



## Affirming Celebration Minute Linda Hutchinson

This is the 5<sup>th</sup> in a monthly series of minutes reflecting on the celebration of Sydenham Street United's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of being an Affirming congregation.

Today we will hear some stories about "what it has been like TO BE AFFIRMING!" . . . but how does one tell 20 years worth of stories in 5 minutes? All of us at SSUC have stories to tell . . . I will focus on two . . . after I update you to say . . .

As a result of our rainbow flag outside and information about being an Affirming congregation on our website, we have had 2 gay men from New York State, parents of a gender diverse child and two Mexican students worship with us in the past 3 months and we have welcomed two people from Calgary to join us in the Pride Parade. Being an Affirming congregation and being public, intentional and explicit about who we are – is really important.

A rainbow logo is a symbol of radical hospitality and celebration of all God's people.

Being Affirming intentionally stretches beyond the LGBTQ Two Spirit communities to being a supportive, safe space for all marginalized people. My stories this morning go beyond the LGBTQ Two Spirit community to others who were shut out by people and circumstances but Affirmed and celebrated at SSUC.

Some years ago, a young heterosexual couple started attending SSUC regularly. When asked what brought them to SSUC, we were surprised to learn that it was the rainbow on our outside sign. Jennifer's story revealed that she had chosen to leave an abusive marriage. Her very conservative Christian church was requiring her to do one of three things

- return to the abusive relationship to make it work
- or to be publicly shamed in worship . . . .
- or to leave. She left in despair.

One day, walking by SSUC, desperately longing for a safe place to belong, she spied the rainbow on our sign . . . and came in . . . . grateful to find a spiritual home which would Affirm and celebrate her and her new husband.

. . . . another story . . . .

One of our most touching experiences of awareness and sensitivity to marginalized people happened in May a few years ago. A beloved member of our community was no longer able to swallow due to a neurological disorder. The Worship Committee raised the concern that this person was being "shut out" at our communion services . . . so a unique and creative communion was offered. On our arrival at worship that day, we each received two seeds, taped to our worship bulletin. These seeds represented the "bread of new life". As we came forward, the seeds were placed in a basket to be planted in our Community Garden on our front lawn. The "cup of new life" – the grape juice, was served in tiny communion cups, each with a sponge lollipop, the type used to moisten the mouths of people who are unable to swallow. As we savoured the "cup of new life" from our sponge lollipops, the sparkle and zest of that tiny bit of juice tasted more amazing than ever before. It was a moment of solidarity that touched all our hearts. The person shut out by a physical disability was celebrated as a part of the whole Body of Christ.

As I have said, those of you who have been part of this ongoing journey of "BEING an Affirming congregation" at SSUC will have other stories to tell as well.

However, as we celebrate all that has been accomplished in these twenty years, we are also very aware of the many ways in which we need to move forward and OUTWARD . . . building reconciling relationships with - Indigenous peoples, racialized communities, an aging LGBTQ population . . . and . . . and . . . and.

The work is never done . . . may we be blessed with the sensitivity, energy and commitment to continue to publicly, intentionally and explicitly Affirm and celebrate all God's people.



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