

What does it mean to be an affirming Congregation?

On Saturday, November 8th I attended a workshop offered at St Margaret's United Church in Kingston that intended to answer this question and to encourage ministries in this area to become Affirming. There is already one good example of such a ministry in Kingston. Sydenham Street United is a ministry which not only has 'welcome' on the notice board but specifically and publicly offers a safe space and a spiritual home to every person regardless of sexual orientation. The rainbow flag which is the symbol of Affirm United can be seen outside and inside the building and is a powerful signal that there is a caring, non-judgmental and accepting community within. By 2010 we want to create another ten affirming ministries in the Bay of Quinte Conference, which has set up a working group titled '10X10'.

The workshop worship set the tone, as we sang the Hymn from *More Voices*

"Draw the circle wider.
Draw it wider still.
Let this be our song,

no one stands alone,
standing side by side,
draw the circle wide."

Many of us in the United Church would be shocked at the suggestion that we need to review our welcoming attitudes. Affirming! Aren't we there already? Are not all people offered a warm greeting? Gays and lesbians, if we recognize them as such, are generally well accepted. The different emphasis that this workshop urged us to make is to take the next step and go beyond acceptance to positive affirmation. This is what we have called "the stalling point" for many. We need to 'come out of the closet' and proclaim that we will affirm the value, and the life style choice, of every individual. In an Affirming Congregation sexuality becomes a non-issue, as does colour, race, social status, and all the other variations of the human spectrum that make up a community of rich diversity.

The workshop event gave us the opportunity of hearing many stories of people who have experienced new levels of love and understanding in their relationship with family

members who were gay or lesbian. A mother spoke of the journey her family made as they accepted a son who acknowledged his sexual orientation. He was still her son, and although things had changed - she had not lost her dreams- they were just different dreams. A nurse spoke of spirituality as a health resource. If the image of the Church as shown in the media is all that young people see, there is a need for us to be explicit, and to show by our actions, who we are, and how we can help.

To become an affirming ministry is a long and delicate process, involving careful discussion and clear communications. But the results can mean an infusion of life and energy as new friends find a home in our midst and old friends find a new level of liberation.

I invite all the Pastoral Charges in the Bay of Quinte Conference to explore the possibility of becoming an Affirming Ministry, and I will be glad to provide resources and information. Help us achieve our goal of developing ten new Affirming Ministries by 2010 and become stronger in the process.

—ROY HUNTLY



Paul McIntosh has been at Coldsprings keyboard for 50 years.

Coldsprings has had only two organists in 110 years!

A special tribute to Paul McIntosh Coldsprings Organist for 50 years

In 110 years, there have only been two organists at Coldsprings United Church in Coldsprings. Miss Edith Hoskin was appointed organist from 1898 to 1958 and Paul McIntosh was appointed from 1958 to 2008. There was a short period of a few months in 1957 when Warren Buttars was organist due to Miss Hoskin's illness.

On Oct. 26, 2008, the Anniversary Service at Coldsprings was a musical tribute to a dedicated or-

ganist, Paul McIntosh, driving from Oshawa for practice and Sunday services. Past choir members joined the present choir to pay tribute to Paul.. His cousin, Dave McIntosh from Napanee, was planning to "Pipe" the mass choir up the aisle to the choir loft, but was unable to come because of illness. There was a beautiful cake in the Sanctuary which was enjoyed at a reception following the service.

—SHIRLEY MCINTOSH