

## Stories of quiet dedication, sadness

Toni Lambert  
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Fifty liturgical stoles are on display through Monday, Oct. 20, at Community United Church of Christ in St. Paul Park.

All the stoles — part of the larger Shower of Stoles project — have one mission: to end religious discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

The collection was set up Saturday, Sept. 13, as a second step in Community United Church of Christ's proposal to officially become Open and Affirming to the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community. In mid-November the congregation will vote on the proposal.

Edie Seefeldt, a member of the task force leading the discussion on becoming an open and affirming church, describes the stoles as sacred, irreplaceable works of art.

"Most of them seem rather sad, but they have to touch your heart to see what life is like for these people," she said.

Marlyne Leary, moderator of the St. Paul Park church's governing ministry board said the story that touched her was about a gay couple that was very active in their church. The couple adopted a baby boy, but their church refused to baptize the baby because it didn't feel the couple could give the baby a Christian upbringing.

"The display is moving; others should see it," Leary said.

**On Sunday, Sept. 14, the Rev. Rebecca Voelkel led worship at the church. Voelkel is program director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Institute for Welcoming Resources.**

**"Many people stayed for the question-and-answer session and later to speak with Voelkel one-on-one," Seefeldt said.**

**"The response to Voelkel was very positive," Leary said.**

"We haven't received any negative responses to our discussion of ONA status," she said, "even though I was anticipating some. Is this just a time when change is happening? I know someday I'll ask my children and grandchildren what they think, and they'll say 'what's the big deal?'"

"I think it's important to be an ONA church, but regardless of the outcome of the vote we will have learned about ourselves and what our mission is as a church and how we will move forward," Leary said.

As part of the Open and Affirming discussion, the 10:30 a.m. worship service on Sunday, Oct. 19, will include a panel of people who are involved with the GLBT community.

The discussion about Open and Affirming status resulted from the church's search for a full-time, permanent pastor last spring. Some of the candidates were gay or lesbian and the woman who was asked to fill the position said she could not accept it because the church was not Open and Affirming.

The display of liturgical stoles at Community United Church of Christ is open on Sundays before and after worship at 10:30 a.m. and by appointment. For details, call the church office at (651) 459-2543. The church is located at 1145 Summit Ave., St. Paul Park.