



Guelph Pride and
Out on the Shelf

Why we Celebrate Winter Pride Statement

Feb 1, 2026

Why do we celebrate Winter Pride?

Winter Pride is rooted in queer history, resistance, and collective care. Each year, we gather to mark the anniversary of the 1981 Toronto bathhouse raids which is when police targeted queer spaces, arrested hundreds of people, and unintentionally sparked one of the most significant moments of queer resistance and organizing in Canada. Those raids made visible the violence queer communities were facing and ignited movements that shaped Pride as we know it today.



Frank Lennon (Photographer). (2013). Toronto bathhouse raids [Photograph]. The Canadian Encyclopedia. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/toronto-feature-bathhouse-raids>



Gay rights demonstration [Photograph]. (1980s). The Canadian Encyclopedia. Courtesy of the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives.

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/toronto-feature-bathhouse-raids>

This history matters because it's not over.

Winter Pride is not only about remembering the past, it's about responding to the present.

Here in **Ontario**, we have seen renewed challenges to inclusion and visibility. Recently, the Waterloo Catholic District School Board became the site of a highly public debate when trustees attempted to ban Pride flags and other inclusive symbols from schools. While community advocacy ultimately stopped the ban, the effort itself sent a clear message to queer and trans students: that their belonging is still being questioned. Moments like this remind us that visibility is not symbolic. It is protective, affirming, and necessary.



Waterloo MPP Catherine Fife with demonstrators outside Monday evening's WCDSB meeting [Photograph]. (2025). Mark Douglas/CityNews. CityNews Kitchener. <https://kitchener.citynews.ca/2025/03/25/hundreds-protest-waterloo-catholic-school-board-meeting-discussing-pride-flag-ban/>

Closer to home, in Guelph, recent incidents at the University of Guelph involving racist, antisemitic, and homophobic messages worn openly at a campus event have shaken many in our community. These moments are painful, but they also reveal the urgency of continued education, accountability, and care. Queer and trans people paying attention to how institutions and communities respond.



Across Canada, in Alberta, trans and gender-diverse people are facing policy decisions that limit access to affirming school environments and healthcare. These developments impact real lives and families, and they reinforce a difficult

truth: progress is not guaranteed. Rights can be challenged, rolled back, or quietly eroded without collective action.



People at an outdoor demonstration hold protest signs that say “Gender-affirming care saves lives” and “Let kids play” [Photograph]. (2024, February 25). Photo by Artur Widak/NurPhoto via Getty Images. Amnesty International Canada. <https://amnesty.ca/human-rights-news/alberta-premier-danielle-smiths-notwithstanding-clause-threat/>

Winter Pride is a response.

It is a time to remember the harm that has been done, honour the resistance that followed, and intentionally create spaces of safety, joy, and belonging.

It’s about showing up, for history, for community, and for one another, especially when it feels uncomfortable or contested.

And it’s about **celebrating queer joy**, because our community deserves moments of happiness, pride, and connection too.

Winter Pride reminds us that Pride is a celebration and, It is a commitment.

References:

- Amnesty International Canada. (2024, December 19). Alberta Premier Danielle Smith's notwithstanding clause threat 'cruel and unnecessary'. <https://amnesty.ca/human-rights-news/alberta-premier-danielle-smiths-notwithstanding-clause-threat/>
- CBC News. (2026, January 20). University of Guelph investigates hateful language and symbols at on-campus event. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/university-of-guelph-aggie-pub-night-graffiti-hate-discrimination-investigation-9.7054809>
- CityNews Kitchener. (2025, March 25). Hundreds protest Catholic school board meeting discussing Pride flag ban. <https://kitchener.citynews.ca/2025/03/25/hundreds-protest-waterloo-catholic-school-board-meeting-discussing-pride-flag-ban/>
- The Canadian Encyclopedia. (n.d.). Toronto bathhouse raids. <https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/toronto-feature-bathhouse-raids>