

'Out' in the Country



The Importance of **Pride** in
Rural Communities and **Small Towns**

PRESENTATION FOR **UNITED CHURCH "AFFIRMING CONVERSATIONS" TOWN HALL MEETING**

PRESENTED BY **AJ ADAMS**



Meet Your Presenter

AJ Adams (he/him)

Communications Professional & Social Change Advocate

- Communications Manager at Egale Canada
- Former President/Board Chair of Stratford-Perth Pride
- Former board member of nonprofits; Rural Ontario Institute, Stratford-Perth ShelterLink, Stratford Community Equity Action Team, and more.
- Lived all over Ontario and currently resides in Ottawa, ON
- Diploma in Public Relations and Bachelor of Arts in Community Leadership and Equity, Diversity and Human Rights





Land Acknowledgement

We wish to recognize the **Indigenous Peoples** on whose territory we are gathered today.

The Indigenous Peoples of **Turtle Island** have always been and will always be stewards of this land and we thank them for the opportunity to be here today.



Agenda

1

**Why People Live
Where They Live**

2

**The Rural
Disadvantage**

3

**The Importance of
Pride in Rural Ontario**
Seven Key Research Findings

4

**The Importance of
Churches in Rural
Communities**

4

**Action Ideas
for Affirming United
Churches and Allies**

Note: I will be using the phrase 2SLGBTQI and queer (and trans) interchangeably.



Part 1

Why People Live Where They Live



Defining Rural & Small Town

Defining “rural” and “small town” is up to YOUR interpretation.



Agricultural
rural communities



Forest/Woodland
Rural communities



Coastal/Lakeside
rural communities



Rural Vs. Urban

- Family/friends may be there
- Quieter life / Closer to nature
- Cheaper cost of living
- Stronger sense of community



- Better health care access
- Better social support access
- More job/career options
- More overall amenities and services



Why 2SLGBTQI Folk Live in the City



Existing 2SLGBTQI
Community/Population



Greater Social
Acceptance and Safety



Access to
2SLGBTQI-specific services



Escape from Family or
Religious Pressure



Post-Pandemic Migration Trends

Due to many factors such as cost of living, increase in remote/hybrid work options and other factors, migration trends in Ontario, has seen noticeable movement from urban centers to smaller towns and rural areas in recent years.

This trend **could** include more 2SLGBTQI people move back to their rural roots or even moving to a rural community for the first time.



Part 2

The Rural Disadvantage For 2SLGBTQI Folks



Living in a Fishbowl



2SLGBTQI people are able to hide in plain sight in cities vs. rural communities where they are more easily seen among other diverse people



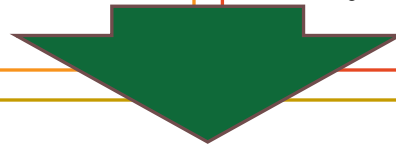
The Rural Disadvantage

RURAL CHALLENGES

- Limited health services
- Limited social services
- Limited community supports
- Limited employment opportunities
- Small population
- Limited/No transit

2SLGBTQI CHALLENGES

- Exclusive health services
- Exclusive social services
- Exclusive Government/Leaders
- Exclusive Community
- Exclusive Workplaces
- Exclusive Sports
- Exclusive Schools/Education



RURAL 2SLGBTQI CHALLENGES



Rural communities are places that...

- Are more conservative (politically and ideologically)
- Have higher populations of 'social conservatives'
- Have a higher percentage of Christians

- Have less diverse populations
- Experience social change at slow rates

84% of 2SLGBTQI Canadians are worried about religious and conservative ideologies concerning 2SLGBTQI issues *(Fondation Jasmin Roy, 2017)*.



Part 3

The Importance of Pride in Rural Ontario

Seven Key Research Findings



'Out' in the Country



The Importance of **Pride** in Rural Communities and Small Towns

This research study was originally conducted in Fall 2021. The research participants (N = 3,160) were from 95 rural communities and small towns from all corners of Ontario - ensuring a wide-range of voices contributed to the study



Defining Pride



Pride Events



Pride Visuals



Pride Programming



Rural Barriers

48%

of rural 2SLGBTQI people believe that **religious and/or social conservative values** are the **number one barrier** for the rural 2SLGBTQI community



Experience with Hate

87%

of rural 2SLGBTQI people
have **experienced some
form of anti-2SLGBTQI hate**

33%

of respondents believe
**anti-2SLGBTQI hate has
decreased**
since the creation of Pride in their rural community



Key Finding 4 & 5 Feelings of Safety & Support

60%

of rural 2SLGBTQI people
feel **safer**...

87%

of rural 2SLGBTQI people feel
more **supported**...

since the creation of Pride in their rural community



A Better Childhood

72%

of 2SLGBTQI respondents stated that Pride would have **eased the coming out journey** of their younger selves – whether directly or indirectly.



Key Finding 7

The Need for Pride

96%

of rural 2SLGBTQI people **state that Pride is needed**
in rural communities and small towns



Part 4

The Importance of Churches in Rural Communities and Small Towns



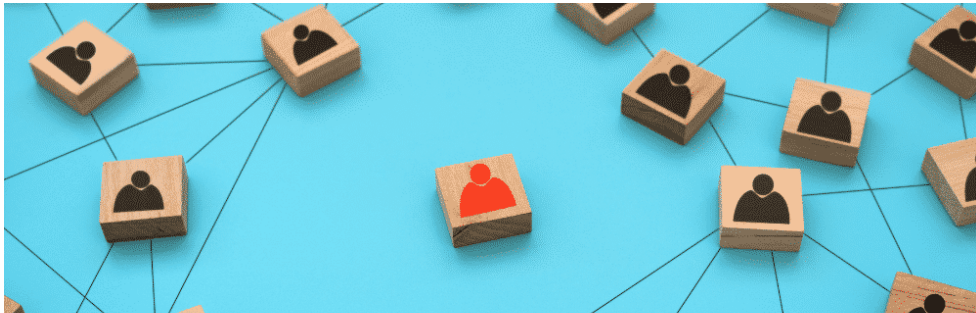
The Role of the Church



Spiritual and Moral Guidance



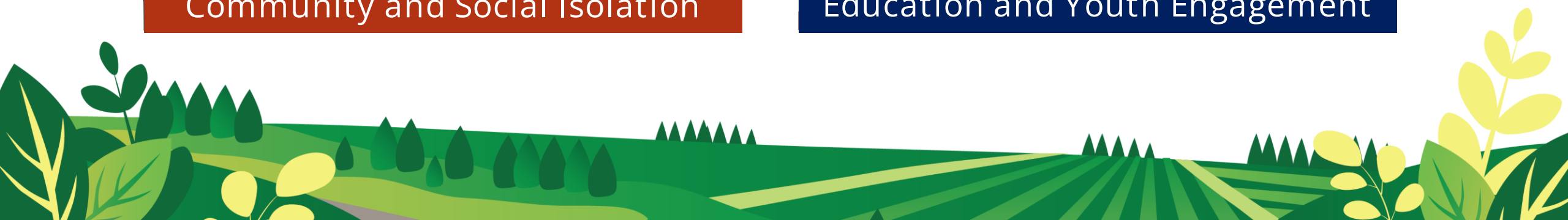
Support System and Charity Work



Community and Social Isolation



Education and Youth Engagement



Part 4

Three Action Ideas for Affirming United Churches and Allies



Action 1: Show 2SLGBTQI Visibility

Display affirming symbols such as rainbow flags, posters, stickers, etc.

Celebrate Pride Season and other days of 2SLGBTQI significance

Use 2SLGBTQI messaging and imagery in church communications



Action 2: Teach and Preach Inclusion

Sermons on Inclusion

Educate Your Congregation and Community

Youth and Children's Ministry



Action 3: Use the Power of Your Voice

The Church has power and influence in your community.
Use your voice to stand with 2SLGBTQI communities – in times of joy and hate.

Partner with and Support 2SLGBTQI
Organizations

Use social media (and other
communications) for good

Stand against hate and discrimination



Break Out Session

What's **an action idea** you can do as an Affirming Church to better support 2SLGBTQI people in rural communities?



THANK YOU

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS?

