



## **Celebration Minutes – June 2, 2019**

Bruce Hutchinson

As Marylil Megginson indicated in her Affirming Celebration Minute of April 28, Sydenham Street is celebrating our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of being an Affirming Ministry and we are inviting everyone to the party.

This second celebration minute will complete the story about how Sydenham Street became Affirming. Marylil's minute ended with one of the two moms asking us if we had considered becoming Affirming after their daughter was baptized at Sydenham Street.

The initial work on response to this baptism request was done in the worship committee. After a time of study the Committee brought a recommendation to enter the Affirming process to the Executive Committee in December 1997 and subsequently to a congregational meeting where it was approved. The congregational meeting established the Affirming Congregation Study Group which was accountable directly to the Executive Committee. The Study Group reported to the Executive Committee monthly for exchange of information and for guidance.

Notes taken at the time, indicate that at the initial Study Group meeting, the intention of keeping the congregation fully informed was foremost in all minds, a concern that remained throughout the process. Congregants were encouraged to join the Study Group and to express their opinions and feelings.

I was chair of the congregation at that time and did not know much about Affirm United or about the Affirming Ministry Program. Fortunately, the national conference of Affirm United/S'Affirmer Ensemble was being held in Peterborough that summer and Linda and I attended it. We learned that it is important to "live" the model – words alone are not enough; that the process is really important - take time and hear all voices.

Over the next church year:

- In October 1998, in a worship service, individuals and parents in our congregation told their own personal stories.
- In November, the Study Group invited written and face to face input.

- In December, a second lesbian couple's child was baptized on Christmas Eve.
- In February 1999
  - A new mission statement was adopted by the congregation
  - Rev. Dr. Robert Bater, Minister Emeritus, spoke on biblical passages, the historical perspective of the United Church and its stance on gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons.
- In March, we hosted guest preacher Rev. Warren MacDougall, an openly gay minister from Bloor Street United Church in Toronto, an Affirming Ministry
- In April, Keith Norton, Chair of the Ontario Human Rights Commission was our anniversary speaker.

In addition to these events, as chair of the congregation, I took some time in regular worship services to keep the congregation informed on the progress of the Study Group.

By May 1999, it was felt that the congregation was ready to take a vote. Letters were sent to members and adherents describing our journey and what being an Affirming Ministry meant. All, including children and youth were allowed to vote.

The vote was held on May 23, 1999 with 79% voting yes. Although there was rejoicing, some had difficulty adjusting to the new direction taken by the congregation. Attempts were made to reach out to them pastorally.

The work of shaping an inclusive and safe environment continues to this day..... use of the Affirm logo on our web site and on our outside sign, a rainbow on The Spire sign, flags both inside and outside the building, an inclusive marriage policy, and a continuing commitment to a culture of celebrating diversity.

Sydenham Street was the only Affirming Congregation in the former Bay of Quinte Conference for 13 years. When the Conference ceased to exist in December 2018, there were 30 Affirming Ministries and ten in the Affirming process for a total of 40 engaged ministries.

Hallelujah!!!