Amherst News
The CITIZEN-RECORD

Trinity-St. Stephen's to permit same-sex marriages

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Published on March 02, 2011

Congregation votes 75 per cent in favour

Same-sex marriages will now be permitted at Trinity-St. Stephen's United Church following a vote by the congregation.

AMHERST - One of Amherst's largest and oldest churches has changed its mind on same-sex marriages.

The congregation at Trinity-St. Stephen's United Church voted 75 per cent in favour of allowing same-sex marriages to take place within the building, overturning a 2002 vote that narrowly refused to allow it.

"The country of Canada welcomes civil marriage for same-sex couples, that's the way it has been since 2005," said Ron Patterson, a member of an ad hoc committee that brought forward the recommendation to a congregational meeting following last Sunday's church service. "It's something that people have a lot of strong feelings about one way or the other, but we supported it because it's the right thing to do."

Patterson said his committee was put together two years ago to review the 2002. That committee brought forward a recommendation to the church council in January and it passed with 80 per cent approval.

While the church will be available for same-sex marriages, Patterson said it doesn't mean the church's ministers will be forced to conduct them.

Local gay rights activist Gerard Veldhoven is applauding the move as progressive, saying the Amherst church will be the only one between Sackville, N.B. and Truro that will perform same-sex unions.

While he doesn't expect a flood of couples to the altar, Veldhoven believes there are same-sex couples who will take advantage of the opportunity.

"It goes to show what this community is like in how it's willing to embrace the GBLT community," Veldhoven said. "It's one more big step in the right direction."

The United Church of Canada has permitted same-sex marriages since 1984, but has left the final decision up to individual churches.

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