

## Aurora United Church celebrates becoming an Affirming Congregation?



It has been a long-time goal of Aurora United Church, and this past Sunday, October 15, the venerable faith community celebrated the start of a new chapter in its storied history: being officially designated as an Affirming Congregation.

The milestone for Aurora United Church (AUC) was celebrated at Trinity Anglican Church, a space they have shared with AUC since its devastating fire in 2014, designates the church as fully inclusive of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

“Our United Church of Canada began the Big Welcome in 1988 when we acknowledged that being gay or lesbian would not bar anyone from membership in or serving as clergy within the United Church and, as has been the practice with our denomination, we took that as a big, wonderful step, knowing there would be pushback, knowing it was the right thing to do nevertheless – in the name of Jesus Christ who welcomed all and included all,” said Reverend Lorraine Newton-Comar, who leads the AUC with Reverend Andy Comar, at Sunday’s service.

“When we first spoke together in this sanctuary about what being ‘affirming’ would mean to us, you will remember that we had some of our committee members speak about their own lives from their own perspectives, using clear language about being gay, being lesbian, being in church as a child and as a teen, as a young adult, having a gay child and teaching neurodiverse, non-verbal young adults,” Newton-Comar continued. “We spoke afterwards about a statement that would reflect who we are as a diverse congregation and what that would look like, what that would include.”

“Being affirming is an ongoing process of expanding the welcome into the fullness of our church community. The church is truly at its best when it addresses the brokenness of the world near and far and then tends to it, so, when one part of the Body of Christ suffers, we rise to attend to those wounds of mind, body and spirit. Becoming an affirming congregation does not mean, of course, that we have arrived at the finish line, done; it does mean that we’re now part of a network of persons and of churches that believe that each person has inherent value, is loved by God as we are – worthy of celebration. We have been reminded recently how important it is to keep strong in the face of growing intolerance and even violence against persons who identify in the LGBTQ2+ community – a disheartening time, really – but a time when we have been reminded how vitally important it is to stay strong together and to advocate for one another.” Sunday’s declaration was greeted as a welcome development well beyond Aurora United Church.

In words delivered in front of the congregation, Mayor Tom Mrakas hailed the importance of AUC in the lives of so many residents and, by becoming an affirming congregation, they were “leading by example,” demonstrating its commitment to “inclusion and justice for all people, including all sexual orientations and gender-identities.”

“The Aurora United Church is showing our entire community what it means to accept everyone for who they are,” he said. “By

becoming an Affirming church, AUC is also making it crystal clear that it is committed to challenging bias and discrimination, working to end racism and promoting economic justice. The sad reality is for far too long residents, especially from the 2SLGBTQ+ communities, have felt excluded in places of worship. With many having no place to turn for support, Aurora United Church's Affirmation signals to our entire community that everyone is, in fact, welcome and will be supportive. This is such a progressive and meaningful step AUC has taken and I couldn't be more proud. It reflects the kind of Town we're all striving to create.?

This goal towards fostering a better future were echoed by Reverend Daniel Graves, Interim Priest-In-Charge at Trinity Aurora.

?I think it goes without saying that the Anglican Church has had its own challenges moving forward on this issue, but several years ago, Trinity Anglican discerned that we would be a place that, if we were permitted by our Bishop to offer same gender marriages ? we were given that blessing several years ago and subsequently our diocese has allowed that to happen in all parishes. When I was in another parish, I was asked to officiate a same-gender blessing and I was unable to and was very sad that I couldn't do that. I was so happy when I came to Trinity Aurora because then I could do this. I think if my feeling of what it was to wait was that profound, how much more must it be for others for whom this is a matter of their own life? I am the father of a gay son and this is a tremendous step you're taking today.?

Citing the Book of Acts passage of, ?Now I truly understand that God shows no partiality,? Graves added: ?If that's good enough for God, it should be good enough for us. I commend you today for this momentous step and commit to continuing to journeying with you as a sibling in Christ on this new and exciting journey we're on together.?

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