

For Immediate Release

Date: Oct. 20, 2017

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October 26 Equality Project Event will focus on LGBTQ+ History

FOND DU LAC—October is National LGBTQ+ History Month and the focus of The Equality Project event on Oct. 26 from 6-8 p.m. at Open Circle Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 19 3rd St., in downtown Fond du Lac. The Equality Project is a monthly gathering to educate, support, and take action to achieve equality for LGBTQ+ persons. The evening begins with a 6 p.m. potluck, and will continue from 6:30-8 p.m. with a “Jeopardy” style game format featuring content about LGBTQ+ history and audience-based teams led by three visiting professional drag queens. All Fond du Lac residents who stand on the side of love are invited to attend.

The 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City are acknowledged by activists and historians as a key turning point in the modern fight for LGBTQ+ rights in the United States. The riots are named for a police raid on the NYC gay bar Stonewall Inn, a then-common event. Police lost control of the situation, and protestors joined those being attacked by police, turning the raid into a riot. Pro-LGBT protestors reconvened the following night and again several evenings later, then organized into activist groups intent on creating safe spaces for gays and lesbians to be open about their sexual orientation without fearing arrest. Within a year, gay pride marches in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Chicago marked the anniversary of the riots. The Stonewall National Monument was established at the riot site near the inn and nearby Christopher Park in 2016.

“Drag queens and Transgender individuals played an important role in the unfolding of the Stonewall riots. In that spirit, we have invited three drag queens to join us at our LGBTQ+ History Month event,” said Christopher Szymczak, OCUUF Equality Project coordinator. “They are going to present the history of Stonewall in a ‘Jeopardy’ format, with question categories including national history, Wisconsin history, pop culture, activists, and laws/politics.”

Men dressed as women created the catalyst for the Stonewall raid turning into a riot. These drag queens refused to follow the usual process of following police orders into a bathroom to verify their gender. Other patrons then also refused to show identification. Police chose to arrest the bar patrons, and when vans arrived for transport, a crowd from the neighborhood had gathered outside. After witnessing police physical aggression toward the arrested patrons, the crowd reacted with spontaneous aggression against the police.

The evening will also include some documentary clips of LGBT history and a lip sync battle by the visiting drag queens, modeled on the television show RuPaul’s Drag Race. Wisconsin drag queens Vanilla

Diamond, Ms. Anya, and Cass Marie (who recently won a national title) are volunteering their time for the educational event.

Like the local Humanity Project, with its goal of getting past race as a barrier, The Equality Project aims to remove gender and sexuality as barriers in understanding each other, and to improve relationships across the community. Upcoming Equality Project topics include Transgender education on Nov. 30 (and participation in a Transgender Day of Remembrance vigil on Nov. 20 at 12:30 p.m. in the UW-FDL Commons), an HIV/AIDS update on Dec. 7 (in conjunction with World Aids Day on Dec. 1), and holiday party on Dec. 28. More dates will be forthcoming in 2018.

“We have embraced radical hospitality,” said Open Circle President Lisette Aldrich. “Open Circle is a welcoming and safe place for all folks, a sanctuary. This supports the core idea that first grabbed me in my religious education in my childhood: Love One Another.”

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.

Follow Open Circle Unitarian Universalist Fellowship on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/Open-Circle-Unitarian-Universalist-Fellowship-115997188421362/> and on the web at <http://www.ocuuf.org/> . Also follow The Equality Project on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/equalityprojectfdl/>.

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