

For Immediate Release

Date: Sept. 17, 2019

Contact: Christopher Szymczak, (920) 979-6278, Open Circle Ochs coordinator
Rev. Jim Coakley, (715)572-0455 , Consulting Minister, Open Circle Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
Paisley Harris, (920)251-2373, OCUUF Social Just Now committee chair

Celebrated LGBTQ+ Educator and Activist Robyn Ochs speaking at Open Circle on Sept. 25

FOND DU LAC (WI)—Open Circle Unitarian Universalist Fellowship is hosting celebrated educator, speaker and LGBTQ+ activist Robyn Ochs on Sept. 25 at the Fellowship Hall at 19 3rd St., downtown Fond du Lac. Ochs is known as an advocate for the rights of people of all orientations to live safely, openly, and with full access and opportunity. A traditional UU potluck of conversation and fellowship begins the evening at 5:30 p.m.; Ochs will speak on “The Changing Landscape of Identity” after the shared meal, with the event concluding at 8 p.m. All are welcome, and invited to bring a food dish to share.

“In today’s atmosphere, I’m really excited to have someone with such compassion, positivity, and kindness come speak with us,” said Christopher Szymczak, who serves on the Open Circle ministry committee and who, as a member of the Social Justice Now committee, previously created and led two years of programming for the Equality Project, which aimed to remove gender and sexuality as barriers in understanding each other and to improve relationships across the community. “Robyn’s level of understanding really allows her to connect with individuals of all identities, but she also has the ability to break down biases and connect on a more intimate, personal level. Besides the educational factor of the program, I’m most looking forward to her words of encouragement, enthusiastic attitude, and the connectedness that she has to offer. With over three decades of activism, I know she will be able to provide much needed insight on how to be culturally competent regarding the LGBTQ+ community.”

Szymczak—a current UW-Oshkosh student where he is president of the Rainbow Alliance for HOPE and an outreach specialist at the LGBTQ+ Resource Center--invited and facilitated Ochs upcoming speaking engagement at the Fellowship after being introduced by Open Circle Consulting Minister Rev. Jim Coakley, who knows Ochs from her frequent educational work at Kimberly Clark where Coakley worked for many years.

Ochs’ programs are described as interactive and dynamic, incorporating current research and ideas from the fields of psychology, sociology, queer theory, and women’s and gender studies with an aim to be accessible to a general audience.

“As our name implies, Open Circle seeks to be radically welcoming, and that includes people from the LGBTQ+ community,” said Rev. Coakley. “In my opinion, the first step to being welcoming is to really

understand someone. Robyn's workshops are designed to help us achieve a better understanding of sexual and gender identities. She is a very energetic and engaging speaker, because she usually speaks at major universities. You will not be disappointed, and will come away with a little more love and understanding in your heart."

Since 1985, Ochs has been a speaker and keynote presenter at hundreds of conferences and events in countries around the globe. She is lauded for her ability to communicate to diverse audiences on sexual orientation, gender, and identity through an interdisciplinary and intersectional lens. Her writing is published in numerous bi, women's studies, multicultural and LGBTQ+ anthologies; she is the editor of *Bi Women Quarterly* and of two anthologies: the 42-country collection "Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World" and "Recognize: The Voices of Bisexual Men." She was an administrator at Harvard University for 26 years, and has taught courses on LGBTQ+ history and politics at several institutions. She has earned many awards for her work, including being named by *Teen Vogue* as one of "9 Bisexual Woman who are Making History."

Ochs is known for crafting the definition of bisexuality used by many bi+ activists around the world: "I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge in myself the potential to be attracted — romantically and/or sexually — to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree."

Ochs' visit is the latest programming in Open Circle's commitment to be a welcoming and affirming community.

"Open Circle was the first welcoming congregation in Fond du Lac and was started in part to provide a spiritual community in Fond du Lac that is open and welcoming to LGBTQ+ individuals," said Paisley Harris, Social Justice Now committee co-chair and a UW-Oshkosh faculty member recently noted by the university for her work as an LGBTQ+ ally. "Open Circle has an ongoing commitment to advocating for LGBT rights in the community and providing educational programming."

Unitarian Universalists strongly believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and the spiritual practice of welcome is a very important part of UU faith communities. For 25 years, congregations have worked hard to make sure lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people are full members of UU faith communities. Being welcoming means striving for radical inclusion, and creating spaces that honor every part of individuals' identities, backgrounds, and experiences.

Open Circle Sunday services are at 10 a.m.

Find Open Circle Unitarian Universalist Fellowship on Facebook at www.facebook.com/Open-Circle-Unitarian-Universalist-Fellowship-115997188421362/ and on the web at <http://www.ocuuf.org/> .

