

For Immediate Release

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Contact: Paisley Harris at (920)251-2373, OCUUF Social Just Now Committee chair
Lisette Aldrich at (920)251-0835, OCUUF president
Christopher Szymczak (920) 979-6278, OCUUF Equality Project coordinator

Stand of the Side of Love at OCUUF Equality Project, beginning Feb. 23

Open Circle Unitarian Universalist Fellowship lives its role as a UU Welcoming Congregation by hosting The Equality Project, a monthly gathering to educate, support and take action to achieve equality for LGBTQ+ persons. All Fond du Lac residents who stand on the side of love are invited to attend the kickoff event on Thursday, Feb. 23, at the fellowship, 19 3rd St., in downtown Fond du Lac.

The evening will begin with a social gathering and refreshments at 6 p.m. Welcomes and introductions from local LGBTQ leaders will follow at 6:30 p.m., leading to the screening of Season 1, Episode 4, of Gaycation, a television series that follows actors Ellen Page and Ian Daniel as they explore LGBT cultures around the world. The episode screened will focus on LGBTQ+ issues in America, followed by discussion. Plans for upcoming gatherings and related events will be shared, and the evening will wrap up at 8:30 p.m.

The Equality Project is the idea of UW-Fond du Lac student leader and Open Circle member Christopher Szymczak.

"In a world full of heteronormativity, The Equality Project is working towards helping end the stigmas and misconceptions about the LGBTQ+ community, starting here in Fond du Lac and then working our way out," Szymczak said. "Although we've achieved marriage equality with the US Supreme Court case Obergefell v. Hodges, individuals who do not identify their sexual orientation as heterosexual are still oppressed and discriminated against in many ways. We still have work to do and right now we're doing it. It can be an uncomfortable topic for some, but we are here to help you understand and feel comfortable."

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.

"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.

"Our new Social Justice Now Committee will work for justice, equality, and a well-functioning democracy," said committee chair Paisley Harris. "We are focusing on The Equality Project as a first major effort because we see a need for such advocacy at this time in Fond du Lac and in society more broadly."

Future Equality Project evenings will examine a variety of topics, including current issues; civility and equality; religion; LGBTQ history, including social justice leaders, the Stonewall Riots, and Pride celebrations; protections for youth at school and in our community; days of remembrance such as Transgender Day of Remembrance and World Aids Day; LGBT families; and mental health.

Equality Project gatherings are scheduled at Open Circle on March 23, April 27, May 25, and June 8. Open Circle Sunday services are at 10 a.m., September through June.

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