

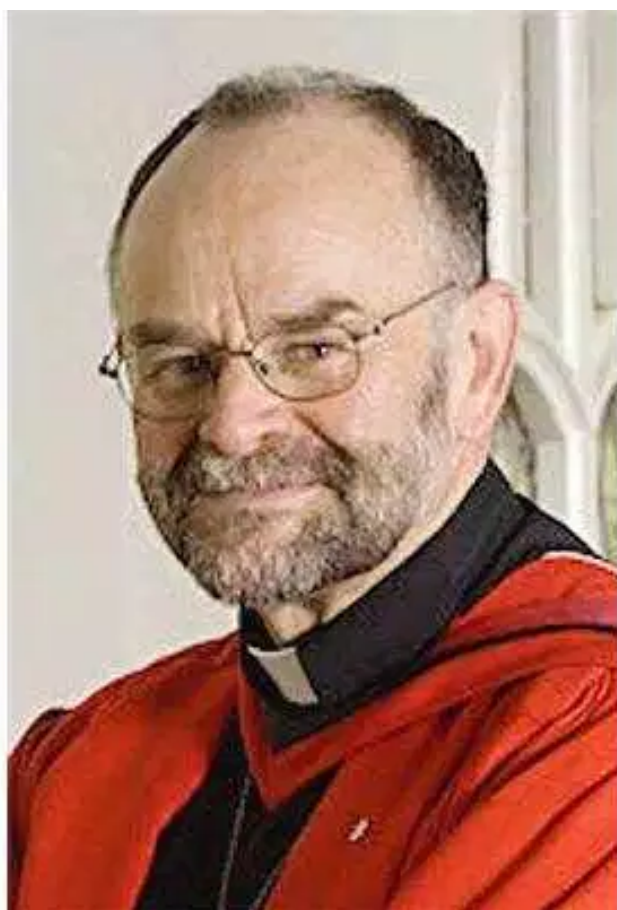
# Human and gay rights pioneer comes to Calgary



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Rev. Brent Hawkes of the Metropolitan Community Church in Toronto. *SUPPLIED*

CALGARY – Toronto-based Rev. Brent Hawkes, a human and gay rights pioneer, best known for officiating at politician Jack Layton's funeral, is coming to Calgary for a speaking engagement.

"Things are in quite a bit of transition in Canada," he says. "Most denominations are struggling with the issue of sexual orientation but I

think in general with sexuality.

“Churches are not great at talking about sexual issues. Churches are struggling with it in terms of between conservatives and liberals. How do you interpret scripture on this issue and others? And how does that relate to sexual orientation? And now that we have equal marriage in Canada the churches are having to decide are we going to marry gay people or not? And more and more gay people are coming out and their families are demanding a place in the church for people . . . It's certainly a hot issue that's being debated.”

Hawkes will be speaking Saturday at 7:30 p.m. at Hillhurst United Church. The Journey to Faith and Freedom will include an open Q&A after the presentation. Opening for Hawkes will be Calgary's BarberEllas – a gay group of females and males performing a barbershop-style musical event.

Hawkes will also be preaching at the two Sunday morning services at the church at 9 a.m. and 10:45 a.m.

Hawkes is a pastor at the Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto, a Christian church, and is well-known for championing several human rights initiatives, especially benefiting the gay and lesbian community.

In 2001, Hawkes officiated at the first legal marriage of a gay or lesbian couple in the history of the world. He was also appointed to the Order of Canada by the Governor General of Canada for his stand on social justice and human rights within the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) communities.

In 2011, Hawkes officiated over the state funeral for the Honourable Jack Layton, Leader of Canada's Official Opposition and head of the NDP.

“I'm very, very impressed with Hillhurst United Church and what they're doing. I think MCC Toronto and Hillhurst have a lot in common and a lot to learn from each other. And so there are a number of more progressive churches in Canada who are starting to look to each other and work with each other,” he says.

“It’s starting to build eventually a bigger movement of progressive churches.”

At his Calgary presentation, Hawkes will be covering the history of gay rights in Canada, from a historical and a spiritual perspective.

“Brent has been a welcome and needed challenge to the broader church to examine important issues such as prejudice against gays and lesbians, inclusive language as well as ordination of women,” says Pam Rocker, affirming coordinator at Hillhurst United Church. “We are honoured to be able to host an evening with an individual who has lived, worked, and fought through so much, and been a tangible source of hope, justice, and reconciliation for countless individuals and families.”

Hawkes said Metropolitan Community Church was founded in 1968 in California. The church in Toronto was started in 1973 and Hawkes became the pastor in 1977. There are 179 MCC churches in about 30 countries.

“We’re an independent denomination. I often describe it to people saying we’re sort of midway between the United Church and the Anglican Church. We’re a bit more liturgical . . . than the United Church but we’re also very progressive in our theology. So very liberal in our theology,” says Hawkes.

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