



For Immediate Release

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### **Bethany Children's Home Officially Listed as Open and Affirming**

April 30, 2015..... On April 28, 2015 the Board of Directors for Bethany Children's Home in Womelsdorf, PA unanimously voted to become "Open and Affirming." The vote came after over five years of discernment and discussion. An "open and affirming" organization fully welcomes people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning into the full life and leadership of the organization.

On the same day, the Open and Affirming Coalition of the United Church of Christ accepted Bethany's ONA Welcoming Statement and Covenant. As a certified ONA Ministry, Bethany Children's Home will be listed with the UCC's national registry of ONA churches and organizations. This will help youth, partners, and agencies network and connect with supporters nationwide. It will also help individuals and other churches or organizations searching for health and human services through the UCC's website to find Bethany and learn about specific services.

Bethany has worked for six years to increase awareness, improve staff trainings, and expand services for LGBT residents and staff. The organization formed a PRIDE team in 2010 to foster safe spaces, provide education, and offer support for Bethany staff and youth regarding individuals of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.

Bethany also provides a Safe Space program that functions as a support group while providing education, safety, and confidentiality to youth who are growing with their identity as it pertains to current LGBTQ struggles. This group is designed to build community cohesion for LGBT and straight ally youth; while focusing on allowing youth to have a "Safe Space" to provide support, build community among one another, and provide tools to build positive activism to create change and spread knowledge to both staff and peer groups.

"The Bethany family was built on a solid foundation of acceptance, inclusiveness, and radical hospitality to children in need. With so many children forced into homelessness, experiencing abuse, and contemplating suicide because they are gay or lesbian or transgender or even questioning those ideas it



is critical that our local communities open our doors and provide those youth with appropriate services; including safe, caring, and loving homes. This is something Bethany does exceptionally well.” says Rose Shepley, Communications Specialist and Chair of Bethany’s PRIDE team.

With this vote, Bethany becomes the second organization to become an “Open and Affirming” ministry of the UCC. Marion, Ohio-based United Church Homes was the first ONA designated ministry.

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