

June 2024 Open and Affirming Task Force Article in "The Caller"

GROWTH – COLLECTIVE AND PERSONAL

As we continue to discuss an Open and Affirming Covenant, it is important to remember that a covenant is not a destination – it is a step on a journey. We will continue to learn more about the people for whom our covenant will be a welcome. We will be tested as we address what it means to be Open and Affirming. People who choose to accept our pledge of welcome and affirmation may dress a little differently, or may be comfortable with displaying affection for one another that catches us by surprise. Some will not be in any way outwardly different from most of the rest of us. Some may have health or medical issues that make their presence in worship unsettling.

How we choose to live into our commitment will evolve. Once we have registered with the Open and Affirming Coalition, that information will be on the web, where those seeking an Open and Affirming UCC congregation can readily find it. How we communicate that commitment to the wider population that might also be seeking a safe worshiping community will take some thought, and some adjustment. There are a number of possibilities – from our website, with information on our sign, with words, with a small bar of rainbow colors, with a banner...

We should be honest with each other and open about the fact that there will be changes. Some of that change will be internal. Every time we welcome a new member, we become a new church. Their views, their talents, their concerns, their sense of servanthood, will make a difference in our collective sense of who we are. Some changes will be external. The perception of who and what First Congregational Church UCC is in the broader community of Meredith may well change. There may be those in the community who hold different views with respect to people who identify as LGBTQ+, and who may choose to express those views in unpleasant terms – both privately, and some few, publicly. Some of this may take the form of physical acts. This is a challenge we should not shrink from, but one we do need to acknowledge.

There is a third element of change that also needs to be acknowledged. More members (we hope), some of whom will eventually want to be involved in the work of the church. As with all groups, there are traditional roles, some official, some almost invisible, that members fill. New people, especially people whose life experiences are different from our own, will inevitably alter the social fabric of the church – and if they don't, it will be because we only welcomed them onto the porch, not into the front room.

For continued reflection and thought, from your Open and Affirming Task Force.