

RCMUC Affirm: Where We've Been and Where We'd Like to Go 😊

Since our Affirm committee was formed in March of 2017, we have engaged, informed and listened to our congregation and community in the following ways:

- Summer, 2017: Donna Scott assisted by others hosted an LGBTQ2+ youth group ages 13 – 19 in Gordon hall. We had movie nights, food theme nights, games nights, round table talks, guest speakers.
- July 2017: Participated in the Canada Day Banff Pride parade
- August 2017: RCMUC hosted the “The Coming Out Monologues” rehearsals
- September 2017: “The Coming Out Monologues-Bow Valley” was presented at Ralph Connor and then In Banff and Canmore theatre venues
- Under the heading of “Affirming Moments,” on 4 occasions, we arranged for various members of our congregation and invited community guests to speak in the Minute for Mission slot about their experiences with LGBTQ2 friends/family members.
- February 2018: Hosted a luncheon and workshop on the Affirming Ministry Program, with Rev. Shannon Mang in Gordon Hall.
- March 2018: began attending Affirm Calgary’s monthly meetings, to build connections with Affirming Congregations(UC and other) in Calgary and environs
- June 2018: We hosted Kelly Ernst at service who talked about the Centre for Newcomers and the Calgary Rainbow Railroad that helps LGBTQ2 refugees find safety in Canada
- July 2018: Participated in “Camp FyreFly” activities for LGBTQ2+ youth. Held at the YMCA Yamnuska Centre.
- July 2018: Participated in the Canada Day Banff Pride parade
- Summer 2018: Hosted six “Screenings with Meanings” – movie nights in the sanctuary focused on marginalization. Local LGBTQ2 activist Aurora Borin, spoke one evening.
- October 2018: Hosted “Top 40 Under 40” LGBTQ2 activist Pam Rocker to preach at a Sunday service, with a Q/A time afterward.
- December 2018: Hosted Bryon Delarue visit to Canmore to meet with our Affirm Committee and learn from Bryon’s Affirm expertise
- March 2019: Hosted our first PIE Day event – a luncheon that enabled members of our community to speak of their experiences with all things LGBTQ2+.
- February to April, 2019: Sabbatical Supply Minister Bill Millar hosted a series of post-service seminars focused on marginalization. He raised the question: Just how diverse and welcoming are we?
- RCMUC has been conducting same-sex marriages since 2016, and had been open to do so for many years prior to that. To ensure that our policy matched our practice, in June 2019, the following motion was passed at RCMUC Council:
 - *“That RCMUC formally adopt an inclusive marriage policy, celebrating God's gift of the human diversity of sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions, and welcoming all couples equally who come to us seeking marriage.”*

This policy is articulated to the public as follows on the RCMUC website {ralphconnor.ca}

- *“At Ralph Connor Memorial United Church, we celebrate God’s gift of the human diversity of sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions. We welcome all couples equally who come to us seeking to be married.”*
- June 2019: This was “Pride Month at RCMUC.” Each Sunday, the sermons and discussions after the service engaged us in seeing, understanding and thinking through inclusion, marginalization and our capacity as a congregation to be truly and deeply welcoming.
- We have also published various “Affirm” links in our weekly newsletter and updated our RCUMC diversity marriage policy on our web site. (RCMUC has been conducting same-sex marriages since January, 2016.)
- Since our inception, Donna has managed the “Bow Valley Pride” Facebook and Twitter feeds.

Where would we like to go from here?

IDEAS FOR OUR CONTINUING PLANS OF ACTION:

(note: many of these ideas are included or reflected in the formal AFFIRMING PLAN)

Please note: we recognize that many aspects of RCMUC’s program already reach out into the community and/or deal with marginalized populations. We encourage and celebrate these! The following suggestions are in addition to, rather than in place of, any of these ongoing ministries.

- Put up Affirm signage in and around our church (in addition to the current rainbow flags)
- Make PIE Day an annual event, a time for learning, support & encouragement re LGBTQ2+ persons/issues.
- “Stir the pot” in Canmore by engaging with other organizations to get a better sense of how marginalized peoples are managed/treated/supported – become a “hub” in our community for engagement. Reach out to other community active orgs like Food and Friends, Climate groups etc.
- Work with the town on things like the rainbow crosswalk. Maybe a rainbow sidewalk in front of the church?
- Host “Screenings with Meanings” again next summer
- Continue to have exposure to/learn from marginalized people who can help educate us through speakers, weekend workshops, Affirming Moments, worship leaders.
- Engage LGBTQ2+ youth. Might they organize a Sunday service in a way that suits them?
- Invite our colleagues at Morley to design occasional services at RCUMC, or other sites where we would come together to worship
- Invite the Filipino community to leverage our church for their services.
- Work closer with first nations 2 spirit community, living into right relations group etc.
- Work closer with GSA’s at the schools and bring them together.
- Throw an Affirm celebration party after our vote (if successful ☺) and mark this with an annual Affirming Anniversary celebration.
- Encourage the formation of a local PFLAG chapter. (Previously: Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays).
- Participation in pride parades.

- Continue to participate in the Affirm Calgary group. Canmore is a great place to visit, if the group ever wants to have a field trip/special event/mountain retreat
- Communicate with Rundle Memorial United Church, Banff, as they consider the Affirming process
- Explore the appetite in communities of faith in Chinook Winds Region for a Social Justice network that would include a commitment to justice for LGBTQ2+ persons and communities, among others. Work with others who are willing to nurture such a network into an relevant and effective body
- Remain open to new ideas, and be ready to respond to local needs
- Request that the RCMUC Council make the following structural changes:
 - Disband the present *Affirming Ministry Working Group*, which had the task of guiding the initial period of study leading to the congregational vote, and establish a new *Affirming Ministry Committee* tasked with guiding and enabling our continuing journey as an Affirming Congregation; and
 - Establish a “*Community Enrichment and Inclusion*” working group (with annual budget of \$1,000 starting in 2020) to nurture RCMUC’s capacity to reach beyond our own boundaries in ways that are in keeping with our Mission Statement and Affirming Vision Statement.
- Other?

Thank you,
 >Your RCUMC Affirm Committee

Donna Scott (co-chair), Margaret Claveau (co-chair), Ruben Nelson, Paul Elfner, Faye Forbes-Anderson, Greg Wooley, Shannon Mang. We also thank Eric McAvity and Micheal McEachen for their participation in the group.