

2016 Annual Report of the Open and Affirming Team

Submitted by Kim Graff, Chair

The members of the Open and Affirming Team were Kim Graff (Community – St Paul Park), Rev. John Fiscus (Peace – St Cloud), Rev. David McMahill* (UCC New Brighton), Carrie Eve Hoagland* (Peace – Duluth), Steve McCurry (St. Paul's – Delano), Aaron Dreyling* (Shift UCC), and Kathleen Dennison* (St Peter's – Stillwater). Rev. Marc Blakesley (Robbinsdale UCC) served as the Open and Affirming consultant for the MN Conference and as an ex officio voting member of the team. Those people designated with a star only served a partial year.

The Team tried to meet 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:

- Three new churches adopted Open and Affirming statements since the last Annual Meeting; The Congregational Church UCC of Rochester, St. Paul's UCC in Delano, and Olivet Congregational UCC in St Paul. In addition, First Congregational Church of Minnesota, UCC in Minneapolis voted to extend their Open and Affirming statement to include transgender people.
- The team led participation in Twin Cities Pride and the Ashley Rukes Pride Parade in Minneapolis in June. In addition, Pride coordinator Aaron Dreyling sent out care packages to other UCC churches around the state to help them with local Pride participation and team members joined local churches at Duluth Pride and St Cloud Pride in September. After feedback from many people within the conference, participation at the 2016 Ashley Rukes Pride parade in Minneapolis will go back to our roots. We will be marching as a loose coalition of churches, carrying our banners and wearing congregation t-shirts.
- The 2016 Celebration Worship was held in April at Linden Hills UCC in Minneapolis. The sermon was delivered by Pastor Lawrence Tanner Richardson and special music was provided by the Mizpah UCC choir.
- This year, much of the discussion focused on how to make the team more streamlined and able to adjust to meet the changing needs of the churches in the conference.
- The Gathering before the Annual Meeting will be happening again this year after a two-year hiatus. It will start on Thursday night with social time. Attendees are also invited to attend the Open and Affirming Coalition of the UCC Banquet on Thursday night. Friday morning will feature a keynote by Andrew Lang, Executive Director of the Coalition, on the topic of Intersectionality of Justice work.

It has been our pleasure to serve on your behalf this year. Please let u 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.