

## 2017 Annual Report of the Open and Affirming Ministry Team

Submitted by John Fiscus, Chair

The members of the Open and Affirming Team were Kim Graff (until July 20, 2016) (Community – St Paul Park), Rev. John Fiscus (Peace – St Cloud), Carrie Eve Hoagland (Pilgrim Congregational – Duluth), Steve McCurry (St. Paul's – Delano), Stephanie Peck\* (Mayflower - Minneapolis), and Jessica Henrich\* (Living Table - Minneapolis). In Addition, Rev. Marc Blakesley (Robbinsdale) and Gigi Nauer (Elk River Union Congregational UCC) served as the Open and Affirming consultants for the MN Conference and as ex officio voting members of the team. Members with \* were added to the team this year.

The Team meets bimonthly, continuing with our practice of conducting the meetings at an Open and Affirming church and asking a member of the host congregation to join us to tell us what their church was doing to fulfill their ONA covenant. Here are some of the highlights of the year:

- The team revisited our mission and purpose statement and adopted the following; **The Open and Affirming Team of the Minnesota conference is a resource for churches to become or deepen their Open and Affirming status. In covenant with the Open and Affirming Coalition, the team advocates for justice for LGBT+ persons in religious and secular arenas. Team seeks to make visible Open and Affirming values in education, worship and advocacy opportunities.**
- Two new churches adopted Open and Affirming covenants since the last Annual Meeting; Union Congregational Church in Hackensack and First Congregational in Grand Marais. Several ONA churches are revisiting their covenants and congregational commitments, especially in the area of transgender inclusion.
- The team led participation in the Ashley Rukes Pride in Minneapolis in June. We marched as a loose coalition of churches, carrying our banners and wearing congregation t-shirts. This same plan is in place for June 2017. More information on our exact location will be made available as soon as possible. Our local churches and team have participated in multiple ways at pride events across the state including, Fargo Morehead, Duluth, Brainerd and St. Cloud.
- The 2017 Minnesota ONA Celebration was held in April at Hazel Park UCC in St. Paul. There were three workshops offered dealing with families of LGBTQ+ folks, ONA evangelism and PR, and a safe space for youth. In worship, the sermon was co-delivered by, Revs. Leslie Moughty and John Fiscus; and music was provided by Gigi Nauer, Don Shier and Aaron VanDanacker. Our Team wishes to thank Marc Blakesley and Stephanie Peck for their energy and work on this annual event.
- This year, much of the discussion focused on how to serve current needs. We are developing infographic signs for use in churches. The team feels especially called to help create safe and affirming spaces for our transgender siblings. There has been an escalation of violence, hateful rhetoric and draconian legislation focused on this community. We hope to serve as witness and resource.
- The Gathering before the Annual Meeting will be happening again this year. It will start on Thursday night with meet and greet, Vespers and a social time (beer/Hymns and

Theology). Friday morning will feature a Panel discussion about reengaging and going deeper in our affirmations, followed by engaging closing worship.

It has been our pleasure to serve on your behalf this year. Please let us know if there are additional things you would like to see going forward. We would also like to encourage interested people from wider Minnesota to consider joining the team. All meetings can be accessed either electronically or via phone.