

## Frequently Asked Questions about Affirm United/ S'affirmer Ensemble

[www.ause.ca](http://www.ause.ca)



Let's start with a really important question:

### **Can I be LGBTQIA+ or Two Spirit and Christian?**

Yes. And yes. And yes. ***You are a cherished and beloved child of God.*** Affirm United/ S'affirmer Ensemble believes that all gender identities and sexualities are a gift from God and that churches should be a safe and fully welcoming space for LGBTQ+ and Two-Spirit people to worship.

**Who are we?** Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble (AU/SE) is a justice-oriented organization of people in The United Church of Canada. AU/SE works for the full inclusion of people of all gender identities and sexual orientations in The United Church of Canada and Canadian society.

Membership is open to those who support our work.

AU/SE works in partnership with the United Church of Canada, but is an independent, volunteer-led movement. If you would like to know more about how this relationship developed have a look at [About Us](#) and [History](#).

**What is the Affirming Ministry Program?** The program is a network of United Church of Canada ministries of all kinds that strive to be fully inclusive of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. And it asks each ministry to take action.

Affirming ministries are at the heart of the Affirming movement. There are over 200 Affirming ministries and ministries in the process across Canada. The program was launched in 1992. The United Church officially endorsed the program in 2000 and encouraged its ministries to participate.

The program encourages all United Church bodies, and other Christian traditions, to study and discern what it means to be publicly welcoming and inclusive in their context. (Ministries include communities of faith, community ministries, chaplaincies of all kinds, care homes and supported living, outdoor ministries/ camps, Regional Councils, and more.) The Affirming program also encourages the study of other United Church resources that promote the inclusion of other marginalized groups.

**How do we start the Affirming process?** Have a look at the [Affirming Ministries site section](#) and the many resources there. (For example, the [requirements page](#) will give you a snapshot of the process.) Contact an [Affirming Ministries coordinator](#) about the process. They will help you get started. Get approval from your church or organization board to begin the process of inquiry, so that everyone is on board. Then your ministry will begin a time of discernment and study to determine if you are ready to become Affirming, and what this will mean in your community and context.

Our free resource, **Open Hearts**, will explain the process and accompany you through it; [click here for the table of contents or to download](#).

We are happy to assist you throughout the process and to help you get in touch with other Affirming ministries.

### **Do you offer grants to Affirming ministries?**

We're sorry, but no. We're a 99% volunteer movement that is funded by memberships and donations, plus about \$3,000 per year from the United Church's Mission and Service fund.

**Why join Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble?** Joining AU/SE gives you an opportunity to become part of a network of ministries that are engaging in community growth, solidarity, theological reflection, resource sharing, and much more. We will help you connect across the country and beyond. And your presence as an individual or new Affirming Ministry strengthens our common work; it's a witness to the belief in action that God loves all, without limit or restriction. [Read more about membership here.](#)

**Do I have to be LGBTQ+ to join?** No! Membership is open to all. We welcome all who would like to support the inclusion of everyone in the church and society.

**Can individuals be members?** Absolutely. [Here's the form!](#) We welcome individual supporters. Your skills, ideas, and energy are a vital part of our movement. Your small membership fee goes to support AU/SE's work in the church and wider community, and you'll receive our newsletter, [Consensus](#), and an invitation to our annual conference.

**How can I connect with Affirming ministries?** All Affirming Ministries to date [are listed here](#). To read more about what Affirming ministries are up to, check out our [Facebook](#) page and email us to subscribe to our [newsletter](#)! We also want to hear from you – send us your stories or questions! Consider attending or sending someone from your ministry to attend our annual meeting, which is held every summer, hosted by an Affirming Ministry in various locations across Canada.

### **What's the difference between being “Welcoming” and “Affirming”?**

Most congregations do their best to be welcoming, but being affirming goes deeper and is public, intentional, and explicit, in their commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Think “**PIE**”: Public, Intentional, and Explicit.

**Public:** An Affirming Ministry uses symbols and signs which are echoed outside and inside the church building, in worship, and in all other facets of church life. The broader community should also know what it stands for; a witness to the wider community that God's love extends to everyone equally and without reserve. This is still a radical message!

**Intentional:** An Affirming Ministry is deliberate in their process of study, education and dialogue with members of their faith community (both during the Affirming process and as a piece of their ongoing work), to 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:** Affirming Ministries should explicitly indicate in their Mission and Vision statement – and everywhere else! – that the LGBTQ+ community is a part of and embraced in all facets of church life. And as part of the Affirming process, their faith community will explore and explain how to live out that commitment.

**We are already an Affirming Ministry – what next?** There are so many ways to live out your ministry. Have a look at our [Take Action page](#) for some ideas, remembering the importance of church participation in your local Pride, the Trans Day of Remembrance (November 20), and the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia.

And ask yourselves: How can you make your commitment to be affirming Public, Intentional, and

Explicit? Think “PIE” again!

For example:

– **Public:** Do the people who come to your ministry or would hear about your ministry know that you are an Affirming congregation and what that means? Do you have your statement or Affirming symbols on your website, print materials, advertisements, signs, and more?

– **Intentional:** Do you continue to have events and initiatives that keep your Affirming ministry active? Workshops, studies, partnerships with other organizations, incorporating Affirming messages into your services, and other regular events at your ministry are all important. Have you revisited your action plan? What areas do you need to grow in? Have you looked at your policies to make sure they are updated to include new areas of education (For example: A trans-inclusive washroom policy, safe space guidelines for rental groups, etc.)

– **Explicit:** Are you clear how you can be fully inclusive – moving beyond tolerance into celebration? Is this communicated to your community and the broader public? Do you continue to share your story of your Affirming process and how the work will be ongoing in the future? Can you accompany neighbouring ministries through the Affirming process?

**I need help!** Whether you need more resources or need support in coming out, we will do our best to support you.

There are many resources available to you – you are not alone!

[Find an Affirming ministry in your area.](#)

[Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays Canada](#) (PFLAG) is another excellent resource.

[Kids Help Phone](#) can be accessed here: 1 800 668-6868

[Trans Lifeline](#) (crisis) line for Canada is 1 877 330-6366

*(Below: West Island LGBTQ Centre, a project of Beaconsfield United Church, at Fierté Montréal Pride.)*

