

Background

My name is Katie Chiarantona, I'm thirty years old and I currently live in Washington DC. I'm a straight Catholic. I identify as an ally for LGBT people.

I was born in Northern Virginia, that's where I call home, but I moved around throughout my childhood all over the world as a result of my parents work. So, I was born in Fairfax VA and I then moved to Rome, Italy when I was about four months old and while in Rome Italy, my brother was born so I am one of two and I have a younger brother he is two years younger. He was baptized by the Pope. I was lucky enough to be a part of that ceremony as well. And, after Rome we lived in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates and then moved back to the States. We lived also in Daka, Bangladesh. That's where I made my first communion. And we lived in Riod Saudi Arabia for three years during middle school. So living around the world was a big part of my childhood and viewing other cultures and experiencing other people.

After high school I went to Boston College. Boston College was a big part of also my education and forming the person that I am today. I'm a social worker currently but I work in policy on programs for families. I started out working on programs that aim to strengthen families as a means to reduce poverty and improve equality. Now I work on programs that prevent and respond to family maltreatment specifically domestic violence and child abuse and neglect.

Catholic Upbringing

I was raised Catholic and it was a big part of my upbringing and it stayed with us around the world. As I mentioned my brother was baptized by the Pope, so that was our experience in Rome and I was able to receive my first communion in Daka Bangladesh at a small Church, the only Catholic Church that was in that city in that country and then in Riat Saudi Arabia we actually attended mass in the American embassy. It was an unsanctioned mass because the laws in Saudi Arabia bar the public practice of other religions.

I was educated in Catholic school when I lived in America. In elementary school from fourth to sixth grade, I was in a Catholic elementary school and then from tenth to twelfth grade, I went to Catholic high school.

The values and lessons that I learned as part of my Catholic upbringing and part of my Catholic education are a big part of my life every day. I've chosen social work as a profession, motivated in great part by the Catholic social justice teaching that I learned both in high school as well as at Boston College and Jesuit ideals of men and women for others, and finding God in all things. And I live my day to day life with those values and those beliefs in mind.

That said, when I identify as a Catholic, I feel the need to explain myself. I feel the need to correct any misconception that there are things that I believe in just by being a Catholic that I don't believe in.

Personal Conflict with Faith

As a straight woman, it matters to me that the Church is accepting of LGBT people because I have lesbian, gay, and bisexual friends who are my family. And I love them, very much, and it is unconscionable and unthinkable for me to support an institution that doesn't celebrate them and encourage them to live fully as who they are. I think that intimacy with another human being is a huge part of what makes us human and to be able to form a bond of love and intimacy with another, has many times, been called, you know, one of God's greatest gifts.

I had an uncle who was gay. I didn't know him very well, he lived in CA, and again, my family lived all over the world. Throughout his life, the Church was – was always there, and I think that his struggle with Church teaching against homosexuality and his own identity caused a lot of conflict and he had a lot of challenges in his life.

I have gay Catholic friends who don't practice anymore and their struggle affects me because it makes me feel as though they've been pushed out of the Church and that even though I know what my Catholic identity means to me and the positive aspects of Catholicism that have influenced my life and turned me into the person that I am today and I feel as though those same aspects have influenced my gay friends who don't practice anymore. Yet, because of the way their being gay is treated by the Catholic Church, they no longer feel welcome or feel a part of those aspects that have helped to shape how they live their lives. The sense of disjointedness makes me feel incredibly sad.

I went to a Catholic mass in DC that was held in an alternate location and my understanding is that it's a community of gay Catholics who left the Church in the 70's to begin their own, community practicing out of a Church that accepts who they are, of a different denomination, presided over by a Catholic priest, and everything start to finish, the same as a Catholic mass would be. I had just come from a Church that was incredibly welcoming of LGBT people and had a ministry for LGBT people. This other Church felt as though these gay Catholic's had to practice underground. I felt overwhelming sadness at this feeling of exclusion that pervaded the entire celebration of the mass. I was one of the only straight people there and while I was very welcomed, by the congregation, it didn't have the sense of community that I had experienced elsewhere, where everyone was practicing together, and everyone was celebrating together. It had a feeling of otherness that just really didn't sit well with me.

In a perfect world, the Church would come out and say that it's okay to be gay. And not only that it's okay to be gay and that we're not going to discriminate against you, but it's okay to be gay and for that to be who you are and for you to live out your life, practicing as a Catholic, and as a gay person, and loving and being intimate with whoever you want to.

I've thought a lot about whether I would raise my children Catholic and I'm truly conflicted about it. On one hand, I want my children to grow up with the values and lessons that I gained through Catholic education and being raised Catholic, but on the other hand, I couldn't take the chance that I wouldn't be able to stop my child from learning the Church's message about gay people and that I would have to undo that damage especially if my child, himself or herself, were gay.

I wouldn't be able to take the risk. I just read a story the other day of another story of a transgender teen who committed suicide because she felt she couldn't live any longer based on the fact that she wasn't supported by her family, as a result of their religious beliefs. I would never be able to take the risk that my child would feel that way, even in the least because of my choice to raise them as a Catholic. And the idea that my child would learn the Church's current message about gay people and to think that he or she were wrong, even if my child weren't gay, I wouldn't want to take the chance that he or she learning the message of the Church as it stands now, would even allow them to entertain the idea that gay people are anything less than...equal and just as valuable, as anyone else.

Ideal Church Community

How a parish treats LGBT people is foremost in importance for me, when I look for a Church. I'm looking for a Church community that values everyone for who they are and is not critical or judgmental of how anybody chooses to live. A Church that I would be a part of would be undeniably welcoming to LGBT people and celebrate who they are and encourage them to live fully as they are.

I did find a Church that is welcoming towards gay people and it's probably the best thing I've ever been a part of – it's the best Church I've ever been a part of and it's a wonderful community that really – I really hear God's voice when I'm there and I really just feel at home. I've never – I don't think, besides when I'm there, actually felt a sense of joy at being in Church. I enjoy the ritual of Church, I enjoy the opportunity for meditation that mass brings, but in this Church, I truly felt and feel a sense of joy when I'm there and anticipation of what I'm going to learn and how the word of God is going to speak to me and how the priest is going to help me understand that.

Straight people can help gay people feel welcome in the Church, by not letting there be a line between straight and gay; forming friendships and forming bonds and celebrating together and being a part of activities together so that there is no line between straight and gay.

Reconciling Faith

I have thought about not being Catholic. And I have visited other Churches. I have experienced other religions, either with other friends, or in other opportunities but I keep coming back to Catholicism because there are certain aspects that really speak to me and it's a part of who I am.

When I was asked to be a part of this video, I really felt like it was, perhaps, one of the greatest things, if not the greatest thing, I'll ever do. It's incredibly important to me to spread the idea of the Church that I have found in the Church community that celebrates LGBT people and hopefully to help others understand why this is a better Church.