May 13, 2018 - Affirming - Robert Powell

Sometimes despite our best intentions as communities, as people on the *inside* with the power to open or close the door to *outside*, it also becomes easy to forget that those distinctions – *without* and *within* – some with some very heavy baggage. The decision to be inclusive, to be hospitable, to people who have traditionally have been disenfranchised, excluded by matter of rote, and who have had door after door impenetrably sealed to them for loving or acting the wrong way, is something that can demonstrate a community’s strength, and show that it values the profound power of inclusion; as well as the strength that comes from believing in the value of diversity.

The affirming process that TSA is involved in right now surrounds the issue of hospitality; the value of inclusion; and the matter of making your stance on welcoming people of all orientations visible. A symbol is a concentrated message that is more than the sum of its parts. Those who share faith and share principles identify with images which connote values commonly shared. The rainbow is a symbol gifted to human kind by nature that *in its very essence* includes the building blocks of everything we see. It is the precise spirit of inclusion as it is composed of all variety, all colours, all waves of light that amount to a complete continuum; and it means that we all belong.

I did not feel this kind of inclusion when I lived in the Ottawa Valley, many years ago; and there were no visible symbols of inclusivity to make me feel like I might or could be at home, even though this was where I was growing up. I cannot overstate the value of making it explicit, and visible, that everyone who lives here who wants to belong knows that they can belong, and that the community supports people who know very well that they are different but are looking to belong to a community that does not ask them to hide, or lie for the chance to experience hospitality. Hospitality, fraternity, and even the radical gesture of an invitation are the fundamental components of what amounts to inclusion.