

Media Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Local church votes to welcome gays, lesbians, others

(Durham, NH) – Congregants at the Durham Community Church voted on November 20 to accept a statement declaring the church “Open and Affirming.” This designation specifically welcomes gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender people into the church.

The congregation voted on a specific statement, crafted over the course of over two years of discussion and study. By a ballot vote, 94% of those attending an open meeting of the membership voted to adopt the Open and Affirming statement which states that “persons of every race, ethnicity, social and economic status, age, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation” will be welcomed to all sacraments, rites, and responsibilities of church membership.

According to Judy Brandon, the chair of the committee that led the church’s discussion of the statement, this is “an exciting and historic moment in the life of our church.”

“Some in our congregation questioned the necessity for such a statement, as we already consider ourselves accepting of people from a range of backgrounds,” said long-time church member Bob Houston. “However, over the last two years, we have learned a great deal about why some groups feel excluded from Christian fellowship and what we need to do to make people in those groups feel welcome.”

“Our denomination has established a process by which each individual congregation enters into a period of dialogue and study before declaring itself Open and Affirming,” said Pastor Mary Westfall. “This helps to ensure that we are true to our tradition of congregational leadership and helps educate those who might say this is wrong or unnecessary.”

According to Brandon, members of the church intend to continue to educate themselves and think about ways to more fully include all groups of people in the work of the church.

“By this action the members of this congregation have affirmed that all people are loved by God and that all are welcomed into the work and fellowship of our church family and our witness to the world,” stated Brandon. “The Open and Affirming vote states our aspiration to live into Jesus Christ’s mission of ministering to everyone.”

The Durham church is a member of the United Church of Christ (UCC). In New Hampshire, over a dozen UCC churches have chosen to designate their congregations Open and Affirming.

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