

Eden United Church of Christ

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Minister, local parents, and faith leaders speak out on gay diversity education in Castro Valley schools

Eden Church kicks off “Love Makes a Family” photo exhibit and celebration

Castro Valley, California – March 5, 2010 – Today, Dr. Arlene K. Nehring, Senior Minister of Eden United Church of Christ, announced she would participate in the “Days of Diversity” program at Castro Valley High School, March 11–12. She was joined by three parents who urged local schools to include lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) awareness in diversity education as a tool for combating bullying in school environments.

Rev. Nehring and the parents were joined by two faith leaders, one Christian and one Jewish, who testified to their support for the inclusion of LGBT issues in diversity education was consistent with and had the broad support of many in their respective traditions. The community was invited to attend Eden Church’s “Love Makes a Family” photo exhibit and celebration this weekend, March 6 and 7.

“I will return to “Days of Diversity” next week for the fourth consecutive year.” said Rev. Nehring. “The title of my talk, “Out for Good”, underscores that being truthful about my identity as a pastor, who happens to be lesbian, is healthy and that I continue to promote diversity education to build respect for all people in our community and local schools.”

Rev. Nehring provided a preview of her talk, which includes a glossary used by sociologists to describe LGBT persons, highlights and photos of her personal life journey, and a brief history of the LGBT civil rights struggle. Rev. Nehring indicated that, as in previous years, students will be invited to ask questions throughout her talk and, anonymously, at its end. “I hope today’s preview will dispel any myths about my talk,” said Rev. Nehring, “and demonstrates that Eden Church has an ongoing commitment to diversity education, safe schools, and anti-bullying programs in Castro Valley public schools.”

Athena Guy Malloy, chairwoman of the Eden Church congregation and mother of two children, said, “It is our belief that it is not the number of adults or children in a family, the gender or sexual orientation of any members, or the family configuration that makes a group of people a healthy family—but rather the love that they share with each other.” On behalf of the Eden Church members, Ms. Guy Malloy, who is Chinese-American, invited the public to participate in Eden Church’s “Love Makes a Family” photo exhibit and celebration that begins today and continues through the weekend. “Bring a photo of your family for our exhibit and a picnic lunch and join us for storytelling and other children’s activities on Saturday, 12 noon to 3 p.m.,” said Ms. Guy Malloy, “or come to our open house on Sunday, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., to view the photo exhibit.”

Jenifer Miller, Castro Valley artist and author of two children’s books about family diversity and tolerance, said, “I have four children in wonderfully-diverse Castro Valley schools. My children live in diversity every time they go to school. I believe diversity education leads to a deeper understanding of

the people they are growing up with and it helps to create an atmosphere of acceptance and tolerance.” Mrs. Miller, an Anglo-American married woman, will read her books, which were inspired by the anti-bullying programs and nontraditional families at her children’s school, at the “Love Makes a Family” celebration this weekend.

Keith Smith, a legally-married African-American gay man with two children, described a successful gay-straight alliance at his children’s local elementary school and said, “Diversity education is important because it builds an inclusive community. I heard a straight parent say ‘When the child of a two-dad or two-mom family is supported, my child is supported.’ I believe that when my children are welcome in their friends’ homes and when parents feel comfortable sending their children to our home, multicultural education is having an impact. Parents and children are both learning how to build a community that accepts and respects everyone.”

Ruth Hartman, President of Congregation Shir Ami in Castro Valley said, “As a Jew, I am keenly aware of the costs of remaining silent when any group of people are forced to hide who they are, are demonized in the public imagination, denied equal rights, or targeted for mistreatment. The Jewish tradition teaches me that we all have an obligation to speak out when we see any group being mistreated.” Ms. Hartman, who is a mother of a CVUSD student, added, “I am proud to state without hesitation that the Jewish community of Castro Valley, and progressive Jews throughout the world, stand with Rev. Nehring and Eden Church in the struggle for full respect and inclusion for LGBT people.”

Rev. Drew Nettinga, who is the Associate Conference Minister for the Bay Association of the Northern California Nevada Conference, United Church of Christ (UCC), explained that in the UCC, God welcomes all people. “Our belief in God’s radical hospitality leads our church to support public schools and community leaders who offer multicultural, anti-bullying, and safe schools programs.” Rev. Nettinga described how the highest governing body of the UCC, which is a mainline Protestant denomination with over one million members, unanimously adopted an official position last summer calling for the inclusion of LGBT persons and families in school programs, a resolution that also called on congregations like Eden Church to provide leadership support for these types of programs.

For further information about Dr. Nehring’s “Out for Good” talk, Eden Church’s “Love Makes a Family” photo exhibit and activities on Saturday and Sunday, March 6 and 7, or the United Church of Christ, please contact Pepper Swanson, pepper@edenucc.com, 510-695-4117.

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