



## David's Dialogue

Dear members and friends of St. Matthew's,

**<sup>15</sup> If your sister or brother should commit some wrong against you, go and point out the error, but keep it between the two of you. If she or he listens to you, you have won a loved one back.**  
*Matthew 18:15-20*

Conflict with others is a cross we bear in life. Disagreements can be painful. Sometimes something will be said that precipitates intense feelings of pain, anger, and shame. When I have been hurt by the words of others I can sometimes stew about it for weeks, not knowing how to move through those feelings to a better place. Sometimes I find out that where I perceived an intended slight, no wrong was meant and in fact the other person seems not to be aware of my feelings at all. Maybe it is just me being too sensitive. Or maybe it is something the other person needs to be sensitised to. One way or another Jesus has advice for us when there are hurt feelings in a relationship.

If I feel wronged, what should I do? Jesus says, I should go and talk to the person and tell them that I feel wronged and why. This is such simple advice, isn't it? But how difficult it is to practice! And yet Jesus points to the possibility of great benefit from doing so. If I can frankly and humbly share the fact that I am hurt and why, it could be that the person I feel has caused the hurt will see what they have done and understand how it has affected me. They might respond with remorse and empathy. They might even open up about how the exchange made them feel. Through such a heart-to-heart conversation, Jesus says, I will have won a loved one back. In fact, my relationship may end up being even deeper and stronger than it was before. People who have worked through difficult problems together gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for one another; they can tighten their bonds with strong cords of understanding. It is sometimes helpful to simply consider this possibility and to work on our faith in God that even the most bitter experiences can be turned to great benefit.

This brings me to an important question: Why do we hear so few stories about people who have found ways to heal from conflict? There are conflicts that occur between people that we have never met that nonetheless affect each of us deeply. Geopolitical conflicts, legal conflicts, violent conflicts, personal conflicts are part of the world we live in. Of course, it is natural to focus on the suffering and the drama. But do we spend enough time seeking out paths to reconciliation and celebrating when healing is achieved?

These are sobering thoughts. But they are appropriate in the season of Lent. Lent is a time when we accept the burdens placed upon us by our faith, the duties, the responsibilities of following Jesus. Lent is a time to take up the cross, to feel its weight, to

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# BECAUSE IT MATTERS

## St. Matthew's as An Affirming Church

What follows is a summary of recent activity that has occurred on the topic of Affirming Ministry.

- ◆ **The Bulletin board** to the right on the short hallway to the hall was put together for you on Feb. 14th . The Committee members each had a task to do and came together with what is a very wonderful display that helps explain a little about the what and why of being an Affirming Church.
- ◆ **Jan. 15. A sermon** relating to being affirming that also included having the committee announced and come to the front of the church.
- ◆ **Jan 15th Affirming Minute as presented by RJ Romer**

In late September and throughout October, a survey was distributed amongst the congregation. The survey was aimed to evaluate our congregation's openness to the ongoing work of being intentional and how to include others within the life of our ministry. Thus, an Affirming Committee was formed of interested members of the Congregation.

Guided by a task group, the Affirming Committee will discern how our new structure can live into the spirit and practice of becoming an Affirming Ministry in order to make the church congregation a more welcoming, inclusive, and safer space for members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

As such, we are thrilled to announce the following Affirming Committee members: If I may ask the members to come up to the front: David, Noah, and Hannah Kim-Cragg, Naomi Knight, Doreen Coyne, Bertha Hurdman, Linda Alldred-Johnson (via zoom), AJ Francisco, Monique Romero, & myself (RJ Romero)

Our committee plans to meet and communicate regularly. We seek to support and enhance the positive voices of people of faith, ministries, and organizations who work to eliminate religious discrimination and to provide safe space for people to explore their spirituality, without any fear of exclusion.

Some things to look forward to and keep an eye out for: a) Following this service, on your way in to grab some coffee - you will notice that we have now put up an Affirming Ministry bulletin board that we will continue to update over the coming months. We are also planning to set up an information table, as well as invite guest speakers into our space as early as next month. b) If you have any questions, any member of the Affirming Ministry would be more than happy to discuss and find the answers for you.

- ◆ **Jan 19th Affirming Minute as presented by Monique Romero**

The Affirming Ministry committee at St. Matthew's United Church is currently working towards completing the steps of becoming recognized as an Affirming church and exploring what it means to become a safer space that is fully inclusive of people of all sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions. Part of the affirming process, is engaging – Educating. Story telling. Praying. Hearing fears and hopes. And working with all in the ministry and wider community to discern what being Affirming could look like for our ministry.

In my own personal life, and within my professional career, I have had multiple friends and clients who are practicing Christians, confide in me their innermost struggles and fears around coming out as Gay or Bisexual and being rejected, turned away or shunned by their family and church congregation. Through these conversations, a recurring theme which seemed to be at the very root and source that drove their fears of rejection, was the harmful messages in the bible that may be interpreted as transphobic or homophobic which contributed to them

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feeling like sinners, hypocrites, and outcasts. To this, I would always challenge them as to why they may hold certain bible passages at a higher regard and of greater importance and greater value, than others. I would challenge their beliefs with affirming bible passages, some of which are posted on the bulletin board near the hall. Romans Chapter 8, Verse 39. For nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God. Psalm 139, which many of us read last week during the workshop with Jeffrey Dale. For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Genesis Chapter 1, Verse 27. So God created humankind in his image. Affirm United believes that all gender identities and sexualities are a gift from God.

Part of educating ourselves and growing is partaking in these difficult conversations and challenging our own personal beliefs. In our Affirming Committee meetings, we have also discussed and addressed some of these contradictions. Taken from the Affirm United website: An Affirming Ministry is deliberate in their process of study, education and dialogue with members of their faith community (both during the Affirming process and as a piece of their ongoing work), to ensure that the history of oppression and discrimination by the Church is both understood and acknowledged, and that continued growth, education, and celebration are part of its ministry.

Most congregations do their best to be welcoming, but being affirming goes deeper and is public, intentional, and explicit, in their commitment to diversity and inclusion. Please join me in being intentional in our learning, and intentional in our conversations, to continue to debunk negative stereotypes and challenge the stigma around the LGBTQ community.

## ♦ Jan 29th Affirming Minute as presented by Naomi Knight

As you may recall, last Fall the Affirming Committee distributed a questionnaire to the congregation to open discussion and inquiry about the becoming an Affirming church. One comment several committee members have heard since embarking on this journey is "I thought we had already voted to become Affirming", "I thought we already did this". I am here to tell you that you are not entirely wrong. Several years ago, the subject was mentioned and in general the Board and the congregation gave the approval to proceed. The process, however, stalled when a committee was never formed to take us through the discernment process towards a vote. We now have an Affirming Committee.

The Affirming Committee now has the task of taking all of us through an educational, discernment and decision process to decide whether we will officially declare ourselves Affirming. Our hope is that we at St. Matthew's will say "Yes" and become Public, Intentional and Explicit in our support and actions to break down barriers in our ministry and community – barriers of age, gender, race, ability, class, economic status and, in particular, gender identity and sexual orientation.

When I joined this committee, one question I had, and it seems others have too is: "we're already welcoming, so why become affirming?" I've realized there is an important distinction to be made between "welcoming" and "affirming" and the United Church of Canada offers this useful explanation. "Being an Affirming Ministry is not merely about welcoming people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Words like *welcoming* or *inclusion* suggest those on the inside have the power to choose to accept those on the *outside*. This makes it sound like an act of charity to welcome those who are different or marginalized. However, it is not *our* place to welcome anyone because church is not a private club and we are not the gatekeepers. As soon as one new person comes through the doors, the community becomes a new community."

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Jesus' parable of the great dinner (Matthew 22:1–14) reminds us that the true host of our faith community is the Risen Christ. In Jesus' parable, the guests who have been invited fail to show up, so the host goes to the streets and back alleys of town to fill the banquet hall. In the church, by God's grace, everyone is already included in the celebration. When we participate in Christ's church, we accept an invitation to which others, including gender and sexual minorities, have *already been welcomed*. By showing up, we agree to sit at table together. By accepting the welcome offered to each one of us as individuals, we encounter God's radical love for humankind in all its wonderful diversity.

Affirming Ministries acknowledge that God's love is wider and more encompassing than they can imagine, let alone live out, and they commit themselves to sharing that news with others who may have heard a quite different message about what it means to be church. Because voices of condemnation, exclusion, and hatred are loud and persistent within the church and in society, Affirming Ministries make a public statement about who they are and what they believe. They understand that while it may be risky and challenging to come out as an Affirming Ministry, it is often far less dangerous than it is for 2SLGBTQIA+ people themselves. Affirming Ministries believe it is important to be a public witness and to be a role model for other ministries.<sup>1</sup>

Thank you for joining the Affirming Committee on this path of discernment. I hope this process will help us all grow and change as we seek to live more fully in God's way of welcome, love and justice for all creation.

Reference: <sup>1</sup>Huntly, Alyson C. "Open Hearts - Resources for Affirming Ministries in the United Church of Canada." Affirm United, 2020.

◆ **Feb.9: Take time to read David's Dialogue in the January issue of St. Matthew's Matters**

◆ **Feb. 12: Sermon and Workshop by Jeffrey Dale**

Jeffrey spoke about his growth and life as a gay person with a desire to be working in the church environment. He talked about non-acceptance and stated why he continued at all ages to keep discussing these topics. Why? Because it Matters. To him, to others like him, to everyone else so they understand and accept without prejudice. *Editorial Note:* Who will forget the passage Jeffrey had us read with a few verses done by someone at each table. This excerpt remains in my heart and mind: "Psalm 139: 13-14 You are the one who put me together inside my mother's body, and I praise you because of the wonderful way you created me. Everything you do is marvelous! Of this I have no doubt."

◆ **Mar. 26: Why we should Be an Affirming Ministry.**

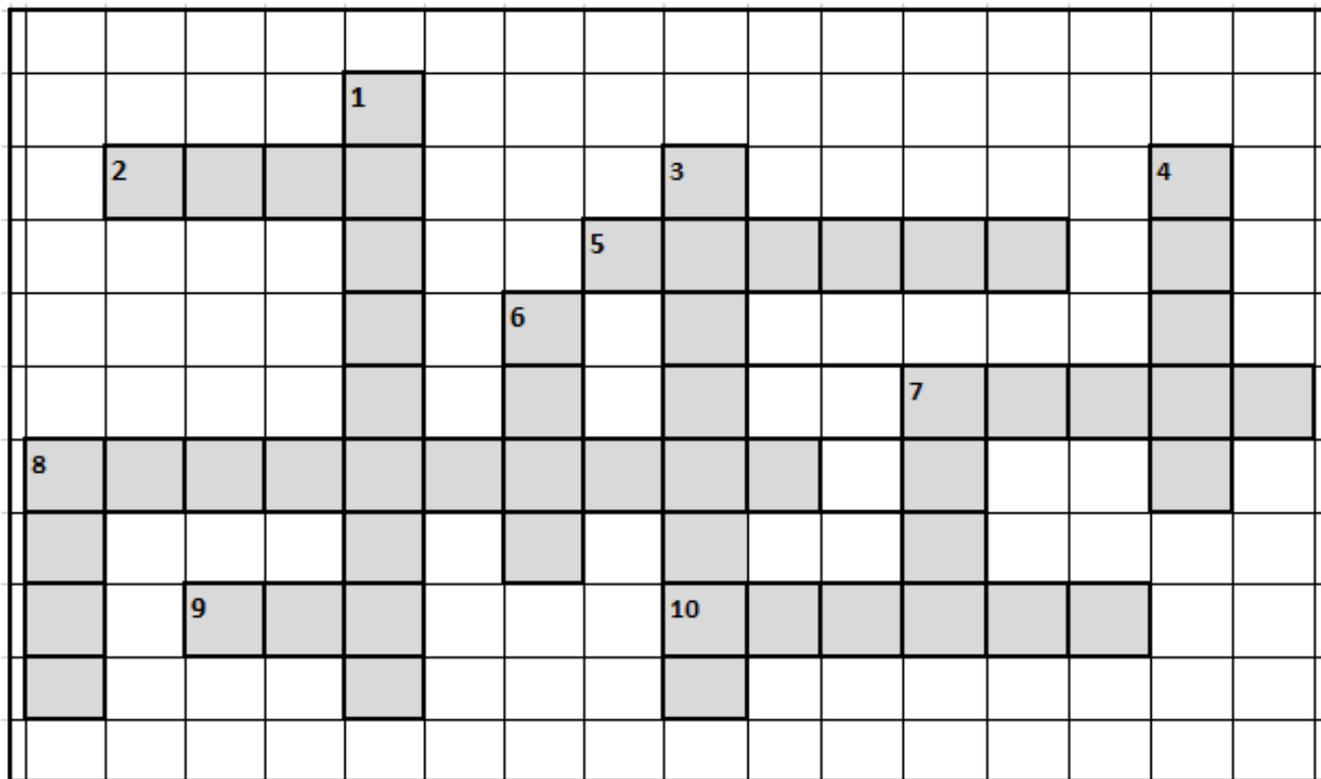
We are planning another interesting service on Affirming Ministry with the goal to weave in many reasons why it is a good idea to be an Affirming Ministry. This will be followed by table discussions and a potluck luncheon.

We all know that there are several initiatives in place now due to non-acceptance of those not quite like others. And being an Affirming Ministry is similar but specifically addresses prejudice due to gender identity and sexual orientation.

- **Our goal as a church** should be — Acceptance and equal treatment to all people without concern of age, gender, race, ability, economic status, colour, creed, religion, gender identity or sexual orientation. Will you vote "YES" to stand up for others and equality in this new affirming way— Public, Intentional and Explicit in our support and actions to break down barriers in our ministry and community?

# A CROSSWORD PUZZLE FOR LENT

*Developed by Doreen Coyne*



## Puzzle Clues

### Down:

1. When Jesus was glorified.
3. We eat these to celebrate the beginning of Lent.
4. Length of this season.
6. Allowed drink for the season.
7. Some people do this during Lent.
8. Most do this during Lent.

### Across:

2. The kids look forward to finding these after Lent.
5. What is the original name of Easter in Latin and Greek?

7. "Easter time" spans this number of days.
8. Jesus rode the donkey that day.
9. What we should lay aside when we "Carry the Cross".
10. What Christian holiday's name was derived from the goddess of spring and fertility.

