

Celebrating 10 Years as an Affirming Congregation

Change often begins with dreams and vision, and feeling a need for something different. Something other than what is transpiring at the moment often prompts the vision for change.



In the case of Trinity United Church, I glean from the archived notes, as well as conversations with members, that it was the dream of something more...the desire for Trinity

United Church to work and walk the process of publicly declaring their welcome and inclusivity to all, and most specifically to gays, lesbians and bisexuals. It was a vision and a dream that was enabled, partially, through the existence of Affirm United.

Affirm United/ S' affirmer Ensemble is a national "organization that works through education and social integration to welcome diverse people into the life and work of the church", and this year Affirm United celebrates its 25th anniversary.

Gwen Chapman and M.E. Kish, co-chairs of Council 1994 through 1996, had a 'good working knowledge' of Affirm United, and in 1995 felt it was

time for Trinity United to consider the process of becoming an Affirming Congregation, thereby proclaiming the church's inclusivity on a much more intentional, visible level.

A steering committee was struck in the fall of 1995 and the actual process began in February of 1996, coinciding with Lent.

The journey to consider becoming an Affirming Congregation began with personal stories shared with the congregation. I have had the opportunity to read those stories (from the well-archived notes Joan Hibbard kept) and as one person wrote, "Since the first day I walked in here, I have been included as if I had something to offer. I didn't know what, or even think I had anything to offer, but through everyone I meet here, I am discovering more and more of who I am and what I have to offer. ...that I can be genuinely welcomed and offered ways to be involved in this church tells me I am valued here. And to be valued is what it is to belong!" This member isn't gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender but had felt marginalized by the church in prior years. What she felt when she came to Trinity was what I felt, and what many others have felt.

Along with these personal stories, during Lent in 1996, members attended discussion groups, answered

questionnaires, voiced concerns and support, and watched the video, "All Means All". A resource table was set up and a two-week bible study was held mid-June. A 'Statement of Faith and Action' was drafted and presented to the congregation in October, with a copy posted on the flip chart in the narthex for further discernment and feedback. After being presented to the church board, the final statement was voted on by the congregation on November 3, 1996. There were no votes against the motion, and only a few who abstained - Trinity United Church had voted to become an Affirming Congregation.

On April 27, 1997 this congregation held a special service of Affirmation, celebrating the history of the congregation and the journey taken to become an Affirming Congregation, inclusive of all people. In 1997, Trinity United was 1 of 6 Affirming Congregations across Canada. Today there are 40, with a number of congregations in process, as this community once was.

Today we celebrate the dream and vision of those who began the intentional, public affirmation of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons within the congregation of Trinity United Church...and the journey continues.

Trinity United Church has an active Affirming Committee that meets regularly. Our purpose is to educate ourselves and our congregation, keeping up to date on current issues by discussion and study, and supporting our minister, Rev. Sally Harris, in her role as Co - chair of the National Affirm United Council (2002-2008).

So far we have fulfilled these purposes by planning worships that highlight Trinity's mission as an Affirming Congregation, submitting a paper to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on "Justice and Human Rights Regarding Same-Sex Marriage", and participating annually in local Vancouver Gay Pride Events.

In the summer of 2005 we proudly hosted the annual Affirm United conference and that fall Trinity was one of three United Church congregations to be filmed for the new Affirming Ministries Video, *Affirming Congregations: Three Stories*.

In the fall of 2006 we hosted a community event with a founding member of PFLAG providing a thoughtful reflection.

We will 'Choose Our Shoes and Walk Our Faith' as a congregation for the annual Vancouver Gay Pride Parade in the summer of 2007. Informational workshops and more community outreach are on our horizon.

What does it mean to be an Affirming Congregation?

This means that we are dedicated to a fully inclusive church community. Our statement of Faith and Action is as follows:

“We declare that our life together will be fully inclusive of gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals, those of all ages and differing abilities, ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic status.

We affirm that with God's help we will:

hear and respect each other's stories, skills, and gifts, embrace the leadership and service of all, have inclusive hiring practices, create a safe environment where people are protected from violation, abuse and discrimination, speak out against injustice, honour each other's life passages in liturgy and celebration, including covenanting ceremonies, dedication of children, rituals of baptism, healing, death and dying.

As we continue our discovery of what it means to be an inclusive community, we understand that teaching and learning about each other is a process of mutual listening and understanding.

Trinity United Church

A Pastoral Charge of
The United Church of Canada



An Affirming Congregation



*Growing in the
Heart of K'itsilano*

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