

Wally's Story

by Kathy O'Moore-Klopf

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I want you to meet my brother, Wally Grimes, one of my very best friends and one of the kindest human beings I know. I see God in him. But does God's church see God in him, a gay man?

I see God in the way he freely shares his knowledge of computers with so many people in his job as a computer help technician, never once making any of them feel foolish for things they do not know. Wally has a neighbor named Herman who is in his eighties. Herman knows that Wally can help him with his computer woes, and that's a blessing, because all he wants to do is send e-mails to his friends and family, not learn how to keep his computer in good running shape. He pays Wally in fresh-baked cookies and brownies.

I see God in the way Wally gives friends and family members the shirt off his back if they need it. This last January, Wally's partner, [Jeff Wilson](#), died of congestive heart failure. For many months Jeff could not work and Wally was Jeff's sole financial support. Wally's job at the time didn't pay much, so he struggled to make the mortgage payments and pay the hospital bills alone. And then, when Jeff's mother wanted to be near her son, Wally took her in as well. Toward the end of Jeff's life, Wally found out that he would soon be laid off. Through all that stress and sadness, he continued to be kind to everyone he dealt with.

Who taught Wally to be so kind and gentle? In part, it was the pastors and the Sunday School teachers of the Southern Baptist church we both grew up in. But Wally learned other lessons in God’s church, too: that gay people are not good in the sight of God’s people. That gay people are to be called sinners and abominations. Wally did not tell anyone in our childhood church that he is gay. He just took the church at its word and has not entered its doors as an adult.

Our mother, a Sunday School teacher for years, wouldn’t volunteer the fact that her son is gay to any friends. But to those who brought the subject up, she’d say she prayed daily for him to “change his ways,” as if he’d have chosen to be gay and face constant discrimination in the Bible Belt.

I see God in the way Wally has worked hard behind the scenes for this church. If Wally didn’t have such a big heart, the Presbyterian church’s stance on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people might have kept us from having a web site. When I started serving as this church’s webmaster 4 years ago, I was a writer and an editor, but I didn’t know very much about maintaining web sites. Wally taught me everything I know today. Every time someone in our congregation has asked me to come up with something new I’ve never done before for the web site, who have I turned to for help? Wally. When some of you have written me about your computer problems and have stumped me, where have I gotten the answer you needed? Wally.

Now, Wally knows that you have prayed for him when Jeff was dying and then when Jeff passed away. He knows that you have prayed for him when he was laid off. He knows that you have prayed for him when he was job-hunting, and that you rejoiced with me when he found work. But he also knows what the Presbyterian church has said about gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people: “You can come to our churches, but we don’t want you as a deacon, an elder, or a minister.” In one presentation on the various views in our denomination to the [Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and the Purity of the Church](#), homosexuality was described as “a tragedy to be understood.”

How does Wally feel about this? He e-mailed me: “It’s too bad we’re seen as a ‘tragedy’ by the church. This is why I don’t fight: Why should I spend my time trying to justify my very existence to anyone?”

Yet though this big-hearted man is denied full acceptance by the church, he continues to help our church. Why does he do it? He told me, “If everybody else in the world tells you that you’re wrong and bad but you *know* in your heart that you’re right and good, that’s the only thing that matters. Helping your church is the right thing for me to do. Doing what’s right isn’t always comfortable.” I think Wally is a living lesson about God’s unconditional love. I pray that God’s church will one day extend to Wally that same unconditional love.