



Affirming Ministries Program in The United Church of Canada

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Before you embark on your journey - please initiate contact with the Affirming Ministry Coordinators
(a contact form is online at www.affirmunited.ca).

Requirements to declare your Ministry an Affirming Ministry

In order to become an Affirming Ministry, your ministry (congregation, presbytery, conference, educational institution, outreach ministry, chaplaincy, retreat centre, camp) must go through an **educational/discernment process** that reflects on what it means to be inclusive and evaluates your ministry's openness to the ongoing work of being intentional about how it includes others within the life and work of your ministry. We expect that you will look at a variety of areas that may be barriers to those coming to your community - age, gender, race, ability, class, economic status and, in particular to the Affirming Ministry, sexual orientation and gender identity. The advice we have received from many Affirming Ministries is that this discussion should include as many groups within your ministry as possible – choir, UCW, spirituality groups, youth, children, outreach, etc.

Components of the Educational/Discernment Process should include:

- a) Hearing Personal Stories from within your ministry and the community in order to understand the need for this action
- b) Hearing about and discussing the modern theological understanding of scriptures which, for years and still today, are used to discriminate
- c) Hearing from Affirming ministries what impact that decision has had on their ministry. Discussing what it might mean for your ministry.
- d) Hearing about and discussing the social justice aspects of why becoming Affirming is important.

Resources – films, books, seminars - for this process can be found in *Open Hearts*, our resource book on the website .

This educational/discernment process could take up to two years depending on the “culture” of the ministry involved. When the ministry feels that it is ready to make a public declaration of its work to be inclusive, there are several actions to be put in place by your ministry as outlined below. All documents should be communicated to your Affirming Ministry Program Coordinator for approval.

Documentation

A. A Vision Statement concerning the inclusion of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in the life and work of the Ministry

Guidelines for writing your statement are listed in *Open Hearts* on the Affirm United web site www.affirmunited.ca. It is a useful process for your Ministry to write its own statement reflecting the particular community you are a part of, the gifts and commitments you bring to the church and world. Your statement might include inclusivity in a variety of areas (class, race, sex, age, ability).

A requirement of the statement is that it should specifically include the full participation of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, in the life and work of the Ministry.

This Vision Statement (or revised mission statement) is often agreed upon within the board and taken to a congregational meeting to be voted on by all members of the congregation. *However, it should be sent to the coordinators of the Affirming Ministry Program first beforehand so that it can be preapproved.*

B. A continuing Plan of Action for the Ministry

This Plan, shared widely during the process with the ministry, might include:

- Ongoing work of your committee to reflect on what areas of inclusion can be further worked on.
 - Cooperation between this committee and other groups in the ministry to continue the education with new members.
- Ongoing educational events for your Ministry, presbytery, community or other ministries,
- Exploring issues of mission and ministry with people of all sexual orientations and gender identities who live in your community,
- Developing workshops for other ministries within your Presbytery and Conference
- Getting involved with the local AIDS Committee, PFLAG, hospice, etc.

C. An Inclusive Marriage Policy (for Affirming Ministries that offer marriage services)

A Marriage Policy in which couples of all gender combinations are treated equitably.

D. A Ministry Voting Requirement

Once you have sent in your Inclusive Marriage Policy, received approval of your Vision Statement and Plan of Action from your Affirming Ministry Program Coordinator, you must seek approval of your ministry to become an Affirming Ministry through a vote in which we strongly advise a minimum of 75% approval. Remember the goal is to have everybody intentionally inclusive. So we encourage all who are actively involved in your ministry to participate in the vote (for example in a congregation both official members and adherents).

E. A commitment to the Affirming Ministry Program nationally by becoming a member of Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble

Contact the Affirming Ministry Coordinator/s via email to:

- Provide a contact name (with e-mail) to be added to our network list. This contact would receive information and report annually the ongoing work of your Ministry. They also may participate in ongoing discussions between Affirming Ministries.
- Give an annual financial contribution to Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble. There is an annual institutional membership fee of \$100 to assist in advocacy and support (i.e. the Affirming Ministry Program, workshops, conferences, working in partnership with United Church courts), communications (i.e. website, email, conference calls, news releases), and providing resources for the national program (i.e. Open Hearts, Consensus blog). We recognize that some Ministries will be able to contribute more and others less. We ask that you notify our membership coordinator if you are unable to contribute in any given year with a short explanation of circumstances that prevents a contribution.

You are encouraged to visit the Affirm United web site to view "**Consensus**", an online blog by Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble. You are also encouraged to send members to Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble's Annual Conference and General Meeting each summer (information available on website www.affirmunited.ca).

F. A Public Celebration

Once requirements A-E are complete, we expect you to hold a public service of celebration for your ministry, your community and the wider United Church (congregations, presbytery members etc.). Some ministries choose to have their service at an alternate time that allows for wider participation, and some will have it at their regular time with an invitation for other congregations to come and worship with them. It is at this service that you would receive a certificate from Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble to mark this step within your ongoing commitment. Following this celebration, you join the growing list of Affirming Ministries throughout Canada and will be listed on the Affirm United web site, www.affirmunited.ca

Revised July 2015