

Called to Be the Church....

This year our newsletters will encourage us to reflect on lines from the United Church Creed (also called the New Creed). I can't remember which line Sharon asked for reflections on this month so I made my own choice.

Asking what it means to be called to be the church leads in many directions. The one I am thinking about today is tied to this last verse from the Marty Haugen hymn (#1 in *More Voices*) "Let Us Build a House":

Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard  
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word.

Built of tears and cries and laughter, prayers of faith and songs of grace,  
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter.

All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

What implications might it have to put those words into action? As it happens I have reflected on this question many times over the years. Here is a column I wrote for the paper in Atikokan on that theme:

*Who is Welcome?*



*The brightly lettered sign on the door said "All welcome, come as you are".*

*Pete looked at his his wheelchair and asked "even me?" and then he continued down the street. How would he get up the stairs?*

*Next came Sue and Cathy. They looked at the sign, and the beautiful stained glass windows and for a moment thought about going in. But then they remembered the last time they had been, and the clear message that folks like them were "bad". They knew they weren't welcome as a couple.*

*Next down the block was a young family. "Let's go see!" shouted the youngest. But the kids tended to be noisy, they had trouble sitting still. Not wanting to cause trouble the parents quickly walked away, dragging the kids with them.*

*Finally came Fred and Alice. They thought it would be nice to have a warm place to sit and maybe a cup of coffee. But they looked at their shabby clothes and their unwashed faces and knew that their presence seemed to make others uncomfortable. So they went down the street to try and find a meal.*

*Meanwhile, oblivious to the people passing by and wishing they could come in, the congregation sat looking around the half-empty sanctuary and asked themselves: "Why aren't there more people here? We are such a friendly group?"*

*The Gospel message is clear. The love and grace of God are offered to all of God's people. But even then we see the struggle to understand what that means. Even Jesus has to be taught about God's amazing welcome. It takes a foreign woman*

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**Words from Gord**

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*challenging his prejudices to show Jesus that, as an old hymn says, "the love of God is broader than the measures of the mind" (see Mark 7:24-30).*

*And still the world struggles. Every church I have attended has described themselves as warm and friendly. Every church wants to believe that all are welcome in their midst. But the reality people experience is far different. The story told earlier plays itself out over and over across this country. But God is still calling us to a new way.*

*God is calling the global community to be a place where all are welcome. All. Regardless of age, or physical/emotional/mental ability, or gender, or race, or social background, or economic status, or marital status, or sexual orientation, or any of the multitude of other ways we have of dividing people; despite all of that you are welcome in the Family of God.*

*This is the challenge for the world, to live out God's amazingly broad and open welcome. We will sometimes fall short. Sometimes we fall short intentionally, sometimes we don't even know it. If we are going to do better, we need to be challenged. Otherwise, we are as oblivious as the congregation in the story. What barricades do we put up that keep others out of our clubs, our businesses, our communities? How do we go about breaking them down?*

Elsewhere in this newsletter are some words from our Affirming Task Group. They too are asking questions about who feels welcome in this place, about what it means to say that all are welcome to belong to this congregation. As Marty Haugen says in the opening of that same hymn: "Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live". We are called to be the church, the Body of Christ, the community of love. Welcoming is part of living out that call. Gord

Church Online  
NOT CANCELED

Quiet Time With God  
NOT CANCELED

Praying For The Sick  
NOT CANCELED

Checking On A Friend  
NOT CANCELED

Helping Others  
NOT CANCELED

Being The Church  
NOW MORE THAN EVER

After the 93 year old man in Italy got better in the hospital, he was told to pay for the ventilator for one day, and the old man started to cry. The doctor advised him not to cry over the bill.

What the old man said made all the doctors cry.

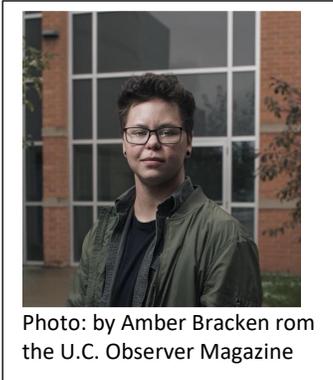
The Old man said, "I don't cry because of the money I have to pay. I can pay all the money." "I cry because I have been breathing God's air for 93 years, but I never had to pay anything for it. But for using a ventilator in your hospital for just one day i have to pay €5,000. I realise now how much I owe God ? I never thanked God for it before."

LET THIS SINK IN 🙏

## Affirm Open Chat Sessions

The first of these Zoom sessions was held on January 13<sup>th</sup> and was deemed successful. We had an interesting chat with the 4 people who joined us for the hour, answered questions and shared a great deal of information.

These Zoom sessions will continue on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of each month starting at 7 pm and will run for an hour. Everyone is welcome to come for the whole hour or just for part of it if that is your preference. You are welcome to ask questions and discuss issues, or just listen if you are more comfortable doing that. The advantage of using Zoom is that there is no limit to how many people can participate so no registration is necessary – just join us!

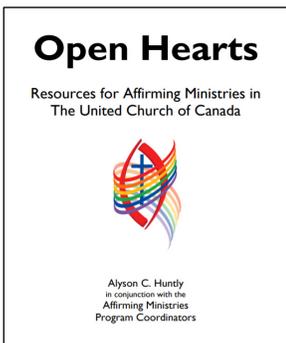


**Our next session will be February 10**, and we will have a guest! Shylo Rosborough (He/Him) is the Affirming Ministries Coordinator for our Northern Spirit Regional Council, and is based out of Edmonton. Shylo's role is to help congregations become affirming while also providing programming, support, resources and pastoral care to LGBTQ2S+ and allies on their spiritual journeys. Shylo has received a certificate in Biblical Studies and Christian Discipleship, and a Bachelor of Arts in both Sociology and Theology. As a transgender man, he has been active in both the LGBTQ and Christian communities supporting and advocating for the full inclusion of LGBTQ people within the church. We hope you will join us at 7 pm on Wednesday February 10<sup>th</sup>, and come with any

questions you may have for Shylo. At 8 pm Shylo will meet with the Affirming Task Group and help us map a way forward on this journey. Many Blessings, Mary Faith Blackburn

A reminder email will be sent on Monday, February 8<sup>th</sup> with the ZOOM details.

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### Open Hearts: Resources for Affirming Ministries in The United Church of Canada

Are you ready to read? Want to know more about the journey to become affirming?

Please download this resource at <https://affirmunited.ausc.ca/open-hearts-table-of-contents/>

If you are unable to download a large document, I am sure Carla will be willing to do so for you. Or I will.

*Open Hearts* is the “bible” for Affirming Ministry journeys. Here is one example of a question and answer found in this resource:

“Did Jesus have anything to say about same-sex relationships? The gospels have no references to same-sex relationships or homosexuality. However, Jesus is quoted as saying, “Do not judge” and “Love your neighbour.”

Pages 1 to 30 contain questions and answers, pages 31 to 64 are resources for education, some of which may be coming to your church in the not-too-distant future, and the third section contains recommended resources.

Many Blessings,  
Mary Faith Blackburn

Communications will print a copy for our library if you want to drop in and borrow it.  
Please return for the next person to take home.

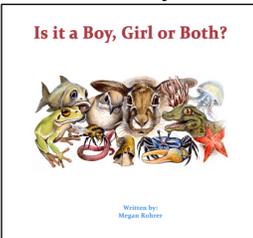
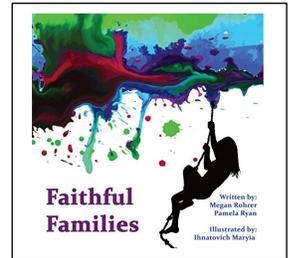


Each month we hope to highlight some of our favourite books and tell you how to get them for yourselves. Sometimes Naomi and I will be happy to lend our own books.

### Children's Books: Ages 1 to 5

**Faithful Families** "Some families are small. Some families are big. ... No matter what your family looks like, God loves you. And so do I." Families are made

up of many different people and characteristics. So much variety and delight in God's family!



**Is It a Boy, Girl, or Both?** "How do I know who is a boy and who is a girl? God created diverse people and animals. Some animals, like birds, have different colors for girls and boys. ... Some animals, like deer, have bodies that look different when they are a boy or a girl. ... But, no matter your favorite color, what your body looks like, ... God will love you no matter what. And so will I." So much variety and delight in the animal world!

Written by Pastor Megan Rohrer and Pamela Ryan,

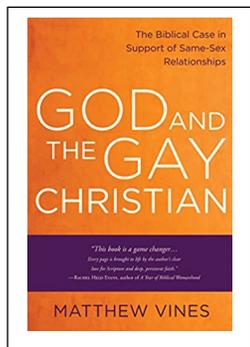
Illustrated by Ihnatovich Maryia 2016 Wilgefortis Press. [Wilgefortisbooks.blogspot.com](http://Wilgefortisbooks.blogspot.com)

Both books are part of the Good News Children's Series from Grace Lutheran Church in San Francisco

### Adult

**God and the Gay Christian**, by Matthew Vines, Convergent Books, 2014.

This book will appeal to those who wish to gain further understanding of the Bible passages that have been used to condemn same-sex relationships. Matthew Vines applies rigorous scholarship but presents it in a very accessible and readable form for the layperson. *God and the Gay Christian* affirms both orthodox faith and sexual diversity. Rachel Held Evans had this to say about the book: "every page is brought to life by the author's clear love for Scripture and deep, persistent faith...prepare to be challenged and enlightened, provoked and inspired." Note that Matthew Vines writes from an evangelical background and his writing is designed for engaging with a conservative Christian audience.



### Where to find it:

1. Amazon: [God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships: Vines, Matthew: 9781601425188: Books - Amazon.ca](http://God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships: Vines, Matthew: 9781601425188: Books - Amazon.ca) Kindle version is \$13.99.
2. Naomi has a paperback copy I am willing to lend out. I can deliver in Grande Prairie!

### Related resources for those who do not like to read:

1. [God and the Gay Christian | Matthew Vines | Talks at Google - YouTube](http://God and the Gay Christian | Matthew Vines | Talks at Google - YouTube) The author talks about the book and his personal history – 1 hr.
2. [Better Together: Matthew and Monte Vines on Studying the Bible and LGBTQ Inclusion - YouTube](http://Better Together: Matthew and Monte Vines on Studying the Bible and LGBTQ Inclusion - YouTube) The author and his father discuss their experience and process – 52 min.
3. [God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships - YouTube](http://God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships - YouTube) – This video is basically the trailer for the book – concise summary – 5 min.
4. [Matthew Vines: "For the Bible Tells Me So: Hermeneutics and the Debate About LGBTQ Inclusion" - YouTube](http://Matthew Vines: 'For the Bible Tells Me So: Hermeneutics and the Debate About LGBTQ Inclusion' - YouTube) – an address given by the author at Plymouth Church United Church of Christ in Seattle, Washington on Nov. 8, 2019 – 1 hr.

QUOTES: "Instead of accepting the divide between more progressive Christians who support marriage equality and conservative Christians who oppose it, this book envisions a future in which *all* Christians come to embrace and affirm their LGBT brothers and sisters – without undermining their commitment to the authority of the Bible." – from *God and the Gay Christian*, p. 3.

"Affirming our gay brothers and sisters isn't simply one possible path Christians can take. It isn't just a valid option. This kind of love and affirmation – regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity – is, in fact, a requirement of Christian faithfulness." – from *God and the Gay Christian*, p. 178.