



28 February 2018

**To:** All Affirming presbyteries and Conferences, and all presbyteries and Conferences in the Affirming process

**From:** Affirm United/ S'affirmer Ensemble

**Re:** Clarity on the Affirming status of Regions

Dear friends in Affirming presbyteries and Conferences, and presbyteries and Conferences in the Affirming process,

Warm greetings from Affirm United/ S'affirmer Ensemble (AUSE) as we together begin a new year of shared Affirming work.

One of the most significant gifts AUSE has experienced over the past decade is the rapidly increasing number of Affirming presbyteries and Conferences. Commitments like yours have helped our movement grow beyond congregations, while continuing to honour the vital place of congregations in our movement. You've pushed us to reflect on LGBTQ+ radical inclusion in the policies, personnel work, education, and community that are all a vital expression of presbyteries' and Conferences' work in the church and the world. This has been and will continue to be a crucial part of AUSE's self-understanding as the United Church moves into three courts.

As the church's work on Remit 1 advanced and it became clearer the remit would likely pass, AUSE realized it faced a difficult question. While numbers of Affirming ministries are growing rapidly, the vast majority of all church ministries and courts are not Affirming. No matter the proposed boundaries of the new Regions, we could see no case in which both the former Conference and all the former presbyteries within the bounds of a new Region would be Affirming.

Our past experience with pastoral charge amalgamations had earlier led AUSE to adopt this policy: ***If one or more of the entities joining the new amalgamation was not Affirming, the new entity would need to enter (or re-enter) the Affirming process.***

After careful reflection, the AUSE Council has decided that the same policy needs to apply to new Regions. All new Regions will need to enter the Affirming process if they wish to become Affirming.

This decision may be a difficult one to accept, given the excellent and very extensive work already done by many Conferences and presbyteries. This decision was not taken lightly. As with pastoral charge amalgamations, Regions represent a new creation, with new relationships and

new understandings and practices of ministry. To not re-enter the process risks excluding those who had not previously worked with an Affirming process, or risks closing down space for conversations that will include important information and address very legitimate concerns.

As Linda Hutchinson, our Eastern Affirming coordinator puts it, “this as an opportunity for that deep conversation about something really important and meaningful, which can be a positive experience as new regions form.” As the Regions come in to being, AUSE encourages those part of the new structures that were Affirming to help ensure that the Affirming values continue to be brought forward in the new structure.

AUSE commits to working closely with new Regions as they move through their own birthing process and begin to consider the Affirming process. We will support you however we can, and our movement will itself be challenged and changed by your Affirming work.

**We would welcome further conversation with each of you.** For the sake of clarity and speed, we opted to confirm the Council’s decision through this letter, but we hope and trust that this is the beginning of our conversation and discernment together.

With respect, gratitude, and hope born of our continued ministry together,

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## Appendix:

### Past examples of the impact of amalgamations or other changes in Affirming ministry status, by Affirming ministries coordinator (East) Linda Hutchinson

In 2013 **Bay of Quinte Conference** restructured from 7 presbyteries to 8 presbyteries. At the time there were 2 Affirming presbyteries, and both had become Affirming very recently. The two presbyteries which were depleted by one or two pastoral charges had a new certificate issued in the new name, and they continued with their Vision statements and Action Plans. One new presbytery comprised part of an Affirming presbytery and part of a presbytery with very little education/understanding of being Affirming. In that case the new presbytery went through a process together and in about a year, became Affirming after developing a new Vision Statement and Action Plan.

Overall, in the experience in Bay of Quinte Conference, presbyteries accepted the fact that if there were new participants in their presbytery, they were a new group. They accepted that it was healthy for them to do some education/conversation around being Affirming, and important to create their own Vision and Action Plan. It definitely brought the newcomers into the community more fully and completely.

AUSE has also had experience with **amalgamating congregations**. New Vision United Church in Hamilton was a case of Centenary United Church (Affirming) and St. Giles (not Affirming but “fine with whoever Centenary is”) coming together. New Vision asked a couple of times, “Do we really have to do this?”, then got on with the process as a new congregation. In the end, their comment was that going through the Affirming process was one of the best things they could have done; bringing everyone together in a deep conversation helped to bond people of the new congregation.

When Leaside United Church in Toronto, having just become Affirming, was in the amalgamation process, they wrote to Affirm United and assumed they would be doing some form of education/conversation process again, indicating to Affirm United that Affirming ministries understand this need.

