

My Story

By
Kathy Flores

My name is Kathy Flores, and I wanted to share my story about what motivated me to be a part of the Agape Reconciling Community (ARC) here at Mountain Park UMC. My husband Dave and I moved to Lilburn in 1998 with our two children, David, now 36, and Stephanie, now 28. We visited the church at the suggestion of one of Dave's co-workers, and we joined MPUMC in 1999 when our son got confirmed. For a while, David attended the youth group, but eventually he stopped going because he told me that many of the kids in the group acted one way at church but very differently at school. (Sadly, I came to find out just recently in talking with David that even someone in a position of leadership in the group used some very unkind words to him and a friend.) I let David know that he didn't have to go to youth group anymore but that he still had to attend worship services with our family because as a parent, I felt it was important to expose our children to our faith.

In the summer of 2001 when he was 15, David "told" us he was gay. He wrote it in a letter and left it in my van where he knew I would see it. David's biggest worry, this precious child whom we have loved all his life, was that we would still love him and know he was the same person he had always been before coming out to us. Being gay was not, is not, a choice for him. This is who God created him to be, and GOD DID NOT MAKE A MISTAKE! I didn't feel comfortable talking about this to others at church because of the way I feared many people would react. My biggest concern, other than making sure he knew he was loved and accepted for who he was, was protecting my son, emotionally and physically. He was dealing with enough ugliness from people at school. But then I realized it was important for people at church to put a familiar face with families with gay children, hoping if it was someone they knew, they might be more open and accepting. I also went to each new pastor as they came to our church, offering my husband and myself to be a support to any other families in our congregation who might need someone with similar issues to talk to. I would have loved to have had that type of connection for our family. Unfortunately, we never heard if there was a need.

In 2010, David moved to New York City to pursue his career, and a year or so later, he met Donny. He and Donny were married in 2013 by a friend in the theatre community. She got her license online to perform their ceremony and did a beautiful job. David and Donny just wanted what everyone else who marries wants: to love and be loved, sharing a commitment and their lives with their beloved.

Donny began to get very sick in the fall of 2018. Around Thanksgiving, after multiple trips to the hospital, they were told that Donny's liver was failing, he wasn't eligible for a transplant, and he had only months to live. I watched the fear and love and commitment my son had for his husband, breathing life to the vows to love each other "in sickness and in health." I was humbled by the love and fight David had for Donny. Through the Grace of God

and MANY answered prayers, our family was able to get the boys moved to Georgia to get Donny the liver transplant he so desperately needed on January 12, 2019. Surrounded by the love of our family and close friends, David and Donny continued to grow in their love for each other here, in Atlanta, until David's sudden and unexpected passing in October 2021.

When David was 5, his VBS teacher excitedly told me that David had accepted Jesus as his Savior. As an adult, David no longer felt comfortable coming to church anymore, and that breaks my heart. I can't tell you how many times I've heard people I care about at church say very hurtful things about those who are LGBTQ identifying. I worry for those in a fragile place, hearing those words when they should be hearing words of welcome and acceptance. That's why I'm a part of ARC, so that I can be a voice of welcome, acceptance, and love to all, especially to the beloved children of God who happen to be part of the LGBTQ community and who are brave enough to walk through the doors of our church, seeking a church home to worship God.