

Hi all,

It seems like it was in another world, but in the months before the pandemic, our church (St. Croix Vineyard), was being asked to leave Vineyard Churches Canada because of our belief and practice in performing same-sex marriages and celebrating full inclusion and affirmation of our LGBTQ+ family, friends, and neighbours.

We took the step of creating a [website](#) and asking folks who supported our approach to "join us as we leave." We wanted to make a statement that the loss to the Vineyard movement was not the simple dismissal of a small renegade community; rather, it was a painful exclusion of LGBTQ+ Christians and those who wanted to fully welcome them. It was an action with serious "ripples" that would extend far beyond our little corner of New Brunswick. Your small step of solidarity with us helped get this message out - and it was noted in various ways, including among local media that was very positive about what was happening here. We trust that the message was also heard among church leaders.

At the time, we planned two events that would mark our leaving: first an "evening of stories, songs and lament from LGBTQ+ voices" that we referred to as "Queerly Grafted," followed by our Sunday service that was meant to have the feel of a "jazz funeral," moving from pain to celebration as we announced the new name of our church. But days before this weekend, the pandemic was announced. We were still able to have the Queerly Grafted event, though it was small and somewhat muted by the precautions. (But if you haven't checked it out yet, you can still see a record of the event [here](#), though this website will only be available for a couple more weeks.) The Sunday service the next day, March 15, was even more muted as the gravity of the pandemic was sinking in. Quietly, we announced that we would henceforth be known simply as St. Croix Church.

Then a different kind of solidarity was forced on the world, and things shut down and the effects of this are, of course, very much still with us. The Celtic (Early) service moved our simple liturgical service online, and we are still meeting on Zoom on Sunday mornings. One surprise blessing has been the participation of friends and family who live far from St. Stephen. Even when we've been able to gather again in the SCC café, we've kept the Zoom connection going to welcome those, near or far, who couldn't come otherwise. (If you're interested, join our Facebook group [here](#).)

Our main (2nd) service has sometimes met indoors with restrictions, sometimes met outdoors beside the community garden, and sometimes we've simply made recorded messages available. Whatever we're able to do, we've been recording them and making them available [here](#) on our website. We're also looking ahead to the future, and we've recently invited a group of relatively younger folk to become an "imagination team," dreaming of new ways in which we can be a church community in the years ahead.

It took a while for legalities to work through, but St. Croix Church did, in fact, become our legal name. Since the winter of 2020, we know that other churches, in the Vineyard and other Evangelical movements, have taken similar stances of affirmation in resistance to their governing bodies. We know this liberation will continue to unfold, but we continue to grieve with those it hurts in the meantime.

Thanks to all of you for being a part of both the grieving and the celebration with us. Thanks for being a part of the liberating of the church. May the Spirit of God continue to help us prioritize living with love for all of our neighbours.

Peace,

Walter Thiessen
for St. Croix Church