

Media Release

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Huron Shores United Church in Grand Bend is Officially “Affirming”

“If you are part of the LGBTQI community, and are looking for a loving church home, we invite you to come and meet us. You belong with us!” says Rev. Dr. Kate Crawford, the minister at Huron Shores United Church in Grand Bend. Rev. Crawford is eager to let everyone know that her church has chosen to become an Affirming Ministry. This means that they are committed to promoting the inclusion of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Intersex).

“We know that many outside the United Church will not know what ‘affirming’ means. It is a special designation which we receive if we have done particular things in preparation to say that we will gladly welcome people of all sexual orientations in our community. It is one thing to say ‘we welcome all’, but many LGBTQI folk have learned that words like that can mask a very unwelcoming community,” Rev. Crawford explains. “The designation of ‘Affirming’ is a public, trusted sign that we really mean what we say: all are truly welcome to be part of our community.”

On September 24, Huron Shores United Church (HSUC) will be formally recognized as an Affirming Ministry by Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble, a justice-oriented organization of people in the United Church of Canada which works for the full inclusion of people of all sexual orientations and gender-identities both within the United Church of Canada and in society in general.

The congregation at HSUC went through a process of reflection and exploration with guest speakers, discussions, films, and personal sharing, explains the chair of the Affirm team, Blanche Savage. “This led to a vote to make a formal commitment to ensuring welcome and inclusion of everyone, by joining Affirm United, and making our Affirming status public,” Ms. Savage adds. Across Canada there are 187 United Church congregations who have made the decision to join Affirm United, 77 of those in Ontario. So far in 2017 alone, there have been 26 congregations in Canada that joined.

According to Rev. Crawford, churches historically have been very judgmental of people with alternative sexual identities, causing much harm and hurt, even death in the worst cases. “Huron Shores United is joining a growing movement of churches who say, ‘that was wrong, and we repent’,” she adds, “We have come to understand that the Bible can be interpreted in many ways. We interpret scripture with care and faithfulness, and find the Bible a beautiful expression of God's gracious and generous love for all of creation.” Rev. Crawford's worship services on becoming an Affirming ministry can be found the HSUC website at www.huronshoresunitedchurch.com, along with other sermons and information about the church's many activities.

HSUC's milestone celebration will take place on September 24. Special guests from Affirm United and the United Church of Canada, along with supporters from the local community and beyond will be attending the celebration. “Please join us at 2:00 p.m. for the service which will include guest speakers and special music, then refreshments and informal fellowship will follow,” Ms. Savage adds. The special service will be at the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 498, 20 Municipal Road in Grand Bend, where the congregation has been meeting while their church is under construction. An addition has just been completed, and the existing building is undergoing extensive renovations.

“I am just delighted to be welcoming the wider community in Grand Bend, and from churches in our area to this celebration. It has taken much work on the part of the Affirming Team members, and a leap of faith for the congregation, but we are ready to celebrate this historic moment,” Rev. Crawford says.



Photo: The Affirming Team at Huron Shores United Church in Grand Bend is preparing for a celebration as they promote the inclusion of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities to join them in worship and all church activities. On the team are: Back: Mary Alderson, David Kai, Wilma Harris. Front: Betsy Hanes, Rev. Dr. Kate Crawford, Janice Sinker, Blanche Savage. Absent from the photo: Marly Bown, Paula Wallis.

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