

## ICM Espana

Dear MCC Toronto,

As you probably may know, I have just come back from Madrid where I went to lead ICM España's recent participation in Madrid's 2011 Gay Pride parade and the first openly LGBT religious service.

Many of you are aware that for the last year and a half my wife and I have been working effortless in order to help establish MCC in Spain (or as we call it in Spanish ICM Espana).

It has been a time full of challenges. The first inclusive church in Spain after over 550 years of exclusive Catholic presence is not an easy task.

When we decided to start this heart fulfilling project, our first approach was to speak with MCC Toronto and with Rev. Brent Hawkes who has a great and amazing vision and has been a great support during all this time.

All the efforts, meetings, conference calls, skype calls back and forth paid off; This year MCC Spain was invited to participate in the first LGBT religious service to be celebrated during Madrid's Pride, the second largest Pride in Europe after London, and I was invited to co-preside this service.

To fulfil the economical and spiritual requirement that this big opportunity represented, I turned to my home church for help, and this congregation and its leadership did not fail me.

And there I went a couple of days before the Pride parade to get ready for the events that were going to take place.

As soon as I got there, I received a message from the FELGTB: National Federation of Lesbians, Gays, Transsexuals and Bisexuals), the main LGBT organization in Spain who was organizing the religious service, telling me that there were some problems regarding the place where we were going to be celebrating. One day later, we were told we didn't have a space where the rest of the events were happening and that they had found another place (not in a public place nor close enough to the gay area). It felt like everybody else had the right to celebrate who they were but we couldn't get together to celebrate our spirituality. Then two days before the celebration was scheduled, one day prior to the Parade, a journalist called the government asking why, and immediately we received our permit... then we start focusing in our participation in the parade and the religious service.

July 2nd came. This was the first time a church was represented in the parade and I have to admit I was a bit scared at first. I didn't know what to expect, how would people react to us and our banner...

We were not sure how would certain segments of the population would react when they saw us marching. To our surprise, we received a warm welcome from people along the parade route. Some of them approached us and asked about MCC, who we are, what we do... One person said to us: "This is not possible... God doesn't love us..." As you can imagine it opened a dialogue and this person's face lightened up when we handed him a flyer with our slogan, which translation would be something like: "Building a faith community for everyone".

The following day, July 3rd, arrived and the religious celebration took place. The result was a wonderfully emotional, joint service with participation from all the people that attended, and in which tears and hugs were the order of the day. My participation in the service, representing ICM España and MCC Churches worldwide, did much to open hearts and minds to our mission in Spain.

As a direct consequence, the very next day we received a phone call from the Vice-President of Crismhom, a gay Catholic group in Madrid which had previously been unreceptive to our attempts to reach out and establish a relationship with them. That same evening, I, along some members of the board met with several members of their group and were greeted with open arms and offers of cooperation and joint activities, including participating in their Ecumenical Commission, which looks at how different denominations can better work together. We understand and pray this turn of events to be a turning point in ICM España's history, and feel blessed that God is leading us forward on this new and exciting path.

As I am sure you can understand this was of great importance and will make history not only in our denomination but in my home country.

I'd like to thank MCC Toronto's congregation who have made this possible through your support by sponsoring my trip.

Think of the number of people that are going to be exposed to a message of faith and inclusion, imagine all those who will find hope in the action that is supported by your help.....just imagine.

Blessings,

**Carmen Llanos**