

January 17, 2021

Dear Mayor Clark and Council,

I thank you for your dedication and hard work to ensure the wellbeing of the people of Saskatoon. I appreciate the great responsibility you have and the difficulties you must go through in order to make the best decisions possible on behalf of the people. As a member of your beautiful city, I would like to share my story with you in hopes of helping as you come to a decision regarding the proposed bylaw to prohibit "conversion therapy" in Saskatoon.

I am currently 28 years old. I was 20 when I began to recognize in myself same-sex attraction. As I looked back on my life at that time, I also began to recognize many moments of this attraction throughout my childhood and teenage years, and many memories and experiences began to make sense to me in a way they hadn't previously. At this time these realizations felt very freeing, but also scary as I was unsure of how people in my life would react, especially those in the faith community that I was very much a part of. However, I knew what I felt, and began to make decisions in my life in pursuit of this. I ended a heterosexual relationship in order to explore and pursue my same-sex attraction, began to spend time at gay bars, came out to some of my closest friends (even though this almost ended some of those friendships), and engaged in other same-sex activities. I initially believed I was gay, but eventually came to identify as bi-sexual.

Although initially this felt like a freeing and exciting revelation to me, eventually I began to feel conflict with myself. About a year and a half later, I went through some experiences that caused me to become more invested in my Christian faith, and desire for this faith to become my defining identity. Although I had trusted people and other resources (both that shared my faith and that didn't) that assured me I could hold on to my Christian identity and my bi-sexual identity, the more serious I became about my faith, the less I believed this was true. I came to a point where I had to make decisions about how I wanted to live my life even if it meant disregarding and seeking to change some feelings and desires in order to pursue others I deemed of more importance to me. I decided this for my own happiness and well-being, based on my own values. Part of the process of being able to live the way I desired according to the feelings I desired involved reaching out to friends and to leaders in my faith community for counsel, accountability, strategies, and encouragement. I am beyond grateful that I had (and have) these people in my life to help enable me to walk out the decision I wanted to make for my own life, and live the way I desired to live. I can tell you with confidence, that in my case, my feelings have changed along with the way I identify. There are rare moments when I still feel conflicting feelings of attraction within me, but I have the freedom to choose how to address them, what to do about them, and whether or not I need to identify with them. I get to decide who I am and what values I live by, and no one or nothing else, even feelings that might come from within my own self, gets to dictate that for me based on their assumptions of how I should walk things out. When I feel conflicted, I have the freedom to seek counsel from people I trust, to be open and honest about what I am feeling and what I desire to do about it based on the faith and values I choose to live by and find joy in, and to find help and encouragement from those people in order to make the choices I want to make. Because of this, I am able to freely live the life I want to live and find joy, purpose, and fulfillment in the things I want to.

As you make this decision for our city, I humbly ask you to please keep stories like mine in mind. Abuse, manipulation, and forced counsel need to be fought against. But in the process, please do not take away opportunities for people like me to seek out counsel and support - support that is so beneficial in order to explore and accept sexual orientations and identities that align with our own personal values and are not based on the assumptions of others. Please allow us to make our own decisions. Please don't assume our priorities in life for us. And please don't punish those who would offer that counsel, in turn punishing us by removing the counsel from us. I ask you to reconsider the scope and definitions of any proposed bylaw and/or ban, and ensure you are protecting the freedoms of all, regardless of faith, values, and conviction.

Thank you for hearing out my stories and considering my words.

Yours respectfully,
Rachel Friesen