



- CONNECTING AND INFORMING GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER PEOPLE AND THEIR FRIENDS ACROSS THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA.
- WORKING FOR JUSTICE AND THE FULL PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE OF ALL SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS AND GENDER IDENTITIES IN THE UNITED CHURCH AND THE WORLD.

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**Affirm/S'affirmer**  
UNITED ENSEMBLE

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# Consensus

March - 2007

## Alberta boasts its second Affirming ministry

**M**ill Woods United Church in Edmonton recently became the second Alberta church to join the Affirming Ministry Program. This brings the number of affirming ministries across Canada to 39.

In its Statement of Affirming Ministry, Mill Woods United Church declared:

“As a community of the Christian faith, striving to answer Jesus’ call to love all of our neighbours as ourselves, we declare our love for all persons, regardless of age, gender, race, sexual orientation, differing abilities, ethnic background or economic circumstance and welcome them into full participation in every aspect of congregational life. As we continue our discovery of what it means to be an inclusive community, we recognize the importance of hearing each other’s stories and respecting each other’s gifts. We celebrate diversity even as it challenges us to

walk with Christ down roads we have not yet explored.”

Mill Woods United Church has two Sunday services and programs for all ages, including a mid-week Bible study, newcomer faith classes, a confirmation program, youth groups, and numerous social events. The church serves as a food bank depot for the Edmonton Food Bank in Mill Woods and operates a clothing bank. The congregation serves lunch for the Inner City Pastoral Ministry in Edmonton and supported a Habitat for Humanity project last year. The church has also welcomed refugee families and provided support while they integrated into the community.

The Mill Woods congregation was founded in 1974 by 30 people worshipping together in a neighbourhood school. Today it has over 250 members and many more adherents. ■

## Moderator to help Affirm United celebrate 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary at 2007 Conference

**L**ed by our Moderator, The Right Rev. David Giuliano, we will experience the theme, “Encountering the Holy on the Journey.” Giuliano will be joined by Chris Giffen and Jessie Negroptes from the “theGoproject.ca”—a young adult duo journeying across Canada to re-imagine mission for our church. The three will provide leadership as we explore together our past, present and future both as individuals and as a community. Through expressive arts—music, drama, visual, and spoken word—we will honour and discern 25 years of Affirm United. This is not an event for artists but for the creative at heart—in other words, all of us.

The overall conference theme, “Never Doubt,” is based on a quotation by Margaret

Mead: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.” At the conference, we will reconnect with friends, welcome newcomers, share new insights, and participate in workshops. Join us in a fun celebration looking toward the future.

Enclosed with *Consensus* is a brochure with more details and registration information. Mark Aug. 3–6 on your calendar, invite a friend or two, and we’ll see you in Peterborough! It promises to be a great weekend at St. Andrew’s United Church, 441 Rubidge Street, in Peterborough, Ont.

Updates about the Conference will also appear on the Affirm United website: [www.affirmunited.ca](http://www.affirmunited.ca). For more information contact Lyn Miller at [jamsbury@nexicom.net](mailto:jamsbury@nexicom.net) or 705-741-4271. ■

■ *Consensus* is the newsletter of Affirm United, an organization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and their friends within The United Church of Canada.

Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Affirm United. Your news stories, articles, and letters are always welcome. *Consensus* reserves the right to edit for length, clarity or style.

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# Reflections from the West Coast Co-chair

As we begin a new year, I will share a story with you.

Once upon a time, in a remote, unfriendly village that clung to the side of a mountain, there lived an old woman whose habits seemed strange to her neighbours. The winters were long and harsh. The mountainside, bleak and barren, beckoned to no one, even in gentler seasons. Only the children ventured to climb, ever so stealthily, partway up the mountain.

During such furtive forays, the children would often meet the old woman. Most of the time they found her bent over, digging little holes in the ground, and dropping something tiny into them. The bravest of the children asked: "What are you doing, old woman?" Her reply was always the same: "I am changing the face of the mountain."

The children grew into adulthood, and most left the village for the cities. Eventually, one of them, Anna, returned to share the harsh environment of her childhood with her

children. But she did not recognize the mountain for it was ablaze with a dazzling array of colourful flowers and clusters of bushes. Young trees lent their foliage as shade to a myriad of children and adults gathered there. Families and neighbours laughed and picnicked together.

And then the image of an old and bent figure from her childhood came flooding back to Anna. It was that elderly woman: planting seeds, intent on her sowing, believing all the while that her persistence would bear fruit. And then Anna understood the meaning of those words: "I am changing the face of the mountain."

Adapted from a publication from the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, 2006

And so we celebrate 25 years of changing the face of the mountain!

Thanks be to God!  
On behalf of the co-chairs,  
Sally Harris

## New Affirming congregations video

A new video just released by the United Church of Canada is called "Affirming Congregations: Three Stories." It tells the compelling stories of three communities of faith: Centenary-Queen's Square United in Saint John, Southminster-Steinhauer United in Edmonton, and Trinity United in Vancouver. The video recounts the process as these three congregations became Affirming Ministries, open to and affirming of people of minority sexual orientation, gender identity, and other historically marginalized groups within the United Church of Canada.

This video will be a useful discussion-starter or information resource for congregations that are

considering becoming Affirming or looking for ways to revitalize their Affirming ministry.

"Affirming Congregations: Three Stories" is available for purchase or loan in DVD format. Besides the 30 minute video, a leader's guide is included giving suggestions for use of the resource.

**How to obtain a copy**

To purchase, call United Church Resource Distribution (UCRD) toll-free at 1-800-288-7365, or in Toronto at 416-253-5456 and speak with a customer service representative. (Cite the product number CH10252 and author, The United Church of Canada). The cost is \$14.95 each.

The video can be borrowed from AVEL outlets across Canada. Go to [www.united-church.ca/avel/outlets.shtm](http://www.united-church.ca/avel/outlets.shtm) or phone your local United Church Presbytery or Conference office to locate an AVEL outlet near you. ■



# Trans advocacy, lost consultation, top National Council agenda

by READ SHERMAN

**T**he National Council of Affirm United/S'affirmer ensemble made history several times over during its meeting in Toronto on February 9-10, 2007.

The first history-making item was the location. Long used to accepting the gracious hospitality of local Affirming ministries for its annual winter gathering, Council met this year for the first time at the national offices of General Council. Here we were treated to the use of a conference room on the third floor, and a surprise and very welcome "meet and greet" by the moderator, the Rt. Rev. David Guiliano, and the General Secretary, Nora Sanders. For an organization which began its history 25 years ago as one very much on the outside looking in, the symbolism of the offer of meeting space and the warm welcome to Church House was not lost on any of us.

The second history-making item was the consensus of Council to support transgender contact Ruth Bramham's goal to put transgender realities on the radar screen of the church. Ruth reported that at her recent trip to Berkeley, CA, to attend the National Centre for Transgender Equality Religious Leaders' Summit, she learned "that if we [trans-folk] want to be part of the church, we have to stand up and be counted." She said that trans issues are buried and not being discussed openly within the church, and that needs to change. Ruth reported that the United Church of Christ (USA) General Synod had adopted a resolution specifically welcoming and affirming people of minority gender identity into the full life and work of that denomination. She expressed the desire to work towards having a similar resolution put forward at the next United Church of Canada General Council in 2009. Affirm United's council gave its full endorsement to this proposal. For those interested in helping in this effort, please contact Ruth ([ruth.bramham@rogers.com](mailto:ruth.bramham@rogers.com)) or come to the Annual Conference in Peterborough this summer and take in her workshop "Are Transpeople Welcome in Our Church?"

The third history-making item was a presentation made by co-chairs Wilson MacLennan and Sally Harris to the full membership of the Justice, Global and

Ecumenical Relations unit of General Council (JGER), which was meeting at the national office at the same time. Their presentation was based on the work of Ken DeLisle, LGBT representative to JGER's Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation advisory committee, Affirm United's co-chairs spoke of the need for a new consultation to examine the current state of LGBT people employed by the church, as follow-up to the 1999 consultation on GLBT employees in the church. In the aftermath of General Council office restructuring in 2000, the work of this consultation was largely lost in the shuffle, and its recommendations were unimplemented.

Sally and Wilson returned from their time with JGER confident that it is committed to continuing

to work on the 1999 Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Persons in Ministry Consultation report and its recommendations. We look forward to developments in the months to come.

In addition to the consultation request, Wilson and Sally asked JGER members to reflect on the questions, "Where are the spaces of hope for LGBT people within the formal structures of the church?" and "How has the United Church been responsive to the marginalization of LGBT rights, persons

and issues?" Some JGER members expressed surprise when they learned that Affirm United is not a part of the structure of the church, not given major financial support by the church, and not run by paid staff. The question was raised of the church benefiting from the work that Affirm does as a small, self-funded voluntary organization, and the willingness of the General Council to own its commitments to GLBT justice and inclusion by integrating these issues more widely in the mandate and work of all its units and committees.

Sally and Wilson left the JGER meeting feeling they had been well heard, and glad at the feeling of openness and support with which they were received.

For details of the February meeting of Council, watch out for next month's E-News council summary coming to your email inbox.

**If you are not currently receiving E-News Updates, and wish to subscribe, please contact Charles Bidwell at [charles.bidwell@ualberta.ca](mailto:charles.bidwell@ualberta.ca). ■**

***"Where are the spaces of hope for LGBT people within the formal structures of the church?"***

## Affirming congregation links T-shirt sales to Affirm United's annual membership campaign

by READ SHERMAN

First United Church in Ottawa has discovered that Affirm United's new rainbow t-shirts are a great way to enhance awareness of Affirm United and to encourage people to renew their memberships or take out new ones.

The first membership drive using the t-shirts occurred in the summer and fall of 2005, just after the new shirts first appeared at the Affirm United/S'affirmer ensemble Annual Conference in Vancouver. "Word had spread about the new logo," says First United Church member and Consensus editor Alyson Huntly, "but we didn't have an actual shirt to show people." Being ever resourceful, Huntly contacted me, then membership coordinator and Ottawa resident. I had purchased a shirt at the Vancouver conference, and Huntly asked me to loan it as a sample. The rest is history. Within weeks, First United had collected nearly 30 orders for the shirts, and at the same time had encouraged many members to either take out an Affirm United membership for the first time or to renew. Says Huntly, "The response was amazing: people simply loved the new design. It was a great way to talk about Affirm United and to encourage First United members to join, to make the link with the wider church beyond our walls."

Now it's time for a repeat performance at First United. The congregation is the home church of John Keddy, Affirm United's new membership coordinator and, most recently, the designated keeper of the

organization's stock of t-shirts and logo pins. Keddy explains that the idea for the February 2007 membership drive came about because of First's upcoming move from its century-long location on Kent Street to a new home on Richmond Road where it will share a building with a welcoming Anglican congregation. "We came up with the idea to take a group photo of everybody out front in their Affirm t-shirts as part of the way to say goodbye to our old space. So I'll be setting up a table in the church

hall on Sundays throughout February with t-shirts for sale and membership forms."

Keddy thinks that there are many people sitting in the pews of affirming ministries who have never heard of Affirm United/S'affirmer ensemble, let alone been invited to take out an individual or household membership. "We should encourage everyone to join," he states, "because it's a great way to support the ongoing work of LGBT inclusion across the Church. Just imagine what we could do if every Affirming ministry set a goal to encourage 25 individual

and household memberships among their congregants in recognition of Affirm United's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary!"

Congregations interested in taking up Keddy's "25 for the 25<sup>th</sup>" challenge can order membership brochures from Read Sherman at [r.sherman@sympatico.ca](mailto:r.sherman@sympatico.ca). Affirm United/S'affirmer ensemble t-shirts are available for sale or consignment on a first-come, first-served basis while quantities last. Contact John Keddy at [marpac2001@rogers.com](mailto:marpac2001@rogers.com). ■



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### Vancouver congregation Affirming Committee receives funding

The Trinity United Church Affirming Committee has announced its delight at being one of seven organizations chosen to receive grants from the Vancouver Pride Legacy Fund. The Committee noted that the award of \$715 will help them offer more educational and social events at Trinity United Church, as they extend an invitation of welcome to the wider GLBT community within Vancouver.

The Legacy Fund is a program created by the Vancouver Pride Society to assist groups that serve or enhance the GLBT community. It is open to all community not-for-profit groups and offers grants of up to \$1,000.

## An evening of pride and joy with the Rev. Eldon Hay

November 4, 2006, at Trinity United Church (Kitsilano, British Columbia)

by COLLEEN ADAIR

As I reflect on the activities of the Affirming Committee of Trinity United in Kitsilano over the past year, I am moved to give thanks for one particular evening of music, affirmation, pride and joy held in November. It was an evening that proved to be truly inspirational for the direction we are taking this year.

The event was conceived in the spring when Rev. Eldon Hay called Trinity's Minister and Affirm National Co-Chair, Rev. Sally Harris, to offer to speak at Trinity as an advocate for GLBT persons. Hay is a retired United Church minister known for his tireless advocacy for marginalized people. Hay wondered if we were interested in having him speak to our community and perhaps to the GLBT community as well. There was no hesitation on our part, and the wheels of the Affirming Committee began to turn.

The evening of November 4 began at Trinity United with moving performances by GLASS and Stained GLASS. These two choirs, made up of GLBT youth, adults and strong supporters, wowed the audience with three powerful pieces that set the stage for Hay's presentation.

During his engaging presentation, Hay shared his journey of advocacy for minority groups, including the GLBT community. His strong support rang clear as he shared his message of hope borne out of the past. He helped us to see the present and look forward to the possibilities we all share. In the question period following his presentation, Hay was asked about the pain that the Church has inflicted and continues to inflict on GLBT people who come to the doors of churches (including United churches) only to be turned away. This was not an easy question for Hay or for any of us to answer but I interpreted his response as a call for a reliance on faith and work, and for working with people one person at a time.



Eldon Hay speaking November 4th at Trinity United Church in Kitsilano, B.C.

Photo: Amanda Bingham

Following the question period, the audience enjoyed a variety of musical entertainment from Trinity choir members, directed by Jon Beenken, Trinity's music minister. Trinity's Affirming Committee then invited everyone to stay for coffee and baked goods. Five different groups affiliated in one way or another with the local GLBT community had set up information tables to share information, make connections and spend time together. Youth groups, PFLAG, a training group with a GLBT focus, and Trinity's own Affirming Committee all hosted tables. The following morning Trinity United shared worship with St. Mark's Anglican Church and Hay offered further reflections on inclusivity and community. After our joint service, St. Mark's hosted a pancake brunch that topped off a very engaging weekend. Eldon Hay has helped us shape the year ahead, connected us with others in the community, and allowed Trinity United Church to continue the work of being more visible and vocal in the Vancouver GLBT community.

Our committee now looks ahead to 2007 with plans for the following:

- A concert co-hosted with GLASS in April to raise funds for the choir and to allow Trinity to open its doors again to the whole community.
- A presentation to Vancouver PFLAG members on what it means to be an Affirming congregation, and to provide members with information on the United Church and its support for GLBTs .
- A workshop on Affirming congregations with an invitation extended to Lower Mainland United Churches to learn more about the Affirming process. ■

*Colleen Adair is Chair of the Trinity United Church Affirming Committee in Vancouver, British Columbia.*

# Welcoming Church Programs covenanted Minneapolis minister as new head of resources institute

by SALLY HARRIS

**T**wice in the past six months, I had the opportunity of representing Affirm United at two very special Welcoming Church Movement events.

On August 22, 2006, I had the honor of participating and representing Affirm United in a covenanting service entitled "Hospitality and Justice: Acts of Resistance in a Time of Fear." On that hot and humid evening in Minneapolis, about 150 people gathered at Lyndale United Church of Christ. In a sanctuary embraced by stoles from the Shower of Stoles Project, a covenant was made between Rev. Rebecca Voelkel, Lyndale UCC, The Minnesota Conference of the UCC, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the Welcoming Church Programs. Affirm United is one of ten Welcoming Church Programs that were represented there that evening. Rev. Rebecca Voelkel was covenanted as the Executive Director of the Institute of Welcoming Resources (IWR) which works with the Welcoming Church Programs.

IWR is a non-profit organization that focuses on resourcing, conferencing, and training folks to be advocates and activists within the church and society on behalf of the Welcoming Church Movement. The IWR

- Maintains a website—[www.WelcomingResources.org](http://www.WelcomingResources.org)—that lists all of the welcoming and affirming congregations in Canada and the U.S. as well as Africa, Australia, and Puerto Rico
- Maintains a weekly news service of pro-LGBT religious news and a comprehensive list of books, sermons, worship resources, articles and other resources
- Convenes conferences and meetings of the Welcoming Church Movement
- Trains leaders in faith-based community organizing in order to spread the Welcoming Church Movement
- Houses The Shower of Stoles Project

In January of 2007, the Welcoming Church Program Leaders met again in Minneapolis. The IWR provided

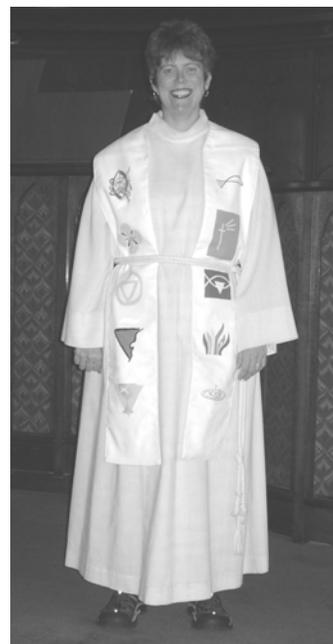
accommodations at a residential retreat facility on the Mississippi River.

These twice annual gatherings support the Welcoming Church Movement by bringing the resources of secular organizing to our religious communities and the wisdom of religious perspectives to our secular colleagues. It is also a time of support and sharing of best practices and trends in our places of ministry. This January we had the opportunity to sit in a circle with Abigail Garner, author of *Families Like Mine: Children of Gay Parents Tell It Like It Is*. Abigail has worked tirelessly to bring this unique perspective of GLBT families to the religious and political debate. Her website is [www.FamiliesLikeMine.com](http://www.FamiliesLikeMine.com).

I want to take this opportunity to thank Affirm United for the opportunity to represent Canada's welcoming movement at this international gathering. May our voice and presence continue to be known in our church and in our world. ■

**Rebecca Voelkel of Lyndale United Church of Christ (USA) is the new executive director of the Institute of Welcoming Resources, a U.S.-based non-profit organization that serves the Welcoming Church Movement.**

Photo: Sally Harris



## Conference puts trans issues on the church radar screen

by RUTH BRAMHAM

**H**ow can the church work more effectively to understand and embrace the needs of transgender and transsexual people? Gay, lesbian and bisexual (GLB) people have been fighting for rights, and winning converts, for years. In response, the religious right has become ever more strident in its opposition. Now trans people are coming out from the shadow of the GLB groups, into the sights of an angry and well-organized religious opposition. But almost no one has yet questioned the binary concept of male and female because they say, that's how God ordained it.

About 50 invited delegates gathered at the University of California at Berkeley to address these questions at a conference organized by the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) and the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies (CLGS) in Religion and Ministry at the Pacific School of Religion. I was the only person from Canada to participate in the conference.

"Faith is a vitally important part of many trans people's lives," said Mara Keisling (NCTE Executive Director). "Too often, though, instead of the nurturing welcome they have expected, trans people have come face to face with ignorance, alienation and spiritual violence. In many faith traditions, however, this has been changing quickly, and for the better."

The conference, she said, was to discuss how to accelerate the acceptance that transgender people need and deserve within faith communities.

The conference began with a chance for us to talk about our own experiences and how we register on our church hierarchy radar. There was, as expected, a wide range of stories, both good and bad, reflecting the confusion many people feel about trans people. Some said they met people who thought if they ignored trans people we would just go away. But there were many examples of genuine effort to understand and include trans people, particularly in the United Church of Christ (UCC). A U.S. denomination, they are far, far ahead of the United Church in embracing trans people. It comes down to numbers and the willingness of a few to make their presence felt on behalf of the many. In the United Church of Canada, our numbers are small and our voices are still crying in the wilderness.

There was a discussion on how we could advance

education and inclusion without coming on too strong. Stereotypes, perpetuated by the media, abound. We agreed we desperately need more high-profile trans people to counter those ideas, people like Joan Roughgarden, Rev. Erin Swenson, Justin Tanis and Mara Keisling, who openly profess their faith and religion.

As a group, we agreed that we need to keep up the fight. We need to continue to persuade those who would try to deny us our fundamental right to our faith journey. We must educate those we can persuade to listen. And, by our example, we must show that we are fully functioning members of the faith community.

We are often looked upon with suspicion in faith communities, because trans issues are not found in scripture. The Bible has little to say about us.

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***We are often looked upon with suspicion in faith communities, because trans issues are not found in scripture.***

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The nearest we can come to finding references to trans people in the Bible is mention of "eunuchs," and the infamous reference in Deuteronomy 22:5: men are forbidden to wear women's garments and vice versa. Most people fail to check what the original language actually says in the context of the era it was written. But these arguments will fall on deaf ears with the conservative right.

Story continued on page 8



Rev. Erin Swenson and Ruth Bramham at the Pacific School of Religion Summit

Photo: Ruth Bramham

# Remembering Graham Down

## Long-time Toronto Affirm United member produced the Affirming ministries video, *All Means All*

by **RON COUGHLIN**

**P**hotographer and film maker, musician and world traveller, gardener and long-time member of Toronto Affirm, Graham Down died of cancer on Christmas Day, 2006. Graham had been a multi-media producer for the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, Peoples' Church, Metropolitan United Church, World Vision, and the John Milton Society.

Graham produced and directed the first Affirming Ministries video called *All Means All*. Having joined Affirm United in 1984, after the AGM held in Toronto that year, Graham was a congenial presence and ready participant in countless Affirm events over the years, and was the main organizer behind a religious multi-faith coordinating group in Toronto.

Graham was a delightful person and will be greatly missed! ■

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## Putting trans issues on the church radar screen

Continued from page 7

It's unfortunate that these people do not separate sexual orientation and gender identity when they talk about us. Many people see us as extreme, or failed homosexuals. We're not. But the causes are related and we're fighting a similar opposition, a conservative religious right wing. So it's up to the more liberal denominations to welcome, and welcome back, trans people into their congregations.

It raises another question. How do we persuade trans people who have been rejected and traumatized by their churches to return and rekindle their faith journeys?

We won't be successful in counteracting the strident, religious voices who oppose us until it becomes obvious they speak out of ignorance. Our primary task must be education. We need to have our own facts and arguments clear and beyond scientific doubt.

In the meantime, we need to provide resources for trans positive activities and support, a safe space, a haven where enquiring trans people can learn more about



**Justin and Mara at the Pacific School of Religion Summit**

Photo: Ruth Bramham

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***We need to show that God's light shines just as brightly in us as TG people as it does in all other children of Christ.***

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themselves, opportunities for our clergy and other potential supporters to learn more about us, and educational tools to help our churches make trans people feel welcome.

Our future progress is not going to be smooth sailing. Above all, we need to show that God's light shines just as brightly in us as TG people as it does in all other children of Christ, or of Abraham in the case of our Jewish friends.

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*The above comments are just a few excerpts from Ruth's report. To view the full report, please go to the Affirm United website at: <http://www.affirmunited.ca> ■*

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**Affirm United website:  
[www.affirmunited.ca](http://www.affirmunited.ca)**

# Worship must show *real* welcome

by DON UHRYNIW

I have never seen a church sign that did not include the words 'welcome' or 'all welcome'. Yet we know that many congregations would intend such a welcome solely for those who make them feel comfortable. This is why we have an Affirming ministries program.

There are many ways a faith community can express an *inclusive* welcome: by designating themselves gay-friendly, by pointing out that "all means all," and by ensuring that diversity is represented in its leadership.

I also believe that an important means of demonstrating inclusivity must be done through liturgy. *Leitourgia*, that is, liturgy as the obligation or duty of the people, is one way through which the relationship between the Holy and the community can be facilitated. Liturgy is the embodiment of the rites and rituals, signs and wonders that symbolize the theological expression of a community of faith. So if the liturgy is not about seeking justice and making justice, then that is a clear theological statement by that community of faith.

I believe it necessary for the community to be able to see itself reflected in the language and actions of worship. All of us need ways to connect, a word or phrase that calls us and invites us to take our place at Jesus' table. If we cannot see ourselves reflected in the "work of the people," then how can we see ourselves being welcomed as members of the Body of Christ?

When I was offered the wonderful honour and responsibility of writing the Communion Prayer for the opening worship at General Council 39 last year, it was clear to me that the diversity that we proclaim as a church had to be reflected in our worship. In that prayer,

therefore, those congregated responded in unison: "In the colours and hues of our faces and friends, straight and gay, clergy and lay, women and men, young and young at heart." ([www.united-church.ca/gc39/extras/openingworship.shtml](http://www.united-church.ca/gc39/extras/openingworship.shtml)) It is imperative that the wonderful diversity of Creation be reflected in our worship, for if it is not, then we should rewrite those hollow welcome signs in front of many congregations.

Part of our task as people of faith is to proclaim the Reign of the Divine, and to remember that justice making is not just something we do outside our places of worship. Our proclamation of affirmation and celebration of diversity must live in our prayers and people, hymns and hopes. It is daring to understand the Divine as being beyond and inclusive of straight and gay, women and men, transgendered and queer; to see the rainbow not only as a sign of covenant relationship but also as an eternal affirmation of the spiritual core that is our sexual orientation and sexual expression. If we truly believe that all of us are made in the image of the Holy, then let us boldly reflect that belief not just in our work, but in our dreams and visions, prayers and praises. ■

See also:

"A Eucharistic Prayer for Gay Pride Week"  
[http://www.pflagcanada.ca/pdfs/Eucharistic\\_Prayer\\_for\\_Pride\\_Week\\_2005.pdf](http://www.pflagcanada.ca/pdfs/Eucharistic_Prayer_for_Pride_Week_2005.pdf)

"Service of Prayer and Hope" [http://pflagcanada.ca/pdfs/Service\\_of\\_Prayer\\_and\\_Hope\\_NDAHT-2006.pdf](http://pflagcanada.ca/pdfs/Service_of_Prayer_and_Hope_NDAHT-2006.pdf)

"A Eucharistic Prayer for Christmas", *Gathering*, Advent/Christmas/Epiphany 2005-2006

"A Litany of Confession and Hope", *Gathering*, Summer/Autumn 2005

## University chaplain links religion and homosexuality

by MARC ROY

Much of the recent controversy surrounding queer issues would suggest that religion and homosexuality are inherently incompatible. But through "Que(e)rying Religion," a series of discussions, the Ecumenical Chaplaincy and the GLBTQ Centre for Sexual and Gender Diversity hoped to dispel that notion.

Tom Sherwood, Ecumenical Chaplain at Carleton University in Ottawa, said that when he first came to Carleton in 1999, "there was very little relation between the self-identified religious community and the self-

identified queer community." He has striven to reduce that gap in his time at the university, he said.

"I've had a carefully thought-out attitude on homosexuality and religion in my own religious group for 30 years, one of understanding homosexuality as part of God's creation," Sherwood explained.

Sherwood arranged guest speakers for a monthly series on religion and sexuality. The series was prompted by the popularity of past events, although "the conversations are safer" than in past years, Sherwood said. The speakers share their own experiences, but offer interpretations of holy texts and answer questions as well.

Continued on page 10

# Affirming Ministries and Volunteers of the Year: Affirm United calls for nominations for annual awards

**N**ominations are now being accepted for the Affirm United/S' affirmer ensemble 2007 Volunteer of the Year and Affirming Ministry Program awards. The volunteer award honours individuals who have made a significant contribution to the work of Affirm United, furthering the welcome and inclusion of GLBTQ people in the church as well as in society. The Affirming ministry award recognizes outstanding examples of outreach and

educational programming within our network of affirming ministries. Nomination forms are available on the AU/AE website and can be sent to communications coordinator, Read Sherman (see back page for address). The deadline is Monday, March 26, 2007. The awards will be presented at the 2007 annual conference and general meeting in August.

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## Faith stories wanted

**C**onsensus wants to profile GLBTQ people whose life, faith, and witness offer inspiration and hope to others in the church and in our communities. Would you be willing to tell your own story or interview someone else about their life and faith? Do you know someone whose story can and must be shared? If so, please contact *Consensus* editor Alyson Huntly or Membership coordinator Read Sherman (see addresses and contact information on the back page). We look forward to hearing from you! ■

## Renew your membership

Affirm United membership renewals are now due for the 2007 calendar year. Your membership fees are central to the survival of our organization, simply because they are our primary source of funding. Please renew your support through membership now. See page 11 for details.

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## “Que(e)rying Religion” university discussion series

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The first speaker this year was Rev. Brian Cornelius, an out-of-the-closet gay minister at First United Church, Ottawa. He shared his story of coming out from a conservative Christian background as the son of Pentecostal missionaries to Africa.

“[Cornelius’] own background condemns homosexuality,” said Sherwood. Hearing him share his own story “was a very positive experience.”

The second speaker in the series, Rabbi Steven Garten of Temple Israel in Ottawa, spoke on the issue of homosexuality in Judaism.

“It is very difficult to make bold statements on what Judaism said on any topic,” Garten said. “While Leviticus said a man lying with a man as one would lie with a woman is an abomination, Genesis says all men, all people, are created in God’s image,” said Garten. “If people are created with the divine imprint upon them and they act based on their nature, not on some arbitrary choice, then there’s no way to call a natural act an abomination based on the same textual reading,” he continued.

Gay and lesbian congregates are welcome in Garten’s synagogue, and children of gay couples are fully integrated into Jewish schooling. ■

# Remembering those who remain nameless

by Eldon Hay

Call her Jean Smith. There she was, photo and all, in the obituary column of the daily newspaper. It took me an instant. I'm poor at remembering names.

How did I know her?

Then it came back to me. Jean had attended several consecutive meetings of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) Canada. It wasn't easy for her to do. She was dependent on someone else driving her from the home where she lived. Gradually, she stopped coming. I phoned for a while, but she couldn't make arrangements. It was just too difficult. I continued phoning, but less often.

Jean was a senior citizen. She'd been married, had children, then divorced much later. She identified herself, somewhat shyly, as a lesbian. It was difficult for her to admit, though she did at PFLAG meetings. But she'd heard her adult sons and daughters speak about gays and lesbians in very unflattering terms. Jean feared that if she came out, she wouldn't see her grandchildren again. It was too much to risk.

Sometimes young people fear coming out. What will their parents say? Will they be disowned? At the other

end of life, sadly, sometimes older people are afraid to come out as well. What will their children think? Will they be cut off from seeing their grandchildren?

Jean's obituary brought back those memories, and elicited others.

At a Maritime conference, Montrealer Bill Ryan told of an elderly woman in Vancouver who walked in the Pride March with a paper bag over her head. She needed the companionship of fellow queers, but she didn't want her own children to know she was one.

I officiated at the funeral of a dear friend several years ago. Call him Bob Brown. His family, his wife, his son and daughter were all there. Bob had been a long time PFLAGer and all his family knew he was gay. But there was an unspoken understanding that this was not to be made public. Not even at the funeral. The silence about this was kept right until the end.

I thank God for people like Jean and Bob. Their names are made up, but their stories are true. Many of us know people like them. They live as best they can, and we honour them. We renew our efforts to create a new culture, church and community, so that future Jeans and Bobs can come out and be the persons God really wants them to be. ■

## Affirm United Membership

**The membership period is Jan. 1 to Dec. 31 of each year. To renew your membership for 2007 complete the form and return it to:**

**Membership Coordinator  
P.O. Box 57057 Somerset Station  
Ottawa ON K1R 1A1**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Institution (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Home Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Work Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

- This is a renewal.
- This is a new membership.
- I am signing here to indicate that I support the purposes of Affirm United ( new members).
- I have enclosed my \$40 fee for an individual/household membership.
- Enclosed is our \$100 fee for an institutional membership ( e.g., congregation, presbytery, school).
- I am adding a donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_ to help with projects and expenses.
- I cannot afford the membership fee right now. Please continue to send me your mailings.
- Please accept my contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ and continue to send me your mailings.
- Please remove me from your mailing list.

# Affirming Ministries

**Augustine United Church**  
444 River Ave., Winnipeg, MB R3L 0C7  
(204) 284-2250

**Bathurst United Church**  
427 Bloor St. W., Toronto, ON M5S 1X7  
(416) 921-4967

**Bedford United Church**  
1200 Bedford Hwy, Bedford, NS B4A 1C3  
(902) 835-8497

**Bloor Street United Church**  
300 Bloor St. W., Toronto, ON M5S 1W3  
(416) 924-7439

**Cambrian Presbytery**  
310 Park Ave., Thunder Bay, ON P7B 6C8  
(807) 345-3916

**Centre for Christian Studies**  
Woodsworth House, 60 Maryland St.  
Winnipeg, MB R3G 1K7  
(204) 783-4490

**Centenary United Church**  
24 Main St. W., Hamilton, ON L8P 1H2  
(905) 522-6843

**Centenary-Queen Square United Church**  
215 Wentworth St.,  
Saint John, NB E2L 2T4  
(506) 634-8288

**Emmanuel-Howard Park United Church**  
214 Wright Ave., Toronto, ON M6R 1L3  
(416) 536-1755

**First United Church**  
397 Kent St., Ottawa, ON K2P 2B1  
(613) 232-1016

**First United Church**  
PO Box 940, Salmon Arm, BC V1E 4P1  
(250) 832-3860

**First United Church**  
320 East Hastings St.,  
Vancouver, BC V6A 1P4  
(604) 681-8365

**Five Oaks United Church  
Education & Retreat Centre,**  
R.R. 3, Paris, ON N3L 3E3  
(519) 442-3212

**Glen Rhodes United Church**  
1470 Gerrard St. E., Toronto, ON M4L 2A3  
(416) 465-3755

**Harcourt Memorial United Church**  
87 Dean Ave., Guelph, ON N1G 1L3  
(519) 824-4177

**Immanuel United Church**  
755 Golspie St., Winnipeg, MB R2K 2V4  
(204) 669-0220

**Kamloops United Church**  
421 St. Paul St., Kamloops, BC V2C 2J7  
(250) 372-3020

**Metropolitan United Church**  
56 Queen St. E., Toronto, ON M5C 2Z3  
(416) 363-0331

**Mill Woods United Church**  
15 Grand Meadow Cres.,  
Edmonton, Alberta T6L 1A3  
(780) 463-2202

**Peterborough and Area Affirm United  
c/o St. Andrew's United Church**  
441 Rubidge St.,  
Peterborough, ON K9H 4E4  
(705) 745-2722 (o) (705) 741-4271 (h)

**PCTC-Calling Lakes Centre**  
Box 159, Fort Qu'Appelle, SK S0G 1S0  
(306) 332-5691

**Rainbow Ministry**  
301-G Weston St., Winnipeg, MB R3E 3H4  
(204) 954-2904

**Rosedale-Queen Mary United Church**  
6870 Terrebonne Ave.,  
Montreal, QC H4B 1C5  
(514) 484-9969

**St. James United Church**  
4506 Sherwood Dr., Regina, SK S4R 4B4  
(306) 543-2626

**Église unie Saint-Jean**  
110, Rue Ste-Catherine est,  
Montréal, QC H2X 1K7  
(514) 866-0641

**St. John's United Church**  
PO Box 698, Birch St.,  
Marathon, ON POT 2E0  
(807) 229-1031

**Église unie Saint-Pierre**  
78, Rue Sainte-Ursule,  
Québec, QC G1R 4E8  
(418) 692-3422

**St. Thomas-Wesley United Church,**  
808-20th St. W., Saskatoon, SK S7M 0Y3  
(306) 244-7676

**Saskatchewan Conference  
Affirming Ministry Committee**  
418A McDonald St., Regina, SK S4N 6E1  
(306) 721-3311

**Southminster-Steinhauer United Church**  
10740-19 Ave., Edmonton, AB T6J 6W9  
(780) 435-2028

**Sydenham Street United Church**  
82 Sydenham St., Kingston, ON K7L 3H4  
(613) 542-9616

**Tatamagouche Centre**  
RR 3, Tatamagouche, NS B0K 1V0  
(902) 657-2231

**Trinity United Church**  
1805 Larch St., Vancouver, BC V6K 3N9  
(778) 889-7324

**Trinity-St. Paul's United Church**  
427 Bloor St. W., Toronto, ON M5S 1X9  
(416) 922-8435

**Union Church**  
24 Maple Ave.,  
Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, QC H9X 2E6  
(514) 457-5819

**United Theological College /  
Le Séminaire Uni**  
3521 University Ave.,  
Montreal, QC H3A 2A9  
(514) 849-2042

**Wesley United Church**  
6 Cambridge St., Cambridge, ON N1R 3R6  
(519) 621-6060

**Westminster United Church**  
543 Beechwood Dr., Waterloo, ON N2T 2G7  
(519) 746-6080

**Young United Church**  
222 Furby St., Winnipeg, MB R3C 2A7  
(204) 783-0128

THE AFFIRMING MINISTRIES  
OF AFFIRM UNITED WORK  
FOR INCLUSION AND JUSTICE  
FOR PEOPLE OF ALL SEXUAL  
ORIENTATIONS AND GENDER  
IDENTITIES WITHIN THE  
UNITED CHURCH  
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