

# Open Hearts Resource B

## Frequently Asked Questions



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### Table of Contents (Questions)

- What is an Affirming community, group, or organization?
- Do Affirming organizations only focus on 2S and LGBTQIA+ issues?
- Who decides whether a group or organization becomes Affirming?
- What do sacred texts say about sexual orientation?
- Did Jesus or other spiritual leaders speak about same-gender relationships?
- What do faith traditions say about gender identity?
- Do Affirming organizations make financial contributions to networks or programs?
- Do all organizations treat same-gender relationships equally?
- Does being Affirming mean the organization is only for 2S and LGBTQIA+ people?
- Will becoming Affirming affect membership or participation?
- Why be explicit about inclusion instead of saying “everyone is welcome”?
- Is becoming Affirming a one-time step?

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### Q. What is an Affirming community, group, or organization?

**A.** Affirming communities, groups, and organizations are those that publicly commit to inclusion, equity, and justice for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

While they make an explicit commitment to 2S and LGBTQIA+ inclusion, their work extends far beyond this. They strive to grow continually in their understanding and practice of justice—embracing diversity, challenging inequity, and fostering environments rooted in respect, dignity, and belonging for all people.

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### Q. Does that mean Affirming organizations only focus on 2S and LGBTQIA+ issues?

**A.** No. Affirming organizations are not single-issue communities.

They are engaged in a wide range of justice efforts, which may include:

- Anti-racism and reconciliation work
- Accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities
- Poverty reduction and housing justice
- Support for mental health and addiction recovery

- Advocacy for children, youth, and seniors
- Honouring Indigenous and Two-Spirit perspectives

Their commitment to justice is ongoing and interconnected across many areas of life.

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### **Q. Who decides whether a group or organization becomes Affirming?**

**A.** Each group or organization is responsible for discerning and deciding, through its own governance and decision-making process, whether it will become Affirming. This usually includes developing an Affirming Vision Statement, adopting inclusive policies, and creating an Action Plan that reflects its commitment to inclusion and justice. A formal approval process—such as a leadership decision or membership vote—is often part of this journey.

Organizations that wish to be formally recognized within the Affirm United network must complete the official Affirming Process established by Affirm United. This includes submitting required documents, receiving approval, and formally registering.

Only those groups and organizations that have completed this recognized process are permitted to use the Affirm United name, designation, and logos. Others may still choose to identify as affirming in principle, but they may not represent themselves as part of the Affirm United network or use its branding without completing the process.

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### **Q. What does the Bible (or sacred texts) say about sexual orientation?**

**A.** Interpretations vary widely across faith traditions and communities.

In the case of the Bible, it does not speak about sexual orientation as we understand it today. Some passages refer to same-gender relationships, but these must be understood within their historical and cultural context.

Many Affirming communities approach sacred texts through the lens of:

- Love, compassion, and justice
- Respect for human dignity
- Ongoing learning and interpretation

Affirming perspectives recognize that theology is complex and continues to evolve.

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**Q. Did Jesus (or other spiritual leaders) speak about same-gender relationships?**

**A.** In the Christian Gospels, there are no direct references to same-gender relationships.

However, teachings such as:

- "Love your neighbour"
- "Do not judge"

are often central to how Affirming communities understand inclusion and belonging.

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**Q. What do faith traditions say about gender identity?**

**A.** Understandings of gender vary across cultures, traditions, and time periods.

Many sacred texts reflect historical gender roles, but also include stories that challenge or expand those roles. Today, many Affirming communities recognize:

- Gender as distinct from biological sex
- The diversity of gender identities and expressions
- The importance of respecting each person's lived experience

Affirming approaches seek to honour both tradition and evolving understanding.

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**Q. Do Affirming organizations make financial contributions to networks or programs?**

**A.** Some do, especially if they are part of a larger network or association. Contributions may support:

- Educational resources and training
- Community-building initiatives
- Advocacy and justice work
- Events, gatherings, and communications

Financial commitments vary widely depending on the organization and its capacity.

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**Q. Do all organizations treat same-gender relationships equally?**

**A.** Not all organizations do.

However, being Affirming generally means committing to **full and equal inclusion**, which includes equal access to programs, services, leadership opportunities, and (where applicable) ceremonies or rites such as marriage.

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**Q. Does being Affirming mean the organization is only for 2S and LGBTQIA+ people?**

**A.** No.

Affirming communities are intentionally diverse and inclusive of people of all:

- Sexual orientations
- Gender identities
- Ages, cultures, and backgrounds

They are spaces where everyone is welcomed, and where 2S and LGBTQIA+ individuals can participate openly and safely. Many people—regardless of identity—are drawn to these environments because of their commitment to respect and justice.

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**Q. Will becoming Affirming affect membership or participation?**

**A.** Experiences vary.

Some organizations may lose a small number of participants who disagree with the decision. However, many find that becoming Affirming:

- Strengthens their sense of purpose
  - Attracts new members or participants
  - Builds a more engaged and vibrant community
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**Q. Why be explicit about inclusion? Why not just say “everyone is welcome”?**

**A.** Being explicit matters for several reasons:

- Many people have experienced exclusion, often explicitly
- General statements like “everyone is welcome” can be interpreted differently
- Naming inclusion clearly helps ensure marginalized groups are truly seen and supported

Affirming communities aim to be **public, intentional, and explicit (P.I.E.)** about their commitments.

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**Q. Is becoming Affirming a one-time step?**

**A.** No. It is an ongoing journey.

Becoming Affirming is a milestone, not an endpoint. Organizations are encouraged to:

- Maintain and update an **Action Plan**
- Continue learning and engaging with new issues
- Adapt practices as understanding grows

Affirming communities evolve over time as they deepen their commitment to justice, inclusion, and the well-being of all.