

KUC is an affirming congregation.

But what does it mean when we say we are an Affirming congregation? Isn't every congregation? As it turns out, Kamloops United Church is one of only 15 Affirming congregations in BC, and one of 125 Affirming (out of over 2900) congregations across Canada.

Most congregations do their best to be welcoming, but being Affirming goes deeper and is public, intentional, and explicit, in the commitment to diversity and inclusion. Twenty years ago, on May 12, 1996, Kamloops United Church became one of the first United Churches in Canada to declare themselves as being an Affirming congregation. The journey to reach that decision in the spring of 1996 stretched over nearly two decades, and we give thanks to those who recognized the call, and who did not waver in nudging the congregation towards becoming truly Affirming.

In August, 1980 the United Church of Canada released a report, 'In God's Image', which included a recommendation for the admission of homosexuals into the ministry. In the early eighties, Rev. Don Robertson invited a gay man and a lesbian to share their stories with a gathering of the KUC congregation. Over the next several years, issues of sexuality, homosexuality and homophobia were explored and discussed in meetings of various KUC Council committees. Our call to be an inclusive people was integrated into worship and, under the leadership of Rev. Allan Richards and Rev. Don Waldon, there were two congregation gatherings around the issue of inclusion and welcoming of gays and lesbians. There was overwhelming support for a vote taken regarding "being an Inclusive Congregation".

In 1992, following a local UCC workshop on issues of human sexuality arising from the most recent General Council, a group formed, calling themselves "Friends of Affirm". A letter to the KUC Council, dated December 1992, and signed by Dency McCalla, asks that serious consideration be given to offering same gender covenanting services at KUC.

In early 1995 a Steering Committee was being formed, and in September the group was meeting frequently and had made the decision to join Affirm. That fall, a bulletin notice to the congregation stated, *"... At KUC we have a Mission Statement, part of which states 'to be among all people fostering loving relationships'. We need to address the reality of the situation and be more sharply aware that at every gathering homosexual people are present. They are unidentified and frightened to reveal their presence because of the hurt caused by the careless use of words and actions...Our hope is that KUC will indeed become a welcoming, affirming congregation for all people and thus help us to live out our Mission Statement, 'To be among all people fostering loving relationships with God, with Jesus Christ and with each other'. Signed, the Steering Committee: Dency McCalla, Martha Ashbaugh, Patricia McColl, Jenny Carter, Betty DeBeck, Betty Tennant, Paul Newman, Gale Glover, Cheryl Lyall, Liz Barlow, Bev Knowles"*. Between September of 1995 and March of 1996, the congregation had the opportunity to view several videos and participate in workshops and discussions. By March 4, the Steering Committee was ready to take a motion to the Spring Congregational meeting: to become an Affirming Congregation, and to change our Mission Statement.

On May 12, 1996 the Annual General Meeting of KUC voted in favour of adding the following to our Mission Statement. *'Kamloops United Church welcomes and embraces all persons who seek to live faithfully, regardless of sexual orientation, age, gender, racial or ethnic background, and affirm that all are welcome to become full participants in the life, membership and leadership of this church.'*