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FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF WATERTOWN OFFICIALLY BECOMES AN OPEN & AFFIRMING CHURCH

WATERTOWN, CT (February 1, 2022) – On Sunday, January 30, 2022 First Congregational Church in Watertown, CT held it's 282nd annual meeting. Among other important church business, the lead vote was for the church to adopt an Open and Affirming covenant and become an Open and Affirming Congregation.

Open and Affirming (ONA) is a movement of more than 1500 churches and other ministries in the United Church of Christ that welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) members. After a time of study, dialogue and prayer, churches adopt an Open and Affirming covenant committing their members to welcome LGBTQ seekers, support their relationships, and advocate for their basic rights.

As part of the covenant the church passed the following statement:

First Congregational Church of Watertown, Connecticut welcomes all who seek to share the Good News of God's love for us in Jesus Christ. We welcome everyone regardless of race, culture, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical, cognitive or emotional ability, marital standing, family structure, socio-economic status, education or spiritual and religious background. All are welcome and encouraged to work together, in mission and service, to participate fully in the leadership, ministry, fellowship, worship, sacraments, responsibilities, blessings and joys of our church. We commit ourselves to the ongoing work of being an Open and Affirming Congregation, one that lives out the belief that God is still speaking, and with God's grace we journey together in Christian faith. No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome at First Church, Watertown, UCC.

Subsequently, the congregation voted to establish an ONA committee to provide support and assist the church community to remain intentional in its ONA ministry, outreach and activities. The ONA committee will plan events, educational and spiritual development opportunities to foster an affirming and extravagant welcome to everyone, no matter who they are or where they are on life's journey.

"LGBTQ people of faith often experience emotional and spiritual trauma in churches that condemn their capacity to love and seek love," said Chris Cole, chair of the committee that has led the church through a nearly three year discernment process. "We've learned that "All Are Welcome" usually doesn't apply to us and that unless a church openly, visually and behaviorally affirms us, we can't assume that any church will be safe for us or our families." Cole added.

"A public welcome by an Open and Affirming church sends a clear message to LGBTQ seekers that they have a home and truly belong – and today, we make that public welcome as a congregation," said Rev. Cindy Carr, Senior Minister at FCC Watertown. "By adopting our ONA covenant we are taking seriously St. Paul's admonition to "accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. I am thrilled for this very joyous event in the life of our church."

To learn more about First Congregational Church Watertown, UCC please visit our website at www.firstchurchwatertown.org or call the church office at 860-274-6737.

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