



Queerfully and Wonderfully Made

Cassandra Saunders

Justice and Peace Fellow for the Office of Public Policy and Advocacy

Content Warning: This piece contains mentions of suicide and mental health. Please prioritize your well-being when deciding whether or not to read.

When I was sixteen, I was a mess. Attending a conservative, anti-LGBTQ church in the Bible Belt plus repressing my sexuality plus being an overachiever with undiagnosed mental health conditions equaled one stressed and lost teenage girl. I scoured the internet, desperately searching for affirmation of something I was too afraid to put a name to. I drowned in what-ifs and repeatedly spiraled about spending eternity in hell. One night, overcome by a panic attack, I broke down sobbing to my mom and confessed how I was feeling. She hugged me and reassured me that God loves me no matter what. But she still couldn't fully understand what it was to be queer and Christian. Since then, I've learned that it's terrifying and beautiful all at once.

That week, I begged God for a sign. A sign that it was okay to be me, a girl who might just like girls. A few days after I had that conversation with my mom, I was sitting outside of the library, alone. A complete stranger, a kind woman in grey scrubs, approached me and said: "I don't know how I know this, but you need to know that Jesus loves you." The heavens all but split open as I sat there in absolute awe. That woman probably has no idea that this one moment changed my life and I will always be grateful to her and God for sending me this divine message at a time when I needed it most.

I am one of the many queer and trans youth who disproportionately struggle with their mental health. There is a devastating but preventable public health crisis of LGBTQ+ youth suicide in this country. In 2023, forty-one percent of

LGBTQ+ youth ages 13–24 seriously considered attempting suicide. For queer youth of color, trans, and non-binary youth, the numbers are even higher. Fourteen percent of queer youth attempted suicide in 2023.

We know that respecting pronouns, making schools gender-affirming and inclusive, and having supportive loved ones lowers suicide rates. We also know that anti-LGBTQ policies, as well as anti-LGBTQ bullying, worsen the mental health of queer youth significantly. Lawmakers who write these hateful laws, many in the name of supposed Christian values, do not represent God’s vision of a just world where all are welcomed and loved. While homophobic and transphobic voices may be loud, we can and must be louder. Let us proudly use our Christian values for love instead of hate.

And if “they will know we are Christians by our love,” and our mandate is to love our neighbor as ourselves, we must first love ourselves. In a world full of discrimination and misunderstanding, being a queer child of God is hard. Fully, truly loving yourself is even harder still. But we are not alone, nor are we something that needs changing. We are queerfully and wonderfully made. I leave you with a quote from the “Desiderata,” penned by Max Ehrmann, which says: “Be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. Keep peace in your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.”

¹ [Strategic Plan - About The Trevor Project’s Mission & Vision](#)

² [Desiderata: Original Text](#)

³ [The Trevor Project: 2023 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cassandra Saunders serves as the Justice and Peace Fellow for the Office of Public Policy and Advocacy in the National Setting of the United Church of Christ.

LEARN

ucc.org/justice

DONATE

ucc.org/donate

ARCHIVE

bit.ly/witness4justice

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.

