

First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
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Fortfcc.org

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First Congregational United Church of Christ Adopts “Covenant of Inclusion”

In a historic vote, members of Fort Atkinson’s First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ approved a “Covenant of Inclusion,” declaring, “The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, is an inclusive congregation who welcomes all persons, including those of all races, ethnicities, ages, sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, family structures, faith backgrounds, abilities and economic circumstances. All persons are invited to fully share and participate in leadership, ministry, fellowship, worship, sacraments, responsibilities, blessings and joys of our church family.”

Though Fort Atkinson’s First Congregational Church has been known as the “Church of the Open Door” for many years, cultural changes and internal discussions led members to want to be more intentional about welcoming everyone, regardless of who they are or where they might be on life’s journey. With the election held February 2, church members overwhelmingly voted to send a clear message that everyone is welcome to make First Congregational Church (known locally as “First Cong”) their church home.

The seeds for the Covenant of Inclusion were planted in August 2018, when the Church Council, at the request of the Evangelism Ministry, voted to begin the process of exploring becoming Open and Affirming (ONA). Open and Affirming is the United Church of Christ’s (UCC) designation for congregations, campus ministries and other bodies in the UCC which have made a public covenant of welcome into their full life and ministry to persons of all sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions (LGBTQ).

The local church’s vote marked the culmination of a year of study and reflection, including Bible studies, group dialogues, and movie screenings followed by discussion and prayer. Worship services included numerous scriptural reflections offered by Reverend Chris Buckingham-Taylor for congregants’ consideration about “who is my neighbor,” and who Christ calls His followers to embrace and to serve.

Following adoption of the Covenant of Inclusion, First Congregational Church received its ONA Certificate from the national United Church of Christ. The ONA designation publicly declares that the congregation openly welcomes all people into all aspects of the life of its congregation.

Rev. Chris Buckingham-Taylor expressed his gratefulness for the decision. “It not only reflects the love this congregation has for each, but the world.” Member Carol Maasz summed up the church’s celebration of approval of the Covenant of Inclusion and open invitation to the community, “With the help of God, and the understanding that each of us is on a lifelong faith journey, know you will receive a warm welcome here!”

Our pews are empty and activities are suspended right now due to the COVID-19 pandemic “Stay at Home” order. The First Congregational Church offers livestream worship services on Sundays at 10:00 a.m. and live radio broadcast on WFAW 940 AM. More information can be obtained from the church website at www.fortfcc.org or by calling the church at (920) 563-4802. The day will come when we are able to worship at church together again - everyone welcome!