

Steve Balog and his wife, Florence, have twin lesbian daughters. Here, Steve tells of how sharing that information has made a difference in their faith community. This story originally appeared in the March 2005 Fortunate Families newsletter.

The light has been passed

About ten years ago, my wife Florence and I and several other parishioners started the Welcoming the Whole Family Committee at St. Andrew Parish in Portland, OR. Our effort was to make our parish welcoming to all especially to persons who are gay or lesbian. Our immediate motivation was the fact that we have twin, adult, lesbian daughters who no longer went to church. The ten or so persons on this committee also began to meet as a Small Faith Community. Father Bob, our former Pastor, was a great promoter of Small Faith Communities. He wanted to increase their number in our Parish. So one day he called and asked a person from each of the four Small Faith Communities to give a brief, three minute testimonial that coming Sunday during the Eucharist. I did not tell Florence what was going to happen. I prayed and jotted down some thoughts. Despite misgivings and fears about what I was to say, that Sunday morning I walked to the microphone when my turn came and spoke briefly about how this group had increased my faith; how our discussions had made me appreciate the Scriptures more. Finally I spoke about our twin, lesbian daughters who had been baptized at St. Andrew, but who no longer came here because they did not find what the Vatican and some Bishops and priests were saying about their sexual orientation very welcoming or even Christian. I spoke that Sunday morning about the Mission Statement of St. Andrew. About how it is based on Christ's own mission of inclusive love stated in Luke, Chapter 4:18. That he was sent by God to:

“bring the good news to the poor,
proclaim liberty to captives,
and to the blind new sight,
set the downtrodden free,
proclaim the Lord's year of favor”.

I told them I had learned in our Small Faith Community that when and if our daughters ever decide to return to this parish that they would find a loving people of God waiting for them and a safe and love filled church. And that I was sure they would be welcomed with love and understanding.

There was a stunned silence for several seconds after I spoke. Then applause. When I returned to my seat, Florence gave me a hug. A middle aged man, a gay parishioner who was sitting in front of us and who attended school at St. Andrew and has never wavered in his faith despite everything, turned and smiled and thanked me. Looking back, I know I never would have found the courage to stand up and say this except for the Spirit helping me. To my knowledge, this was the first time the words “gay” or “lesbian” had ever been spoken in this church.

Fast forward ten years to this January, 2005. The weekend of January 21-23, 2005, St. Andrew had its annual parish retreat at a Retreat House in a rural setting in the

woods. About 40 attended along with our new Pastor, Father Chuck Lienert. It was mostly a silent, contemplative retreat. We were looking at our parish to see who we are and where we are going. We thought and prayed and talked about whether we have been as inclusive and welcoming and devoted to Christ's message in Luke Chapter 4 as we should be. At Saturday breakfast I was sitting next to a young mother, Mary, who has two daughters of grade school age. We talked about our children. She told us about her daughters in grade school. Mary told us that they have friends who have "two moms". And her children ask Mary questions about this. She answers their questions in a loving, straight-forward way. Mary says that her daughters "have no problem with this. That they find nothing strange in this family situation". Then Mary looked at me and said: "I still remember that Sunday morning when you got up and talked about your daughters and St. Andrew and how they would find at St. Andrew a safe and loving place when they chose to return".

The message of Christ's love has been passed on to another generation. A small light has been passed to the young mother and now to the two young daughters. As parents of our wonderful lesbian adult daughters we can hope that this love, this light will burn away the hatred and fear still found in the church of Christ. The Spirit asks us for the courage to speak of God's love for all of us!

