

The Harcourt Herald June 2021

The Life and Work of Harcourt United Church



Published on our Website

The United Church affirms that gender and sexuality are gifts of God. This June, we invite all people of faith to celebrate the lives and ministry of LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit people across the church and beyond. Pride Month, which is marked in June in many communities across Canada, is a time to publicly celebrate the rainbow people of God, intentionally affirm people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, and make explicit our acceptance and kindness for all.

June 8, 2020



Harcourt Memorial United Church

An Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Canada

We are a people of God called together and sent forth by Christ to... **Seek. Connect. Act.**

Our Mission: Inspired by the Spirit, we participate in Christian practices that strengthen us in the building of just, compassionate and non-violent relationships.

Our Vision Statement: To be an authentic community of spiritual growth and service.

Our Core Values: Risk... Respect... Responsibility... Vulnerability... Trust

Our Purpose: To welcome and strengthen in community all who wish to serve God and follow the way of Jesus

Church Administrator:
Wendy Guilmette

Worship, Communication
and Technical Support:
Casey Connor

Custodian: David Kucherepa

The Ministers: The People
with
Reverend Miriam Flynn,
part-time pastoral care
minister Rev. Marcie
Gibson, Pamela Girardi
Manna lead coordinator,
Director of Music Ministry:
Alison MacNeill

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The Harcourt
Herald is
published 10
times per year
(in paper and
digital formats).

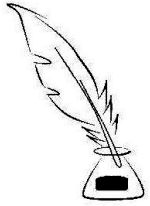
Submission
Deadline: 20th
of each month.
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A Minister's Quill: Signs of Pride

Rev. Marcie Gibson

In 2005 our son Eli was born in Québec. His birth certificate was one of the first issued in that province to read “Mother – Mother” with both of our names listed and no distinction of who gave birth. This was a tangible sign, a legal sign, of recognition. Recognition not only of us as his legal and equal parents, but also of the decades of organizing that had led to the change in Québec laws that year. For us, it meant being able to more easily cross the border with our son; it meant we didn’t need to go through a costly second parent adoption; it meant we could both access his medical and educational needs. I’d say “no questions asked,” but of course there are always questions.



In 2005, some 600 km away, Harcourt Memorial United Church was also going through a process of recognition, as an Affirming Ministry: a community of faith which **Publicly, Intentionally, and Explicitly**¹ declares its affirmation and celebration of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. This was a tangible sign, a public sign, recognizing the dedicated journey that brought you to that decision, your commitment to being an inclusive community and your commitment to furthering justice. Displaying a rainbow flag, incorporating the Affirm United logo on all things Harcourt meant that you were known in Guelph as a safe space to meet, as “thaaat church,” as a place to celebrate same-sex weddings when most others wouldn’t. I’d say, “no questions asked,” but of course there are always questions.

And here we are in 2021, with more questions and more opportunities to live out our Affirming commitment and identity. Our signs are changing. Even the rainbow flag (begun in 1978 as a “new” symbol in addition to older signs such as pink and black triangles) has been transformed and diversified in the last few years as we recognize and understand more about the diversity of human experience and struggles for human rights. Our bathroom signs are changing. Our government ID, use of language and pronouns are changing, signs that we affirm more expansive understandings of gender.

With more churches (and other organizations) becoming Affirming, our designation is no less significant. It’s important that we not become complacent or seek only to normalize queer experience, but keep walking in justice, inclusion, questions and love. Sometimes that means listening to voices in the rainbow that we haven’t really heard before. Sometimes that means learning new signs or expressions. Sometimes that means we’re not going to get it right the first time. Let’s keep trying to be public, intentional, explicit and, of course, Affirming!

Blessings,

¹ Public Intentional Explicit spells PIE, which is an approach of Affirm United to promote Affirming actions.

Council News

Lorraine Holding, Council Chair

Spring season has shifted to the feel of summer. With it, we yearn for a shift from stay at home orders to more freedom.

I write just after Ontario's announcement of a three-step approach to reopening the province. Our re-entry planning group will continue to monitor all public health regulations and adjust our protocols as appropriate. Watch for updates about when our building will re-open for small gatherings.

During May, our Harcourt Conversations – Round 2 involved approximately 60 people in eight Zoom sessions as well as a survey and Zoom for Manna participants. Key to this success has been leadership by theme leaders, facilitators and scribes in guiding the process. Thank you to all who took part. At our May 19 meeting, council reflected on the participation level and overview of the discussions. The high level of engagement, preparation and commitment of participants was very evident in each of the theme sessions. Early gleanings from the many pages of notes indicate some areas of priority and some areas that require more exploration, creative thinking and experimentation. Generally, there is acceptance that changes are necessary, although there are diverse opinions about specifics. The Transition Steering Team will work with the theme leaders to summarize the input into an overview and practical next steps for each theme.

Council also reflected on Rev. Paul Miller's recommendations to Guelph United Ministries (GUM). Which ones will

affect/inspire/shape Harcourt's discernment decisions? While there is a sprinkling of connection with all nine, these recommendations particularly tie into our internal work: strengthen relationships; diversify worship; share staff; and plant new seeds. Collaboration and discussion with our GUM partners will continue over the coming months.

So, what's next? All of this work flows into the next steps in our discernment process. Council and the Transition Steering Team will meet in early June with Rev. John Neff, minister for congregational support and mission (Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council) to discuss preparation of our community of faith profile. That step will lead us to recommendations on a staffing structure to support Harcourt's planning for the future. While our goal has been to complete that process and present for congregational approval by July, we realize that there is much work still to do. A more realistic goal is probably September. Continue to watch for e-weekly updates through the summer.

We look forward to a summer that provides some opportunities to share our reflections and learnings in a safe and healthy way. We look forward to having some fun with family and friends. We look forward to connecting online and in person. May we continue to listen for the Spirit in all that we do.

With faith and hope.

Lorraine

From the editor's desk

Marion Auger

Here we are. It is June again and summer has started. Thanks to a cooler May, we had an exceptionally long blooming season this spring, and now the outdoors invites us out again. Great time – except for Covid 19, of course.

Traditionally the *Herald* takes the summer off and we will follow this pattern as well. We will not publish in July and August, but will start again in September 2021.

This will mark almost a year with a new editor-team, a good occasion to thank my team for all their involvement. Julie Henshaw has done several interviews with Harcourt folk and has kept us informed, especially about Manna activities. Ann Middleton is really our co-editor, the one who searches out articles and authors and tries to prevent typos. It is wonderful to work with Ann and Julie.

Many heartfelt thanks!

You will see that we also help celebrate National Pride Month in this issue with articles pertaining to thoughts and experiences relating to the very challenging topic of gender diversity. Enjoy.

We wish you a very good summer. Come back refreshed and energetic in September and help us maintain the togetherness of our Harcourt community.



A Guide to the Liturgical Year –Year B The Season of Pentecost

Andre Auger

In this last issue of the *Herald* for this season, we look at the remaining Sundays in the Season of Pentecost, often called Ordinary Time. Last issue, we talked about the thread that runs through these Sundays. Jesus has come and gone and his life has been celebrated in the various seasons of the liturgical year. The question is: Now what? In each of the three years, each in its own way, this season tells us: **we have all we need to carry on Jesus' vision of an alternative community called the Kingdom of God.**



Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 6:1-13

We too are being sent out

So being a church community is a co-op program, like in college: you've watched me; you know how I do it; go out and do the same. This sending out is radically different from the way we typically plan our outreach: we are to go out with nothing – no due diligence, no back-up plan, no market study. We go out and be the presence of God where it is most needed. That's it. How ready are we to be sent out like that? What is holding us back?

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 6:14-29

The way the dominant culture works

This is a story of lust, power and revenge. It's a story that repeats itself over and over throughout history. For this is the way the dominant culture works. People with wealth, status and power do not want to be challenged and will go to any lengths to silence opposition. How ready are we to bring our message where it is needed against pressure from the establishment not to?

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost and healing

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56 The kingdom is about feeding

Once again our gospel reading drills down on the heart of Jesus' project: heal the sick, eat with them, and tell them that this is the way the kingdom works. The next six Sundays offer multiple opportunities to reflect on what it means to be the bread of life. How do our hearts break open? Are we willing to let those in pain and misery touch the fringe of our cloaks to participate in some way in our well-being?

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

John 6:1-21 The kingdom is about feeding and healing

Another feeding story: do we get the message yet? Being a Christian is about feeding and healing. The boat story appended to this gospel reading reminds us that when Jesus is in the boat with us, things go well; when we forget about Jesus, we panic. How do we remind

ourselves – and our children – that so long as we stick close to Jesus and his project, we experience abundance rather than scarcity? How can we go about bringing that sense of abundance to those who see the world only through the eyes of scarcity?

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost John 6:24-35 Living like Jesus yields the bread of life

Whether Jesus actually said these words is irrelevant: the author of the Gospel of John wanted us to understand that “I am the way, the truth and the life” means just that: live as I live and you will be the bread of life for those around you as I am the bread of life for those around me. When we place Jesus' words in the context of an oppressed, landless, expropriated culture where hunger is the norm, we can more readily appreciate why the centrality of bread of life. We pray every week “may everyone have the nourishment they need each day.” This is a political and economic statement. What would change in our faith if we took seriously that Jesus' project is economic and political as well as spiritual?

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost John 6:35, 41-51 Living like Jesus yields the bread of life

The focus this Sunday is Jesus as the bread of life. This image has so many rich layers: bread sustains our physical bodies; proximity to Jesus in our daily lives nourishes us on our spiritual journey; breaking bread together creates sustaining and healing communities. How do we help create food security for all? How do we keep Jesus at the centre of our lives? How do we create communities where people nurture and support each other?

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost John 6:51-58 Living like Jesus yields the bread of life

If we rethink John's gospel in terms of an invitation to see Jesus' **life** as the way, the truth and the light, then all the strange language in this text begins to make some sense. It's once again about table fellowship, to remind us of the Christ's real presence among us, guiding us toward the healing of ourselves, others, and this planet. Once again, we place before us the image of the bread of life and all that it implies. So how do we, on a daily basis, live out the heart of Jesus' project: heal the sick, eat with them, and tell them that this is the way the kingdom works?

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost John 6:56-69 Living like Jesus yields the bread of life

Are we getting the message yet? Sunday after Sunday in Year B we hear the same exhortation: be the bread of life for others, the way Jesus was. So, spend some time reflecting on the expression “bread of life.” When are you the bread of life for someone? When do you feed on the bread of life? How can our community be the bread of life for others?

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

The kingdom is IN the world but not OF it

We are not to separate ourselves from the world through external rituals and taboos. The way in which Christians can remain IN the world without being OF the world is to develop the inner dispositions described in the beatitudes. This is the heart of the Christian effort, the spiritual journey as it were: how do I develop the right relationships with the world without being caught up in its values?

What's Up at Manna?

Merrill Pierce

Manna, our intergenerational worship group, continues to meet virtually, but that hasn't kept us from having fun together. One Sunday we made pizza from scratch in our own homes and shared lunch on Zoom.

We have learned how the early church members took care of one another so none were hungry or homeless. We did an activity that illustrated the inequities in the time of Jesus when the Romans occupied the land.

We have learned about pruning the vines and the branches and discussed what we have had to prune in our lives to make changes during this pandemic.

On Christian family Sunday, we played a memory game about love and celebrated Communion.

Our group has collected 238 pounds of supplies for Chalmers Community Services. These include diapers, wipes, peanut butter, disposable razors and canned tomatoes.

Some excellent music has been enjoyed from Shannon Kingsbury, Jerry Daminato and other Manna musicians and singers.



Property Committee report

Dave Hume, chair

This report was written on May 20. During the previous month, the hot water heating was turned off for the summer, the Royal City Pre-School was at recess and several clean-up bees resulted in better-looking grounds. Thanks to all those who participated. David Kucherepa is keeping up with grass cutting. The Property Committee members are looking into outside surveillance cameras and getting quotes on repainting the lines on the parking lot. Lots going on even if the church building is closed!

20 years on, Harcourt looks back at the affirming process

Marilyn Whiteley

In June of 2000, the United Church celebrated the 75th anniversary of church union. It was a time for giving thought to the years to come, and Hugh Whiteley reflected on the future shape of the church and wondered about ways to avoid some of the cultural blindness of the denomination's earlier years. He subsequently presented a motion at the January 2001 council meeting that Harcourt explore what it might entail to become an affirming congregation, one that explicitly welcomed everyone, regardless of sexual orientation. Council passed the motion and struck a committee. The committee, chaired by Peggy Knapp, presented its report to council in May. At that meeting, council voted to have the congregation enter the process that might – or might not – lead to a decision to become an affirming congregation.

Knowing that the process was coming up for consideration, John Buttars and his family made a significant decision. In a sermon on December 10, 2000, he shared his “experiences of being a father of two wonderful daughters, one of whom is a lesbian.” John remained at the front of the sanctuary afterwards so that no one would feel obligated to greet him on the way out. But the line-up of people who chose to come and speak with him was long. John did not participate actively in the affirming process; instead, it was Harcourt's other minister, Monica Moore, who served on the two committees, the first an exploratory committee, and the second a steering committee.

The Affirming Congregation Steering Committee held its first meeting in October of 2001, chaired by Randy Seager. A long and careful process followed. It included a bulletin board and bookshelf, an idea box, newsletter reports and several forums. Members of the congregation were encouraged to express what they considered the advantages and the disadvantages of becoming an affirming congregation. Committee members tried to develop safe ways for those opposed to the idea to express their opinions, but this they found the most frustrating part of their work. They hoped that, whatever the outcome of the process, Harcourt would as a result become more welcoming toward people who were different.

In the spring of 2003, the committee wrote its report and sent it to the church council. There was little time to hold a congregational meeting and a vote before many members dispersed for the summer, so the council called no meeting. And no vote on that question was taken at the annual meeting the next February. But that didn't mean that nothing was happening.

During the months before the 2004 annual meeting much work had been done studying and developing the congregation's positioning statement, mission statement and core values. The values were similar to those reached through a visioning process in 1993, but with some additions. According to the 1993 values, Harcourt welcomed all “regardless of background, ability, sex, age, race, lifestyle or class.” Now at its 2004 annual meeting, the congregation approved a new version that included the phrase “regardless of background, colour, ability, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status.” In addition, it voted to strike a Core Values/Mission Statement Implementation Committee to monitor Harcourt's faithfulness to what it had approved.

During the months that followed, it became apparent the congregation was able to live according to these values. The council decided that all couples, including same-sex couples, were to be treated equally in respect to congregational marriage policies. In effect, Harcourt was already functioning as an affirming congregation. Perhaps it would not be so difficult or so divisive to become, officially, an affirming congregation and to become a member of Affirm United! At the annual meeting in February 2005, a strong majority voted in favour of that action, and on Sunday afternoon, April 3, a service of celebration was held as Harcourt became an affirming congregation of the United Church.

Since that time, Harcourt has become known as a welcoming place for people of any sexual orientation or gender identity. It has developed a warm relationship with Rainbow Chorus Waterloo-Wellington, of which Harcourt's Alison MacNeill is now the artistic director. And each year Harcourt celebrates and renews its status as an affirming congregation by devoting one Sunday morning service as Harcourt's affirming Sunday. Harcourt became, and has remained, an affirming congregation.

Dublin and Trinity both consider affirming process

Dublin has been moving forward over the past few years as they follow the process that is becoming an affirming congregation. They have appreciated support from Harcourt and from Affirm United, particularly through their *Open Hearts Resource Manual*. Over the past winter, 13 workshops were held for all the church's committees plus interested members of the congregation. These meetings included testimonies from members of Affirm Dublin and the queer community in Guelph. As a result of years of work, the Affirm Dublin Vision Statement was passed by the board a week ago. The church is now working on an action plan to be approved by Affirm United and the Dublin board, prior to a congregational vote in February of 2022. For further information on Affirm Dublin, contact Rosemary Kennedy at affirmdublin@gmail.com

Trinity too has been exploring the affirming ministry process over several years with guest speakers and the formation of a committee. A congregational poll in 2020 sought members' thoughts on pacing, content and how to create a safer space for discussions on LGBTQ+ issues while maintaining deep respect. The committee is now working to create a process to include all members of the congregation, recognizing that people with a minority viewpoint sometimes feel shut down. As many members of the congregation are not able to use Zoom, the committee has decided to create a web page with learning resources, including books, videos and films as a resource while waiting for the journey to continue in person. For further information on Trinity's affirm process, contact Wendelin Galatianos at galatian@sentex.ca



Gender-related terms

Andre Auger

I grew up in a binary culture: God made man and woman. Period. No gender fluidity here. I encountered my first homosexual when I worked at the university, where two of the psychological counsellors on my staff were gay. I knew one well and found him to be a wonderful, caring person as well as an artist with impeccable taste. I think I overlooked the fact that he was gay ... I think I still believed that homosexuality was somehow wrong, but I knew I wasn't to judge.

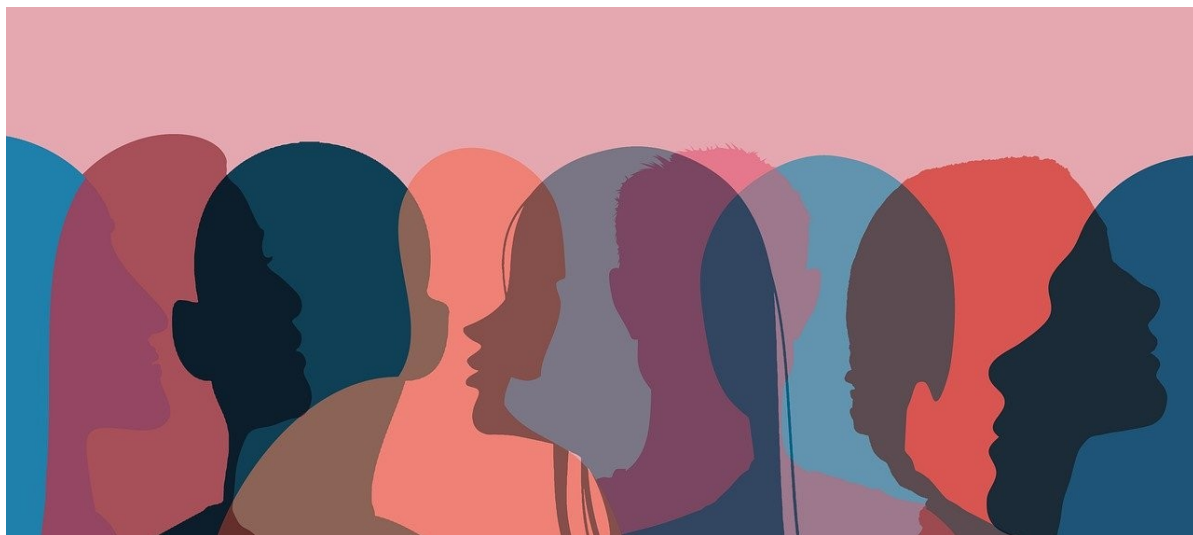
Then Harcourt went through the process of affirming, and I learned a lot more. Later, when I was involved in the Awakening series, I heard some heart-rending stories of people rejected by their parents and their churches because they did not conform to the traditional sexual expectations of the community. Recently I heard a moving sermon by Rev Junia Joplin, a transgender pastor who was removed from her church when she announced her transition. Her sermon was lucid, intelligent, caring, and helpful.

To a degree unimaginable a decade ago, the intensely personal subject of gender identity has entered the public square. In a 2017 issue of *National Geographic*, authors looked at cultural, social, biological, and political aspects of gender, and offered me a repertoire of terms I had never heard before. Alongside **sexual orientation**, which I knew about, which refers to attraction to other people (external), I learned of **gender identity**, which refers to an internal sense of who people are as gendered beings – the gender with which they identify themselves. It is the deep-seated sense of self (internal). Two other useful terms are **gender conforming** and **gender non-conforming**, which refer to whether behaviours coincide with traditional cultural expectations. Then there is the helpful term **gender expression**, which refers to a person's outward gender presentation, usually comprising personal style, clothing, hairstyle, makeup, jewelry, vocal inflection, and body language. Gender expression can be congruent with a person's gender identity or not.

From that article, I also learned of new gender descriptors that describe a far more complex world than the binary one I grew up in. See if you can match the term in the table below with its correct definition. Answers are on the last page.

(This glossary is taken from the *National Geographic* article and was prepared in consultation with Eli R. Green of the Center for Human Sexuality Studies at Pennsylvania's Widener University and Luca Maurer of the Center for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Education, Outreach, and Services at New York's Ithaca College. They are co-authors of the book *The Teaching Transgender Toolkit*.)

Term	Which definition is correct???
A. Agender	1. A person whose gender identity does not match the biological sex they were assigned at birth.
B. Cisgender	2. A person whose gender identity is neither man nor woman, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders.
C. Genderfluid	3. A person with a genetic, genital, reproductive, or hormonal configuration that does not fit typical binary notions of a male or female body.
D. Genderqueer	4. A person whose gender identity or expression shifts between man/masculine and woman/feminine or falls somewhere along this spectrum.
E. Intersex	5. A person who does not identify as having a gender identity that can be categorized as man or woman or who identifies as not having a gender identity
F. Transgender	6. A person whose gender identity matches the biological sex they were assigned at birth



This choir feels like family

Ann Middleton

Rainbow Chorus Waterloo-Wellington is more than a choir. It's a community that welcomes all genders, sexualities and gender expressions and allies. Harcourt's Alison MacNeill has been with the choir since 2005, first as pianist and for the past three years as artistic director.

Although the group has not met in person since last fall when they practised, wearing masks, in the church garden and December when they sang carols in downtown Guelph, they have gathered virtually for a trivia night, a book club discussion and a social. And now they are planning for a short virtual concert. Watch the Harcourt bulletin for details.

Choir members share their feelings for this special community.



Maureen Anderson

"I have been a member of the Rainbow Chorus since 2008. The chorus really is like a family – we love singing together and being together, and we have some really great times. Like any family, we don't always get along perfectly, but we work hard to improve and grow our relationships within the chorus, and ultimately it makes us better as individuals and stronger and more supportive as a community. And I like to think that also has ripple effects through our local LGBTQ community, arts community and beyond!"



Crystal Chilvers

"The rainbow chorus has been an extension of home for me, a safe place to be myself, while being surrounded by love and acceptance. I get to shine through vocals, but also get to clown around when the time is right. One Wednesday night rehearsal can erase all the stress of the week. The chorus has also been an extension of my spiritual life at Harcourt. It means so much to me to get to sing on

Harcourt stage, with the support of so many Harcourt members at concerts. My favourite service has always been Affirming Sunday (beating out the Blessing of the Animals by a hair) when I get to sing with both my Harcourt choir friends and my Rainbow Chorus friends all at the same time.”

Colleen Lichti, chair Rainbow Chorus



“I have been a member of the Rainbow Chorus since 2001. I grew up singing in church and in high school choirs and I love it, so to find a group like the Rainbow Chorus where one gets to sing but also benefit in so many more ways is just wonderful. RCWW has formed the basis of my Guelph community. Like many community choirs, RCWW has brought me lifelong friendships, given me a place to go for weekly energy and restoration, provided opportunities for volunteering and community contribution and provided a place to sing and to perform. But this choir is special. As a queer organization, it provides a place where people can be completely themselves, let their guards down, wear what makes them feel most themselves, see themselves in others, sing about and for equality and justice, show their families there are other people just like them, and learn from queer people who are older or younger. The rainbow chorus has given me joy and confidence.”

When the chorus sings at Harcourt, there is always a full house. Rainbow Chorus not only shares a musical director and many singers with the church choir, it has a special relationship with Harcourt which sponsors the group by waiving rental fees for weekly practice.



Artistic director Alison MacNeill conducts the Rainbow Chorus in Harcourt Church.

Greetings Harcourt from Banff

Andrew Oosting

Many of you will have been at Harcourt for the Awakening series sponsored by the Spiritual Life Committee for almost three years. Each month someone spoke on a moment of spiritual awakening in their life. Some of you may remember the moving story of Andrew Oosting, a young man from a traditional faith group, who came out to his church and family, only to be rejected.

At Harcourt he found a safe and supportive community, sang in the choir and one Sunday told his story in front of the congregation. That day his father sat in the church and listened to his son's story. It was the beginning of their reconciliation.

Andrew now lives in Banff, Alberta. The *Herald* reached out to him to see if he would share something of his recent life with us. This is his reply:



It has been a long time since I was back in Guelph attending Sunday services, going to choir practices, or practicing for *Godspell* the musical. I truly miss the connection I had to the place and the people I met when I was there. Being at Harcourt really provided me with a wonderful and safe community in which I could really express myself! It was just the place I needed as I came out and just the place that reminded me that I could be gay and be a Christian!

Well it's been over 10 years since I waved to everyone and moved to Alberta. I started out in Calgary and after five years I moved to Banff. I work for Parks Canada now and I work on projects all across the Canadian Rockies in various parks. It was in Banff I found my husband, Shane, and also started a family with the help of a surrogate in Winnipeg. Theodore was born in April 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, and it has been a sheer joy to watch him grow.

I sometimes find myself reflecting on all that has happened since I moved from Guelph and it is hard to believe the changes that have happened. However, sometimes in the smallest and quietest moments, when I am singing to Theodore at night from the *More Voices* songbook (one of my favourites being "O Beautiful Gaia"), I smile and think about the times at Harcourt and all the people that I met. A smile comes across my face and I would like to think at that moment that all the love and support that I received from a truly amazing community flows from me and settles on Theodore. He's a good sleeper so I would like to think it is working!

So on that note I hope that everyone is doing well and that everyone stays safe during these difficult times.

Lots of love, Andrew Oosting

Beyond the rainbow cake

Angela Jimenez

As a child I am not sure I truly understood what Affirming Sunday was and why we were celebrating. In all honesty, I was just excited that I got to eat a piece of pretty rainbow cake. Now that I am older and understand, I am not solely interested in the cake. I feel that as young children it isn't necessarily brought to us what Affirming Sunday is or what it means for someone to be LGBTQ+.

I was shocked to find that Harcourt is the only affirming church in Guelph. I figured they all were. This being the case, I am extremely happy and proud to be part of a church that is filled with such welcoming members. I hope that the rest of the Guelph churches follow in Harcourt's footsteps. Church can be scary for some LGBTQ+ people.

Sadly, in America many bills are being passed and deliberated that are hurting transgender youth. They are banning transgender athletes from participating in sports consistent with their gender identities and making it harder for them to get medical help. Luckily there are some incredible celebrities and activists who have been sharing positive information through social media. These include Elliot Page, Chase Strangio and Laura Jane Grace. I think with education and more understanding and acceptance in general we can make everyone feel more welcome.

I consider myself very lucky, being that I am part of the LGBTQ+ community and that I am surrounded by such wonderful and amazing accepting people like my friends and family. I found there was this uncertain fear when it came for me to come out, mainly regarding how those around me would take the news, considering that for most of my life they thought I was heterosexual and so did I.

This whole pandemic has truly been one of the most difficult times for everyone. I am lucky there was one good thing that came out of it and that is that I was able to find out more about myself and realize and discover my true sexuality. This realization came a few weeks before the first lockdown and it took me until the middle of April to confidently express to myself who I was out loud.

After this happened, I felt it was time to come out to some friends and family. I first came out to one of my best friends who is part of the LGBTQ+ community. Since we were unable to meet, I did it over text which was quite nerve wracking. I didn't want anything to change in my relationships with the people I care for the most. I'm overjoyed to say that I've only ever received love, acceptance and offers of help if I ever need it on my journey.

Not everyone is as lucky as I am. For me it's hard to hear that some people are kicked out of their homes, disowned by families and suffer other unimaginable reactions. We all just need



to love each other. We're all human, which means we're all the same. It shouldn't make a difference who anyone wants to love as long as they are happy. Society sometimes says that each person needs to fit into a specific box and this is wrong. We are all completely unique human beings. That is how God made us. It would have been a waste of time to make everyone the same. The world would be incredibly boring. Be proud of who you are. We are all unique and weird. If someone doesn't accept you, it's their loss.

These three quotes really speak to me personally:

"There's nothing wrong with you . There's a lot wrong with the world you live in." Chris Colfer

"I am tired of hiding and I am tired of lying by omission. I suffered for years because I was scared to come out. My spirit suffered, my mental health suffered and my relationships suffered. And I'm standing here today, with you all, on the other side of all that pain." Elliot Page

"Homosexuality is found in over 450 species. Homophobia is found in only one. Now which seems unnatural?" Unknown



Commemorating Pride Week

Remembering: a conversation between mother and son

Julie Ashley



Julie Ashley was raised in Knox United Church and later attended a more conservative denomination before returning to the United Church at Harcourt. A former social worker with a love for writing, dogs, and people, she now works as a realtor.

Andrew, 31, is a graduate of Rockway Mennonite Collegiate, was youth editor for *The Record* and has a Masters of Architecture degree from the University of Toronto. Andrew is now in a committed relationship and living in Toronto.

This conversation took place over the phone.

JULIE: You came out when you were about 16. Time flies! That was 15 years ago now. You were still very young – still in high school. What were your biggest fears in coming out?

ANDREW: I am old enough, but young enough, to remember that even in middle school I was reading newspaper articles about the debate over gay rights in Canada, notably gay marriage. So coming out always felt like something that could potentially turn out okay, but could also go very poorly. In so many ways I was fortunate and regularly heard supportive voices around me. You run into people here and there – I had outspoken teachers at my high school, and media figures who addressed the topic of LGBTQ rights. But I think the fear is twofold – how will this change my relationship to society around me, and how will those most immediate to me – my friends and family members – react? This is tangential but I wanted to ask you – when you think back to when I was younger – what did a mother like yourself dream of for her son or how did you envision my future?

JULIE: To be frank, I had never given it a thought that you were anything but straight – an assumption! I knew that you were always very grounded and sensible. I just wanted to give you a great foundation of a strong faith and work ethic, a set of values that

would ensure you would be of good character. And of course, I wanted you to be a happy contented man. I hadn't gone too far down the road of marriage etc., but I remember wanting you to have positive dating experiences in high school, and choose girls who were of solid character too.

Little did I know! There's this interesting tension of a teenager trying to create some separation (individuation) but a parent always wants to be privy to what is going on for their child. How did you get support at the time?

ANDREW: A young LGBTQ person will always seek out their allies. I mentioned I had a couple of teachers in high school who were outspoken allies that I could chat with. I had friends who were safe to turn to. Music, books, movies: I wanted to absorb anything I could that related to my experience. And I am fortunate that you were a loving parent because you became a big support for me too. I saw your perception of gay people change in a big and exciting way – you made gay friends, you went to a gay wedding, and you realized you had been denied the experience of getting to know all these fantastic people. To hear it in your words – how did having a gay son reshape your view of people and your belief system?

JULIE: First, I had to re-calibrate what this meant in terms of my faith and most recent understanding of the Bible, now that I was living it less theoretically and in real time. So, researching, praying and engaging in conversation, and reading books that gave insight to me in allowing “gay” and “being fully accepted by God” to be in the same sentence. I had to finally work through my faith from inside out as I was challenged by others that your so-called “choice” was not okay, and I should “straighten you out,” but my heart and soul did not believe that. You taught me a lot when you gently reminded me that being gay wasn't about sex, but it was about LOVE. I was humbled by your graciousness with me as I figured it out. You were an excellent teacher! Also, I experienced a whole level of fear of what it meant for you to be gay. Like the first time I took you to Toronto so you could meet a friend you had met online who was gay. I wanted to give you the experience but was terrified that he might adversely influence you – until I met him and realized that he was as scared and uncomfortable as you were in trying on this new reality! It was a pretty quiet ride home as we both worked through our feelings. What has been most difficult for you, in your experience, once you became comfortable with this?

ANDREW: The survivor's guilt of watching a lot of people who live in countries or towns or families where they are unable to be truly seen. They are seen for being LGBTQ, and unloved for it, or worse – exposed to violence and hatred. I haven't experienced much of that first hand. I am particularly troubled by what I see our transgender brothers and sisters going through around the world at this moment. The general public has a poor understanding of the experiences of transgender people who experience a deficit of the love that a lot of us take for granted. I can walk down the

street and run errands and do all the things that are typical for a normal day. In 2021 trans people still cannot.

JULIE: Maybe the church has a big role to play in changing that. What can the church do to be more supportive of our LGBTQ-identifying population?

ANDREW: There's two parts to this answer because I don't see people or the institution of the church as a homogeneous entity. So there's a bad part and a good part. I'm quick to admonish some denominations for what I would describe as a very un-Christian attitude toward people in general, and LGBTQ people bear the brunt of that by nature of being a minority group with a history of not fitting in. There's no gentle way for me to phrase that. As human beings, we're quick to pick on the little guys. And once we have won our rights, there will always be another group that is next in line to be bullied.

That said – the United Church always gives me a warm feeling and at Pride I love hearing the loud cheers for the United Church and other affirming denominations. I think the church needs to continue their great work and demonstrate their ally-ship by advocating for other groups facing discrimination or challenges. Black Lives Matter, trans rights... these are important too. And on an individual level, more of us need to push ourselves to do some research and learn about the challenges other people face so that we have context; demystify groups that you are unfamiliar with so that you humanize their experience.

Sometimes I marvel at what a different world it was in the decades before I was born (1990), and how unfamiliar gay rights or the mere notion of trans rights were to the general population. Even more terrifying, I think of how alienated gay people were by the AIDS crisis. If you think back to the 1970s or 1980s, would you ever have imagined how things have changed? How do you think future generations will view love and the LGBTQ sector? And what has been your growing awareness about these issues?

JULIE: I remember going dancing in Toronto at a gay bar in the early 1980s with a friend who was trying to figure out his sexual orientation. I felt so invisible, as it was almost all men in this low-profile club. That was a new experience and my only real LGBTQ experience to draw on personally. Then in the 1990s, I actually ended up accidentally at the Pride Parade where I quietly prayed for what I was witnessing – “forgive them father for they know not what they do.”

Meanwhile, I have come full circle to focusing on forgiving all those who cannot, out of fear and judgment, accept their own LGBTQ children/family members and friends. How sad for everyone! My early experience in hearing your heart allowed me to engage my

faith fully and authentically and extend to all people that there are no “others” who should be marginalized. As I connect to so many LGBTQ relatives and friends, and through involvement with Guelph Pride, and originally co-leading the LGBTQ group at Harcourt, it just gets clearer how simple Christ’s message is. We need to see and celebrate each individual (full stop), each individual as a child of God, deserving of our love. If we are going to BE the Church, there are no qualifiers to that. We need to find the ways we can step into places to bridge the gap and assist those who are marginalized in any manner and love them into the fully inclusive embrace of our loving God, as demonstrated by Jesus. Easier said than done, but that is the work. What a gift you have been for me Andrew.



My experience of an affirming church

Julie Henshaw

From infancy and childhood until I left home for university, I attended Thornhill United Church. Church was a fairly big part of my life; as a child, I enjoyed attending Sunday school and singing songs with Jeannie Bryce on the ukulele. Later, I would help out in the church nursery and eventually lead Sunday school classes. In my adolescence, our church youth group was introduced to the Out of the Cold program – a temporary homeless shelter that moved from one faith-based institution to another each night of the week. We served the dinner meal there and got to know the guests. When I was 16, an opportunity presented itself for me and a friend from youth group to take part in a global learning trip to Guatemala City. On this trip, we learned about Guatemala's civil war and were introduced to the work of an orphanage for street involved children. This is where I learned what social work was, and became drawn to it as a profession to pursue.



My mother was also heavily involved in the work of the church. I learned of her participation in committee work to help settle refugees and I watched and helped as she baked brownies for various church events. I always came along to sell treats at the church's booth at the Thornhill Village Festival and at our country fairs and rummage sales. Belonging in the church was second nature.

In 2000, I attended the 37th General Council meeting as a youth delegate. I learned about the church's earlier declaration that "all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, who profess their faith in Jesus Christ are welcome to be or become members of The United Church of Canada" and that "all members of the United Church are eligible to be considered for ordered ministry." I also learned about the church's 1998 apology to students of United Church residential schools. This was the first time I learned about the residential school system – I was in Grade 12 and had not to this point (nor ever in the future) learned about it in school.

In high school I began to question my sexual orientation. I had a girlfriend throughout, and we attended prom together. I never really came out to my family or community; I just showed up, as I was. I knew that the United Church was a safe space for me. Could you imagine it otherwise? What if my church, the place that had fostered so much of my upbringing, didn't accept me for who I was? How would my understanding of my identity be shaped if I belonged to a church with a negative ideology towards the 2SLGBTQ community?

When I left home for university and tried to find like-minded Christians on campus, I began to realize how many Christian communities were not affirming of the 2SLGBTQ community. Sometimes this was subtle, and sometimes it was as overt as praying for gay people to repent and find Jesus, or hearing a message of Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve in a sermon. While

limited, these experiences were hurtful to me. And this theology of exclusion enraged me. To this day, I cannot understand how someone can be a follower of Jesus and reconcile a message of anything but acceptance towards their gay, lesbian or trans neighbours.

I am immensely grateful that I was brought up in the United Church. I am thankful that I never had to doubt whether God loved me. I believe that affirming ministries save lives and represent the essence of what it is to be Christian.

GUM sponsorship helps Syrian refugee get established in Canadian safe space

Majd Kabbani



Hello, my name is Majd. For those who don't know me, I came to Canada in August 2019. I was blessed with a very supportive group of volunteer sponsors from the United Churches that helped me to find my way to the best life possible in Canada. Since I arrived, I was trying to be productive and at the same time was looking for something that suits me the best. At the beginning, and thanks to one member in the sponsorship, I enrolled in the Rainbow Chorus and had an amazing chance to show my talents there; it was an unforgettable experience for me. I wanted to continue in this path and strengthen my talents in singing, acting, and dancing, but due to the pandemic, things have been changed!

I started last fall a diploma certificate at Georgian College to study automotive business there. My passion for the automotive industry is very huge and at the same time, I wanted to strengthen my degree in financial and banking sciences from Aleppo University in Syria with a Canadian certification. I was really excited to get the acceptance letter for my enrolment because of the strong co-op program that they have. And indeed, I just started my co-op position this month and I'm so excited to excel there. The position will give me a great experience in this field and hopefully, I'm looking for a permanent contract with them, so wish me luck. I'm working as a dealer support representative, which has a very big space for talking (that obviously I love so much since I'm a people person) to customers and serving them to fix their technical issues through our portal which is called Dealertrack.

Recently, I started a part-time job along with the full-time co-op job, just on the weekends. It's a bit exhausting, but hey, it's good money during the continuous lock-downs that we are having.

Since last November, I moved to Mississauga to have more chances to get a job and start my career. Guelph has so many options, but I was afraid that I might struggle to find a job in the field that I'm studying since the choices are limited there. It was a hard time for me to move here and say goodbye to the wonderful people that I met and had awesome memories with. Hopefully, after Covid is done, I will be meeting with them more often, because I will never let these situations stand between me and those beautiful hearts that I was fortunate to know. ♥

When I was living in the Middle East, I was always sad when it's Pride Month, because we don't have it there and I was so excited to come to Canada and enjoy this event. Unfortunately, that did not happen! Covid obviously happened and ruined all our plans. Even though I did not live this experience, I'm still looking forward to enjoying it with everyone and walking the Pride. I was wishing at least to enjoy it this year, but we have to be careful during these times and follow the instructions of our government whatsoever!

At the end, I'm so happy that I reached the point to pay back to this beautiful country that helped me living freely and expressing my sexuality legally. Sending a lot of love to Harcourt Church that has so many lovely memories to my heart during my time in the Rainbow Chorus and the fantastic concert that we had. I wish you all to stay safe and hope that you, your families and loved ones will pass these tough times safely to have many more memories in the future with them.



Majd Kabbani was sponsored by United Churches in Guelph with support from other partners. Canada is one of only a few countries in the world with an LGBTIQ2+ Refugee Program, and the United Church is one of only three national faith groups that can sponsor LGBTIQ2+ refugees.

Church garden corner

Sarah Lowe

A big thank you to all the volunteers who helped us tidy up the church gardens this spring. Your help made all the difference! We hope you enjoyed getting out into the sunshine after the long winter.

Forsythia, tulips and daffodils had a lovely long blooming season thanks to the cool spring, and the commemorative magnolia on the east side of the building blossomed gloriously. It avoided the frosts, thanks to being a late flowering hybrid.

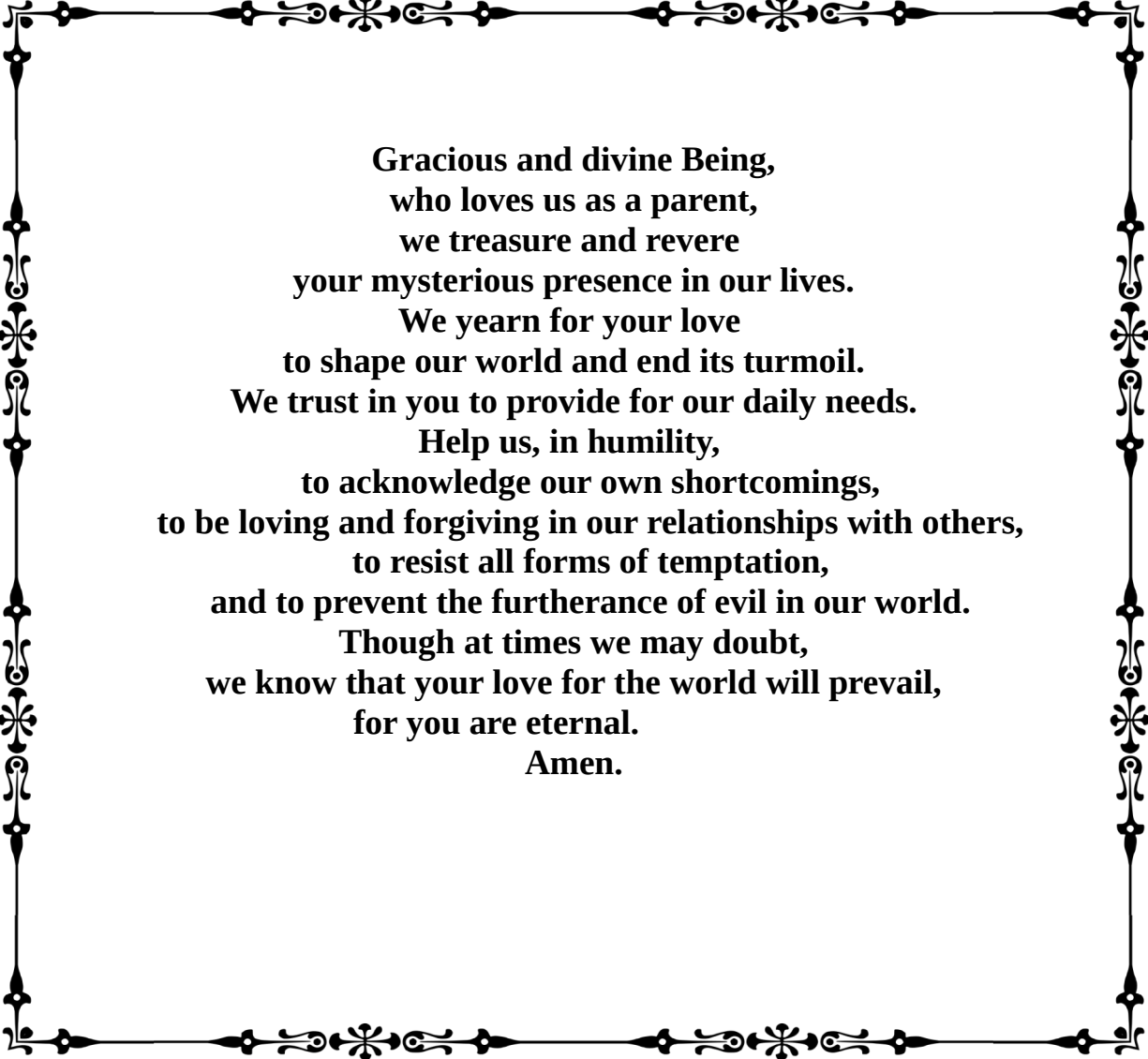
Then summer suddenly came before the May 24 weekend and the two redbuds burst into flower outside the sanctuary windows. I have never seen so many people walking round the church taking photographs as this year!

We are planning another gardening session for Saturday, June 19; rain date is June 26. Please let me know if you can help us (519-824-7206), so we can organize small groups. We would really welcome extra help for weeding, trimming and pruning some trees and hedges. Thanks again!



Paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer

In 2003, Harcourt members were invited to write their own versions of the Lord's Prayer for Lent. We will run one of these prayers in each edition of the Herald over the next year or so. This one, which was used in an April 2021 service, was written by Sandy Middleton.



**Gracious and divine Being,
who loves us as a parent,
we treasure and revere
your mysterious presence in our lives.
We yearn for your love
to shape our world and end its turmoil.
We trust in you to provide for our daily needs.
Help us, in humility,
to acknowledge our own shortcomings,
to be loving and forgiving in our relationships with others,
to resist all forms of temptation,
and to prevent the furtherance of evil in our world.
Though at times we may doubt,
we know that your love for the world will prevail,
for you are eternal.
Amen.**

Life Events:

Passages



Brian Clark died May 15 at his home at the Village by the Arboretum. Brian and Rev. Diane Clark began attending Harcourt after her retirement from ministry at Chalmers United Church. Brian and Diane were active supporters of Chalmers Community Services from its beginnings. Brian was a photojournalist at the Kitchener-Waterloo Record and instructor of photography at Loyalist College. He loved to sail, build model railways and watch the Toronto Blue Jays. In later years he belonged to the Park N' Dance group. He was also a member of the Harcourt Men's Group. Brian, who was 75, is survived by children Elissa (Ian) Newby-Clark, Erinn Clark (Steve Steers), Colin (Darcie) Clark and grandchildren Adrian, Alasdair, Saya, Gemma and Norah. Brian and Diane's son Joel died in 1974.



Answers: A5; B6; C4; D2; E3; F1