ROYALS

By: Josephine Amusa and Noshin Khan

 Homecoming passed four months ago, yet the issue of Homecoming positions were still a subject of debate in February. Central Islip High School senior, Faith Shepherd, ran for Homecoming King in October 2013 to stand up for transgender rights, a divisive topic for some outside of the Central Islip High School.

During the December 9, 2013 Board of Education meeting, several bishops stood up and proclaimed their disagreement with the homecoming gender issue, claiming that allowing this kind of election to slip will confuse children who have been taught that kings are meant to be boys and queens are meant to be girls. The Board of Education considered adopting a policy that would set guidelines for the gender roles of the homecoming positions to prevent such an event from happening in the future.

 There is no need for this to be an issue. This is a practice that happened three years ago in Central Islip when Isennette Serrano was voted Homecoming King. No major form of contention was present then and there should be none now.

Becoming part of the Homecoming Court is a popularity contest. Each candidate must receive 50 signatures from their classmates and get signed off by ten teachers. There is no rule in place from the Student Council, which regulates the homecoming election, for gender standards for each position. While there were other male candidates, Faith overwhelmingly received the support of her peers, and won convincingly.

 Central Islip’s mission statement “is to enable all students to fulfill their potentials and become responsible, contributing adults able to thrive in a culturally diverse, changing world.” However, questioning Faith’s symbolic act, shows that principle is not fully accepted.

At the Board of Education meeting on February 10, 2014, the Alfano School gym was packed with community leaders, board members, church officials, and students, including senior and Homecoming Queen, Valerie Baez, who came to show her support for her king.

Several students such as Student Council President, Devontae Torriente, and Homecoming Queen, Valerie Baez, spoke about their views, in support of Faith’s cause. Additionally, Faith was backed by Pride for Youth social worker, Erin Furey, who spoke as well.

Devontae Torriente, a senior at Central Islip High School, stated at the February 10th Board of Education meeting, “I, just like many other people here can attest to having LGBTQ friends who are worth fighting for, and this unjust policy tramples on their rights.”

 The opposition to Faith’s coronation as Homecoming King, which included church leaders such as Bishop Hudson, Reverend Mosey and Reverend Weiner, stepped to the microphone to speak on their belief that allowing Faith to be Prom King causes confusion and immorality to spread in the high school and the community. However, while religious affiliation plays a major role in the community, CIHS is a public high school, not a private one. Therefore, no secular beliefs such as the one that church officials mentioned are allowed to transcend into the school beyond a certain point.

 Central Islip, a community marked by its diversity of cultures and religions, has been at the forefront of acceptance, tolerance, and racial cohesiveness on Long Island. In a June 5, 2002 article by the New York Times, Long Island was labeled one the most segregated suburb the state of New York. However, even with this being true a 2010 Central Islip census showed that 19.4% of CI residents are White, 25% are Black or African American, 52.1% are Hispanic or Latino and 4.5% are other. The image painted by this census is one of change a vision that many inspirational leaders for tolerance such as Harvey Milk and Martin Luther King hoped to see.

 Even as supporters of Faith Shepherd fight on the grounds of continuing the message of tolerance that CI spreads, others are fighting on more legal grounds. The Central Islip Board of Education could have faced a serious lawsuit if they enacted the Homecoming Policy that would make it impossible for another female to run for Homecoming King or a male to run for Homecoming Queen.

The Dignity for All Students Act (DASA) was signed into law on September 13, 2010 and became effective on July 1, 2012. DASA expanded the “concepts of tolerance… including but not limited to, different races, weights, national origins, ethnic groups, religions, religious practices, mental or physical abilities, sexual orientations, gender identity, and sexes,” as stated by nysed.gov, the New York State Department of Education website. This stipulation under DASA gives a student the right to identify by any pronoun that they choose, in order to main the students level of comfort and respect that they receive while in school.

 Even major corporations such as Google do not require a new user to define themselves as a male or a female. Instead, Google has the third option of “other” available for their new users to choose when creating a Google+ account. Seemingly small acts such as this can spark big change.

 The CIHS class of 2014 is a class of Millennials; pioneers of drastic change in the societal norms that were once set by our parents and grandparents. In the end, the voice of the students, primarily Faith Shepherd, was triumphant. The Board of Education did not pass the policy aimed at limiting the gender roles of king and queen.

Faith maintains that, “I ran because I was paving the way for those who identify as the opposite sex.” The antiquated idea of societal gender roles was one that failed to resonate within Central Islip High School.

We are a progressive community that embraces tolerance and diversity. The LGBTQ community is one that should be embraced and celebrated for their tremendous accomplishments and the students of Central Islip, the Board of Education and Faith Shepherd continue to do this with policies that promote the rights of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders, and all of those who are still questioning. Society is changing. Today, interracial marriages are not condemned, civil rights laws have been passed, women have been given the right to vote, and 17 states have legalized marriage between same-sex couples, New York State being one of the 17. Transgenders need their turn as well.