

## Iridesce: The Living Apology Project

March 2019

Dear Members and Friends of the United Church,

This letter is reaching you to share an update on the work and vision of **Iridesce: The Living Apology Project**. In our first year, we received support and encouragement from the Conferences in our goal of remembering and sharing around the United Church's 1988 vote of gay and lesbian membership and ministry. We wish to extend our sincere thanks for the many ways you connected us to communities of faith in each of your areas.

In this package, we'll look back on our year and reflect on why it is important to continue the work of Iridesce. We'll outline our new focuses for Iridesce 2.0, **including a new invitation to support Regional Councils in their Interim Affirming Ministry work**. Finally, we'll outline how communities of faith in your Region can be involved in this project of our Church.

We are asking for your help to identify communities or groups who were challenged by the vote in 1988, or who continue to wrestle with membership and ministry of LGBTQ2+ Christians today and are open to engaging in a conversation. We are also asking for your help to connect us with United Church people who may have particular stories to share... from any perspective on the 1988 vote.

As a final note, a new team is being formed and you'll hear from us again to share that information.

We thank you for this opportunity to work together, to connect with this United Church of ours seeking to know, grow and heal in community through presence, sharing and listening to our diverse experiences of 1988.

In peace,

Aaron Miechkota, Project Coordinator

### **Iridesce: The Living Apology Project**

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## Iridesce Reflection & New Directions

### **Overall Goal of Iridesce**

At General Council 42 the church voted to support a national project of story-sharing with people affected by the Church's 1988 decision — when the church declared that all people, regardless of sexual orientation, are welcome as full members and all members are eligible to be considered for ordered ministry. These stories would then help the church to discern if, and how, it might live into a possible apology to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and Two-Spirit people (LGBTQ2+).

### **Look back at Iridesce 1.0**

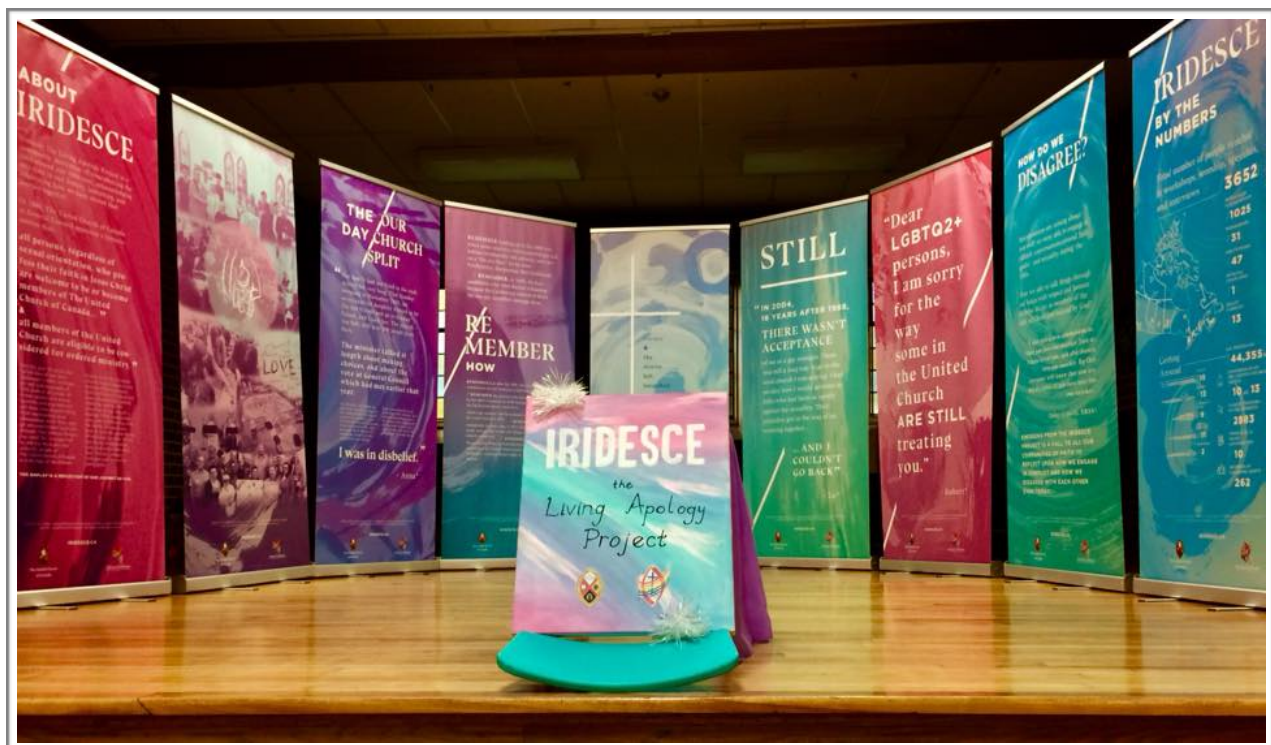
The first instalment of the Iridesce project began in May 2017, working toward a report to GC43 in July 2018. During that time we travelled 44,355 km from coast-to-coast, visiting 10 of the 13 then-Conferences of the United Church. We engaged with 1025 participants at 31 workshop held in communities of faith in rural, suburban and urban areas. We discovered that most of the communities who invited us were Affirming ministries and/or had participated in Intercultural ministry training. We attended Youth Forum, Conference AGMs, and Presbytery meetings across the country. To date, we have collected over 270 stories, shared on our website. All of this we did on time and on budget, which was no small feat and thanks to the support of 47 volunteers, 13 families who billeted us in their homes, local ministers, General Council Office departments and all levels of United Church organization. We were supported pastorally and in prayer by our incredible chaplain and partner, Rev. Read Sherman of Trinity UC (Montreal), who we cannot thank enough for his wisdom, creativity, insight and unwavering commitment to guiding this project toward the Way of Christ.

## What we learned in Iridesce 1.0

We took time away in autumn of 2018, to reflect on what had emerged, and to pray and vision on how to move the project forward. The feeling from our interviews, workshops and stories collected is that the experience of 1988 was not a neutral experience. Rather, it was a charged time in our history together. The idea of gay and lesbian membership and ministry both gathered people and polarized people. Other people did not understand why this was happening. The vote was a celebration for some people and churches, it was devastating for others. Following the vote there was significant conflict in some churches, for returning 1988 General Council commissioners, and for some people both lay and clergy.

## Why it is important to continue this work

During Iridesce 1.0, we accepted almost every invitation to visit. We discovered that most of the communities who invited us were Affirming ministries and/or had participated in Intercultural Ministry training. The result is that the stories we collected represent a particular perspective. We want to challenge ourselves and the church to reach out in new ways, to hear from more voices for a more well-rounded conversation about the history and affects of our 1988 vote.



The Iridesce Posters. Photo: Kim Uyede-kai.

## New Focuses for Iridesce 2.0

In 2019, Iridesce 2.0 will focus on these groups and areas:

### ✓ **Marginalized Voices**

We seek to build relationships with the goal of collecting stories about experiences and perspectives of LGBTQ2+ people who are racialized, Indigenous, Two-Spirit, and/or disabled, and are often marginalized within the LGBTQ2+ community in the United Church and wider society.

### ✓ **Regional Councils**

We seek to engage with those Regional Councils who are working on their Affirming Ministry status, and offer Iridesce as a resource to support their Action Plans.

### ✓ **All United Church Voices**

We seek to listen to communities of faith who are willing to engage in conversation, who have not yet become an Affirming Ministry, who may have been opposed to the 1988 decision or who have never engaged the issue, and/or may feel isolated from those in the church who are engaging these issues.

### ✓ **Global Partner Stories**

How did our Global Partners respond to the 1988 decision and what impact did it have for them? Iridesce is teaming with GCO staff to collect stories from the church's Global Partners, on the impact of The United Church of Canada's 1988 decision on their partnership with the church, and on what their experience of this has been since then.

### ✓ **Voices from the Past**

We seek to know more about our church's perception and reality around supports available before and during The Issue Years (1980-1998). We will search our archives to know: How did we as church respond to individual and community experiences leading up to and after 1988? For example, were there research proposals, support documents, etc.? We also want to know where other denominations in Canada are in their journeys with LGBTQ2+ people.

### ✓ **Theology**

Everything we do as church is rooted in our relationship with God, Jesus Christ and the Spirit. We are stronger together when we act, care and love from a standpoint of faith and spirit. Therefore, we seek to collect theological resources connected with: the work around 1988, collective healing, story-sharing; a theology of diversity; why be affirming; what was our theology around LGBTQ2+ welcome then and now; a theology of apology/forgiveness/grace; why discern wisdom together; scripture parallels, etc. We also seek to identify where there may be gaps in theological resources.

### ✓ **Timeline**

January 2019: Relaunch of project  
March - November 2019: Collect stories, conduct workshops & interviews, etc.  
December 2019: Prepare final report for partners