

## LUNCH & LEARN #1 SEPTEMBER 28, 2022 for Website

### WHAT ARE AFFIRMING MINISTRIES?



### **Affirming Ministries**

Affirming Ministries are communities of faith, regional councils, assisted living homes, educational institutions, retreat centres, outdoor ministries and other ministries within the United Church that publicly declare their commitment to inclusion and justice for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Although Affirming Ministries make an explicit statement about issues of sexuality and gender, their commitment to justice is far broader including people of all ages, health conditions, races, genders, gender identity, sexual orientations, family diversity, ability, economic circumstances, religion, spiritual and ethnic background. Everyone is encouraged to fully participate in the life and work of the church ministry.

They continually grow and change as they seek to live more fully into God's way of welcome, love, and justice for all creation. Just as God rejoices in the goodness and diversity of creation, so too Affirming Ministries honour and celebrate diversity

**Affirm United:** Affirm United is a national program for United Church congregations and ministries that has been in place since 1992. This program is envisioned as a means of support and education for justice-seeking Ministries. Becoming Affirming isn't a quick journey because it's a process of love, discernment, and transformation.

**What we must do to become Affirming:** The Process outlined by Affirm United (AU):

- a) AU requires, as part of the process, examination and revision of Vision Statement (VS) and Marriage Policy (MP) so that they include people of all ages, health conditions, races, genders, gender identity, sexual orientations, family diversity, ability, economic circumstances, religion, spiritual and ethnic background in the life and work of the ministry.

Using AU guidelines, we have created a VS that was approved by Executive Board on September 8, 2022. Our existing MP just needed some tweaking to make it more inclusive and it will go back to the Board for approval.

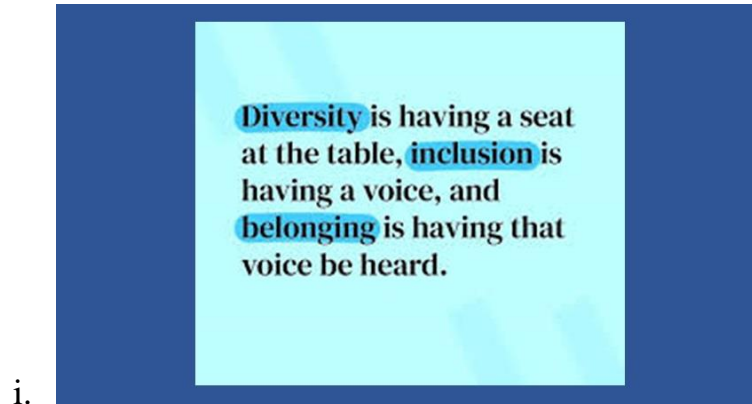


- b) An Affirming ministry is deliberate in their process of study, education and dialogue with members of their faith community.

Our education and discernment process will include:

- 1) Hearing personal stories from within our ministry and community in order to understand the need for this action
  - 2) Hear about and discuss modern theological understandings of scriptures which for years and still today are used to discriminate.
  - 3) Hear from other Affirming ministries what impact that decision has had on their ministry. Discussing what it might mean for our ministry.
  - 4) Hear about and discuss the social justice aspects of why becoming Affirming is important.
- c) Our Lunch & Learn sessions are part of our study, education, and dialogue plan. Over the next 2 months and February through June 2023 we have monthly sessions planned using video, film, speakers, study and reflection to examine the elements of our

Vision Statement - **ageism, health conditions, races, genders, gender identity, sexual orientations, family diversity, ability, economic circumstances, religion, spiritual and ethnic background.**



AU tells us this process takes as long as it needs to take. Some take 2 years; others are longer. In the end when the time is right, we will have a congregational vote to seek approval of the congregation to become an Affirming Ministry. For this vote, AU strongly advises a minimum of 75% approval.

If there is approval to become an affirm congregation, we will be joining a community of 111 urban and rural Affirming United Churches in Ontario.

In our area this includes Pine River, Georgian Shores UC, and further afield Grand Bend. There are several churches at different points in their process as well including Kincardine UC, Grace UC Hanover and Southampton UC.

### **That's the plan!**

We don't often talk about our biases because it can be uncomfortable. So at our Lunch & learn sessions we'll implement a practice that we use in our Committee meetings call Holy Manners. It's a practice recommended by the UC for meetings, group discussions etc..

### **Lunch & Learn:**

At our next Lunch & Learn we'll begin looking at the elements of our Vision Statement by starting with Ageism.

What is ageism? Ageism refers to **the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards others or oneself based on age.** Who does ageism affect? Ageism affects everyone.

To quote from an article published in THE STAR August 2021

Despite our denial, we are all old people in training. And to become old often means to become 'the other' in Western society. It's a reality that experts and senior advocates can attest to.

For the most part ageism continues to be a socially acceptable prejudice to the point of being murderous, according to Margaret Morganroth Gullette, an American scholar in age studies.

Food for thought for Oct's L & L:

- Have you experienced Ageism?
- Does Ageism exist in the church as a whole? Our church?

**Closing Prayer/Grace:**

<https://youtu.be/eqVbLQh-IT0><https://youtu.be/eqVbLQh-IT0>