

AFFIRMING MINISTRIES ACROSS CANADA

HOW IS IT DIFFERENT NOW?

Behaviors, Activities, and their Journeys

At present , (May 2013) there are **90** Affirming ministries in 10 provinces in Canada. That might sound like quite a few but not when you consider for every Affirming ministry in the United Church, there are **more than 30** others that have not made that welcome explicit or who explicitly exclude sexual and gender minorities.

In June of 2007, Grosvenor Park UC Affirming ministry committee sent letters to all the Affirming congregations in Canada asking –**how is it different now?**

Here are some excerpts from the responses we received: (GLBT refers to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender)

“It signals a safe place for those GLBT people outside the church to **come in** and those in the congregation to **come out**. “It is not unrealistic to think a life could be saved by providing a safe and accepting environment” (referring to the high suicide rate amongst GLBT individuals)”

“Affirming means you are making a public declaration of your acceptance.”

“It is not sufficient to assume that a friendly welcome means a safe and accepting place.”

“Members felt safe bringing their partners.”

“GLBT members immediately became more active members of the congregation.”

“More GLBT people joined the church, though we have not become “the gay church”. - Also an increase number of heterosexual couples with children have joined stating the reason for attendance was the church’s affirming status.”

“The examination and the dialogue are the most important aspects of becoming affirming”

“A few members left but that was compensated by newcomers- seekers who value inclusiveness (not only GLBT)”

“Our slumbering souls were awakened to the amount of exclusion that is practised in the church – not just towards our GLBT friends but to differently abled, economically challenged, single parents etc”

“It is a work in progress.”

“Membership can grow.”

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“It is a kinder warmer, gentler congregation.”

“Some left the congregation and some returned.”

“Our children grow up in this atmosphere of acceptance”

“There was no community backlash.”

“It was not until I realized the depth of societal rejection many GLBT live with or have lived with, that to risk rejection once more would be unthinkable and unbearable for them. ... it was an act of deep faith response based on our belief that we are called by our Creator to act for justice.... The work is on going.”

“It made all the difference in the world...we found people began to venture in who would never have done so otherwise”

-To be inclusive can be scary, we have to set aside our fear of the unknown. We have to confront our misconceptions, and our prejudice. We have to take seriously the call to do justice. It is not easy work and it can come at a cost. All of those things can be mighty uncomfortable”

“To become Affirming was equated to a church *coming out of the closet*.- We became visible and vulnerable. By our signs, symbols and our work we announced to the world that this is who we are, and this is what we are about. There was freedom in that. That sense of freedom released us from being concerned about what others might think of us. And we were enabled to get on with the work that needed to be done.... We have been made acutely aware that all discriminations are equal and linked. “

“We now have gay staff and members”

“At Sunset (United church)consensus does not necessarily mean complete agreement but rather being able to *live into a decision - an intention* (from *Under the Rainbow*-newsletter of Affirming Ministries committee of Sask. Conference)”

SOME AFFIRMING SYMBOLS & ACTIVITIES

Vancouver Trinity United spent time together making placards in the shape of shoes and held a fundraiser to create a church banner “Walking our Faith” for the Vancouver Pride Parade

Discreet rainbows on the church sign along with wheelchair accessibility sign and hearing loop signs.

Symbol of the rainbow candle along with the white “Christ Candle”

Display table in the foyer with rainbow banner and materials related to GLBT issues

Changes to forms- marriage form now states Spouse 1, Spouse 2. Family related forms indicate Parent 1, Parent 2.

Banner at the sanctuary entrance and our statement of welcome in the bulletin specific in noting all are welcome.

Reflected in their statement of Faith and Mission Statement- displayed

Display case with Affirming Congregation designation

Rainbow flag on the exterior of the building

“Everyone Welcome” sign