

Open and Affirming Committee Meeting
Minutes
October 23, 2007

Present: Gail Hall, Chairman

Michael Bower, Laurel Cole, Mary Dean, Tim Dostie, Katie Hoffman-Fulda, Bob Inderbitzen, Bill Hoffman, Pat Howland, Stephanie Heneghan, Ron Robbins, Tom Rolfe, Steve Smith, and Wendy Ware

The meeting was called to order a 7:30 with a prayer.

Gail noted that Joan Diaz had resigned from the committee. Joan felt that she didn't have sufficient time to devote to the committee's work.

Minutes from the October 11th meeting were adopted after a change in verbiage.

Discussion took place on the draft ONA Charter. The Preface was revised to remove the "key points" from the Diaconate section of the preface. In essence, the committee was in agreement that Civil Unions as a subject would come up during the ONA process and that there was no need to spike it out as a subject in the preface. Instead, the key points document from the July 29 meeting would be available at our open forum and on the church website. The committee also revised language on participation under section six. Further language changes were made to Section 1.

The Committee adopted the following ONA Charter language:

Opening and Affirming Committee Charter

Rocky Hill Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Rocky Hill, Connecticut

1. Preface

We the members of the Open and Affirming Committee of Rocky Hill Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, are people united by word and deed. We are listening for God's Word to us in this time and place, trusting that God has yet more truth to break forth out of the Word.

The Diaconate, supported in covenant by the Church Council, has commissioned this committee to guide the congregation through a process of discernment over whether we (RHCC) should become an Open and Affirming Church. We expect that this process will take place over a period of at least one year, and longer if necessary.

In 1985, the United Church of Christ urged its member churches to issue a public statement making it clear that all are welcome in our congregation, regardless of sexual orientation. In the tradition of the UCC, this resolution of General Synod is not a mandate. Each congregation must make its own decision, and every member has a vote. Church-wide participation in prayer and study is crucial to the outcome of this journey, whatever it may be. Each believer, as well as the entire church family will be invited to explore their range of experience, values and beliefs.

In order to effectively coordinate and manage our actions as a committee, and to communicate to the Congregation on how we plan to work together as group, we have established this **Charter**. The Charter outlines a process that we believe is best for the RHCC and will help clearly set forth our purpose and mission. The ONA Committee is a diverse group of 14 RHCC Members who are involved with various aspects of church life.

2. Vision

To create and implement an open and unbiased process that engages all in the Rocky Hill Congregational Church Family in a journey of prayer, study, and discussion and to provide all with the information needed to make an informed decision.

3. Mission

To guide the congregation through the ONA process of discernment.

4. Goals and Objectives

- ☆ To collect and provide information on Open and Affirming to **all** in the RHCC family.
- ☆ To educate the congregation on what “Open and Affirming” means per the United Church of Christ and what flexibilities are available to each Congregation
- ☆ To collect and share information with the Diaconate about the questions, concerns and trends affecting the outcome of this process of discernment.
- ☆ To provide opportunities for all members of the congregation to learn, ask questions, express concerns/issues and share support for each other.

5. Participants

The ONA Committee is made up of the following church members (in alphabetical order):

ONA Committee Members

- Michael Bower
- Laurel Cole

- Mary Dean
- Tim Dostie
- Gail Hall (chairperson)
- Stephanie Heneghan
- Bill Hoffman
- Katie Hoffman-Fulda
- Pat Howland
- Bob Inderbitzen
- Ron Robbins
- Tom Rolfe
- Steve Smith
- Wendy Ware

6. Participant Commitment

The ONA Committee will convene twice a month on an ongoing basis for at least one year.

Committee members will be expected to actively participate in meetings and follow-up activities. They will be expected to make contributions towards achieving the goals and objectives of this Charter and to maintain a focus on the Vision and Mission of the ONA Committee.

Other interested church members will be invited to participate in the organization of committee-sponsored activities.

7. Communications

On a monthly basis, as appropriate, information on the ONA process will be made available to Church members on the RHCC website, and periodic updates will be provided in the Church Newsletter.

Additional forums and workshops will be planned and scheduled as part of the Committee's Action Plan which will be posted on the RHCC Website.

8. Sponsorship

The ONA Committee is authorized and sponsored by the Diaconate of the Rocky Hill Congregational Church, United Church of Christ.

The Committee continued its meeting with planning for the second hour presentation. It was determined that Gail Hall would facilitate the meeting this time.

Hand outs for the meeting will include the just adopted Charter as well as the July 29th second hour fact sheet from the Diaconate.

The participants will be asked how we can reach out to them. What mechanisms can we create to communicate. Discussion of future forum topics might include UCC positions, Social Justice, What is the law in Connecticut on Civil Unions, and Biblical studies to name a few.

The goal of the second hour is to answer people's questions and bring them to a level of comfort that we are asking and seeking the answers to their questions. It was agreed that handouts would include copies of the ONA Committee Charter along with the Questions and Answers Handout provided by the Diaconate at the second hour meeting on July 29th, 2007. A further goal is to set up many different ways for people to communicate with the committee, among them tables with ONA materials at the main entrances of the Church as well as suggestion boxes in the same location.

Next meeting topics:

Thursday, November 1: prepare for the 2nd hour.
Prepare suggestions boxes.

Tuesday, November 13th meeting: someone from the conference will attend who can tell us about other church's experiences.

The meeting closed with a prayer at 9:05 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Steve Smith