



OUR AFFIRMING JOURNEY AT SYDENHAM STREET UNITED CHURCH

1997 to November 2019

Rooted in a strong culture of social justice and caring for people on the margins, over the years, SSUC has been home to several AA/support Groups, Metropolitan Community Church (LGBTQ specific denomination), Helen Tufts Child Outreach Program (friendship and support from Queen's students for children living with limited resources) and other outreach programs as well as an inclusive worshipping Christian community.

In 1996, the request by a lesbian couple to have their child baptized, having been turned down by another church, was welcomed . . . and the suggestion that SSUC become an Affirming Congregation fell on **fertile ground**. But what is an Affirming Congregation?

An Affirming Ministry is one which publicly, intentionally and explicitly celebrates and Affirms diversity, welcoming people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, as well as other marginalized people, into full participation in all aspects of the life and work of that ministry.

Over a period of about two years, SSUC **cultivated** the growth of understanding what it would mean to be Affirming with special worship services, education and conversation. Personal stories of marginalization were heard, theology of radical hospitality was explored, justice for all people in a church setting— especially people who had been and often still are excluded - was discussed, and information about what it was like to be Affirming was heard from a Toronto Affirming congregation.

In November 1999, SSUC was declared an Affirming Congregation by Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble, adopting a new Vision and Mission Statement (revised in October 2014) which in part says,

"As an Affirming congregation

We are committed to following Jesus' example as we embrace people of all ages, racialized groups, genders, sexual orientations, gender identities, ethnic origins, political beliefs, economic circumstances and differing abilities and challenges in the ministry and life of Sydenham Street United Church."

SSUC Vision/Mission

Statement Oct. 26, 2014

In the 20 years since that defining moment of becoming Affirming, our SSUC building, now known as The Spire, has continued to be home for individuals and groups who exemplify our vision of a world that Affirms and celebrates all people . . . including the SSUC congregation.

Some of the impacts over the years have included:

- Flying rainbow flags, symbols of inclusivity, both outside & in the sanctuary
- Rainbow/Affirm United symbols on outside signs of SSUC and The Spire
- LGBTQ people involved in congregational leadership
- Marriages of couples of all gender combinations
- Participation in Kingston PRIDE events and parades
- Inclusive language/themes in worship services
- Calling an out lesbian minister
- Accessibility up-grades: elevator, washrooms, ramped entrance, hearing assists, large print bulletins
- Inclusive communion
- Participation in Queen's Annual Sidewalk Sale
- Continuation of weekly food voucher program for people on limited incomes
- Hosting Rainbow Sabbath – a monthly sharing of food & worship for LGBTQ and allies
- Leadership in LGBTQ advocacy in the wider United Church

Strong roots, fertile ground, constant cultivating and nurturing have resulted in a committed Affirming Congregation ready to continue to grow into what God is calling us to be!!!!