious organizations could prevent a lot of agony in our young people, and older ones as well, if acceptance is part of the teachings. True love for another is a dedication to the well-being of a happy society. The type of religion should not matter as that simply indicates a certain belief in a god.

What really matters is that a person, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression, will be considered equal. Baptist, United Church, Anglican or Catholic, it should not matter. Love does conquer.

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PC Opposition leader introduces legislation to ban gay conversion therapy in Nova Scotia

Friday, Sept. 7, a day chosen for MLAs in Nova Scotia's House of Assembly to present bills for eventual passing. One of those bills was presented by PC interim leader Karla MacFarlane. The MLA for Pictou West stood in the House to table the bill to ban gay conversion therapy.

As an invited guest, along with John Carter and Brenda Hattie, I was delighted that this issue came to the attention of our political parties. The dreadful, damaging and discriminatory practice should have been scrapped when it first came on the scene. The horrific results have been well publicized, resulting in positive action. Friday, Sept. 7, Opposition Leader Karla MacFarlane, introduced a bill in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly that calls for the ban on gay conversion therapy. It was an emotional moment, and I was so pleased



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to have been asked to attend in support of the bill. I was one of only three out of the hundreds of LGBTQ Nova Scotians present for this important presentation.

I was saddened that more from the LGBTQ+ community could not find some time to show support. It is imperative that we all work together to make this work, and that future generations have a law in place that protects LGBTQ+ youth from dreadful practices that do irreparable harm. The Liberals are on board as is the NDP which also presented a bill to outlaw this prac-

tice.

Karla MacFarlane has made it clear that she will work together with other leaders to make this a reality. She told the CBC that "It doesn't matter if it's our bill, their bill, we just want to make sure that in this session the bill goes through and we all agree and I think we will." I told the CBC that "While there's been social progress through the years, it has not come easy or quickly. Our young people, especially, are vulnerable — young gay people. They will develop mental anguish and some even contemplate suicide and, indeed, will commit suicide in the end."

I also reiterated that "We need to make sure that this harmful and unnecessary practice does not happen in Nova Scotia. As more progress is achieved, it remains important for young people to stand up and fight for their rights

and live lives as they are meant to be lived." We must emphasize that gay conversion therapy is a direct result of discrimination, and followed by mental instability instilled by those who deem that being gay is an abomination in the eyes of their god. By passing the law, protection is to a great extent eliminated. If ignored, charges will be dealt with in our courts. Discrimination is widespread and increasing around the world, to an extent that is cause for concern. We must fight with all that is in us to attempt to eradicate this disease. As we turn on our televisions, contact social media on the internet or turn the pages of our newspapers, the messages are similar. Discrimination is rampant, here in our own land, south of our border or other countries, the beatings, the bullying, the murders, just because of the colour of our skin, the languages

we speak, the way we dress, the manner in which we worship, or not at all, gender inequality, sexual orientation, or our true gender identity and expression; it is a reality. We can no longer look through rose-coloured glasses and pretend that the progress we have made is phenomenal. Not so, dear readers.

The object of presenting new legislation is a great step forward and with each bill our lawmakers pass there is more strength in our endeavours for a more loving world.

Thank you, legislators, for recognizing the desperate need to protect our gay youth, and indeed the LGBTQ+ Community.

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Sept 13, 2018

Activism for LGBTQ+ equality

The recent tabling of a law that would ban gay conversion therapy was the result of many voices arguing that the practice is discriminatory and leads to mental illness, suicidal thoughts and in some cases even suicide.

The voices were heard and action followed. Some would argue that this is the result of many voices speaking in unison and individuals are usually muzzled. Not so, and this has been proven over the years. Not to say that groups are not being heard, but all who work towards an equal world are on top of that world. Individual activists in the LGBTQ+ community are noteworthy because they are ready and willing to be out there for all to pay attention, and not afraid to be hassled, contradicted or some other reaction that could result in some sort of physical harm.

A group or association making



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statements that are controversial and indeed powerful are generally viewed as a unified group of people and usually not associated with one particular person. In part, this is a safer manner that, when a statement is made, abusive action against them is not so common. In any case, it matters not if it is one person or 100 — the goal is to get folks to listen, pay attention to the reasons for the activism.

The LGBTQ+ citizens of Canada and around the world have many issues that need to be addressed. Those needs are real, and the em-

phasis must be on the eventual needs to be satisfied, protection under new laws to be on par with all other citizens, discrimination lessened, mental stability assured in cases of abuse and attacks because of sexual orientation, or true gender identity and expression.

Whatever the ills, we pay attention, and we act. As an activist for over four decades, I have some insight into the challenges of fighting governments — federally, provincially and on the municipal level. It is time consuming, argumentative and decidedly worth the efforts. About 10 years ago, I did a study on long-term care facilities in Nova Scotia, to find out if LGBTQ+ seniors would have protection and equal care. One person demanded to know if I worked alone, or part of an LGBTQ+ group. The person insisted that the time for individual

activists has ended.

I have been involved in activism for over four decades, and mostly alone with the occasional addition of a few interested persons. It is challenging, but yet I have experienced much in the way of contacting governments, ministers, mayors and so many others. All of us must be involved in pursuing those in power to get on our side, instead of attempting to shrug off the importance of equal rights for Canada's LGBTQ+ citizens.

The importance of activism cannot be viewed as a mere attempt to fight for rights.

Of course, a common thought from "outsiders" is, "Well, you have equal rights and Canadians are so welcoming and accepting, so your work is done." Not so, by any means. To be fair, yes, we have protection under the law and have rights as all others such

as, equal marriage, survivor's benefits, adoptions and more.

Discrimination is on the increase around the globe. So whether we work alone as an activist or as a group, we all have the responsibility to make a dent in the discrimination that is so ominous. We fight on with whatever tools are available. We must, or face a future where dominance of the majority reigns and equality is not attainable.

In the words of cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

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The Roman Catholic Church, apologies do not cut it!

Sept 27, 2018

Revelations about Roman Catholic clergy molesting children has come to the forefront in recent days.

Many instances of abuses have been in the courts over time, but this is the most damaging and the most horrid news we have heard for some time. The children involved, boys and girls, many of whom are now adults, have come forward to tell their stories that have haunted them over the years. The pedophiles, priests in the Roman Catholic Church, have molested youngsters for years.

Firstly, let us define pedophilia as explained in Psychology Today: "Pedophilia is a condition in which a person's sexual arousal and gratification depend on fantasizing about and engaging in sexual behaviour that is atypical and extreme. It is defined as the fantasy or act of sexual activity with children who are generally



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age 13 or younger. Pedophiles are usually men and can be attracted to either or both sexes."

Women have also been known to engage in these sexual activities. It has been suggested that priests be allowed to marry, but that does not "cure" a pedophile. One may suggest that a pedophile feels comfort in the robes of the church and that no one would suspect his real identity. Pope Francis has released a three-page letter and laments that the clergy has indeed performed these heinous crimes, but fails to mention that the law of the land must take

charge. Feeling regret is fine, but does absolutely nothing to heal the victims. Some closure must be forthcoming to live their lives in some sort of contentment.

The law, not the Roman Catholic Church, must step in to take the priest pedophiles within the church to task for their criminal activities towards boys and girls. The law is clear regarding these matters and Pope Francis, cardinals, bishops and priests must face the consequences and not pretend they are above the law, and should only answer to God.

The church can no longer hide these horrific offences, as it has done in the past, and the latest words from the pope and other church officials sound empty, as that yes, offences took place and remain a huge problem, while calling for forgiveness.

I fail to recognize that the request will heal the wounds of the

victims of sexual abuse. Is anyone listening to the cries of those who were at the mercy of these offenders? Does the Roman Catholic Church, not the only religious denomination to have been accused of such crimes, really believe that they, and only they, are in charge of such investigations?

The statutes of limitations should not enter into it, as the law has been broken, and sexual offences must be brought forward in our courts and those responsible be brought to justice, tried and punished.

The church seems bent on apologizing, but are they concerned about the welfare of the child, or its future as a viable and trusting institution. The horrors were evident as one victim interviewed, now an adult, clearly remains visibly upset and does not view the church as part of his life, but is spiritually healthy. How

many are there in this world who have endured these offences and were silenced by the offenders in some way?

The problem is worldwide, including in our own Atlantic Canada. The church has announced changes to be introduced in an attempt to minimize sexual abuse by the clergy. The fact remains that those priests that have committed the crimes must be arrested and face the courts. Many have died, but so many are still with us. The law must act immediately and punish the offenders. Some say the priests are gay, but sexual orientation has no bearing on pedophilia.

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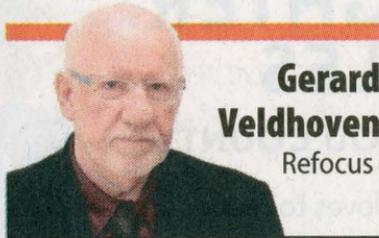
LGBTQ+ citizens must stand in unity

Oct 4, 2018

We often hear that citizens within the LGBTQ+ are bound in a unified group in this society. Of course that is a myth, as in many cases there is division within all parts of society.

The recent gay conversion therapy bill introduced in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly is a prime example of how divided it may be. This important occasion should have been attended by more than three people of Nova Scotia's LGBTQ+ community. The bill to ban this terrible practice is of extreme importance and I expected a large number of our community's members to be present. It was well publicized on social media, and when we arrived at the legislature I was totally surprised that the gallery was practically empty.

I was profoundly disappointed. Do we not band together to find justice for our LGBTQ+ commun-



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ity? Do our gay teens not deserve to be supported by those of us who have experienced the hardships of being a solid part of this society? Do friendships and a sense of family feeling not belong in our LGBTQ+ community?

If this column is to chastise my fellow LGBTQ+ citizens, then view it as such. My intentions are to unify us, not to take the view that we should be separated in this world.

We, as a minority, must move forward and support all the legislation that improves our existence. We should look

ahead and work to diminish the atrocities committed against our community. It's imperative that we do this in unison and not think others will do it for us. It just does not happen. For years, activists and those who dared stand for the rights as all others in society were ridiculed, bullied, attacked and even murdered. We also know that this continues to this day, and there is no reason to believe that the future looks bright.

Discrimination will continue to rear its ugly head. Our goal is to eradicate this continuous attack on members of our community, here and abroad. So the proof faces us daily, making it a priority to work even harder at minimizing the problems we face. The tabling of a bill to outlaw gay conversion therapy is a great step towards that goal. Nova Scotia will become the third province to ban

this horrific practice.

Our politicians are aiding us in this case and we must show support when they support our goals to equality. Over the years we have faced uphill battles with many of our governments. Laws such as equal marriage, adoptions, pension benefits and protection from discrimination have become reality of sorts. The latter, however, is an ongoing battle, as indicated by some right-wing religious sects that seem to think they have the right to perform the therapies.

Religious freedom is great, but not if it discriminates. Governments tend to close their minds and eyes to this issue as they view this as interference with religious beliefs. Well, with the introduction of this new bill, we realize some of our politicians are willing to fight against discrimination. In order to accom-

plish success we must and have the obligation to stand up and protect our young and senior LGBTQ+ Canadians. It's challenging but necessary and our future depends on those who are ready to unify. That's the way to success, and a sure way to see some positive results, yes, even as we are in the midst of a rise in discrimination.

It is my wish that when the bill becomes law, the LGBTQ+ community will go on masse to the legislature to celebrate another step towards equality. This is a great way to emphasize that we are unified, and grateful to our lawmakers.

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Feb 11, 2018

Nova Scotia PC leader hopeful marries same-sex partner

Another step was taken towards equal marriage as two loving people tied the knot in Nova Scotia.

The fact this is newsworthy is that the mayor of the Cape Breton Regional Municipality, and a contender for the leadership of the PC party of Nova Scotia, has come out in full force as being gay. Cecil Clarke, 50, and Kyle Peterson, 40, were married in St. Matthews United Church in North Sydney in front of hundreds of guests.

Clarke is considered a front-runner in the race for the party's leadership. The fact a politician comes out of the closet is not a new phenomenon, but it does make the news. Premier Wade MacLauchlan of Prince Edward Island, a recipient of the Order of Canada, and the first openly gay man to be a provincial premier in Canada, was welcomed with open arms in 2015.



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In our society where discrimination remains a serious issue, such developments gives one hope that the future looks a bit brighter for Canada's LGBTQ+ citizens.

In Ottawa, a number of gay MPs have graced the seats in our Parliament for a number of years, beginning with the NDP's Svend Robinson, a pioneer for LGBTQ+ rights. We have a prime minister who supports the LGBTQ+ community without hesitation. His apology in the House for past wrongs committed against the community was welcomed with appreciation and was never at-

tempted by other leaders in this country. The fact Justin Trudeau named a special advisor to the prime minister was historic, and brought forth another huge step in our country towards equal rights as a mainstay in Canada. Trudeau also sends the message to other nations in a call for equal treatment, as did his colleague to the south, Barack Obama.

The world is in desperate need of such actions, and if equality is to be initiated and maintained, our existence around the globe would benefit greatly. The pressure must not be eliminated and consequently inroads will come slowly, but surely. That is the hope of many.

The well-publicized wedding of Clarke and Peterson resonates around our nation in a positive, inclusive way. We are fully aware of the long road that has been travelled with many obstacles

and twists and turns, however, with each bit of news such as the wedding in Cape Breton, a light shines again, giving us an example of the positives we acquire in time.

Clarke and Peterson give us that light, letting the LGBTQ+ citizens of this country the idea that all is possible if we contribute to the betterment of society. The happy spouses obviously are contributing to this effort to show that inclusion in marriage, in love and in the journey of life, one's sexual orientation, or true gender identity or expression are not the issue, but acceptance of each other as human beings is the profound conclusion.

Canada, as has been out numerous times, has been and remains a leader in LGBTQ+ rights, regardless of some of our politicians such as anti-gay Jason Kenney of Alberta, and some others in Ot-

tawa, as well as the provinces. As leaders step up to the plate to support the LGBTQ+ citizens in this country we celebrate. In the case of Cecil Clarke, we see a bright spot. He is in the political arena and that carries much responsibility, also giving him the opportunity to lead the work towards positive change.

Our LGBTQ+ population depends on politicians who come out and speak freely about the concerns that are faced daily. So, we may celebrate with the happy couple, and look ahead to a time when this sort of news will not make a headline, but considered a normal occurrence.

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German president apologizes to LGBTQ+ community

President Frank-Walter Steinmeier of Germany has asked for forgiveness for decades of suffering and injustice towards gay men during the Nazi era and after the Second World War. The president spoke at a ceremony marking the persecution of gays by the Hitler regime when thousands were placed in concentration camps, humiliated, beaten and executed.

This has been well-documented. Steinmeier said that the harsh treatment continued in the post-war era, in both West and East Germany, where being gay remained a criminal offence for years. He said that "this is why I'm asking for forgiveness today, for all the suffering and injustice, and the silence that followed." He emphasized that "all gays, lesbians and bisexuals, all queers, trans and intersexual" are protected in today's Germany.

Not many governments have issued such statements and with each apology a huge step is taken for the purpose of reconciliation. Canada's Liberal government also apologized to the LGBTQ+ community. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stood in the Canadian Parliament, flanked by his



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ministers, members of Parliament and the opposition parties, and tearfully made it known that there is no place for discrimination in this country.

Yes, indeed, but it continues, regardless of apologies and profound statements. The constant bickering in the House of Commons, provincial legislatures and other venues, we hardly hear a word of how we may deal with the ongoing problems of blatant discrimination. We loudly hear the complaints from all sides regarding the waste of our revenues of investing in pipelines and countless other concerns. Not a word of how to combat discrimination. Our politicians tend to ignore, or simply cannot be bothered with an issue they feel will take care of itself.

Apologies matter but let me assure readers that if the issue is not addressed by our govern-

ments, saying sorry means little if not followed by sincere efforts to work towards eradicating this horrendous situation. LGBTQ+ folks are harassed, beaten and, yes, even killed on occasion in our own country. We must continue to pressure those in charge to alter the laws so that complete protection is available to our citizens. Words are easy to say and sound so inclusive, yet not followed up with concrete action.

Anti-LGBTQ+ politicians in Canada are hard at work to discredit these citizens. The likes of Premier Doug Ford of Ontario and Alberta Conservative leader Jason Kenney are prime examples of leaders who have vocalized discriminatory statements. If our politicians are not on side, we stand little to gain and protection from such individuals is not at hand. One will not find Kenney, Ford or Andrew Scheer in a Pride parade, nor will one in the near future. Scheer has already said he will not take part, and Ford and Kenney openly discriminate and so opportunities to be inclusive lessen.

One problem that has surfaced is that once an apology has been established, not one statement

has been made public to assure us that the work continues to counteract discrimination. A special adviser on LGBTQ+ issues was appointed by Trudeau and the LGBTQ+ community was elated. No follow-ups and no further announcements. Perhaps before the next election will we hear more words, and hopefully further positive action will follow.

Canada's LGBTQ+ population has much to celebrate and our fortunes must be appreciated. We are not finished by any stretch of the imagination and continued raising awareness is a must. I urge our community to make politicians produce platforms during election time and demand action on lessening discrimination, in turn reducing the harassments, beatings and LGBTQ+ teens suicides, which are at an all-time high, only surpassed by Indigenous youths. We still have the distinction of being one of the world leaders in human rights.

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Evangelicals support LGBTQ+ discrimination

Oct 19, 2018

On numerous occasions, we are bombarded with the Trumps of this world, and that includes some Canadian politicians who do make it known how they feel about the LGBTQ+ community.

The recent death of a nine-year-old American boy signals that discrimination is a reality that seems to be on the increase across the continent. James Myles was found dead of suicide after his Mom said he came out as gay to his classmates when the school year began. He endured significant bullying as a result. In the US, an estimated 34 per cent of LGBTQ+ kids face bullying, consequently making them susceptible to suicidal behavior. This, according to John Ackerman, a Clinical Psychologist for the Centre for Suicide Prevention and Research. The sad statistics tell us that discrimination is not decreasing. There are numerous reasons for this increase, and we may well assume that evangelical opposition to LGBTQ+ equality is a reality.

The on-going gay conversion therapy controversy is practiced by many evangelicals who believe that one must become a heterosexual in order to be complete. We hear about Alberta Opposition Leader, Jason Kenney, who insists that parents must be notified that their LGBTQ+ child has joined a gay/straight alliance group in school. The reason for not admitting to parents that this is a space where they feel safe, and if found out, rejection may be a direct



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sult. Hence, perhaps another step towards suicidal tendencies.

We tend to believe that these actions only take place in other countries. Sadly, the situation is similar in Canada. Change must be forthcoming if we are to save those youngsters, many who are at the mercy of not only evangelistic action, but other faiths such as, the Roman Catholic Church, a religious organization that is in conflict with its pedophile priests, as well as its stance on LGBTQ+ issues. Pope Francis has on occasion said that the church must do more to accept LGBTQ+ members, but there are no indications that this is in the future with a positive outcome.

Once again, a reason for kids to be afraid of rejection by their parents, peers, some educator and of course the clergy of certain churches, who will tell them this is contrary to god's will. It is a contradictory society where young people are criticized for daring to take a stand and be reprimanded for honesty. Where is the honesty within the religious community, and how will it go forth to reconcile all in our society? Do we give in to discriminatory attitudes, or do we take a stand and demand to be an equal

part in this world? The other road is to join the multitudes who take pride in discriminating against those who are simply born into this world the way they are meant to be. No, that is not an option.

We cannot join forces that work against nature and we must not, under any circumstances, be submissive to those who are working to destroy young people, and others, because of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. To downplay the actions of the world's religious community is to reverse the positive steps we have taken and place ourselves in on this earth with pride and determination. Those who work towards a separation in families and told to reject a child, who is part of our society, is surely guilty of discrimination of the worst kind. I have received correspondence from evangelical pastors and a few followers who directly chastise me for discriminating against their beliefs.

The belief according to them, is to reject being gay because the bible tells them so. How does that explain the biblical message of love? Where is the Vatican, and where are all the others in the Christian community and others, who believe in love for all?

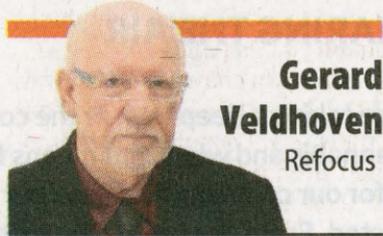
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A journey to equality, the status quo not an option

The journey through life is filled with memories – those we celebrate, and those we rather push aside into the background.

We make choices on the way that do not always suit us, but at the time seemed the right decisions, and so we proceed to go on our way, preparing for the future. That future, even with what we determined as perhaps the middle road, the status quo, was not a guarantee to a satisfying existence. At the time it seemed correct and we made decisions that would suit our families, friends, teachers, and others who we deemed as great influences on our future. Perhaps so, but then we discovered that our principles may have differed from what historically worked for our fellow citizens.

Through the years, many have attempted not to live by the



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status quo, just give up and face whatever decisions are made for us. Humans, as other living creatures, tend to be followers, adjusting to whatever fate lies ahead. This is the easiest and some say, the most peaceful existence. But wait, what about the millions of us who, looking into the future, suddenly discover that changes must come forward to accommodate those who do not fit the so-called 'norm'. Historically rejected, those who were not part of the Caucasian race, those viewed as sinners by most religious factions for simply being

who they are such as, members of the LGBTQ+ community and the countless folks who may not possess the same intelligence due to circumstances beyond their control. We think of countless others who were, and are deemed not equals and are lost along the way.

In recent years people started to be heard and demanded to be treated equal to all others, those who spoke of themselves to be perfect examples of how one should behave, and had better conform to what they considered as proper. Religious influences have dictated for years how we must live our lives. Many within our society have learned to stand firm and be counted.

My columns deal mainly with the LGBTQ+ citizens of this world, but I also include all those who have felt the stings of discrimination. Many ideas we bring

forth are not in agreement with the population at large, making it difficult, if not impossible, to take positive action. In order to make change, we cannot possibly take the middle road and truly believe that eventually, "I may be equal to all others around the globe."

We stand up, determined to live our lives as they are meant to be lived, that we are indeed equal, and we fight for equal rights and we shall succeed. This is the positive attitude that will take us on the road to recovery and the journey to end discrimination. The middle road, the belief in the status quo, no longer has value in this century, and indeed should never have been part of our society. We tend to lie back and be satisfied that all will be well without too much fuss. This, my dear readers, will not change the world, but will indeed make our

existence more intolerable.

Many are desperately afraid to make waves in fear of retaliation. The majority however, are feeling the need to be a complete part of society, and not be counted as a minority, because that in itself indicates discrimination. Choices are difficult to make and that is completely understandable, but if we are to succeed we must not give in, but initiate action to make positive change. Many obstacles are in our way, making it seemingly impossible to forge ahead. No other option exists and the LGBTQ+ citizens, as many others in our society, must act. The status quo is not an option, as equality is for all.

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Discrimination is the culprit

There are 7.6 billion people who roam this earth, divided into many races, countless beliefs and endless discriminatory attitudes that are rampant. It's the divisions that are the main source of discrimination in a world where healing seems a long-distance goal. Nevertheless, countless are making honest attempts to make a difference. Discrimination is the culprit.

As we study the world's inhabitants, we soon discover the diversity of people. There are great numbers of races, languages, manners of dress, sexualities, gender identities and so many variants in behaviour. We are surrounded by despots, those who possess absolute power and those who cannot, or dare not speak and be counted. Wars are plentiful, with the powerful, the absolute rich, those who make it their life's ambition to rule. Why?



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The reason is not so difficult to understand.

We are fully aware of the majority governing the minority, and thereby they rule with iron fists and the need to oversee that equality for all people is non-existent, or indeed unattainable. Yes, it all comes down to discrimination, groups, or individuals, it matters not, because it is called by the same name. We find it in governments, in schools, in our places of business, the person on the street and our religious institutions. All we have to do is search out the Vatican, or other

denominations, and we realize that religious influence remains quite powerful, especially in regards to LGBTQ+ citizens.

Thousands are calling for action to make positive change, with some success. The emphasis must be placed on equal rights for all, bar none. Our governments must be on our side to change laws that are antiquated and redundant. Of course, they only pay slight attention to the need for change at election time, and even so, we must convince the electorate to be on our side. That is not an easy task. First and foremost, the fact discrimination continues and is on the rise everywhere towards all minorities is the issue.

Around the globe, we hear of punishments for LGBTQ+ people who face trials, beatings, prison and even death. Many are not even afforded a trial and face punish-

ment immediately. LGBTQ+ folks in the United States have much to fear from President Donald Trump and the Republican Party as they constantly attempt to, or indeed are successful, changing the laws that offer some protection from discrimination. Within our schools, we find LGBTQ+ students who do not feel safe, or accepted, through bullying and other means.

This is not isolated, but quite common in our Canadian schools, elementary, high school and post-secondary education. How are we able to fight that horrific attitude and feel that we are a contributing part of our society? We work, we are in relationships, buy homes, go to the same churches, if one is so inclined, pay our taxes, and do all things as others in our nation.

The importance of gaining equality is self-evident in that it

places everyone on par with all in our society. Our skin colour, the way we speak, the way we dress and whom we love must not be criticized or dismissed. Each of us is individual and each of us has the human right to co-exist on this earth.

If we must fight for that freedom, so be it, and we should approach our journey with a positive mind. That is not an easy task, as we see so much in present day that must be corrected. Our commitments must be set forth in the coming years and in doing so we will see a bit of a dent in the process to eliminate discrimination. It is the culprit that must be defeated.

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Nov 1, 2018

Nov 8 2018

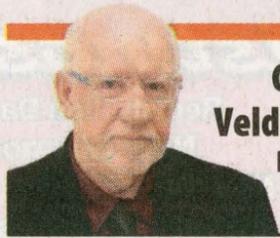
Kavanaugh's seat on U.S. Supreme Court leaves LGBTQ+ rights at stake

The addition of Justice Brett Kavanaugh to the United States Supreme Court is certainly a step towards eliminating LGBTQ+ equal rights in that country.

The right-wing, evangelistic-thinking justice is known to be against same-sex marriage and is opposed to pro-choice abortion. This development means that the Republicans control the Supreme Court and have the ability and the willingness to overturn all that has been accomplished in the way of equal rights and abortion access.

Of course, this is not surprising in the least, as we were fully aware of Donald Trump's outlook, and that being in control as president, his party has the opportunity to dismiss any chances of heading in a direction where LGBTQ+ citizens and others will be protected.

We have heard the threats, and we are very much aware of the five Republican justices on the United States Supreme Court. Any chan-



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ges to what we used to celebrate as equality are now at stake for the LGBTQ+ citizens south of the border. The right-wing evangelistic justices on this court will be in a position to change direction that will surely diminish equal rights. The United States, in the hands of Republicans, is set to continue as an intolerant country, thanks to Trump, his cabinet and the Republican Party.

We must consider the dangers that may have some effect on Canada's LGBTQ+ equal rights if a conservative right-wing government is in power. We would like to believe that these attitudes do

not exist here, but let me assure you that it is possible. As pointed to in an earlier column, we do have politicians who, if voted in to govern our nation, could possibly take such negative action. If Doug Ford or the likes of Alberta opposition leader Jason Kenney become national party leaders, then we may be in the same position as is expected in the United States.

This is not only a scary thought but a possible result if our government turns to a right-wing evangelistic regime. Ideas have a habit of crossing borders and could be implemented in Canada. This happens in some countries in Europe where many nations are influenced by others on that continent, but mainly in Eastern countries. Russia's anti-LGBTQ+ citizens are constantly battered by the police, and yes, its citizens, as gay rights are challenged daily.

Russia's anti-gay movement is very strong, as 63 per cent of its

population believes that gays are conspiring to subvert the nation's traditional values, according to a survey recently conducted by the state-run Russian Public Opinion Research Center.

"There is the strong belief in the existence of an organization that seeks to destroy the spiritual values generated by Russians, through the propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations," the poll states.

This is quite common in eastern nations, especially where tradition means more than equality for all. Ukraine and others are in the same position, as ideas cross borders and negatively affect LGBTQ+ citizens. The federal courts in those countries are controlled by their respective governments and really carry no weight. Turkey, Saudi Arabia and so many others in the area are also heavyweights as far as the courts are concerned, and where LGBTQ+

rights are really non-existent.

So, as we contemplate the changes that may occur as we move forward in North America, we must be on guard and be ready to counteract the discrimination that may come from the highest courts. Brett Kavanaugh is against same-sex marriage and other LGBTQ+ rights and there is every indication that this will be dealt with in short order.

The highest courts in our society are decidedly given the power to change course, therefore, discrimination is practised at the highest level, as well. It's a sad time when some of the world's highest courts practice discrimination. Hopefully, Canada will never follow suit!

Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears weekly in The News. Comments and information may be sent to lgbtconnections@v@gmail.com.

Pope Francis signs new ban on gay men to priesthood

Nov 15 2018

The pope has reiterated that gay men will not be allowed to become Roman Catholic priests.

A new Vatican instruction that reaffirms a 2005 ban signed by Pope Benedict XVI resurfaced and further fuels the fires of intolerance and discrimination by the church. This, as Francis famously exclaimed that, "Who am I to judge?," indeed proves he does judge by not speaking in favour of all who wish to enter the priesthood.

The lame statement he made in 2013 that he did not have a problem with a gay priest's sexual orientation was followed by as long as "he searches for the Lord and has good will."

This is purely a strong indication that one may be gay, according to the pontiff, but do not give in to sexual impulses. In other words, the Roman Catholic Church remains opposed to "homosexuality."



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By signing the document, Francis is declaring the church indeed practices discrimination. Unfortunately, we will not see a turnabout in this ongoing intolerance and those gay men who wish to become priests are sidelined and denied being who they are.

According to New Ways Ministry, a national Catholic ministry of justice and reconciliation for LGBT Catholics and the wider church community, the newest document, entitled "The Gift of the Priestly Vocation," contains three sections about gay men as candidates for the priesthood,

and all the messages are negative. "The writers seem to have their eyes closed to the fact that thousands upon thousands of gay men are already serving faithfully and effectively in the Catholic priesthood. Indeed, without gay men, the Church would not be able to operate."

There is also mention of "the multitude of lesbian women who serve in diverse ministries in the church, whose service allows so much good to happen." By signing this document, written by Vatican officials, Pope Francis has approved the continuation of blatant discrimination and is a let-down to Catholic LGBTQ+ members, as well as supporters. The New Ways Ministry continues, "At the very least, Pope Francis owes it to the Church, the world, and, not least, the LGBTQ+ community to explain exactly where he stands, given the blatant contradiction between 'Who am I

to judge?' and this most recent document."

Discrimination has existed for centuries, and if we continue on this path, that seems endless, we will not succeed in embracing equality for all. Many of our religious leaders, politicians and countless others, seem hell-bent to continue on this destructive path of alienation. This, in a world where bullying and attacks of all sorts continue to take place, we cannot foresee a better future. We have heard the results, and we have read the studies that tell us about the increase in discrimination on a scale that seems to be escalating.

Our sexual orientation, the colour of our skin, the language we speak and whom we love, are some of the realities included in the intolerance that is so horrifically evident. Where does this take us? How do we reconcile with those whose minds are deter-

mined to squash folks who practise a certain religion, speak in a different tongue, dress according to one's background and think in a manner that hopes for a true embrace where love conquers all? Is the world so blinded, and are we truly concerned about the wellbeing of others?

One would think that in 2018 the world population would embrace love for one another, but it seems so far off into the future. Pope Francis, considered a world leader, cannot or indeed will not rid the religious community of discrimination, has the influence to make a difference. He has thrown a curve that informs us his church has no plan to end discrimination.

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No place for hurtful comments

Nov 22, 2018

Again and again, we are subjected to hateful rhetoric from certain politicians around the globe, and the most recent comments come from Alberta's United Conservative Party member, John Carpay.

The party was formed when the Wildrose and the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta joined forces in a move to solidify the right-wing movement. Well known for religious right-wing policies, its leader, Jason Kenney, has on numerous occasions made his views known on LGBTQ+ rights and equal treatment.

They have not been favourable and indeed have hurt LGBTQ+ youngsters in the Alberta school system where Kenney made it known that parents should be informed by school officials that their child is a member of the LGBTQ+ community.

This invasion of privacy is not acceptable and goes against the



Gerard Veldhoven
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wishes of the child. Of course, this provincial party leader of the official opposition, has a history of statements that indicates his disdain for this community.

The person in question, Mr. Carpay, also president of the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedom, has compared the Pride flag to the Nazi swastika, and the Communist hammer and sickle. The LGBTQ+ community is outraged by these comments from Carpay, who also challenges the gay-straight alliance bill. He apologized and said his remark was "unintentional," and Kenney refers to the comment as a mistake.

We are constantly bombarded with offensive remarks by politicians and others, who later seem to think that an apology will fix the matter. Not so, as we learn throughout our lives that hateful remarks are just that and are results of what we are taught in life.

Mr. Carpay has made it very clear where he stands on LGBTQ+ issues and an apology does not end this, and indeed will not be erased from his mind as it is instilled in him that sexual orientation and true gender identity are not to be part of humanity. The words, therefore, are meaningless, unless he voices that he accepts and supports the LGBTQ+ members of our society.

Someone who says that the gay rights movement is an example of totalitarianism does not intend to change his views but instead attempts to save his political future through apologies. Once comments of this nature are vocalized,

the person, or persons involved, have put their thoughts into words.

Pope Francis has apologized for the Vatican's treatment of the LGBTQ+ citizens of the world, and those within the Christian community. Words cannot be taken seriously until put into action. Then change is possible and only then may we take those who respond so negatively with hate as possible supporters who embrace all.

Statistics have made it abundantly clear that discrimination and violence against minorities is on the rise everywhere. We are obliged to respond with positive education in our schools, in our homes, in the workplace, on the street, and yes within the religious community. Then, and only then, will we experience change, be it slow and time consuming, but attainable.

It may take decades and indeed centuries, but with positive atti-

tudes and determination, success may be ours, that is, on the side of love and respect. In a world with 7.6 billion people the task is arduous. The choice we must make is to just sit back and be totally destroyed by the negativity, or we stand with pride and determination to end the hatred that befalls so many around us. The right-wing factions are totally determined to rid our planet of 'undesirables' in some sort of order.

The LGBTQ+ enemies such as, Donald Trump, Christian right-wing advocates, Jason Kenney, John Carpay and countless others must come to terms with the fact that LGBTQ+ folks and so many others have roamed this globe for countless centuries, and all are part of the world community.

Gerard Veldhoven is a former area resident and longtime gay rights activist. Comments and information: lgbtconnections@sgv@gmail.com.

Gay conversion therapy bill needs to be amended

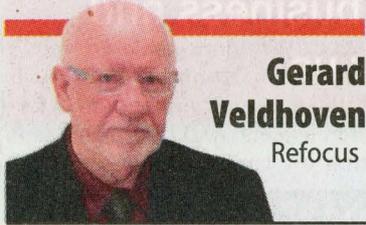
Nov 29, 2018

A bill to ban gay conversion therapy has recently cleared third reading in the Nova Scotia Legislature.

It will now be illegal to practice this horrific, unsuccessful and damaging procedure. Even as we may celebrate the new law, there are omissions that must be addressed in the near future.

While I celebrate the success of the passage, I emphasize that more needs to be done as far as complete protection is concerned, and this must be considered at once. If not addressed, the culprits will continue, without punishment, to attack teens between the ages of 16 and 18 years of age.

The new legislation only deals with those under the age of 16. The reasoning is ludicrous. The Liberals approved a bill that was mainly authored by two Halifax LGBTQ+ groups, and no others from the province had input. The



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PCs and NDP also produced their own bills before the Liberal bill was presented. The very nature of conversion therapy is founded on the fact that certain religious views, as well as other aspects, feel this is an offense against God.

Consequently, they take it upon themselves to attempt to "cure" a person whose sexual orientation, or true gender identity and expression is the core of their existence. The lives they are meant to live are at stake.

In my letter I suggested the bill must include all teens under the age of 19 years, but the Liberals

discarded that idea. Youth over the age of 16, in many instances, are not able to react to the pressures placed on them by those who take advantage. Lives depend on this and steps must be taken so our teens will be saved from discrimination that ends in trauma and in certain cases, suicides.

Perhaps some 16-year-olds are mentally capable of resisting such action, but do we, or should we, take the chance to expose them to conversation therapy, fully realizing that mental confusion and suicide may prevail? In addition, we must also be concerned about LGBTQ+ people who have intellectual and emotional challenges, regardless of age, those who are not able to make informed decisions. They are at the mercy of others who are determined to change their natural way of being.

These are troubling situations

and it is essential, and indeed the obligations of all who are concerned, that protection is in place. I am deeply troubled and worried that protection is only directed at those under the age of 16, and LGBTQ+ people with the above-mentioned challenges are not being considered, regardless of age. It is imperative to consider the consequences that may develop if the age as stated in the legislation is not changed.

In addition, I am concerned that the lack of inclusion of LGBTQ+ people who cannot, regardless of age, resist the discriminatory and horrific results for conversion therapy.

In 2015, Manitoba became the first province in Canada to ban the practice outright, while Ontario's legislation is similar to the one in Nova Scotia. We should celebrate the fact the legislation is in place, but not all the concerns

have been addressed, and must be emphasized to be included at a later date with the amendments:

Discrimination is against the law in Canada and all are protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as well as the Human Rights Acts across the nation. Citizens across this county, province, territories and indeed around the world, deserve to be treated equally, as well as the expectation to be protected from harm.

The next step is to convince our governments, federal and provincial, to act now and bring forth legislation that will be inclusive.

I will close with this statement; conversion therapy should be banned outright, unconditionally, and immediately before more gay people become victims.

Comments and information:
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The LGBTQ+ community; the intent to fight for equality

In a recent letter to the editor in *The News*, a reader makes the following statement; "I don't know what it's like to be subjected to hateful rhetoric because I am not gay."

This admission reveals that the author of this statement does not understand how hurtful society can be towards LGBTQ+ citizens, in this country and around the world.

The immediate reaction by so many in our society is to divide rather than learn to understand the very existence of those whose sexual orientation and true gender identity or expression is a foreign subject. The obvious answer that comes to mind at once is that right-wing Christian followers, among many others, believe a choice must be made and change into a "heterosexual" person, or decide to live in a body that is not in tune with one's thoughts and behaviour, not thought to be



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on par with others. The reason? Christianity teaches this concept and especially those within evangelical circles take this to heart, consequently filled with hate and disdain.

Firstly, as I have mentioned on numerous occasions, our sexual orientation is not a choice, just as being straight is not chosen, but accepted without confusion. Why would one choose to be subjected to a life of horror inflicted by those who reject the normalcy of being gay. Consequently, violence follows and continues today, and well into the future. Secondly, if Christianity teaches to love, em-

brace and reject hate, then why does the LGBTQ+ community not experience positive action? Does love not conquer hate? We do not declare war on Christianity, instead we seek friendship and the embrace.

Yes, the Trumps, the Kenneys, the Carpays and right-wing Christians and so many more pointedly condemn the LGBTQ+ population of this world. Should we just close our eyes, our ears, go into hiding, pretending all is well and that bullying and violence do not exist? Must we give in to rejection, horrific ideals, and the beliefs by those who feel their superiority is what must be accepted? No, not in this world.

The author of the aforementioned letter reads my columns and he insists he becomes angry at me. Is the anger directed at me personally, or is it aimed at the LGBTQ+ community? Is he angry that gay people have

always existed and not simply someone decided to create such a person? The recent anti-gay conversion therapy bill passed in the N.S. legislature addresses the fact this practice is indeed hurtful, discriminatory and leads to mental illness, and in many cases, suicides.

It simply does not work in any case, as it would not work to change a heterosexual person to make him/her gay. One cannot change what nature gave us. Teenage suicides are among the highest in Canada and around the globe because of family, friends, teachers and some Christian influences. This must change as lives should not be lost on account of one's sexual orientation or true gender identity. Right-wing Christian beliefs apparently support the discrimination that leads to the horrible consequences we learn about on a daily basis.

Why is the hatred so strong and why do many Christian denominations, and other religions, support such actions? If disdain is the answer then it seems normal for churches to lose members. LGBTQ+ citizens and others are leaving in droves and the church remains adamant to continue on the path of hate and rejection. No one is ready to be bullied, or threatened, for living their lives as they are meant to be lived.

If wishing for a life without discrimination, the LGBTQ+ citizens around the globe must stand and be proud of who they are, as we cannot change our lives, just like the author of the letter.

The gap must heal and all will live in harmony and peace.

Happy holidays to all.

Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Comments and information: lgbtconnections@v@gmail.com.

Flag flap over sexual orientation

To the editor:

Gerard Veldhoven is unhappy again.

This week it is over someone who wants to fly a flag to celebrate their sexual orientation. He says that this is a discriminatory act and people who do this are bigots.

I am glad to see he realizes it may be wrong to celebrate one's sexual orientation.

Don't be so unhappy, Gerard, there is hope for you.

Benvie Johnson
Pleasant Valley

Start the inquisition with me

To the editor,

I read Gerard Veldhoven's column. He is complaining the bill to ban gay conversion therapy does not go far enough.

I believe he won't be happy until he takes my right to believe that homosexuality is against nature and is a sin against the God of the Bible I read.

Check out Genesis 19:5-9, Romans 1:25-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Leviticus 18:22 for some examples of what the Bible says about it.

When believing the Bible becomes illegal, start the inquisition with me.

Benvie Johnson
Pleasant Valley

Is it a question of quality or immunity?

To the editor:

Once again, I read Gerard Veldhoven's column entitled "The intent to fight for equality."

I don't know why he would want equality, because his community would lose ground if they were to be treated equally.

I think it should be called "fight for immunity," because I believe he wants to attack Christianity with immunity. Gerard says he does not see Christian love. If he looked past his hatred for it, he might see it.

Gerard, you wonder who my anger is directed against — anyone who attacks my right-wing Christian views and I believe you are one of the best at it.

Benvie Johnson,
Pleasant Valley

Reader takes issue with columnist

To the editor,

I don't know why I read Gerard Veldhoven's column because

every time I do, I get angry at him.

I don't know what it's like to be subjected to hateful rhetoric because I'm not gay.

If the LGBTQ thinks Donald Trump, right-wing Christians, Jason Kenney, John Carpay and countless others are their enemies, then Gerard Veldhoven can add my name to the list because I am a right-wing Christian who believes war is being declared on my beliefs by the Gerard Veldhovens.

Bernie Johnson
Pleasant Valley

County airwaves are secularized

To the editor,

I am writing this letter on the day that the last local church-related program was aired on Pictou County radio station, CKEC.

With the sign off of Sunday Morning Inspiration, the air waves of our county are completely secu-

Dec 13, 2018

A straight flag indeed!

I urge Glenn Bishop and his supporters to study the history of the Pride flag.

They will discover the reason for its design was, and remains to this day, to be the emblem of solidarity for LGBTQ+ citizens who were, and remain, a section of society who endure bullying, beatings, killings and all sorts of punishments because of sexual orientation, and true gender identity and expression.

Chipman, N.B., was the scene of the raising of the so-called "straight flag" designed by Mr. Bishop. It was raised in the village to celebrate our straight population.

The flag shows the symbol of a female and a male on a field of black and white stripes. The event was staged in the village and was attended by the mayor and other citizens. Outcries from many who view this as a discriminatory act



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towards the LGBTQ+ population ended in the flag being removed. Of course, Bishop immediately replied that the straight population is now being the target of discrimination.

Mayor Carson Atkinson was quoted in the Chronicle Herald as saying, "This flag distraction is a lesson for us and other rural communities such as our own. No harm or hate was intended and the village of 1,200 remains an open, welcoming community."

Meanwhile, Bishop said he and his supporters will be meeting and may even plan court action. We

have heard, and read, of incidents that reflect the strong feelings against the LGBTQ+ community.

Bishop is taking this to new heights. He told the Chronicle Herald he has no objection to the Pride flag flown this past summer.

His attitude indicates he has strong objections as is evident from his statements.

He pointed to his belief that the whole village was not gay, and to this represents 95 per cent of the population. This information cannot be assumed to be correct, as there are a number of studies that point in various directions as to the percentage of LGBTQ+ people in our society.

Bishop, in his comments, assures us of his discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community in our society. He said, "The straight people built this nation, and now we're being told we can't say we're straight." He seems to

be unaware that by this statement he admits he is a bigot who cannot even fathom the fact that many gay people were involved in building Canada, a nation that embraces equality under the law, yes, including LGBTQ+ folks.

Sexual orientation, gender identity, skin colour, the many languages we speak have been part of our world throughout history. Bishop is not alone believing that straight people are the one, and only people, who really count and are on the side of the law, as well as contemplating thoughts to further divide and not embrace diversity.

It's a sad time when we remain on the radar as a minority to be discounted as not contributing to society, or indeed have a solid history. By threatening to take this issue to court, or challenging the village officials, he will surely be noted as a nonbeliever in his

community. The word is that the majority of Chipman's population are on the LGBTQ+ side and that indicates a strong desire to fix the problem.

Since when in this world have "straight" people experienced discrimination because of their sexual orientation?

Indeed, who would "choose" to be part of the LGBTQ+ community knowing the opposition associated with that, and the consequences, such as violence and other discriminatory actions that have been evident over the centuries. The rainbow flag is the symbol of pride in who we are and how we live, true to who we are meant to be, and we live our lives accordingly.

Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Comments and information: lgbtconnections@gmail.com.

World's minorities must speak with one voice to fight discrimination

This world: this place where people exist, where people have families, where people work and speak countless languages, and a place where we have various colours of skin, citizenship that lives in poverty and squalor, where we fall in love with the person of choice, and where gender should be respected and embraced.

This list is partial and is non-ending.

Around this globe, wars are fought by those who seek power and attempt to conquer regardless of hurting others. Discrimination rears its ugly head around us, and this discrimination against minorities is rampant, increasing as time moves forward.

Statistics indicate bullying, attacks and killings, plus suicides brought on by these horrific actions, are evident on a daily basis. Should we be concerned about the growing negativity, or do we just



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idly sit in our comfortable chairs, should all be so fortunate, and pretend all will be well in short order?

Discrimination is widespread, causing heartache, separates, confusion, discontentment, mental illness, deaths and all sorts of horrific consequences. The minorities are too many to list, but we must think about our future with positivity and we must identify ourselves, regardless of the minority because we are all attempting to reach the other side, meaning that as a world where all of us matter, where all live with equal rights and exist in peace.

The question we must ask is, how do we accomplish this arduous undertaking? Each of us must self-identify, not be afraid to speak, but believe each of us is as important as the person next to us. This venture is attainable and with determination to squash discrimination, we will surely make progress. We are very aware of the causes, and the continuing world religious and other influences on those who are approached as sinners, unworthy because of sexual orientation, same-sex marriage, not recognized as a transgender person, those who live in poverty, the black community, our Indigenous Peoples and all who are at the blunt end of the stick.

The media constantly bombards us with the latest attacks on our population who are considered "different." We know, we care, and we must combine our efforts to erase the world of discrimination.

What is stopping us?

Each group believes that they alone must fight back, must educate and must seek ways to eradicate this curse that exists around the globe. This is a world concern and therefore I call out to everyone who belongs to a minority that feels the sting of discrimination, and those who are allies, to unite as a world force. Many believe each group must raise awareness alone, fight the forces that profoundly express hate and intolerance. I suggest that while this has merit and many have, and continue on that path, with positive results, I maintain, and indeed recommend that we join forces, all those who are threatened by discrimination, step up and be heard as one powerful voice, one unified part of the population, a strong and determined call for equality.

I am not suggesting that we should change direction — on

the contrary, as each individual and each section of society must continue to stand proud, and do what we are supposed to do, and that is to accomplish our desire and our aim to be free of discrimination. As a unified force we increase our chances, stand side by side, face the discriminators, not in a militant manner but as a multitude of individuals demanding equal treatment as all others. This is a human right, approaching others with pride and taking our place in this world society.

Often, I look for the day when we may live in peace and harmony. At my age of 78, it is but a dream, and therefore I suggest that we move ahead, anticipating a positive conclusion for all.

Comments and information: lgbtconnections@gmail.com.

Gerard Veldhoven is a former area resident and longtime gay rights activist.

Taiwan referendum a disappointment to gay couples

Taiwan was set to become the first country in Asia to adjust marriage laws to give gay couples the choice to be legally married.

The negative vote comes as a great disappointment to the country's same-sex couples who wish to marry legally. As well, this decision infringes on the rights of not only gay couples, but affects the LGBTQ+ community entirely.

The decision by the government to hold the referendum, further demonstrates the lack of respect and the decline of efforts towards the LGBTQ+ population in Asia as a whole. Of course, this does not come as a surprise, but reveals the fact that Asiatic nations are not yet anxious to embrace equal rights. They are not alone, as revealed by the fact that out of 192 nations only 27 allow equal marriage. This number may increase in time, but will not be a world-wide acceptance anytime soon.

Many will say that it's not necessary to have same-sex marriage written into law, nevertheless, people should have the choice to marry, and that is of the utmost importance.

The vast majority of the marriages are performed as civil unions and is outside the churches. Only a handful of churches will perform such ceremonies, so discrimination against gay couples remains a strong issue.

Time will reveal when and where more countries will change the marriage laws to accommodate gay couples who wish to marry. The Taiwan court had given the government two years to change the law, but the referendum decided otherwise. The decision to vote against the marriage was at the urging of the Taiwanese Christian Churches which, in fact, only represents five per cent of the population, but has a strong influence.

Chen Ke, a Catholic priest in Taiwan said, "This legislature has a choice to make." He is a strong opponent of gay marriage. The government of President Tsai Ing-wen had proposed legalizing same-sex marriage. Apparently, marriage licensing offices face violation of the law by May 2019 if they refuse to marry gay couples; this, according to a Ministry of Justice spokesperson.

A professor of gender studies and communication management, Shiau Hong-chi said, "The referendum is a general survey; it doesn't have strong legal implications. One way or another it has to go back to the court."



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"Many will say that it's not necessary to have same-sex marriage written into law, nevertheless, people should have the choice to marry, and that is of the utmost importance."

The same referendum also suggested that schools avoid teaching LGBTQ education. By all accounts this issue remains unsettled. The Taiwan elections in the near future will also have influence as members of that government wish to be re-elected.

Hopefully, the government and the court will settle this dispute and be on the side of gay couples and LGBTQ education in the curriculum. We cannot take for granted that the outcome will be on the side of gay couples, and indeed the Taiwan LGBTQ+ community. As well, whatever the outcome it must be reinforced through time. The eventual result is not necessarily for all time.

Changes in government, the courts as well as changes in thoughts may overturn the results of the past. We are fully aware of the Trump Administration making an effort to change the policy of accepting transgender members in the armed forces. The Pentagon insists there are no negatives at all having transgender people serve that nation.

The point is that changes are possible in any nation and all it takes is a change of thinking such as the influence of evangelical Christians, or any other world religions where LGBTQ+ folks are reviled and punished. This may take the form of rejecting equality, and even overturning laws that protect us. This may be accomplished in our country depending on the government at the time. All we have to do is pay attention to leaders like Premier Doug Ford of Ontario's Progressive Conservative Party cancelling sexual health education, and similar action is possible on the Federal level.

Unfortunate!

Gerard Veldhoven is a long time gay rights activist. Comments and information: lgbt-connections@gmail.com.

Trudeau's apology to the LGBTQ+ community, one year later

Last year, on Nov. 28, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau rose in the House of Commons to apologize for the terrible wrongs committed towards gays and lesbians in the Canadian Armed Forces and civil service.

This historic occasion, long overdue, had a tremendous impact on those who served. For more than 30 years, and it lasted until the 1990s, thousands lost their jobs and many faced prosecution because of their sexual orientation. The policy affected Canadians in the military, the public service and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The gallery was filled with victims and their supporters.

Mr. Trudeau apologized for Canada's role in the systematic oppression, criminalization, and violence against members of the LGBTQ+ community.

"It is with shame and sorrow and deep regret for the things we have done that I stand here today and say: We were wrong," he said.



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He went on to say, "It is my hope that in talking about these injustices, vowing never to repeat them, and acting to right these wrongs, we can begin to heal."

The government also promised to pay up to \$110 million to compensate victims of the so-called "gay purge" — decades of government-authorized discrimination against gay Canadians. Legislation was introduced to expunge "unjust convictions" from the judicial records of people charged under laws that criminalize homosexuality. There have been reports from certain people that this is just not enough, that it was a ploy by Trudeau to get the votes. The apology was sincere and com-

plete, making this the single most important decision since LGBTQ rights became entrenched in our laws.

Much has happened since my time of revealing my sexual orientation 44 years ago. Equality is not accomplished in a short period of time, but with much patience, education and raising awareness, we will experience more equality, hopefully in conjunction with lessening discrimination. A tall order, to be sure. There are many obstacles that leave us with the responsibility to be more determined, to be more vocal, to increase our intent to fight for equality as all others, and to approach the issues with clarity, patience and shift the political landscape, regardless of the apology.

The present government's support for equal rights does not necessarily indicate that future governments will be on side. We are experiencing this with Ontario's Premier Doug Ford, a

Progressive Conservative, who as a Trump wannabe has reversed the sex education policy in the schools, a definite step back. He has the reputation for disdain towards the LGBTQ+ community, and he is not alone.

More needs to be done and continue the efforts well into the next century.

Meanwhile we celebrate the gains, appreciate the apology from Justin Trudeau, detailed and meaningful. The fact the issues remain a challenge in the months and years ahead, we must embrace our allies, educate those who reject us because of discrimination within some religious right-wing beliefs, a challenging arduous project.

The apology from the Liberal government was also meant as a tool to continue efforts towards reconciliation between all Canadians, a positive step to unify. Apologies must be followed by positive action, or be viewed as hollow statements.

We learn of this daily as the pope, political leaders, sports heroes, entertainers or any other person attempts to rectify a statement that clearly indicates a rejection if not followed by a positive action so that true healing has a chance.

This first-year anniversary must be recognized as a positive and celebrations are in order. We realize the opposition forces that deny the normalcy of one's sexual orientation, true gender identity or expression.

Many are vocal in their discriminatory thoughts and expressions. Discrimination is the worst offense of our time.

Thanks to Prime Minister Trudeau, a clearer path has been paved.

Millions of others are likewise thanked for their persistence to engage a more positive society.

Gerard Veldhoven is a long time gay rights activist. Comments and information: lgbtconnections@gmail.com.

2018, a year in review, the LGBTQ+ connection

We just realized the end of another year and we have now entered 2019. Upon thinking what we have accomplished and what remains to be done, we must understand the reasons for the ups and the downs that occurred in the previous 12 months.

Hopefully we learn from our mistakes and build on the positives that have improved our existence as human kind. Decidedly not an easy task. So, let us ponder where we went wrong, and understand the situations that led us to this point. Canada's LGBTQ+ citizens are part of the whole human existence, not just a community onto its own.

We refer to the LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY, but only as a description as part of the human society as a whole. As such, we identify each person as a special being, living life, as we see it, as a means to contribute to the so-called



betterment of our world. Did we succeed? Some gains have been realized, but the struggles continue, make no mistake about it, and only time will reveal the end results.

During the past year, more countries have introduced equal marriage, and also have given equal rights to LGBTQ+ citizens. Countries such as South Africa, The Netherlands, France and Canada have same-sex marriage written into law over the past years, 27 in all, with Austria being the latest country to join the fray. As we scan the world we realize

more than 100 nations have either banned the marriage or have not yet addressed the issue.

As far as equal treatment is concerned, we are in the midst of what many consider a crisis. Discrimination is on the rise around the globe, with the United States having the distinction of being one of the leaders in this predicament, in part thanks to Donald Trump and his cohorts. They continually attack minorities in a fashion that promotes acts against them, and it creeps into Canada, as well as other countries.

2018 was a year of challenges for us all — some positive and others were viewed as disparaging in not just North America but around the world. Each year, we are encouraged to make new resolutions, think of the positives we wish for to improve our way of life, deepening the efforts for equality directed towards each of

us, bar none. Where are we going from here? How do we approach the challenges that were before us in 2018, and do we know all the facts? Yes, we are very aware of the majority of incidents that lead us to the challenges that must be faced head-on by all who desire a world free of discrimination. If we do not challenge the mishaps, the bullying, the killings, the suicides and countless other forms of so-called punishment, a term that fits the world order today, the increase of such attitudes will no doubt continue as a reality in 2019.

People are punished for simply being who they are, all of us members of human kind. The LGBTQ+ citizens of this world are constantly chastised by conservative elements that are heavily influenced by right-wing religious ideologies, which are adamantly against the very exist-

ence of LGBTQ+ citizens, which presents a constant threat to our well-being.

In order to find peace with those who deny us equality, we must make efforts to somehow reach the religious community and others, to embrace mutual respect. That is of the essence. Why must we be enemies, why can we not live together in harmony, why are we unable to reach some sort of positive conclusion, and why can we not respect the fact that we are all part of this world, regardless of our differences and beliefs, our sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other uniqueness we may possess?

All of us matter, be kind and love.

Gerard Veldhoven is a former area resident and longtime gay rights activist.

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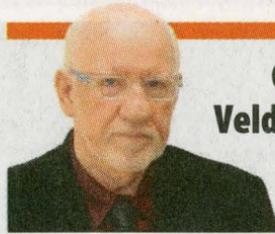
Jan 17, 2019

The challenge for LGBTQ+ children in a right-wing religious family

During my 40-odd years as an advocate for equality for Canada's LGBTQ+ community, I have encountered numerous attacks from within right-wing religious individuals, especially those from the Christian religious right.

One hears constantly how certain sexual orientations are against biblical teachings, namely being gay or bisexual, but a straight person is considered a child of their God, who may have other "sins" under his/her belt, is just fine, thank you.

Recently, a few members of certain religious beliefs have made it known that in my efforts for advocating equal treatment from all sectors is a human right, is totally and utterly rejected. In other words, deny the right for being what nature intended for us, that is, be who we are as human beings. A question arises that is of grave concern. Do children who identify



Gerard Veldhoven
Refocus

as members of the LGBTQ+ community within a Christian family not be tolerated by that family, and be ousted?

This question must be answered, and must be explained in its entirety. Of course, we may assume the answer will be that the child must be changed, be turned into a being that does not agree with that child's natural makeup. Parents and clergy of right-wing beliefs will bear eventual responsibility for the child's well-being, or the opposite and be the cause of mental illness, or even the possibility of suicide. Do religious

writings and demands overrule a person's natural existence?

We come into this world in so many varieties, including sexual orientation and true gender identity. The expectation is to be treated on equal basis, respect and live life in peace, harmony and love, especially from those closest to us. Is that too much to ask? The general belief is that humanity must be treated equally, but there are many who will challenge that right, especially from right-wing religious believers, who are taught that being gay, lesbian, bisexual must not be accepted as a natural way of one's being. The answer is, according to them, to reverse gays into heterosexuals. That procedure has proven to be unsuccessful and leads to mental confusion, and in many cases suicides.

If we live in a caring society, parents who love their children,

regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, colour of skin or all other individual characteristics, then we must call for embrace and love. Those who believe in a god that punishes members of our human society, rejects our individualities, only has love for those who are perfect in every sense, and embraces those who discriminate. Believing in a God and to follow teachings that profess love for one another is wonderful, but ceases to be so if families and friends are torn apart by hate and rejection because a certain person, or more, who are not exactly as those teachings imply. Religious teachings must surely be meant to embrace, to love, to accept, and to recognize that all are not as all others.

On the other hand, if this is not so, then we are fighting an uphill battle that may never be solved. In a recent column or two, I referred

to right-wing religious beliefs and I was severely accosted because of my views and my belief that all must be regarded as part of our society, and not be blinded by hate and rejection, in this case, members of the LGBTQ+ community.

We must not, and indeed cannot, be separated because of our individuality that is within us. Another question arises. If my critics had a child in their respective families, would this child be tossed out because of sexual orientation, or would they say, "I love my child, this child I helped create?"

Religions are a world reality, but surely hate and rejection should be discarded. We owe it to our children.

Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime gay rights activist. Comments and information: lgbtconnectionsgh@gmail.com.

Love is all it takes to be a family

The word love and the term family should be united in definition.

Tradition dictates to us that a family consists of a father, mother and at least one child.

Love, as we discover through living our existence, is a phenomenon second to none and people cherish the moments as one unites with the person of one's choice, regardless of sexual orientation.

This we were told was an unaccepted, formed family unit and that meant the traditional nucleus must be maintained because religious and other authorities tell us so. After all, that is what the Bible says we must do.

As we know, and with the advent of inclusive thinking and nature's wonderful gift of the natural progression of falling in love, we are now in a world of a more accepting society where we all have the right for a happy existence. We fall in love with



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the person of our own individual choice rather than accept the person that is the perfect one according to parents and friends. We choose on the basis of our own inner feelings.

The number of those who constitute a "family" is no longer an issue as in the past. In Canada we learn, as in many western nations, that those who choose a partner who is compatible and one who is our chosen mate in love, are no less an accepted unit than any other. From the moment we are born, our parents and others instil the thoughts in our minds that at some point we meet someone, of course of the opposite sex, to

have children, because our parents wish to be grandparents. That was a given.

Today, that thought persists, but to a much lesser extent.

The word "family" is usually defined as parents and their children, however, in our more inclusive world we now recognize family as those who are cohabitating, with or without offspring, or indeed living separately and are committed to each other and therefore a family unit. Sometimes living together is not an option, but nevertheless a true love keeps the relationship intact. Love is not confined to a certain situation or place, but survives because of commitment, regardless of sexual orientation, gender, type of family nucleus, or simply defining their love as family.

Times have changed dramatically and the fact members of our society are able to express love as they feel it is of pro-

found importance. Love is the inner feelings for another and we must celebrate that and respect the outcome as a positive. Marriage is not the only family unit.

Religious institutions, for the most part, speak out against such situations and insist on marriage. The great news is that people who find love also become a family, perhaps not in the traditional sense, but nevertheless with the same intent in that love makes them equal.

This will remain a serious issue for some and frowned upon, dismissed as morally wrong, but love prevails and that is the end result. Love equals family and love is all it takes to be a family.

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Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesdays in *The News*.

LGBTQ America justified in fearing a Trump presidency

Now that Donald Trump has been sworn in as the 45th U.S. president, many questions surface that are rightfully of great concern to LGBTQ Americans.

Being part of the Republican establishment Trump has mentioned during his campaign that he would attempt to squash equal marriage and has also made reference to other rights that he regards as non-traditional American values.

The Republican Party has steadfastly criticized Barack Obama in his quest to have total equality for all Americans and going so far as to promote equal rights for LGBTQ folks around the globe. Kudos to former president Obama.

There is no reason to expect Trump to sway from his beliefs. On the contrary, he is ready to act recklessly. At his inauguration, he indicated in no uncertain terms a strong anti-world support and that alone gives us much to ponder, just as he neglected to raise concern about minority rights.



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Unlike his predecessor, Trump opposes involving himself to promote equality, (a word that is not part of his existence), around the world. If this man is supposed to be the leader of the free world then one would expect him to wield some influence on the positive side.

We learn from Donald Trump his intentions of separation such as dividing a nation and shutting out the rest of the world. On occasion, he has verbalized his intention of reversing the marriage laws that would shut out same-sex couples.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that these couples must be afforded the right to marry and only that court has the power to reverse the law. Trump and

the Republican Party cannot change the law. This can only be accomplished if Trump appoints enough judges to overrule the Democratic judges.

Before the inauguration he, his family and entourage, attended a church service near the White House. The service was conducted by Rev. Robert Jeffress, a right wing evangelical pastor who said that Barack Obama "paved the road for the Antichrist" in response to the president's support for LGBTQ equal rights, including marriage equality.

Jeffress is also a close friend to Donald Trump. The evangelical movement has consistently and adamantly spoken out against equal rights – true friends of Mr. Trump. Trump's choice for U.S. Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, has also voted against equal rights for the LGBTQ citizens, as well as women's rights, the African American community and many others in the U.S.

If approved by the Senate this

AG promises to be a strong opponent to all minorities. This may be said of most, if not all, of Trump's picks for his cabinet. The next four years will be challenging for many U.S. citizens. I have lamented the need for total equality for all human kind, as have thousands of others.

The United States government may well be viewed as a non-supporter of equal rights for all its citizens and has the backing of fundamentalist religious movements.

Donald Trump's administration is a collection of right-wing despots who will further divide and exclude those who seek equality. The world is experiencing a divisive time and the American LGBTQ community and others have serious cause for concern.

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March 21, 2018

American Evangelists attack on LGBTQ community



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“Let me say this loud and clear. We traffic in homosexuality at the peril of our spiritual welfare.” This was Billy Graham’s response to a woman’s confession to him for her love for another woman. Graham had previously said that being gay is a “sinister form of perversion that was contributing to the decay of civilization.”

Graham died recently at the age of 99 and was considered a founder of the evangelical coalition, also referred to as the “Christian right.” The preacher to presidents and the millions of followers that he garnered during his long career in evangelism won him respect, but similarly made him an enemy of the LGBTQ community.

In 1993, he told a crowd of 44,300 followers that he thought “AIDS is a judgment of God.” Billy Graham’s Evangelical Association advocates the “gay cure” on its website. He also used his influence to push anti-gay laws such as his support in a 2012 attempt in North Carolina to amend the constitution to define marriage as “between a man and a woman,” making a point that this is God’s

definition.

Graham’s son, Franklin, also a right-winger, is an outspoken anti-gay activist. He claimed that there had been a “moral 9/11” in America due to gays and lesbians. When Russian President Vladimir Putin brought in anti-gay laws, Franklin showed his support. He even went so far as to claim that gays take people’s children and calling them “predators and perverts.”

As we study the attitudes of these two Christians, we soon realize that the hate towards the LGBTQ community is harsh, real and knows no bounds. Pat Robertson, a televangelist in the U.S., also wreaks havoc on the LGBTQ community. Reacting to the massacre at the Orlando LGBTQ club, he claimed that liberal ad-

vocates have aligned themselves with radical Islamists and all are reaping what they sowed. He suggested that the two groups kill each other.

The late evangelist Jerry Falwell had lots to say, as well. He suggested all gays be transported to an island and be left to whatever fate may befall them. When Ellen DeGeneres came out as a lesbian in 1997, Falwell referred to her as Ellen Degenerate.

There are many other right-wing religious leaders who come out swinging and with hatred that is so deep-rooted, making it impossible to hope for change. Many evangelical groups go overseas to such places as Uganda and preach against sexual orientation and transgender issues, also providing finances as bribery. This ongoing practice is not only hurtful, demeaning and hateful, but makes positive inclusion for all impossible.

It is difficult to comprehend the reasons for such blatant discrimination by religious leaders. Is it not possible to accept and embrace each other’s uniqueness,

resulting in a society that is on a journey of peace and equality? Do we not deserve equal treatment and do we not deserve the human right to be who we are?

This is only a sample of right-wing ideology. There are countless individuals and groups involved in these hateful attempts to “rid” society of so-called undesirables. Anita Bryant comes to mind as the front-runner for the likes of the Grams, the Falwells, the Robertsons and others, such as fundamental Christian places of learning, as well as many church hierarchies. Bryant was an anti-gay crusader, who made a name for herself in the 1970s, and remains active in her attempt to spread pure hate of LGBTQ citizens.

Who will be next? Well, we are well aware of President Donald Trump’s ideas, and let’s not forget VP Mike Pence.

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April 12, 2017

Discrimination is the gravest error of our time

Trinity Western, a private, fundamentalist Christian University in B.C. and New Brunswick's Crandall University, also a fundamentalist place of learning, are a strong indication that discrimination is alive and well, even within the education system.

We know this has been part of our society for centuries. Intolerance, homophobia biphobia, transphobia and discrimination of all sorts should not be part of Canadian life. The law tells us that we cannot discriminate and we realize this as Canadians. The fact these universities are not publicly funded should have no bearing on whether to allow religion to discriminate.

Religious freedom should be respected, but not if the tone and actions discriminate against a certain part in our society, in this case LGBTQ citizens. We like to believe in a civilized society, but we certainly have not experienced such a way of life in this world.

We hear and read about wars being fought, black people being abused and killed in the United States, poverty in our own country and the inequality of our aboriginal sisters and brothers, the treatment of those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender. We are appalled as thousands are starving



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and children are murdered in a school in Pakistan. When will the world listen as atrocities against humankind remain a threat to the well-being of millions around the Globe?

In Canada poverty has not been eradicated. No, we have not learned from history and seem determined to continue on this path. If we live in the hope that we will see an accepting, peaceful and loving society, then we must educate, raise awareness of our differences and rid the world of judging others.

The world's religions bear much of the blame as they constantly judge members of the LGBTQ community world-wide. Evangelists in the United States pour money into countries, such as Uganda and others where anti-homosexuality bills are the norm. The present Pope has spoken conciliatory words about gays, but at the same time Catholic Church officials have reiterated that church doc-

trine will not change. In other words the embrace will not happen.

The Donald Trumps and Vladimir Putins of this world add to the warring, the tough measures and the rhetoric that pit one against the other. We need positive action, not meaningless promises. So it is with discrimination, take the fire out of it and eliminate the crimes in our society and then perhaps we will see the world's religions embrace us and know that we are who we are.

Worried about empty pews? Well, being of narrow mind will certainly not be beneficial. This is where I say, "Open your hearts." Discrimination is the gravest error of our time.

Somewhat the world must take responsibility, as should each one of us, and hopefully achieve a world order where we all live in peace, with respect and dignity. The light at the end of the tunnel must shine brighter and we must make haste to work towards an equal society where all benefit, where each and every one will know that human rights are respected.

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Elsie Wayne as an enemy of gays

The recent death of former Saint John mayor and Progressive Conservative MP Elsie Wayne was announced with great fanfare and admiration and she certainly had the support of many. However, gay New Brunswickers and Canadians were bombarded with anti-gay rhetoric during her long career.

I am not about to sing her praises, although I extend my condolences to her family and friends. I vividly recall her outbursts in Parliament regarding gay rights and same-sex marriage, seen by countless Canadians in the media. Wayne was a constant in the media with attacks on the gay community.

During her tenure in politics she spared no words in describing her intolerance and disdain towards members of the gay community. While debating same-sex marriage in parliament she was very vocal in her opposition to the planned change in the marriage laws. Wayne's outbursts took on a slant with hateful and hurtful rhetoric in the House of Commons. Her rants were well publicised on television and other media.



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At a time when the gay community needed support and acceptance, Elsie Wayne did her very best to set up a roadblock. On May 8, 2003, she told parliamentarians that "gays should shut up about their lifestyles" and she complained that Canadians should not have to tolerate gay pride, men in dresses and same-sex marriage.

Judith Meinert, co-founder of PFLAG, Saint John Chapter, commented that "I was almost sickened and I felt really sad for her at the end of her statement because of the venom and prejudice just dripping from her mouth."

The Toronto Star's D'Arcy McLenaghan commented, "Judging by her outrage, I can only assume that Wayne has found the whole human rights movement confusing and irk-

some. Why couldn't Rosa Parks have just shut up and given up her seat on that bus to the nice white folks? Why didn't the Jews in Germany shut up about losing their homes, their loved ones and their lives? Why couldn't Nellie McClung have just shut up about wanting women to vote?"

So it was with Elsie Wayne. No doubt Wayne served many of her constituents well, but not all of them.

Former New Brunswick premier Frank McKenna lamented that "We need more people like her."

No, Mr. Premier, not as an adversary of Canada's gay community.

She served years ago and if ever she had managed to rise to the top we would have experienced a government that would surpass Stephen Harper's days in power when LGBT rights were not a priority.

I am certain Wayne will be missed by her many fans. She was just not an ally for gay rights and we may assume her feelings had not altered.

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COMMENTARY

Humanity and the right to be human

Over the centuries, we, as human beings, have travelled the roads before us in various directions.

Accomplishments have been great and our scientific research has given us medical assistance that has given us the chance for a longer life and less suffering in many instances.

The fact we are able to converse in ways that our grandparents and those before them could not, is in itself a phenomenal part of our existence. The telephone, the Internet, television are a few examples of how far we have come in technology.

We marvel at the immediate newscasts as we learn of what is happening around the world in seconds. The way in which we fly around to all locations in a matter of hours is indicative of how any country in the world is only hours away.

Our paved highways and the latest model vehicles take us to places previously viewed as impossible to reach. We buy on the Internet instead of personally visiting stores, do our banking and pay our bills online.

Yes, all the conveniences of a so-called modern existence, yet, with all those advances we still remain in a society that is not able to unite in a common bond where respect for others is simply ignored.

One would think that with



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the improvements in technology, human beings are able to recognize diversity and welcome the unique qualities we possess.

The media has the perfect tool to bring people together, to educate us to the various types of humans that occupy our world.

We are women, men, blacks, indigenous, Chinese, Korean, short, tall, and guess what other folks live within our families, circle of friends, our schools, at work, churches: yes, LGBTQ folks. The list is endless, but we are miles apart in our treatment of those who do not fit traditional thinking, do not adhere to "proper" dress codes, those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or any other sexuality and the ones who do not quite fit the "norm."

According to what writings, thinking or language?

The LGBTQ community citizens around the globe are constantly bombarded with accusations of abnormality. How do we end discrimination against each other and embrace the countless differences we

may possess? Not one individual must be punished for being who they are. We live in a violent world where the colour of one's skin, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender equality are reason for rejection and punishment. All are members of humanity and all count as individuals with unique qualities, each one of us.

In more than 40 years of advocating equality I am grateful for advances made, but that is in a handful of nations in the Western world. In most countries, and this is where most of humanity lives, rights are violated daily and in great numbers. We are rather fortunate that Canadians are generally more tolerant.

However, Muslims seem to be latest group of world citizens to suffer discrimination, especially under the Trump administration.

The work is not yet completed and it will take centuries, if ever, to erase inequality.

"I am what I am, my own special creation." (La Cage Aux Folles). We are all part of humanity and must be given the right to be human.

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Gerard Veldhoven is a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. His column appears Wednesdays in The News.

■ COMMENTARY

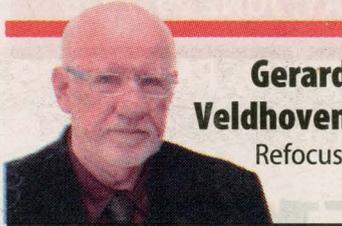
Invitation to Pictou County Pride

It's that time of year when the Pride flag will be hoisted and on display in many parts of the world. Atlantic Canada is no exception and each province has cities, towns and villages where celebrations will be a sight to behold for the summer. Folks from various locations will take drives to attend the events slated.

From Halifax, the fourth-largest festival in Canada, Saint John, Sydney, New Glasgow, Amherst, Moncton, Sackville, Charlottetown and all places in between, will experience the Pride festivities that are planned. As a resident of Pictou County and formerly Amherst, I am so pleased with the developing festivities around Atlantic Canada where Pride festivities have become a regular summer event in rural parts, many with a full week of activities, others with a Pride flag raising ceremony.

Large or small, the influence of these events are phenomenal and as indicated by the attendance are viewed as a huge way to increase awareness and decrease homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. Discrimination may take a back seat.

The recent event in Orlando has wakened us to the fact the



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work ahead is arduous and will be ongoing for the unforeseeable future. In the Middle East and elsewhere, discrimination continues at an alarming rate and we are in this for the long haul. Meanwhile, we celebrate and we educate feeling we are accomplishing some success.

The various events slated for Pictou County are as follows: on Monday, July 4, the annual Pride flag raising ceremony will take place at noon, an event that kicks off Pride Week in many areas around the globe. Hosted by the Town of New Glasgow and attended by representatives from other towns, as well as area MLAs and the Member of Parliament, it draws large crowds.

The next event is the Open Panel Discussion where questions from the audience will be answered on sexuality, gender identity and relationship styles. Two sessions will be held from 2 to 4 p.m. and from 6 to 8 p.m.

at the New Glasgow Library on Wednesday, July 6. We get a bit less serious on Thursday, July 7, when an All Bodies Swim event will take place at the pool in Trenton Park between 6 and 7 p.m. The next night, things really liven up with the Kitchen Party at The Commune on Archimedes Street in New Glasgow from 7 p.m. and on and admission is \$5.

Finally, on Saturday, July 9, we invite the families for the Rainbow Family Picnic where any family constellation is welcome and this final event is a potluck affair, beginning at 3 p.m. at Trenton Park.

Why do we make such a fuss about these celebrations?

Well my dear readers, this is an opportunity for LGBTQ citizens to come together and mingle with all others and appreciate the camaraderie that is so important to emphasize. A Book of Messages for the Orlando victims will be placed at most events. Please accept our invitation to Pictou County.

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Pride events are essential in our communities

Do we still celebrate Pride? This question is frequently asked. The answer depends on who's asking.

Those who feel that all problems have been solved and that Canadians are totally accepting of LGBTQ+ citizens in this country are members of the heterosexual community. They are of the opinion that ever since same-sex marriage became legal that the problems have solved. Of course, members of the LGBTQ+ community will give a much different answer and will tell you that yes, we must continue to have Pride celebrations. As a matter of fact, such events are on the increase, worldwide.

Recently, Amherst was the scene of a Pride flag-raising ceremony at other events, as well as its second Pride parade. The border town with New Brunswick, with a population of about 9,600, became



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a beehive of activity and inclusion. I observed first-hand the mood of those participating and the crowds watching from the sidelines. As Parade Marshal, I had the best view of all. Mayor David Kogon drove his brand new, red Chevrolet Corvette, with me watching the people waving and generally having a great time. Parade participants were equally excited.

I am using this event as a prime example of the need to continue these celebrations. Even as hundreds of people participated, thousands did not. The reason? Some may very well feel that if

they appear they may be viewed as being a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Others, for religious beliefs, will not support, and indeed vilify the LGBTQ+ society. I assure readers that this remains a serious concern as evangelical, and some other religious organizations, speak out to criticize, and indeed display true hatred.

The Evangelical movement is experiencing an increase in membership across North America. As I mentioned in a previous column, the Seventh-day Adventist church has been involved in "gay conversion therapy," which results in horrific harm mentally and physically to those in the "program." It does not work, resulting in depression, self-harm and suicide. This is not the only church, or organization to hold these false attempts at harming people, and this is not against the law.

The Vatican's opposition to

equality has been well-documented. There are many reasons, among them is a couldn't-care-less attitude. The list is quite extensive, and if we think of Canada as being one of the most accepting at 80 per cent, a percentage that I would challenge, we are still lacking in accepting our population who are LGBTQ+.

Our world must continue to hold Pride events, to raise awareness, get everyone on the side of equal rights and equal treatment. As long as our Canadian LGBTQ+ youth are the second-highest group to commit suicide, and a continuing unabashed society continues to dictate how our lives should be lived, then yes, Pride celebrations must continue.

Attacks on the LGBTQ+ community are on the increase and that is of great concern. We must take off our proverbial rose-coloured glasses and come

to terms with reality. Our Pride events are essential and we must continue to raise awareness, encourage allies to come out in great numbers, reflect on who we are and perhaps, in time, we will realize a definite shift in support.

We are who we are, and we are members of the same society as all human kind. In order to manifest this reality we are obliged to tell the world, we are part of you, whether you agree, or dislike the very idea.

American actor and playwright Harvey Fierstein said, "Never be bullied into silence. Never allow yourself to be a victim. Accept no one's definition of your life; define yourself."

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Seventh-day Adventists intent on harming gay youth

The Seventh-day Adventists, a right-wing evangelical sect, is planning sessions at Camp Pugwash in Nova Scotia, in an attempt to “cure” gay youth. I have touched on this subject in a previous column, and with this news, it is of the utmost importance that this subject be re-addressed.

This horrendous act has been proven to be unsuccessful and indeed promises to do great harm mentally and physically to our gay young people. One problem is that conversion therapy is permitted in most provinces, except in Ontario and Manitoba. There is no federal ban. This is a travesty and governments must enforce a ban, as major harm is caused as a result of this attempted therapy. In a nation where LGBTQ+ rights are defended by law and where 80 per cent of the population is in favour of equality in all its forms, the ban must be included.



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Following is how the camp is described on the church’s website:

“Camp Pugwash is a non-profit Christian camp owned and operated by the Maritime Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church Inc. We are happy to accept campers of any race, religion, or nationality. Our camp program features the Christian teaching of salvation according to the Gospels.”

This statement contains no mention of LGBTQ+ people, yet will attempt to “cure” gay young people. Contrary to popular belief, discrimination is a reality that

just will not go away. The practice of conversion therapy is a reality that must be stopped immediately. Malta is the only European nation that has banned the practice. In Brazil, the government had banned conversion tactics, but a judge overruled that recently and so the tortures continue. Barack Obama introduced a bill to ban the therapies on the federal level but was stalled in Congress last year.

Many right-wing religious factions approve of this ongoing wrongdoing and indeed promote it. Shortly, Pugwash will witness such a horrific event. The town should not permit it to occur, but if not supported by the Nova Scotia government, little can be accomplished. In other words, gay conversion therapy has the approval of this government.

If Canada is a progressive nation, then outlawing this damaging and unfair practice that

smacks of discrimination must be a priority. The practice is widespread and may be paid for by provincial health plans. Discriminating, religious organizations such as the Seventh-day Adventists may be entitled to a tax-exempt charitable status. Experts and medical associations are unanimous that the therapies are bogus and cause serious harm to those involved, leading to depression, self-harm and suicide.

Our governments must act and not be seen to be on the side of those who are involved in this horrific practice. Laws must be implemented so that organizers may be charged for contributing to hurt and damage to a gay person’s life. If one is beaten, or perhaps robbed, one will be charged with that crime, but as the laws read now, the damage to one’s mental health because of these therapies is overlooked.

Parents who take their gay children to be “healed,” must be taken to task, as must the so-called healers who are determined to cause willful and serious harm.

Of course, we are reminded by many in the religious community that they have the right to conduct these practices, because of religious beliefs and teachings. So, from that we may take the message that it is the belief that gives them the right to cause irreparable damage to a person, a so-called loving way that is their Christian way.

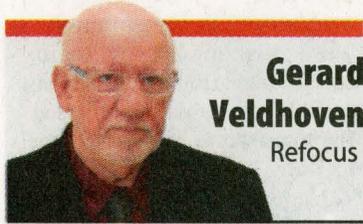
Hopefully the Seventh-day Adventist people can be stopped to prevent damaging results.

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Jan 24, 2019

British government to ban gay conversion therapy outright, Canada must follow



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British Prime Minister Theresa May is pushing for an outright ban on gay conversion therapy. The government's plan is to outlaw the horrific practice as part of an effort to counter intolerance and discrimination.

The \$7.6-million initiative follows a survey of LGBTQ people that found two per cent of the 108,000 respondents had undergone conversion therapy while five per cent had been offered the service. May said she had been "struck by just how many respondents said they cannot be open about their sexual orientation or avoid holding

hands with their partner in public for fear of a negative reaction." She continued, "No one should have to hide who they are or who they love. This LGBTQ action plan will set out concrete steps to deliver real and lasting change across society, from health and education to tackling discrimination and addressing the burning injustices LGBTQ people face."

Gay conversion therapies are based on the premise that being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender is a mental illness that can be cured. Strong evidence suggests that it simply does not, and cannot work. The techniques are discredited. The Nova Scotia government recently passed a bill that bans the therapy, but only with restrictions. The federal government has yet to follow suit, and indeed has been silent on the subject. We do, however, expect some sort of reaction shortly.

The only way to ensure positive change that will protect all of our LGBTQ+ citizens is to ban gay conversion therapy outright.

The Nova Scotia bill only protects those up to age 16, which leaves out those who cannot defend themselves because of emotional or intellectual challenges, or those who, due to other circumstances, are not able to decide due to the level of maturity. In order to eliminate this we must ban the procedure outright. If not, the religious right will keep the practice going and with dire consequences. The law must step in to prevent such horrible consequences. These are troubling situations and it is essential, and indeed the obligation of all who are concerned, that complete protection is in place.

I remain deeply troubled that protection is only directed at those under the age of 16, and LGBTQ+ people with the above mentioned

challenges are not being considered, regardless of age. A complete ban is the only solution to rid us of conversion therapy. It is imperative this hurtful procedure is eliminated for all time. Hopefully, the Liberal government under Premier Stephen McNeil will revisit the bill and make it complete.

This imperative move will send the therapy procedure into oblivion. The time is now to end the torture of minds that cause suicidal thoughts, as it goes against nature to who we are as human beings. We do not choose our sexual orientation, a reality that is constantly challenged by the religious right. This is how we live, exist in our natural lives. We fall in love, have families, and according to this phrase — "love is all it takes to be family" — we contribute to our world, and we must garner the courage to live our lives as they are meant to be lived. It was conveyed

to me a few months ago by a government official that this is a health issue and therefore the responsibility of the provinces.

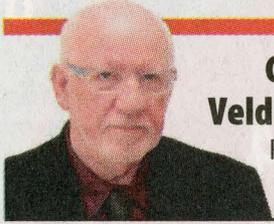
This in reply to letter I sent to the federal government regarding this issue. I argued that health issues are created by gay conversion therapy as a result of discriminatory actions. The reality is that those who provide the service are determined to rid the LGBTQ+ population and transition them to heterosexuality. This clearly indicates discrimination at its most harsh.

Outright banning the therapy must be dealt with immediately. Provincial and federal governments must act now. A great follow-up to the apology by Justin Trudeau.

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Jan 31, 2019

Bride and bride, groom and groom, bride and groom



Gerard Veldhoven
Refocus

For centuries, weddings have been performed in numerous venues, and with parents beaming with pride.

The bride and groom are now legally ready to begin a family, another joy for parents, as they wish for grandchildren to carry on family names.

Wait a minute — are we not missing something in this age-long tradition? We are all aware of the fact that in many countries marriages have traditionally performed by the clergy, though civil weddings were also known to take place, especially in European nations.

Do we know if same-sex couples were also of the same mind and wishing to be married during the past hundreds of years? If so, the religious community would certainly have frowned on this proposal, so civil ceremonies would have been the way to go. It all concerns acceptance by society to embrace LGBTQ+ people's rights to take their places beside all others, with all the benefits and other equal treatment, yes, including the right to marry.

So, we forward to 2000 and The Netherlands became the first nation in the world to rewrite the marriage laws to include same-sex marriage. Canada was fourth, and soon others followed, climbing to 28 countries. I married my partner, Norman Carter, on Oct. 16, 2004 — the first publicly performed such marriage in Nova Scotia.

In 2005, marriage was legalized on the federal level. We had been together 35 years when Norman

suddenly died. The wedding, with 125 guests, was totally organized by ourselves with the assistance of a few close friends. Wedding organizers were not accustomed to same-gender marriages, consequently we had to rely on a very few to handle the plans. So, this brings me to the point of how far we have come — and do wedding planners consider the fact that it's not only a bride and groom who wish to celebrate the union of marriage?

A recent article in the newspaper explaining the perfect wedding plans for the bride and groom and not once mentioned a bride and bride, or groom and groom as possible clients. This is not the first such article that completely ignored same-gender weddings. Over the years, there has been a tremendous increase in gay couples who chose to marry, and continue to do so. According to the 2016 census, there

were 24,370 married same-sex couples in Canada, and 10,020 children lived in these family nucleuses.

Of course thousands of couples live in common-law situations, choosing not to legally marry. So, with all these couples in this country and abroad, one would think that wedding planners, cake decorators and the religious community would be in step with today's diverse society.

Apparently, not necessarily, as is evident by the aforementioned article, and others in the past. Occasionally, we may get a glimpse of a same-sex couple on television, or other media advertising. Bride and bride, groom and groom, bride and groom, it matters not and we must be aware of what has been happening during the past 19 years, as the increase in couples getting married is a reality, and consequently must be recognized by all. In order to get

married, couples are very limited as to whom they may contact.

The vast majority of church denominations strictly forbid the very nature of gay couples, as well as all members of the LGBTQ+ community. The discrimination is in place, and very few churches will allow their clergy to perform the ceremonies. The alternative is a Justice of the Peace, or another court appointee who will be available.

Recently, a baker refused to make a cake, and a florist simply told the couple that it was against their religious belief to accommodate a gay couple.

The couples, regardless if they are same-sex or opposite sex, marriage or not, it's the love represented that matters.

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Feb 28, 2019

Discrimination under the umbrella of the law



Gerard Veldhoven
Refocus

Much has been written and discussed, and battles have been fought in the courts regarding the discrimination that continues in this country.

Ironically, Canada remains one of the most accepting countries in the world. To say that conservative minds are at work is not out of line. Those who believe certain members of our society are eligible to live their lives as they are meant to be lived, and be accepted as “normal,” serve as a constant reminder of how much work remains to be done in this society. Do we LGBTQ+ citizens of this world deserve to be treated

like second-class beings, and is it acceptable to let this community of world citizens be treated in this way?

Many of us remember former Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s attempt to reverse the marriage act and exclude gay couples from being able to legally marry. And most of his MPs agreed with him. Last year, the Conservative Party decided to not question the issue any longer. Of course, that’s not written in stone as Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer has also voted against same-sex marriage. So, as we study the issue of discrimination which has a multitude of headings, we learn, through experience, many changes may occur.

Even as Canada’s Conservative Party has indicated it will not reopen the issues regarding LGBTQ+ citizens’ rights, a change of heart, as well as changes in policies, may be in the future. Dis-

crimination under the law is also evident in Ontario as the Progressive Conservative government in that province has ordered the reinstatement of sexual education as set forth in 1995 and erasing the content concerning the LGBTQ+ community. This is pure discrimination under the umbrella of the laws of this land. Yet, governments in our provinces, as well as the federal governments, may introduce legislation that allows actions that do not follow the laws of this country.

Alberta is on the verge of a provincial election. There could be a change in government to the United Conservative Party under leader Jason Kenney, a staunch anti-LGBTQ+ former federal MP, and a return to eliminating any laws concerning LGBTQ+ citizens in that province. He is against gay/straight alliance groups in educational facilities and same-sex marriage, and other

gains that have made in Canada, one of the leaders in the world, as far as equal rights are concerned. The concerns are real and the fact the laws do not always protect makes it clear the fight for equality continues.

Religious ideologies are a strong factor that influences the politicians, and of course the general public, in a manner that gives us cause for concern as only those who are “straight” are welcome. This should also be counted as discrimination. It must be made clear that not all religious denominations are guilty of this discriminatory action. Our world, our existence, and our rights as human beings, are challenged by those who feel the need to exclude rather than embrace. The meaning of this is abundantly clear. The LGBTQ+ citizens of this country are not necessarily protected under the laws of the land because discrimination occurs

daily, with terrible consequences that do not need to exist. Let us be clear, discrimination is the culprit of all minorities, even as we are told by governments and others, that protection exists under the laws. Who is responsible to make certain that protection exists and is promoted in reality, not just philosophical words that are meaningless? Words as spoken by Pope Francis and others mean little unless put into action. Positive deeds will tell the story, and history will tell our children if discrimination has indeed been eliminated. Human rights dictate that all be treated equally under the laws, and indeed through kindness and love. Much has been accomplished, but so much more remains to be done.

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Coming out a challenge straights do not face



**Gerard
Veldhoven**
Refocus

Coming out to family and friends can be a traumatic journey.

This journey is complicated as one may be, over time, consumed with fear of parental acceptance, peer rejection or perhaps internalized homophobia, which can be a prolonged period of anger at one's self for wishing not to be in that situation.

How are we able to take this important step towards revealing ourselves to the world and feel a level of comfort? The task is daunting for many — however, a necessary step that will influence

future years. As well, many are in a comfort level and simply decide to come out and be comfortable with that decision. Some at an early age, as they have realized their sexual orientation as soon as they are sexually aware, perhaps as young as eight or 10.

We also know that coming out at a later age may have negative consequences because of family, friends, in schools or at work, may have an influence on equal treatment. Socially, one's sexual orientation remains a controversial issue and we must not be idle and feel society has come a long way towards acceptance.

Yes, pockets of our population are very much at ease with family members or friends coming out to them and not face guilt or rejection. We have come a long way, but years of hard work are still ahead as the majority of

the globe's population remains in limbo, or simply reject sexual orientation and true gender identity outright. The so-called "straight" members of our society are not questioned as to why they identify as such.

Of course, we really know the answer and we will be told that it is "normal." That answer begs the following question; what is normal? How does one define that word, how do we accept the answer defined years ago? The word should not exist as we are all unique and to be "normal" takes that away because straight society has defined it and the LGBTQ+ population is not included. We are in a different time, with many people becoming aware of their true identity, not one ordered upon us. The forerunners for equal rights were correct in taking on the task, to come out,

to demand equal treatment, be who they are, regardless of sexual orientation. Straight society is only one part of the picture and those who have gone before us, the initiators for equality, were very aware that straights ruled with an iron fist, making the rules, taking for granted gays were a minor nuisance. Religious factions were more vocal in opposition to LGBTQ equal rights. We have realized some changes in the world of religion, but those on the right remain strongly opposed to members of the LGBTQ+ community. How do we convince them otherwise, or should we just ignore the opposition and take our rightful place?

Yes, it is indeed our obligation to come out with pride and determination, and in doing so working to end discrimination. Many around the world are engaged in raising awareness and fighting

for equal rights, which are human rights. Should we ask if someone is straight, or do we simply say, "We are here, alongside all others?" The only difference is that each of us is unique and thankful that we are who we are". Do we really care if someone is "straight", or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or any other identification? How important is it if we wish to know how a person identifies? The person cannot change who he/she is, and above all, attempts to do so must be squashed.

We are here, and we share the world with so many, so let us, each of us, identify ourselves and not allow others to interfere. Do not ask, and do not judge.

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March 21, 2019

LGBTQ+ refugee assistance in Sackville, New Brunswick



**Gerard
Veldhoven**
Refocus

The United Church in Sackville, N.B., a town close to the Nova Scotia border, has announced efforts in partnership with the Sackville Refugee Response Coalition to resettlement those who are persecuted because of their sexual orientation, gender identity expression, or HIV status.

The church is an affirming congregation, meaning a welcome is extended to all members of society, bar none. After being approved to sponsor a person by Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada, the congregation recently stepped up efforts to bring a member of the

LGBTQ+ community to Sackville in the very near future.

Rev. Lloyd Bruce of the Sackville church is calling for assistance in accomplishing a smooth transfer to aid this person in fleeing a part of the world where safety for LGBTQ+ persons is constantly at tremendous risk. Beatings, imprisonment, harassment and even death, are consequential to LGBTQ+ lives, and coming out is severely reduced as a result of blatant discrimination.

"Because it is urgent that this individual be removed from harm's way as soon as possible, they will soon arrive in Sackville, within 12 to 16 weeks," Bruce said.

He goes on to say that much work remains to be done. "The Sackville Refugee Response Committee and the Welcoming Committee of the Sackville United Church are busy sourcing housing options and beginning to consider

other needs that this individual may arrive with."

LGBTQ+ citizens in many nations are the subject of unimaginable horror, and we live in a country where they are protected by law, though many obstacles still occur, with discrimination a reality. We are diligent in our work towards that goal and with profound determination, we will surely make a huge difference.

We live in a time where discrimination continues to be a burden, and considering the 7.6 billion inhabitants that occupy the globe, the work is arduous and time consuming. Will we experience an end to this dilemma? Do we see a lowering of this curse that society faces on a daily basis? Not as yet, as discrimination rose sharply as of last year. We must, however, not give in, but raise awareness, not only on this side of the world, but internationally.

After 40-plus years as an activist for equality, I have experienced positive outcomes, but regardless of those outcomes, the fight continues. There are so many of us, and so many are involved in the fight for inclusion that it would indicate a speedy recovery. Not so. Our peaceful and loving existence depends on how we treat our fellow beings.

Discrimination is not a local problem, but a global reality. The alarms keep up the warnings and with that comes our natural desire to fix the problems we face. Our neighbours to the south, who have the unfortunate experience of living with a leader who disrespects so many in our society, who, as a wannabe dictator, keeps the fires of intolerance burning brightly. This so-called leader of the "free world," hinders progress to bring people together, regardless of our identity. The problem is that his influence

does carry weight, and that unfortunately slows positive progress.

The outstanding progress we have made is in the fact that the laws of many nations are inclusive, and that, dear readers, we must emphasize. But keep in mind that the work we must yet do is demanding but attainable. Progress is slow, and patience, being a virtue, so we are told, must prevail.

So, with the story of an LGBTQ+ refugee coming to Sackville, N.B., we learn of the positive thinking and love projected by this community. It is heartwarming and so inclusive!

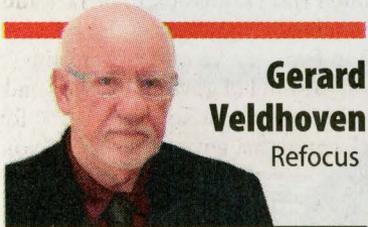
I urge readers to contact the Sackville United Church at 506-536-0498, and support this effort that spells equality, while perhaps saving a life. This is Canada!

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April 18, 2019

COMMENTARY

Politicians Robinson, Brison and others influenced gains for LGBTQ+ equality



Gerard Veldhoven
Refocus

The member of Parliament for Kings-Hants in Nova Scotia, and until recently the president of the treasury board, has a profound influence on the equality of LGBTQ+ citizens in Canada.

Scott Brison, 66, has represented his riding federally for the past 22 years and as a gay man has been re-elected many times, obviously his sexual orientation not an issue. Repeatedly, he was voted back for other terms, regardless of his sexual orientation. In 2005, he crossed the floor and left Stephen Harper's Conservatives to join the Liberals under Paul Martin. Harper and most of his MPs voted

against same-sex marriage. Mr. Brison chose to leave, having decided to come out in 2003. He was the first openly gay cabinet minister in Parliament.

In 2007, Brison married his partner, Maxime Saint-Pierre, a wedding that was attended by hundreds of family, friends and politicians. Paul Martin was one of the guests. Recently, Brison decided to resign from politics in order to spend more time with his husband and their two daughters. He never considered himself as an activist, but quietly lives his life as it is meant to be lived.

In an interview, Mr. Brison revealed he embraced his sexuality in 1997. He will be celebrated as a huge contributor to equality as he never shied away from who he really is, and for that we are thankful.

In 1988, Svend Robinson, the NDP member of Parliament, was elected and was in that position

for 16 years. The Burnaby MP was a vocal proponent for equal rights and fought diligently in the House of Commons for years. He said it was the possibility of giving "a message of hope and solidarity to younger gay men and lesbian people" that spurred him to do so. Having participated on numerous committees and other forms of study, Mr. Robinson exerted considerable influence. Among his noted accomplishments are involvement as an activist for the anti-apartheid movement and part of the physician assisted movement. Robinson has received many honours nationally as well as internationally for his work for equality for LGBTQ+ citizens.

Married to Max Riveron, the 66-year-old is making a strong case to return to politics. He was recently involved with the Global Fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria from a base in

Switzerland. Svend Robinson has proven to be a stalwart in the LGBTQ+ community for many years.

B.C. MP Spencer Chandra Herbert came out because of trailblazers like Robinson. Bill Siksay, Libbie Davies and Randy Boissonault are among those who have served, or are presently representing federal ridings. Boissonault was appointed the special advisor to the prime minister on LGBTQ+ issues. He is the MP for Edmonton Centre.

Canada is well positioned to be one of the leaders worldwide. Even as discrimination is alive and well around the world, some inroads are being recognized, and leaders in Ottawa are necessary to write the laws of protection, and those who are part of the LGBTQ+ community will pave the road for advancing a more positive future.

Let us be positive and give

a hand to those who represent us in Ottawa, and those who are in other jurisdictions in our provinces. Our children and grandchildren must be assured of a future that recognizes them as complete individuals, regardless of identity. Those who represent us in our nation's capital are few, and the need for more LGBTQ+ representation is essential for further change. The changes have been rather speedy over the past years, but we are also aware that we cannot be remiss as changes in government may also signal changes in policies and attitudes. We only have to glance at Ontario where PC Premier Doug Ford may just set back the gains LGBTQ+ citizens have enjoyed in that province.

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COMMENTARY

Ottawa rejects gay-conversion therapy ban



**Gerard
Veldhoven**
Refocus

The federal government has decided not to ban gay conversion therapy, the horrendous discriminatory procedure in use in this country and around the globe, to “cure” gay persons.

A petition by advocates and letters to our government have been ignored. The procedure is mainly practiced by right-wing religious organizations, some health “professionals”, and those vehemently opposed to equality for gay people. Regardless of one’s view, this spells blatant discrimination that leads to mental confusion, and in some cases, suicide.

In my letter to Ottawa, I joined

thousands of other concerned citizens in efforts to have a total ban on gay conversion therapy. In response, I was advised that since this is considered a health issue, it is the responsibility of the provinces and territories. Again, I pointed to the fact that this a discrimination based on sexual orientation and must be the responsibility of our government in Ottawa.

In the fall of 2017, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau rose in the House of Commons to apologize to Canada’s LGBTQ+ citizens for past wrongs against them by federal authorities. The appointment of Randy Boissonault as special advisor to the prime minister on LGBTQ+ issues was a tremendous event that promised a healing process that would continue into the future to assure the elimination of discrimination in this country. The LGBTQ+ community was elated by these developments, viewed as positive and inclusive by our government.

The action by our government to refuse a ban is step back from taking positive action, and in doing so allows discrimination to continue and lives be engulfed by religious, right-wing and some others, continuing a decidedly negative attitude. The refusal to deal with this issue plays with the minds of our young LGBTQ+ folks, as well as those who do not possess the mental capacity, or the maturity, to fight this procedure, has dire consequences. The fact remains that this so-called therapy constitutes discrimination by its very nature. Aside from the fact it has no merit and does not change one’s sexual orientation, it is a blatant attempt to alter one’s natural being because of religious intolerance, and that spells discrimination. This is a dreadful reality.

It is hurtful and also extremely ludicrous to treat gay conversion therapy as a health issue only, and not discrimination. Our politicians in Ottawa must recognize this

and act immediately. Canada has a fall election on the agenda and if a Conservative government takes the helm with Andrew Scheer, then the whole process of eliminating gay conversion therapy has no chance of passing. Many Conservative Members of Parliament have already indicated that they will not support a ban. Provincially, we have Premier Doug Ford, Premier Jason Kenney, and along with Mr. Scheer, makes a strong case that gay-conversion therapy will continue to rear its ugly head.

This must not be a political tug of war but a sensible understanding of human nature. Our concerns stem from our politicians on centre-left, who may feel the wrath of right-wing religious organizations that not only support the procedure, but indeed encourage it. The October election will decide if our prime minister and the Liberal government will continue, and a chance to end this discrimination, or a right-

wing Conservative government that promises to continue this dreadful, on-going procedure. A Liberal government with a prime minister, and an appointed LGBTQ+ special advisor, have decided that gay conversion therapy is not discrimination, but just a health issue, is deeply disappointing.

We must display a national, and an international leadership by condemning discrimination at the highest level. Canada considers itself a leader in equality, and therefore we must hold our government accountable to do the right thing by eliminating gay conversion therapy. We must insist on an outright ban. By nature and with pride, we are equal, bar none. Vote to end discrimination. The Liberals remain our best chance.

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Governments are too slow to react

Religious influence on gay conversion therapy; governments must listen



**Gerard
Veldhoven**
Refocus

Further to the federal Liberal government's action not to ban gay conversion therapy, we keep hearing and reading about how this procedure is a mental health issue. That is partly the case, however, it all begins with far-right religious beliefs that emphasize being gay is not in favour with God, and therefore must be "healed."

So, how do we reply to that belief, and why are we opposed to that ideology?

As people, we come in various personalities, makeup, the way we look, how we present ourselves, our sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. These are our human qualities

and, of course, let us not forget our four-legged creatures, and others. As such, we may differ, but we are all the same somehow. We sleep, we consume food, our thoughts may differ, our decision making may not be of another, we receive our education, and we go to work in order to house ourselves and put food on the table. We do this in various ways. Taking into consideration the reason for this column, we differ in sexual orientation and that is at the centre of this controversy.

Our governments — federal and most provincial — have ignored requests from those who are concerned with medical eventualities as a result of the procedure, and/or the discrimination that is at the centre of this dilemma. First, those in power must realize this is a religious-based program that is a result of discrimination in accordance with biblical teachings, (as they indicate). We can

always count on governments to hesitate on acting if it involves religious beliefs.

In this case, they will emphasize the mental health issue of the equation, and because of the controversy, will simply not mention the word "discrimination." Looking for reasons why governments reject action to protect gay people from this drastic and horrific practice, one may conclude religious influence trumps the right for gay people to exist. This ludicrous idea boggles the mind. Government officials seem to say it is quite alright to alter a person's sexual orientation because the religious right demands it.

Secondly, an outright ban is the only answer to end this program that the medical community has already indicated does not work, and has terrible consequences which result in mental illness and, in some cases, suicides. The only concern seems to be the young teens

who are gay, but let's be frank and emphasize that those adult gays who are mentally not able to protect themselves, must also be considered, as must those of any age. In other words, our governments must, and have the responsibility, to end this procedure, and put a total ban in place.

As mentioned previously, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stood in the House of Commons and apologized to the LGBTQ+ community for past wrongs vowing never to return to those horrific actions by governments. By his side was the Special Advisor to the Prime Minister, Randy Boissonnault, who tearfully stood by his boss, an indication that better days were ahead. I truly believed that sincere efforts were made, and I rejoiced with millions of others. Subsequent announcements have been made since that great day. This begs the question: why does our federal government

reject a call to ban gay conversion therapy and, in doing so, perhaps keep thousands from being exposed to this horrible discrimination that may lead to mental instabilities?

Discrimination is a curse that human kind cannot seem to eradicate, and with governments in denial that this is a fact, gays are subjected to this religious idea, which is blatant discrimination. Discrimination is one of the worst offences of our time. I call on our elected officials to take this seriously, ban gay conversion therapy, and save lives. May we possibly see a future when religions accept us for who we are? The government has announced a willingness to act over the summer. A total ban must be the end result.

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COMMENTARY

LGBTQ+ work towards an inclusive community



**Gerard
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Refocus

Speaker after speaker, articles that call for unity, LGBTQ+ equal treatment calls, continually appear wherever the crowds gather, fill our media with opportunities to be discussed and put into action.

If we work in unison we can move mountains and eliminate much of the discrimination that exists today, as well as the homophobia, transphobia, biphobia and so many other identities that mar our world. Equality under the law does not automatically translate into equal treatment as so many barriers are in existence in our society, but we are able

to march on and be heard. The continuing need to address the situation is amply demonstrated by the fact that many young lives have been destroyed, and continue to do so as a result of stress associated with sexual orientation and true gender identity. Bullying and hateful name calling will not stop unless we stop tolerating such behaviour. Confronting can be done nicely, politely and firmly.

We are who we are and all, bar none, have the opportunity to contribute in this society with vigour and determination. Positive early education in our school system and at home stands a great chance that we will eventually enjoy a culture that is made up of children and grandchildren with positive minds and beliefs in inclusion. They are our future adults, our leaders and our shining lights who will instill in their children to be inclusive, regard-

less of sexual orientation or true gender identity. We must never lose sight of the fact that LGBTQ+ citizens around the world continue to face discrimination and persecution based on who they are.

Our schools, medical care givers, religious organizations, in the workplace, discrimination remains a huge factor in youth suicides and other hate crimes. The world must come to realize that individuality is a human right, and therefore is for each and every one of us. We like to believe that in 2019 all is well and society has become kinder and recognizes diversity and accepts what comes from that, but let's not be naïve.

Our LGBTQ+ citizens have suffered much over the centuries. Diversity was not a recognized word, making life hell for those who were judged as not "normal." They faced terrible consequences, beat-

ings, prison and/or death. The Second World War was a prime example, when Hitler and his henchmen targeted gay men and lesbians and thousands died in concentration camps. Author Oscar Wilde was imprisoned and sentenced to hard labour because of his affair with Lord Alfred Douglas.

There are countless stories that remind us of the dire consequences over the centuries, too numerous to mention. As I have mentioned on many occasions, we celebrate our achievements, but we remain on guard as we hear daily reports of attacks on LGBTQ+ members around the world. This bears repeating over and over as the reality is before us. To be positive is to remember those who have encountered unbearable discrimination, yet also keep the present and future in our thoughts, hoping to make a better world for future generations. The task is arduous and

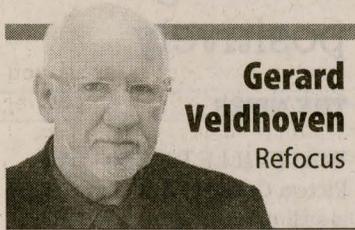
will take years to even make a dent, but we fight on with all the energy we are able to muster and the positivity within us will flourish. In the western world are many nations that have changed laws that embrace protection for the LGBTQ+ citizens in those countries.

It is indeed unfortunate that equal treatment remains a core issue, not only in the Far East and other places but here in our own country. In Canada about 80 per cent of the population are in agreement with equality, but yet so many occurrences tell us otherwise. Some religious beliefs are in total agreement with LGBTQ+ discrimination. Just remember this: our constitution protects us all. So it is written!

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COMMENTARY

Special advisor weighs in on LGBTQ2 issues



Gerard Veldhoven
Refocus

A few years ago I met Randy Boissonnault, the MP for Edmonton Centre, and then newly appointed special advisor to the prime minister on LGBTQ2 Issues. At the round-table discussions in Halifax on how we may proceed with our work towards equal treatment, Mr. Boissonnault suggested we co-author a column.

The following are the views we share as members of Canada's LGBTQ2 community, and how our Liberal government has made positive strides for equal treatment.

"LGBTQ2 rights are basic human rights, yet, while other human rights are respected and upheld, many individuals continue to be denied the same rights. Being a leader for all communities and all people means continuing to uphold rights for all, while also actively advocating for rights not currently upheld," Randy says. "This Liberal government has invested funds specifically to

assist Canadian organizations fighting these battles in places around the world where rights are being infringed. Our missions around the world are empowered at the local level to encourage and promote Canadian values, including human rights. The support of the Canadian government, the importance of promoting equality for everyone, was monumental and inspiring."

Randy says he and his partner are just like every other couple walking down the street.

"We are human beings who work and play and love and laugh just the same. Normalizing diversities in society on equal playing fields includes fair, just, and equal treatment for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, race, creed, religion, or any other identity. It is what makes this country so spectacular."

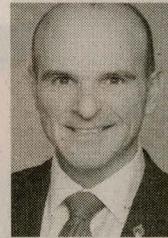
I asked Mr. Boissonnault if the prime minister's apology in Parliament will influence other political leaders. He went on to say that "Having the prime minister acknowledge the historical injustices of the past and recognize the path we have been on, while looking to the path of the future, is a significant step. It highlights the importance

of not ignoring past mistakes. We had worked on this project, engaging with the community and ensuring we were doing this in a way that was respectful and authentic, for over a year. It was a monumental moment for me to be there and to see our prime minister apologize for the persecution of LGBTQ2 Canadian public servants. I do believe that any leader at minimum knows our shared history and actively works to heal wounds or rectify wrongs under the population they seek to represent. Political leaders need to be leaders for all Canadians."

The apology was a huge step in promoting positive values that are so essential in our society. Gay-conversion therapy is cause for grave concerns and I have addressed this hurtful and discriminatory practice in my previous columns. Mr. Boissonnault says that: "The Liberal government has announced this will be dealt with in short order by banning this horrific practice."

He went on to say that: "The minister of health, Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, and the

minister of justice, Hon. David Lametti, and I recently wrote to our provincial counterparts across this country to encourage them to look at ways which their jurisdictions could identify and rectify legislative gaps to criminalize the practice. Further, I have spoken at multiple local municipal city councils to encourage them to look at banning the practice at the municipal level as well. The reason a multi-jurisdictional approach is necessary is because of the underground and shadowed nature of conversion therapy. It is happening in basements and is often disguised as a therapeutic intervention that can change someone's identity or expression. Cities and even provinces have much more on-the-ground exposure and access to stopping these harmful practices than



Boissonnault

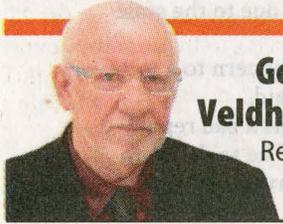
federal legislation can approach on their own. I have asked my colleague Hon. David Lametti to ask his Justice department to perform a 'deep dive' into the conversion therapy and the respective legislation that targets it from the federal lens. No one should feel like they are not free to be themselves, love who they want to love, in this country. As I often say, diversity is our strength and it takes a full rainbow spectrum to colour life in its fullest."

I concur that we are a special nation indeed, and the rainbow colours are on full display in Canada throughout the year.

My sincere thanks to Randy Boissonnault for his contribution to this column.

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A call to collectively fight discrimination



Gerard Veldhoven
Refocus

This column usually concerns LGBTQ+ issues; however, on occasion there is mention of other minorities that are equally discriminated against. Should we not, as minorities in a world where discrimination remains out of hand, be a united front, a strong, determined and vocal group of diverse people.

Some believe that each group should fight their own battles, but to be realistic, discrimination must be eradicated and the most effective way is to speak with one voice. We are all the same somehow, and each minority group searches for answers. We direct our con-

cerns to the world community at large, and the fact that 7.6 billion inhabitants walk on this earth, the task is arduous. We cannot realistically expect that discrimination will end in our lifetime.

Over the centuries, this curse has embraced us and we should continue the fight for equality and not sit idly by wishing for discrimination to end. The constant attacks on each group, the horrendous consequences, must end in order to find some peace. Decades and perhaps centuries may offer some relief, but with unifying all those who face daily angst the necessity to gather is essential. Our children, grandchildren and all future generations will be counting on us to educate and raise awareness. The diversity of generations in our world is evident by the daily oppressive and intolerant behavior of the discriminatory majority.

That is not to say that gains

have not been forthcoming. As a matter of fact, during the past few decades inroads have been successful in some instances. Canada and other countries, have changed laws to protect minorities, but to enforce those laws has not been completely successful and is challenging. Equal treatment is not yet ours to enjoy, and I am speaking about all minorities, of which there are many. Going forward, it is essential that a unified and global effort by all minorities, Indigenous people, the black community, the LGBTQ+ community, people of faiths, the way we dress or the language we speak, among others, is in place.

I have written about this very idea in previous columns and it must be repeated over and over again, so that we may proceed towards a better, more inclusive world where all live in peace, respect and with love. The challenges ahead are phenom-

enal, but just think of a world without discrimination. The road to success is dependent on our dedication for change. On a daily basis we are challenged to do more, to move forward and make noise in an effort to be heard. Some listen, but the majority are silent and rather not be involved in working for change. This begs the following question: how do we reach those who, for some unexplainable reason, or wish to stay out of controversy?

Then, we are very aware of those who do not believe in equality for all, and make horrific accusations against all minorities. White supremacist groups, right-wing evangelicals, politicians who regularly deny equal rights and do not support equal treatment are in abundance. The task at hand is arduous and seems unreachable until we realize that the choice is limited and the call to action is the only way in which the

possibility exists to eradicate discrimination and its ugly consequences, even in a small way. This small way may seem insignificant, but nevertheless has merit. The world simply cannot continue in the manner that has existed for so many years.

Humanity must co-ordinate if it's to survive in peaceful times. Years, decades and centuries go by and we remain divided. Of course, we have witnessed some changes, but at today's pace the urgency increases so that we harmonize and live with dignity, peace and love. We are who we are, and we recognize our differences, but remember, we are all, each of us, part of humankind. Let us unify, and speak with one voice.

Gerard Veldhoven is a gay rights activist and resident of Pictou County. His column appears monthly in The News. Comments and information: lgbtconnections-gv@gmail.com.

COMMENTARY

Return of the Trudeau government assures LGBTQ+ rights



**Gerard
Veldhoven**
Refocus

Justin Trudeau was successful in forming a new government after a contentious election battle that contained much animosity among candidates and the reality of a minority.

Nevertheless, the positive result promises a continuation of the Liberal government's protection of equal rights and the upcoming ban on gay-conversion therapy. Those of us who view this of great importance are celebrating this win, and the fact the people of this great country chose wisely will assure us that the work started four years ago to attain equality is expected to lead us into four more years of support.

Andrew Scheer had already

pointed out that he would have to see the wording of the proposed ban in order to support its passing. The wording is clear, as is the total rejection by medical experts and researchers that GCT jeopardizes mental health and many times leads to suicides. Scheer, however, according to his religious beliefs, has pointed out that a person should be heterosexual. In other words, let's continue the horrific consequences of these actions.

In recent statements, he only believes an apology from some of his outspoken MPs, who openly and maliciously spoke about LGBTQ+ citizens, is acceptable — not a retraction. This is not the first time Mr. Scheer has admitted to prejudicial thinking: he's voted against same-sex marriage and rejected transgender protection. And now he opposes a ban on gay-conversion therapy. The Conservative leader has proven beyond a reasonable doubt that the LGBTQ+ citizens

of Canada must follow "heterosexual" behaviour, because the Bible tells him so. The followers of that belief have no intention of changing the ideological teachings that are ingrained from childhood. Unfortunately, that is the way it will be well into the future.

Mr. Trudeau, from the beginning of his mandate in 2015, revealed to us his intention to continue the journey that is necessary to gain equality for all. I am certain Mr. Trudeau has regrets about the part he had in a play in 2004, and has apologized profusely. Mr. Scheer has yet to apologize for his comments on same-sex marriage. For the Conservative leader this is normal thinking and he will continue to do so. Now, the positive action that Trudeau initiated four years ago will produce more positivity for the LGBTQ+ citizens by banning gay conversion therapy as a criminal offence.

As well, thousands of dollars

will be distributed to LGBTQ+ groups across the country to fight discrimination.

To be sure, history has taught us that we come in all shapes, sizes, colours, sexual orientation, gender identities and beliefs. The Liberal government recognizes this fact and acts accordingly.

As the election results became clear, Randy Boissonnault, the Special Advisor to the Prime Minister on LGBTQ+ issues, could not hold on to his seat. Hopefully, he will be replaced by someone who will carry the mantle of this extremely important position. Our LGBTQ+ Canadians remain confident that Prime Minister Trudeau will deliver and so continues the support we deserve in this great nation.

The LGBTQ+ community has a great ally in the Liberal government and that cannot falter. If Scheer had been successful, the situation would have delivered dire consequences, as far as equal rights and treatment

are concerned. Gay-conversion therapy, equal marriage, transgender protection, to name just a few, would most certainly be negatively affected. Canada may stand proud to be a world leader in equal rights, and now we must work towards equal treatment and rid our country of discrimination in its many forms.

More must be done to correct the situation by implementing programs that in still an order of embrace, regardless of who and what we are as human beings. It is a matter of human rights, and our country and government must continue on a path of positive thinking, work on ideas to end division. Each and every one of us are called on to participate as it will affect our children, grandchildren and all thereafter.

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Religious right, conservative Protestants and Catholics slam LGBTQ+ community



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Refocus

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Around the globe, numerous religions play out in various ways and beliefs, with many consequences which may be viewed in different ways.

Even as many LGBTQ+ folks believe in a god, or other images of dominant figures, our true nature may be heralded as a "sin," or another form of judgement that hurts, discriminates or otherwise separates members of society. The true nature, our true intimate inner selves, are constantly facing a barrage of criticism from our religious friends.

As a society with so many cultures, languages and a variety of beliefs, the issues tend to be con-

fusing for many. Our concerns are met with disdain and viewed as unimportant because our sexual orientation, true gender identity or expression that are not part of religious beliefs. To be fair, some Christian denominations, referred to as mainstream churches, are welcoming and embrace same-sex marriage. The United Church of Canada, the Anglicans in some parts of Canada, and the Presbyterians working to perform same-sex marriages, are positive signs of progress.

So many are non-participants, instead choosing to further the cause for discrimination. Leaders of nations, leaders of political parties, leaders of religious organizations, and those who happily follow those who lead and discriminate without hesitation. The world in which we reside has many sides, but the most glaring angst ridden problem is the fact that discrimination is on the rise.

The religious right has been,

and continues to be, influential in convincing that being an LGBTQ+ citizen is against their god. Recently, A Roman Catholic priest in Calgary blasted Pride celebrations, exclaiming that the Pride flag was invented by Satan. The Rev. Jerome, the Vicar for Education at the Roman Catholic Diocese of Calgary, said the flag "represents lawlessness, a break from the natural order and evil." This according to The Star Calgary.

In Picton, Ont., Father R.J. Chisholm of St. Gregory's Roman Catholic Church, declared that "Catholics and all other Christians should not attend LGBTQ2 Pride Month events. They promote a culture and encourage activities that are contrary to Christian faith and morals. This is especially harmful to children because it could lead them away from God's revealed Truth."

Evangelical churches constantly bombard the LGBTQ+

community, among them, Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. Countless religious organizations speak out against LGBTQ+ citizens. In 2016, many Muslim countries opposed a move to advance LGBTQ+ rights, and blocked 11 gay and transgender organizations from attending high-level meetings on ending AIDS. Many political leaders are also slow to move in a positive direction, and indeed are swayed, or truly believe, that LGBTQ+ members of society do not deserve equal rights and equal treatment. The struggle continues with politicians not being on side. Canada's reputation as a so-called tolerant nation is true on many issues but we cannot and should not be idle as a change in government could very well place us in a different position. Laws can change, treatment towards others may not be as before. How will we know the best road to take? And I wonder

how we promise a better future to generations to follow.

These questions are not easily answered, except to say that we must choose to the best of our abilities and vote for those leaders who will best serve to make a more positive and inclusive world. The Liberal government in Ottawa is proposing a law that will ban gay-conversion therapy this fall, a welcome addition for protecting LGBTQ+ folks. Our LGBTQ+ friends in the U.S. have much to endure as President Trump continues his war against equality for those citizens who do not fit the norm, so to speak. Human rights are inclusive rights and we cannot allow inequality and discrimination to continue. Let us go forward and embrace each other and not give in to discrimination.

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LGBTQ+ community on the move, Roman Catholic bishops in Germany on side



Gerard Veldhoven
Refocus

The Hallmark Channel recently caved in to demands that an advertisement, depicting a lesbian couple kissing at the altar, be removed after a hate group, One Million Moms, made the demand.

Following an outcry from various corners, Hallmark has decided to resume the ads.

Many instances have been well documented. Our society is steadfastly in limbo regarding this subject, but be assured that the vast majority around the globe reject the notion, as well as the reality, that those who are on the "other side" usually remain there.

We are aware of many stories that hit the headlines in our daily news, as well as through personal experiences, that all is not well. Tradition seems to rule and that mould is difficult to crack, making us who are of the liberal mind uneasy in regard to the future.

Gay couples are denied services, such as bakeries refusing to supply a cake depicting a gay couple, or who simply say it is against their religious beliefs. Some flower shops are on record denying couples services.

Of course, this is where it becomes rather tricky. Our religious friends are of various opinions and beliefs, but be assured, atheists view it from a different angle in that human rights are at stake, our inherent right to equality, regardless of our views.

The LGBTQ+ population in this world is on the move, albeit at a slow pace. Opposition to equality, especially as viewed by religious teachings, is concerning, but nevertheless may result in a possible change in attitudes. Being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning or any other unique quality we may possess, must eventually be accepted as part of the world

order, as well as a committed community that must also accept the differences in all of humanity.

Sexuality has been discussed in great detail and over the centuries has experienced violence as incited by strong anti-equality.

Many religions have denounced equal rights sought by the LGBTQ+ community. Only a handful is in the process of positive change. We cannot overlook that same-sex activities have always been part of society.

We may well ask how many biblical or historical characters were gay. Articles have been written suggesting that the Christian character, Jesus, was gay. Do we know that for certain? No, of course not, but it is entirely possible.

Our entire society must take into account that none of us is like the other. We must find answers to reveal who we truly are, our true self-identities and live our lives as they are meant to be lived. In other words, be true to one's self.

Some religious attitudes are changing into a positive. The Conference of Roman Catholic Bishops in Germany have concluded that being gay is a "normal form of sexual predisposition." They agreed that "human sexuality encompasses a dimension of lust, of procreation and of relationships. Sexual preference expresses itself in puberty and assumes a hetero- or homosexual orientation and that any form of discrimination of these persons with a homosexual orientation has to be rejected."

At this point it is not clear how the Vatican will view this news, but it seems unlikely it will be accepted.

The point is that this is hopefully a beginning of acceptance by the church as a whole. Then and only then, will the healing begin. Mutual respect must be the end result for an embracing society.

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COMMENTARY

Canada's LGBTQ+ community versus conservatives



**Gerard
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Refocus

The year 2020 may just be one we will see more decisive action on eliminating discrimination, a daunting task and a long-term project.

Our intentions are well-meaning and many of us in the LGBTQ+ community are solidly involved in working towards some sort of end result.

The fact that discrimination has been a problem for centuries strongly indicates that to rid the world of this horrendous problem may well take us into future centuries. We work diligently to rectify the constant hurt and the ongoing stories of abuse, the attacks and killings around the globe against the LGBTQ+ citizens every-

where. Of course, we may be discouraged as we go along, but we must, above all, be patient. The progress is slow, and at times seems to stall. A barrage of news items that are discriminatory in content constantly stare us in the face.

Some churches are determined to see the LGBTQ+ community pushed aside and pretend they don't exist, therefore denying equality, which is a human right. Many support gay-conversion therapy because of religious teachings. So conservatism continues on the path of division, seeking to alienate, separate and condemn same-sex love.

Why is the obsession in the conservative right-wing part of our world society so filled with hate and intolerant actions? Why is embrace denied and not freely given? LGBTQ+ citizens are equal to all others. Family units develop, children with nowhere to go are embraced through adoption and receive love.

We go to work, attend the same schools, shop, speak our minds and so many more ways indicate we are all the same somehow. This world and its inhabitants have so much to learn, to accept and to embrace those who are perhaps a little different, to respect the love that develops between two human beings and hopefully to teach that our sexual orientation, gender equality, transgender identity and expressions matter, in spite of conservative thinking. Why not place energy on embracing instead of emphasizing the differences? If we are serious about making peace, live side by side as neighbours, accept our differences regardless of origin, then we may be proud of our position as equality lovers.

This may just be the year that brings us more joy and love among people of all backgrounds. We may be grabbing at straws, have unrealistic

ideas of how to move forward and what to expect. Yet, if we do not work in a positive manner, with promising end results, our efforts are worthless to a great degree.

Our LGBTQ+ citizens around the world have endured much suffering in many ways. Unspeakable consequences through beatings, slurs, murders and many other attacks occur. Some religious teachings are squarely responsible for much of the discontent because of negativity, resulting in those who take the anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes to the extreme. In order to combat this we must take action, but only positive action, void of hate and discrimination. We cannot fight fire with fire as the end result will not be to our liking.

To achieve some success we must, above all, rise to the occasion and become teachers — teachers of equality, teachers of love and teachers of inclusion. A great way is

to attempt to infiltrate our schools, our churches, synagogues, the workplace and playgrounds. At times our medical care suffers as some doctors, nurses and other first responders have been non-supportive. Religious teachings forbid same-sex love, so that our teachers, parents, grandparents, clergy and others have historically been exposed to hate. Unless we organize, unless we unify and unless we take on the task with love and embrace, we will surely not realize the positive end result we seek. So many have been exposed to discrimination and hate for LGBTQ+ citizens for decades. Discrimination rears its ugly head continually and is on the increase as more LGBTQ+ folks reveal themselves. The teachings must continue.

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The future must hold the LGBTQ+ citizens in embrace



Gerard Veldhoven
Refocus

Alas, my final column.

After 45 years of writing letters, speeches and other means of communication, I have decided that in my 80th year I must slow my pace as an activist for LGBTQ+ citizens in Nova Scotia and, indeed, Canada.

Aside from wishing to spend more time with family, friends and some travelling, I feel a transition to becoming older is not necessarily an easy time, but it's a reminder that aging has its drawbacks. I am often told age is just a number, but let me assure everyone that reality dictates another thought. Let me explain. Many of us have a proverbial "bucket list" and to achieve our goals we must also make haste and get those wishes accomplished. In doing so, we go towards a much more satisfying end, feeling we have that list shortened. So it is, with our previous years, in which we

set out goals. With determination, sincerity, total commitment to a cause, or causes, our lives are richer because of our wish to make a difference.

My determination over the years has brought me riches I never thought possible in my younger years. I have dedicated much time to educate, raise awareness of the need to bring attention the horrific treatment afforded the LGBTQ+ community locally and nationally. The advances have been tremendous, thanks to so many advocates in our community. I am saddened that a complete elimination of discrimination has not yet taken hold and that will continue well into the future. That is not to say our time was wasted. On the contrary, dedication and hard work has paid off with many improvements, and changes in the law to protect our LGBTQ+ population, such as equal marriage, survivor pension benefits and protection in our medical needs.

As we enjoy equality under the law, equal treatment is a continuing concern and a huge problem. Some of our citizens continue on a path of discrimination often fuelled by the religious right.

We must take into account that many politicians in our country also keep the fires of intolerance burning brightly. We have some provincial premiers, such as Alberta's Jason Kenney and Ontario's Doug Ford, who fight to oppose equality. We do have some MPs who have voiced opposition to equal marriage and protection under the law for transgender citizens. World leaders such as U.S. President Donald Trump, Russia's President Vladimir Putin and others continually contribute to the alienation of LGBTQ+ rights and equality. Canada, as a leader for equality, must be rigorous in fighting to keep liberal-minded politicians in power.

We must not, under any circumstances, revert to yesterday when the atrocities against LGBTQ+ citizens were plentiful and shameful; yes, even in Canada. We usually look to other nations and bitterly complain about human rights. In this country many wrongs committed against our community were vile and criminal. During much of the 20th century, gay members of the Armed Forces, the RCMP and civil employees were unceremoniously

fired.

A few years ago, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau formally apologized in Parliament to those affected. Viewed as a huge success, it was a long time overdue. Regardless, it was accepted by most of those who were impacted. As a columnist, I have addressed so many situations over the years and now I look back and I make an attempt to decipher what historical advances the LGBTQ+ community has made. I feel fortunate that I was able to contribute to my community in even a small way. The experience has been both rewarding and indeed challenging.

My marriage to Norman Carter in 2004, the first such public, legal same-sex marriage ceremony in Nova Scotia, with 135 guests in front of CBC and CTV cameras, was a proud moment as we committed to each other. I was chosen as a parade marshal in an Amherst Pride Parade, and was nominated four times to the Order of Nova Scotia, but my primary task was as a fighter for the LGBTQ+ community.

My love for family, friends and neighbours, my concern for the mistreatment of

LGBTQ+ people, the endless fuelling of discrimination by those whose lust for hate rather than embrace — all these things I care about and continue to care about at the forefront of my very existence. I will continue to assist as I am able.

At this time I would like to express my appreciation and say thanks for the opportunity afforded me to advocate for LGBTQ+ equality. I thank Transcontinental, SaltWire Network and Wayves Magazine for printing my columns and all supporters and allies over the years. My journey, so far, has been rewarding and energizing. I am well on my way to finishing my autobiography, entitled "A Passion for Equality, a Personal Journey."

I leave you with this thought: We hear the cries of those in need for love; commit your time and energy for positive change. Then and only then the tears will disappear and our society will hopefully realize that love conquers hate.

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