

For Immediate Release

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### **National Coming Out Day 2017 Honored at Open Circle UU Fellowship, Wednesday, Oct. 11**

FOND DU LAC—The Equality Project of Open Circle Unitarian Universalist Fellowship is honoring National Coming Out Day on Wednesday, Oct. 11, by offering local LGBTQ+ citizens a chance to film and post their own coming out stories on the fellowship's Facebook page during an evening drop-in open house from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Confidential paraprofessional counseling and conversation about coming out is available in person at the event and also by contacting The Equality Project through Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/equalityprojectfdl/>. The Wednesday evening gathering will also include an LGBT movie, games, refreshments, and socializing.

The Equality Project is a monthly gathering to educate, support, and take action to achieve equality for LGBTQ+ persons. Open Circle is located at 19 3rd St., in downtown Fond du Lac.

October is National LGBT History Month.

"Coming out is an ongoing process," said Equality Project Coordinator Christopher Szymczak. "It starts with ourselves, and usually includes our family and friends. It can include our co-workers and colleagues, and new people we meet throughout our lives. We may evaluate the risks of coming out to new people and in new situations. Heterosexuality is the default expectation in our society, and LGBT people are not accepted by all other people in all situations.

"In fact, it is not unusual for a significant number of LGBT people to experience negative reactions when they come out," Szymczak said. "They may be rejected by people as important as family. So, on National Coming Out Day, we are offering an opportunity for people to come out in a positive and nurturing environment—whether it is actually for their first time or if they simply are looking for a welcoming place to say and be who they are."

National Coming Out Day was founded in the United States in 1988, on the belief that homophobia thrives on silence and ignorance. "Most people think they don't know anyone gay or lesbian, and in fact everybody does. It is imperative that we come out and let people know who we are and disabuse them of their fears and stereotypes," said the late psychologist Robert Eichberg, in 1993.

Eichberg co-founded NCOD with activist Jean O'Leary, and the duo chose to create a day of positive celebration instead of defensiveness to anti-LGBT action on the anniversary of the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. For more about National Coming Out day, visit the Human Rights Campaign website at <https://www.hrc.org/resources/national-coming-out-day>.

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 Day of Remembrance on Nov. 30 and an HIV/AIDS update on Dec. 7.

“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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