

## **Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of Open and Affirming at Danville Congregational Church**

*(Second in a series of articles by Chris Rauen.)*

In the fall of 1996, Danville Congregational Church formed an Open and Affirming (ONA) committee. This would be the first step in a multi-year process to become recognized as an ONA church. In less than three years – after many second-hour and council discussions, workshops, a classroom program, and adult study video series, among other activities – the ONA designation for DCC would become official.

This effort followed a movement that began decades earlier within the larger United Church of Christ community. 1972 was a milestone year. On June 25 of that year, William R. Johnson was ordained as the first openly gay minister of the United Church of Christ by the Golden Gate Association, which consists of UCC churches in San Francisco, the peninsula, and the North Bay. Rev. Johnson and fellow UCC members then founded the UCC Gay Caucus, now known as the Open and Affirming Coalition of the UCC. This group advocates for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community within UCC, and supports UCC churches in their efforts to become recognized as Open and Affirming.

In the spring of 1982, another milestone was achieved when the Rev. Anne Holmes became the first openly lesbian minister, ordained in the Emmaus UCC church in Vienna, Va. The debate over Holmes' ordination was “highly charged,” according to a news report at the time. She ultimately received a substantial majority of votes, but the controversy cost the 350-member church about 20 percent of its active membership.

Advances in promoting ONA more broadly came in 1985, when the UCC General Synod adopted its ONA resolution. The resolution urges UCC congregations to declare themselves “Open and Affirming.” The word chosen to reflect a church’s ONA commitment is covenant, defined as “a promise we make to God.” In support of this covenant, DCC is among the estimated 30 percent of UCC 5,000 churches that today have voted to be an ONA church.

At DCC, the committee that was formed in 1996 set the stage for a comprehensive set of second-hour discussions and educational programs in 1997, 1998 and 1999. We’ll take a closer look at these next month.