

SAMPLE FAITH STATEMENTS

We believe that all people are created in the image of God and are unconditionally loved by God. All persons are free to enjoy God's gifts of love, joy and intimacy. We lament injustice done to gay, lesbian and bisexual persons in church and society.

We, the people of Bloor Street United Church, are committed to creating a community where all people are welcome regardless of age, gender, race, sexual orientation, differing abilities, ethnic background, or economic circumstance. We seek to use the gifts of all persons in every aspect of congregational life, including designated ministry, regardless of sexual orientation. We pray for God's spirit to guide us as we work for reconciliation and justice for all persons in both church and society.

2) All people are recipients of God's love and grace. God's church is meant to be a united community embodying love, grace, and justice for all persons. As a sign of faithfulness to God's covenant with all of humanity, we feel that God is challenging the Christian community to accept heterosexuals, homosexuals, and bisexuals as equal partners in the community of faith.

We, the congregation of Young United Church, welcome and embrace all persons who seek to live in faith, regardless of sexual orientation, age, gender, racial or ethnic background, differently-abled condition, economic or cultural background; and we affirm that they are full participants in the life, work, membership, and leadership of this church.

We are distressed by the presence of homophobia, racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice within the United Church and in our society. We trust that our affirmation of the sanctity of each person will bring reconciliation to all people within the church, who, because of prejudice or ignorance, find themselves in exile from the family of God.

We thank you for your interest in the Affirming Congregation Program. The church's ministry with bisexuals, lesbians and gay men, particularly in the United Church, is one of the most innovative and hopeful aspects of ministry today. As you begin the implementation of the Affirming Congregation Program in your local church, remember that you are part of a growing movement of concerned Christians who are striving to fulfill the vision of God's community, the Body of Christ, which is inclusive of all persons.

While this program is geared to congregations, it is possible for theological schools, educational centres, presbyteries and conferences to declare themselves a part of this Affirming movement by following a similar process.

**For more information or assistance,
contact:**

Your local AFFIRM UNITED group

or

write:

Affirming Congregation Program
Box 333, Station Q
Toronto, ON M4T 2M5

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AFFIRMING CONGREGATIONS IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA



A Program of
AFFIRM UNITED

WHAT IS IT?

Affirming Congregations are local churches which:

- **welcome** bisexuals, lesbians, gay men, and their families in all aspects of church life;
- **promote reconciliation** for bisexual, lesbian and gay people in Church and society; and
- **minister to and with** gay men, lesbians and bisexual persons.

The Affirming Congregation Program is an opportunity, a challenge, a hand reaching out. It is for congregations who are ready to begin dialogue about the concerns of lesbians, bisexuals and gay men in the United Church. If your congregation is committed to justice, is willing to discuss difficult issues, or has a group of people in the congregation who are willing to foster this discussion, then you are ready to begin the process of becoming an Affirming Congregation.

PURPOSE

The Affirming Congregation Program has a three-fold purpose:

- 1) **to help** local churches to consider justice and ministry issues arising from the involvement of gay men, lesbian women and bisexual persons;
- 2) **to support** local churches who are willing to be visible servant churches in ministry to and with lesbian, bisexual and gay members of the United Church;
- 3) **to identify** local churches where lesbians, bisexuals and gay men are welcomed as full participants in the Body of Christ.

The Affirming Congregation Program provides the stimulus to churches to engage the critical issue of social and biblical justice. While this program centers on the church's ministry with bisexuals, lesbians and gay men, it is assumed that an Affirming Congregation will reach out to *all* persons who may be alienated from the church. The program does not intend to single out ministries with lesbians, bisexuals and gay men as more significant than ministries with persons who are separated from the church because of racism, sexism, classism, or agism. However, it is our historical situation that today gay men, bisexuals and lesbians face blatant discrimination within the church. Ministry with lesbians and gay men has become a test of the inclusivity of the Body of Christ in our day.

THE PROGRAM

To become an Affirming Congregation, a local church:

- 1) Undertakes study, discussion, and prayer leading to the explicit, intentional, and public inclusion of lesbians, bisexuals and gay men in its life and ministry.
- 2) Writes a statement of faith and action regarding the affirmation of all persons regardless of sexual orientation and registers the statement with AFFIRM UNITED.
- 3) Incorporates ministries to and with lesbians and gay men into the general ministries of the local church.
- 4) Supports the program nationally through gifts of visibility, financial resources, and participation.

THE PROCESS

The process of becoming an Affirming Congregation is different for every local church. However, there are some common steps which most congregations will need to follow. This is a brief picture of the various steps:

- 1) You will need to form a steering committee in your church and contact AFFIRM UNITED for a consultant.
- 2) You will need to evaluate where your local church is in relation to lesbian and gay concerns.
- 3) You will need to plan an educational and decision-making strategy which fits your congregation.
- 4) You will need to take a motion for action to the appropriate body in your congregation (e.g. Session, Official Board, Congregational Meeting).

In the decision to become an Affirming Congregation, this motion should include:

- *a statement of faith concerning the inclusion of lesbians and gay men in the life and work of the congregation,*
 - *a plan of action for the congregation,*
 - *a commitment to the Affirming Congregation Program nationally.*
- 5) You will need to plan ongoing follow up to your decision.

RESOURCES

There is a variety of resources available as you work towards becoming an Affirming Congregation. A video entitled *All Means All* and an Affirming Congregation Program kit (including a bibliography and people resources) are available from your local Affirm United group or the address at the end of this brochure.