

Requirements to declare your Ministry an Affirming Ministry.

In order to become an Affirming Ministry, your ministry (congregation, presbytery, conference, educational institution, outreach ministry, chaplaincy, retreat centre) must go through an educational process that reflects on what it means to be inclusive and evaluates your ministry's openness to the ongoing work of being intentional about how it both welcomes and includes others within the life and work of your ministry. We hope that you will look at a variety of areas that may be barriers to those coming to your community, agism, sexism, racism, ablism, classism and in particular to the Affirming Ministry the issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. The advice we have received from many Affirming Ministries is that this discussion must include as many groups 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 taken by your ministry as outlined within our Open Hearts kit:

A. *A Vision Statement concerning the inclusion of bisexuals, transgender individuals, lesbians and gay men in the life and work of the Ministry.*

Guidelines for writing your statement are listed in the kit on the Affirm United web site. 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 gay men, bisexuals, lesbians and transgender individuals in the life of the Ministry.***

This Vision Statement (or revised mission statement) is often agreed upon within the board and taken to a congregational meeting to be voted on by all members of the congregation. *However, it should be sent to the coordinators of the Affirming Ministry Program first so that it can be preapproved.*

B. *A continuing Plan of Action for the Ministry.*

This 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 to continue the education with new members.
- ongoing educational events for your Ministry, presbytery, community or other ministries,
- joint worship service with a Chapter of AFFIRM UNITED or other lgbt religious groups in your area,
- exploring issues of mission and ministry with lesbians, bisexuals, transgender individuals and gay men who live in your community,
- developing workshops for other ministries within your Presbytery and Conference
- getting involved with the local AIDS Committee or hospice

C. A commitment to the Affirming Ministry Program nationally.

You will need to contact the Affirming Ministry coordinator/s via email.

You will need to:

- provide a contact name (preferably with e-mail) to be added to our network list. This contact would receive information and report annually the ongoing work of your Ministry. They also may participate in ongoing discussions between Affirming Ministries.
- give an annual financial contribution to Affirm United/S' affirmer Ensemble . There is an annual institutional membership fee of \$100 to assist in communications, and providing resources for the national program. We recognize that some Ministries will be able to contribute more and others less. We ask that you notify our membership coordinator if you are unable to contribute in any given year with a short explanation of circumstances that prevents a contribution.

There is also an expectation that a separate free will offering will be collected at the time of the service of celebration.

You will be added to the mailing list for the Newsletter *Consensus* produced approximately four times per year by Affirm United/S' affirmer Ensemble. You are also encouraged to send members to Affirm United/S' affirmer Ensemble's Annual Conference and General Meeting each summer.

D. An Inclusive Marriage Policy (for Affirming Ministries that offer marriage services)

A Marriage Policy in which couples of all gender combinations are treated equally. This requirement was added by the actions of the Affirm United/S' affirmer Ensemble Council in February 07.

Once you receive approval of your Vision Statement and Plan of Action from the Affirming Ministry Program Coordinator/s and you have become members of Affirm United/S' affirmer Ensemble, we expect you to hold a public service of celebration. It is at this service that you would receive a certificate from Affirm United/S' affirmer Ensemble to mark this step within your process and at this point you join the growing list of Affirming Ministries throughout Canada.

If you have any other further questions – please contact [Anne Hebb](#).