



Consensus

June - 2007

■ CONNECTING AND INFORMING GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER PEOPLE AND THEIR FRIENDS ACROSS THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA.

■ WORKING FOR JUSTICE AND 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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Four more congregations in two months Total 43 Affirming ministries now in the program

In April and May, four more United Church congregations became Affirming ministries. The new congregations are Deer Park United Church and Wholeness Centre and Knox United Church, both in Calgary, Westminster United Church in Thunder Bay, and St. John's United Church, Halifax.

The Affirming ministries of Affirm United go through a process of learning and discernment before making a public statement of their commitment. These ministries declare that they are fully inclusive of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities and commit themselves to working for justice within the

United Church and in society.

The Affirming ministry program continues to grow in strength as more congregations and other church bodies engage in the process of discerning whether or not to become affirming and what that might mean for their mission and ministry. There are now 42 Affirming ministries in eight provinces across Canada.

Deer Park United Church is profiled on page 5 of this issue. The Knox United and Westminster congregations will be introduced in future issues of *Consensus*. See page 4 for more Affirming ministry news. A complete list of all Affirming ministries appears on the back page. ■

NE DOUTE JAMAIS...

Conférence 2007 *S'affirmer ensemble /Affirm United*

Venez vous joindre à nous pour célébrer le 25^e anniversaire de *S'affirmer ensemble!* Notre conférence et notre assemblée générale annuelle 2007 auront lieu du vendredi 3 août au lundi 6 août 2007 à l'église unie St. Andrew's de Peterborough (Ontario), 441, rue Rubidge.

Guidés par notre modérateur, le révérend David Giuliano, nous réfléchissons ensemble à ce que nous avons accompli depuis les 25 dernières années tout au long de notre cheminement collectif et individuel, à ce que nous sommes aujourd'hui et à ce que nous voulons devenir. Nous nous inspirerons en particulier de la citation suivante de Margaret Mead : « Ne doute jamais...qu'un petit groupe de pensée, de citoyens impliqués peut changer le monde. » Se joindront à David pour orienter notre réflexion Chris Giffen et Jessie

Negroportes, du « theGoproject.ca ».

Vous êtes tous conviés à vous joindre à nous alors que nous en profiterons pour explorer le thème de la « découverte de la sainteté sur notre chemin » au cours d'ateliers, mais aussi pour passer de bons moments ensemble, retrouver des amis et exprimer notre créativité par de la musique, du théâtre, des arts visuels et la parole. Au programme également, il y aura un banquet le samedi soir 4 août.

Votre voix à l'assemblée générale de lundi matin, le 6 août, est importante pour l'avenir de notre association.

Formulaire d'inscription, à imprimer à partir de notre site web :

<http://www.affirmunited.ca/>

ou par la poste :

« Conférence 2007 *S'affirmer ensemble* »
a/s de M. Tudhope
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■ *Consensus* is the newsletter of Affirm United/S'affirmer ensemble, 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/S'affirmer ensemble. Your news stories, articles, and letters are always welcome. *Consensus* reserves the right to edit for length, clarity or style.

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Co-chair Reflections from the Prairies

At the beginning of May, I was traveling across the prairies, taking in the wonders of spring as we made our way southeast from Edmonton to Winnipeg. Somewhere near Regina the mid-afternoon sun was shining brightly, the temperature nearing 30° C, and the radio announcer commented—"This is as good as it gets."

I pondered his comment for several minutes and as I did, the preamble to The Earth Charter came to mind.

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join

together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations. The Earth Charter

The words of the radio announcer and the preamble to The Earth Charter remind us that we must protect, preserve and build, and as we strive to do so we must celebrate creation in all its forms.

We, the members of Affirm United/S'affirmer ensemble, have answered a call to work for a just society for all God's people. As we go forward into our second quarter century, it is my prayer that we continue to recognize injustice where it exists and with the help of the Holy Spirit, foster a climate of love, peace and understanding for all.

On behalf of the co-chairs
Wilson MacLennan

Letters

To the Editor,

Saint John's Centenary-Queen's Square United is the only Affirming congregation in New Brunswick. That church and a couple of others in the province, Wilmot United in Fredericton and Sackville United in Sackville, are open to same-gender weddings. There are other religious venues as well, including the Unitarian Fellowship in Fredericton. To that small number, there is now a significant addition: the Chapel at Mount Allison University.

Chapel policy at Mount Allison has recently been amended. The policy (now minus excised exclusives) means that the Chapel welcomes potential wedding couples, whether they are lesbian, gay or straight. Even a casual reading of the amended and well articulated policy—now on the Mount Allison website—makes it clear that a couple's sexual orientation is no longer an

obstacle to considering the Chapel as an appropriate wedding venue. Moreover, the President of Mount Allison has made a public declaration that the policy is inclusive—a policy with the wholehearted support of the Chaplain.

Will other United Churches become more open to same-gender as well as opposite-gender marriages? In brief, there are probably two responses: 1) Not yet; 2) Never will.

Blessedly, Canada has separation of Church and State. So, there is recourse for New Brunswick couples (gay and lesbian) barred from wedding in their own religions, and for couples (lesbian, gay and straight) who are indifferent to or consider religiosity insignificant. They have recourse to a clerk or deputy clerk of the Queen's Bench.

For its Chapel policy amendment, clarification and inclusion, congratulations to Mount Allison, and, a special commendation to University President Dr. Robert Campbell and Chaplain Rev. John C. Perkin.

Eldon Hay

Bedford United Church Inclusivity Committee takes action inside and outside the church

The Bedford United Church Inclusivity Committee, in collaboration with St. John's United Church of Halifax, set up a display table at the Halifax Pride celebrations. Committee members also attended the first ever interfaith worship service held on Pride Day in Halifax.

The Inclusivity Committee of the congregation is charged with the responsibility "To support the congregation in carrying out the Bedford United Church's Mission Statement of accepting all people in an intentional way."

The Inclusivity Committee has been involved in several other activities outside the congregation including a local AIDS Walk; the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Youth Project "Trans Day" Vigil, and the AIDS Coalition's AIDS Day Vigil.



Bedford United Church display table in the church foyer

Photo: Anne Hebb

The committee also maintains a library of background material on Affirm United's program, educational videos, and publications; engages in advocacy and awareness raising within the congregation regarding being an Affirming Congregation; establishes support groups within the congregation for gay and lesbians; networks with other congregations working on

inclusivity issues; and maintains a display table of resources available through the committee. Bedford United Church became an Affirming congregation in May 2006. ■

United Church committee proposes consultation on GLBT ministry issues

The Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit (JGER) of the United Church has passed a motion requesting a church-wide inter-unit consultation in 2008 to

- address the structure of the United Church and how it might more adequately provide support for GLBT Ministry personnel and United Church members
- determine the actions needed on the recommendations from the 1999 consultation on GLBT persons in ministry and how these recommendations can be pursued
- review and discuss whether Affirm United should be included and funded in the structures of the United Church
- discuss the creation of a GLBT ministry within the General Council offices

This decision came as a result of Affirm's request for dialogue with JGGR on the unresolved issues resulting from a previous consultation with GLBT in ministry. It was recommended that the planning committee for the consultation should have representatives from Affirm. ■

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

Breaking barriers and crossing lines in search of truth

Excerpts from a sermon by

Rev. Dale Irving at the Mill Woods United Church
(Edmonton) Affirming Service November 26, 2006

Jesus is before Pilate. "Are you the King of the Jews?" asks Pilate. The conversation goes on and then Jesus says: "I came into the world, to testify to the truth." "What is truth?" asks Pilate. What is truth, indeed?

There was a day when women were not permitted to attend Church meetings and most certainly not to hold office and their exclusion was justified on the basis of biblical teaching that the man was to be head of the woman as Christ is head of the Church, and that women are to be silent in church. The Spirit had more to teach us! For centuries the Church required in marriage that wives obey their husbands. But the Spirit had more to teach us.

Similar justification was later used for the exclusion of women from the Order of Ministry until Lydia Gruchie was ordained in 1936. But it was more than 20 years later that married women were permitted to be in active ministry and be married. The Spirit had more to teach us. And today we welcome women to all aspects of Church life.

In 1980, the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education of The United Church of Canada was in a panic. Rumour had it that a candidate for ministry was planning to 'come out' and declare his homosexual orientation during the final interview leading to Ordination. How would the church respond to this announcement? I, along with seven others, was invited to become part of a Task Group that was to study this matter on behalf of the church and report to the General Council at its meeting in Morden, MB in 1984. It took until 1988 when the church decided that all persons, regardless of sexual orientation were eligible to be considered for ministry. The Spirit had more to teach us.

We need the Spirit to remind us of our history - of the trials and struggles that brought into being that part of the Church we have come to know and love. We need the Spirit to teach us that we are now a multicultural family of independent Churches, and that that calls for respect for a variety of responses to the Gospel in different contexts. We need the Spirit to help us understand how the love of God in Jesus Christ is revealed for our time through the record of Scripture. "What is truth?"

Gradually the church has started to recognize that the social conventions of the Biblical ages are not the

unchanging Word of God. Throughout the years, whenever we have discovered new possibilities for human liberation and for more abundant life, we have eventually embraced them.

I believe that the full inclusion of gay people in the life of our church and our society is as inevitable and as God-energized as the full inclusion of the uncircumcised, slaves, women and people of color has been. I believe it is the work of God's Spirit and it is ultimately irresistible. "What is truth?"

***I look forward to a day
when we draw a
wider circle.***

I look forward to the day when children who are different are no longer teased, but are accepted. I foresee a time when all people can date and fall in love and give themselves to another person regardless of their sexual orientation with the full support of their church and an understanding society. I look forward to living in a society when we no longer oppress lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people, so that they feel they must live in closets. I look forward to a day when we draw a wider circle and cross a line that will allow all people regardless of their sexual identity to commit themselves to the church's values and participate fully in all aspects of the church's life.



Mill Woods United Church

Today, in Mill Woods United Church we have crossed a line. Today, as we gather our collective courage and our good will, healing is possible because we celebrate something larger than ourselves. Today we celebrate not only that Mill Woods United Church has

become an Affirming Congregation within The United Church of Canada, but the love of our God that invites us all to cross the line, to stay back no longer, to step into healing, and into hope and into joy. Today, we cross that line. Yes, the Spirit still has more to teach us. We will continue to struggle with Pilate's question and in so doing we will open ourselves to the possibility that even we can more fully become the people God intends us to be in our time and place. ■

Deer Park United Church and Wholeness Centre: Becoming an Affirming Congregation

A relatively new congregation, Deer Park was started in 1979 by ten passionate individuals who wanted a United Church located in the rapidly growing area of southeast Calgary. The congregation grew in numbers and in 1986, the church building was completed. A visioning process that the congregation began in 1998 led to the development of our values, beliefs, vision and mission—seeking wholeness through the Spirit—along with a logo.

The Deer Park wholeness model, conceived in the form of a wheel, provides the framework for our vision. It is founded on the ancient wisdom of the seven energy chakras of the body, as well as the full spectrum of the rainbow of promise. Each of our seven ministries of wholeness corresponds to one of the chakras or energy wheels which are like mini-rainbows in the human body that keep us healthy, balanced and whole. Five of our ministries provide services to others; two provide internal support. Each ministry is represented by a specific chakra colour. The seven ministries also correspond to seven aspects of Jesus' ministry, in particular his healing, teaching, leadership, justice, preaching and inclusive ministries. Jesus' desire for all people to live an abundant life and to experience oneness with the Spirit and with one another is what we strive to live out.

Efforts continue to develop and expand the various ministries of Deer Park as we live out our mission in action. The wholeness centre concept came into being in 2005. We intend Deer Park to be a place where people of every background and affiliation can seek personal wholeness: a balance of body, mind, heart and spirit. Our work is progressing, especially in the area of expanding our interfaith partners.

Accordingly, Deer Park decided to become an Affirming congregation. The process began in the fall of 2003, when council held meetings to listen to the congregation voice its core identity and passions. It was decided to live out our mission for the following three years by focusing on youth, men, healing, community with each other, people of other faiths, people in need, and gay and lesbian people.

Explore Affirm was formed early in 2004 to work with the congregation. The group held workshops on same-gender marriage and explored the broader issues of becoming an Affirming congregation. Our well-attended adult education program included a workshop on the Affirming process and this same workshop was repeated after Sunday worship. Education sessions were also held for council members and for each ministry. "Myths and Facts" about homosexuality were printed in the bulletin and a large poster was designed to inform the congregation about issues of inclusiveness. Messages about inclusiveness were also delivered from the pulpit. Finally, a two-day forum on sexuality, gender and spirituality was held at Deer Park in cooperation with Calgary Presbytery Pastoral and Spiritual Care and Scarboro United Church. The 14 panelists included gay, lesbian, transgendered people and their families. Overall, eighty-five people representing 13 United Church congregations attended, including over 50 people from Deer Park.

The congregation's decision to become an Affirming congregation within the United Church of Canada represents a public declaration of who we are and who we intend to be, and this means continued action to support our decision. ■

After 25 years, people still keep coming back Affirm Conference and AGM: August 3 to 6, Peterborough Ontario

What makes you want to be at the Affirm Conference and AGM? Perhaps it is to join the fun? Or maybe it's to be a part of the action? Is it that sense you get of being connected to something much bigger than yourself? Are you a long time member who wants to reconnect as we celebrate 25 years of growth, challenge, support, and change? Or perhaps you are new to

Affirm or the United Church and want to find out what's happening. Maybe you are coming to add your voice to the decisions we will make at the business meeting (during the conference) or the AGM (held on Aug. 6). Whatever the reason, we know you'll want to be there! It's not too late to register. Check out the Affirm website at www.affirmunited.ca for more information. See you in Peterborough! ■

Assisted living and GLBT people: Research needed

by RUTH BRAMHAM

As I approach the traditional retirement age (65), I have gained more than a passing interest in housing for the elderly. As a transwoman, it also brings up the question: are there services for people like me?

To grasp my concerns, you should know that I need to wear a wig (male pattern baldness) and shave daily (never been able to afford electrolysis). A number of recent reports highlighting concerns of gay and lesbian people have heightened my own fears. The "don't ask don't tell" attitude of many extended care homes for the elderly basically means going back into the closet. That is quite possible for gays and lesbians (and bisexuals). For transpeople there is no closet.

The situation is worse if you live away from a major urban center, as I discovered during a recent trip to Powell River, B.C. There, as long as you are a healthy senior citizen, you have a great life, with many programs available through the local town council. However, once you lose the ability to look after yourself and need daily assistance, there is no help locally, no senior "Extendicare" residences, no continuous care, no chronic care facilities. The local hospital can only house a dozen or so patients temporarily while beds are found elsewhere in the province. This leads to splitting up an elderly couple, for instance, if the healthy partner cannot cope and cannot afford to move. The shortage is the result of a chronic lack of "public" care facilities and the high cost of private accommodation. After a few inquiries, I have found this to be fairly typical across the country.

I went to Powell River to help a 74 year old friend (another transwoman) pack up her retirement apartment and return to Ontario. After being diagnosed with lung cancer, her family in London, Ontario made arrangements to look after her and make her final months as comfortable as possible. She had been sent to Vancouver for diagnosis, and received initial cancer therapy there before being shipped back to Powell River. To monitor her condition would require regular trips to either Vancouver or Comox (on the island) as the local hospital did not have the equipment or the staff to do so.

Now place yourself in her shoes. Take a look around you. Does your home town have long term care facilities? Are they welcoming to GLBT people? How do you think they would handle a transman or a transwoman needing personal care? Today hospitals provide excellent care for

us. Unfortunately few have the capacity to allow long term stays. This has been downgraded by the provincial governments to the non-profit or private sector facilities, where the care (according to a multitude of news reports over the last few years) is frequently suspect.

The experience not only got me thinking, but prompted me to write this piece, inviting you to join a "Mission Impossible." Your mission, if you accept, is to research senior care facilities in your community, to ask if they accept GLBT people, gladly or otherwise, and what level of awareness, sensitivity and openness to accommodate you discover. I would be particularly interested in their reaction to a transperson needing accommodation. In turn, I would collect your findings, and, hopefully, we will be able to make a list of GLBT friendly retirement/extended care facilities across the country. Please send your comments to me at: ruth.bramham@rogers.com ■

Coming out resource for trans folk

The Trans Religious Summit, with the help of the American Human Rights Campaign, has produced a brochure aimed at helping trans people in the almost unavoidable coming out process. It is a 16-page brochure called "Coming Out As Transgender." Although this resource is aimed at the American TG/TS community, the content is universal in application. This is a useful resource for Affirming congregations and those who minister with transgender people.

The resource can be found and can be downloaded from the web site of the Human Rights Campaign, <http://www.hrc.org>. Click on the tab for publications on the left side of the homepage and scroll down to the title "Coming Out As Transgender." ■

**Affirm United website:
www.affirmunited.ca**

Book Reviews

Bilingual book: *Du caillou au séquoia/From Stone to Sequoia* Quand serrent les maux, Éditions du Mécène, Nicole Hamel

Cinq ans avant l'apparition de la tumeur cancéreuse au sein gauche, elle dessinait une « boule dure », une « bombe du côté gauche, près du cœur », une « grenade ». Sur le point de jeter œuvres et écrits, elle découvre que son expérience est à la fois unique et universelle. Une quarantaine de peintures viendront dès lors illustrer la trame du présent recueil racontant cette expérience...

Chaque peinture est accompagnée d'un texte avec un thème, les raisons du choix des couleurs et des formes, en plus de réflexions qui y sont reliées. On trouve aussi des éléments autobiographiques, incluant sa traversée d'une vie hétérosexuelle jusqu'à son mariage avec sa conjointe et la découverte de Église Unie.

Dans le caillou se lovait un germe de séquoia.

Ce livre a été écrit par Nicole Hamel, membre de l'église unie Saint-Pierre. Bilingue et ayant pour titre *Du caillou au séquoia / From Stone to Sequoia*, il raconte le

cheminement de la guérison d'un cancer, avec comme trame du récit la reproduction d'une quarantaine de peintures réalisées par l'auteure. Sa publication a bénéficié d'un soutien financier de United Church Women (UCW) et de l'Unité des ministères en français (UMiF), de l'Église Unie du Canada.

Five years before the tumour on her left breast appeared, she was drawing a "hard ball", a "bomb on the left side, near the heart", a "grenade". On the verge of throwing away drawings and writings, she discovers that her experience is both unique and universal.

One finds autobiographical elements as well and other resources that have helped the other to not only recover health, but also become happier. The author is a mother of three and is remarried to the woman who shared her life for 14 years.

In the stone was lying a sequoia seed. ■

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.
- I wish to be contacted by a member of An Affirm United ministry or group near my home.

Affirming Ministries

Augustine United Church
444 River Ave., Winnipeg, MB R3L 0C7
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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.,
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Deer Park United Church & Wholeness Ctr.
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(403) 278-8263

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

First United Church
347 Richmond Road, Ottawa, ON K2A 0E7
(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

Knox United Church
506 Fourth Street SW, Calgary, AB T2P 1S7
(403) 269-8382

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

Mill Woods United Church
15 Grand Meadow Cres.,
Edmonton, AB T6L 1A3
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PCTC-Calling Lakes Centre
Box 159, Fort Qu'Appelle, SK S0G 1S0
(306) 332-5691

Peterborough and Area Affirm United
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441 Rubidge St.,
Peterborough, ON K9H 4E4
(705) 745-2722 (o) (705) 741-4271 (h)

Rainbow Ministry
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(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,
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(514) 866-0641

St. John's United Church
PO Box 698, Birch St.,
Marathon, ON P0T 2E0
(807) 229-1031

St. John's United Church
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(902) 423-8498

Église unie Saint-Pierre
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(418) 692-3422

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(306) 721-3311

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(780) 435-2028

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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 /
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3521 University Ave.,
Montreal, QC H3A 2A9
(514) 849-2042

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6 Cambridge St., Cambridge, ON N1R 3R6
(519) 621-6060

Westminster United Church
650 River Street, Thunder Bay, ON P7A 3S6
(807) 767-2781

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

Young United Church
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