

**SAMPLE FAQ's
AFFIRM STUDY GROUP
MEETINGS WITH COMMITTEES**

1. Why are we meeting with you?

We are visiting the committees and groups in the church to share information we have gathered about becoming an Affirming Church and to provide answers to questions that we have been previously asked. We are also here in the hope that you might join us for an information and discussion session on _____.

2. Why are we looking into becoming an Affirming Church? Aren't we already welcoming to everyone? Why do we need to single out one specific group?

The reason that the United Church of Canada and our study group feel the need to provide a special welcome to one individual group is that people in the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered (GLBT) community have historically faced specific and deliberate rejection and condemnation in places of worship, the United Church of Canada included. As recently as 1960 homosexuality was still considered a crime in Canada (and in some countries, still carries the death penalty). Those who have a sexual orientation or gender identity different from the majority of people in a worship community have been shunned and excluded and are still made to feel most unwelcome in many situations. Their friends and families have often been rejected if they tried to approach their congregations to seek answers to their questions, or solace in their grief over illness or loss. Jesus was criticized because he associated with those who were outcast. Jesus' vision included all who were excluded by society and organized religion.

3. What does it mean to be an Affirming Church?

To be an Affirming church means that a church has worked through an educational process that reflects on what it means to be fully inclusive of others, including people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. This process evaluates the church's openness to the ongoing work of being intentional about how it both welcomes and includes marginalized groups within the life and work of the church. Once a church is ready to make a public declaration of its work to be inclusive, 3 things are needed:

** a statement of faith concerning the inclusion of GLBT folks. This statement is often agreed upon within Church Council and then taken to the congregation for approval.*

** a continuing plan of action which might include such things as ongoing work of the Affirming Ministries committee to reflect on what areas of inclusion might be further worked on, such as age, ability, economic status, etc. or developing workshops for other ministries within our Presbytery or Conference*

** an annual membership fee of \$100.00 to Affirm United. This is to assist in communications and provision of resources for the national program.*

**an inclusive marriage policy*

*** If our church were to become officially Affirming, it would be added to the list of Affirming United Churches across Canada. This list is accessed through www.affirmunited.ca and people looking to worship with an Affirming congregation would be able to find us when traveling through the *****area or when locating here.*

4. Why do we need “study” sessions? Why can’t we just go ahead and do it?

Although we agree that the vast majority of our congregants would be very welcoming to anyone regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity there are many steps that can be taken to make folks feel more intentionally welcomed. Learning about the obstacles faced by those who have traditionally been excluded by organized religion can only make us a more compassionate and caring society. Wide consultation and education is necessary so that everyone may be heard. In fact, it is a prerequisite to being designated as an Affirming Ministry.

5. What is the stand of the United Church of Canada on this issue?

The United Church of Canada has declared that all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, are welcome and are to have full rights and privileges in the life and work of the Church. Affirm United was created in 1992 and was endorsed by the United Church of Canada in 2000, over a decade ago.

6. How many churches/ministries in the area are now affirming?

7. How will our basic church life change if we become affirming?

Our Mission Statement and bulletins will be changed to state our full acceptance of individuals regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity (along with age, ability, race, economic status, etc.) Prayers and other verbal messages during services will be specifically inclusive of GLBT people, as well as other groups who have been marginalized. There will be a symbol, of our choosing, on our sign, web site and ads in papers, etc. indicating that we are an affirming church. Other than that our week to week church life should not be significantly altered.

A few other questions we have been asked:

- a. **Will we be required to fly a rainbow flag?** *It is not a requirement, it is a choice.*
- b. **How will people know that we are an Affirming Church?** *See #7*
- c. **Have you attended any affirming churches?** *Yes, we have attended Sydenham St United Church in Kingston and had an interesting lunch and discussion with some of their congregants. We would encourage anyone who would like to understand how an Affirming Church would run, to consider attending a service at Sydenham St. United Church. They are a most welcoming and vital congregation.*