Affirm/S'affirmer
UNITED/ENSEMBLE

What happens when we amalgamate?

More and more United Churches are choosing to amalgamate. Some churches are coming together in clusters to share the same staff team. With new ministry formations comes a process of coming together as a new church community. When one church is affirming or even if the churches that are coming together are all affirming, a new affirming process needs to be part of the creation of the new community of faith.

The affirming process entails taking the Action Plan, Vision Statement and Equal Marriage Policy and revising them for the new amalgamated church community.

The affirming process is an opportunity for an intentional time of education. This can be helpful even for the congregation who is already affirming to reinvigorate their affirm journey.

It is up to you how the long the process will take, it could be up to a year of intentional education, or shorter, but whatever you decide, be explicit about the policies and plans for the future of the amalgamated church and culminate this time in a public vote and celebration.

The amalgamated church is embarking on a new ministry **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.

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

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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.

Create a new revised vision statement to encompass the amalgamated church as well as a new revised Action plan and renewed acceptance of the marriage policy

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 amalgamated 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.

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