



Steps to becoming an Affirming Ministry

This is a summary that begins to answer a question we get all the time:

“Tell us what we have to do to become Affirming.” For full details, see *Open Hearts: Resources for Affirming Ministries*, and other resources, available at www.ause.ca under *Resources* and *Affirming Ministries*.

Before you embark on your journey, please contact the Affirming Ministry Coordinators through our website:

<http://affirmunited.ause.ca/affirming-ministry-cordinators/>

To become Affirming, your ministry embarks on an **educational, discernment, and decision process** that helps your ministry be **PIE**:

Public: Being out and proud! Using symbols, signs and words which are echoed outside and inside the church building, in all facets of church life.

Intentional: An Affirming ministry is deliberate in their process of study, education and dialogue with members of their faith community. They ensure that the history of oppression and discrimination by the Church is both understood and acknowledged, and that continued growth, education, and celebration are part of its ministry.

Explicit: An Affirming ministry is very clear about who it welcomes. It names queer, trans, and Two Spirit people and the gifts they bring.

You're asked to look at a variety of areas that may be barriers to those coming to your ministry and community - age, gender, race, ability, class, economic status and, in particular, gender identity and sexual orientation.

“Ministry” covers: communities of faith, Regional Councils, educational institutions, outreach ministries, chaplaincies, retreat centres, outdoor ministries, and others. We also welcome ecumenical interest. **Resources** for this process are on our website, at www.ause.ca and in *Open Hearts*, our free resource book.

The education and 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 modern theological understandings 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.

This process takes as long as it needs to take. Some take a year; others are longer. Many Affirming Ministries have told us that this process should include as many groups within your ministry as possible. 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 sent to your Affirming Ministry Program Coordinator for approval before having them approved by your ministry.

Making public commitments: please send drafts of these to your Affirming Ministry Coordinator!

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

Guidelines for writing your statement are listed in *Open Hearts* at www.ause.ca under Affirming Ministries. 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 is often agreed upon within the board and then taken to a meeting to be voted on by all members of the ministry. *However, it should be sent to the coordinators of the Affirming Ministry Program first so that it can be approved.*

B. A continuing Plan of Action for the Ministry once you're Affirming

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 and/ or wider community,
- 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 Regional Council.
- Getting involved with the wider community.

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

A marriage policy in which couples of all gender combinations are treated equitably.

These three commitments are required. Some ministries go further, and develop things like an inclusive building user policy. Going further is always welcome!

Making your decision

Once you have sent in your equal 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. **For this vote, AU/SE strongly advises a minimum of 75% approval.** Remember the goal is to have everybody be intentionally inclusive. So we encourage all who are actively involved in your ministry to participate in the vote (for example in a community of faith this would include both official members and adherents).

Making a commitment to the national Affirming movement

All Affirming ministries are required to become members of Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble through an annual institutional membership. This supports our Affirming Ministries program, advocacy work, our annual conference, governance, and much more.

We ask you to identify lead contacts to receive information and invitations, and report annually on the ongoing work of your Ministry. You are also encouraged to send members to Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble's Annual Conference and General Meeting each summer (information available at www.ause.ca).

Celebrating!

Once the above steps and requirements are complete, we expect you to hold a **public** service of celebration for your ministry, your community and the wider United Church and community. At this service you 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 national AUSE and United Church websites.