

For Immediate Release

Date: Nov. 20, 2017

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November 30 Equality Project Event will focus on Transgender Education and Awareness

FOND DU LAC—The Equality Project’s Nov. 30 event will focus on Transgender Education and Awareness 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 program featuring educational content and a personal presentation on living as a transgender individual. All Fond du Lac residents who stand on the side of love are invited to attend.

“The recent decision by our government calling for a ban on transgender people serving in the military has brought awareness of trans people more into mainstream consciousness and conversation,” said Christopher Szymczak, OCUUF Equality Project coordinator. “The estimate is that 15,500 military members identify as transgender. That is a significant number of military personnel, and there has been push-back about removing these capable, trained people from service.

“Nearly 700,000 people identify as transgender in the U.S.” Szymczak said. “Because of lack of acceptance and understanding, 41 percent of those people have attempted suicide. Trans individuals have higher risks of mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse, self-harm, sexual assault, homelessness, and dropping out of education. And, an estimated 25 trans individuals have been murdered in our country this year. Many of these distressing outcomes could be eliminated with more understanding and knowledge about the many natural variations within humanity.”

Across the country, 18 states offer legal protection for trans individuals, ensuring equality and safety in housing, employment, schools, and public accommodations; the other 32 (including Wisconsin) do not. Cities are taking up the call for diversity protection, including DePere, WI, whose city council in November gave preliminary approval on a 5-4 vote to a measure that would broaden the local nondiscrimination ordinance to cover transgender people. A decade ago, Fond du Lac County voted down a diversity initiative. A new Statement in Support of Diversity in Fond du Lac County was announced in June 2017 through two full-page ads in The Reporter. The project was launched by Ripon College, Marian University, Moraine Park Technical College and the University of Wisconsin-Fond du Lac; it is available for viewing and signing at: ripon.edu/diversity-statement/ .

The Thursday evening program at OCUUF will include information on terminology, pronouns and gender identity; transgender history; issues in the transgender community; legislation affecting transgender people; the recent election of openly transgender persons in government; conversation tips; ways to be

an ally, and more. Award-winning drag queen Cass Marie--who performed at Drag Queen Jeopardy for the Equality Project's October LGBT History Month program--will speak about her own personal journey to becoming her true self. A moment of silence will be held for the hundreds of known and unknown transgender individuals killed around the world during the past year: National Transgender Day of Awareness was held Nov. 20 and the Equality Project co-sponsored a vigil on that date at the UW-Fond du Lac Campus.

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 include 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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