

Affirm United / S'affirmer Ensemble

ANNUAL REPORT

2019



Tables of Contents:	Page
Co-Chair Report – Michiko Bown-Kai	3
Affirming Ministry Program – Linda Hutchinson, Liz Carter-Morgan, Jackie Harper	4-9
Membership Statistics - John Calhoun	10
Treasurers Report – Anne Wood	11
Statement of Operations Budget vs Actual	12
Balance Sheet	13
Auditor’s Report	14
Narrative Budget	15
General Council Office Report – Jordan Sullivan	16
Global Advocacy	17
Canadian Advocacy	17
In Partnership with Affirm United	18
Affirming Ministries	19
Resources	20
Gender Identity Work	20-21
Communications Report – Michele K. Petick	22
Photo Gallery of Affirming Ministries	23-25



Co-chair Report 2019



I am so proud to be able to look at all that Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble has achieved this year. For a small, volunteer-run organization we certainly have much to celebrate:

- We have supported the church and many communities of faith as they adapt to a whole new structure.
- We have seen many new Affirming Ministries.
- We have continued to support the work of Iridesce: The Living Apology Project.
- We have celebrated our second PIE Day on March 14
- We continue to serve as a network of people supporting one another in making the church a space that is affirming to people of all gender identities and sexual orientations.

I'm so inspired to see the ways that Affirming Ministries across the country are finding ways to live out their calling, whether that be the banning of conversion therapy, offering drop in programming for LGBTQ+ seniors and youth, or hosting annual conferences dedicated to the intersections of faith, 2SLGBTQA+ Pride, and justice.

I want to thank all of you who have offered me support, grace, and wisdom, on this five year journey serving as co-chair of Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble. I have learned so much about who we are as a community, the work of LGBTQ+ justice in the church, the need to center 2 Spirit people in our movement, and so much more from the many conversations this work has enabled me to be a part of.

I also want to give thanks to my co-chair Katie Rose-Vardy for all of their hard work. I'm so grateful for the chance to have worked with you and for all the passion you brought to council. Katie served as co-chair from 2018-2019 while completing their undergraduate studies and remains involved with Affirming work at the local level.

While this report covers the 2019 calendar year, I would also like to share an important newer update. We are grateful to announce the hiring of a Communications Coordinator, Michele Petick. We are thrilled to have Michele offering us such a variety of communication and tech support in her part-time position which began in May 2020. Although our previous Communications Coordinator, Julie Graham, has moved onto regional ministry work, she is still very much a part of our Affirm United community and I want to thank her for her many years of helping AUSE grow and the many ideas and innovations she brought to this organization.

As I step back from my role of co-chair, I see so much potential for AUSE and look forward to seeing further growth and innovation for this very special and important ministry.

Many thanks,

Michiko Bown-Kai
Co-chair Affirm United / S'affirmer Ensemble



2019 Affirming Ministry Program Annual Report

We present a report of a strong program with a total of 30 new ministries, listed below, having become Affirming between January 1 and December 31, 2019, 3 more than in 2018.

A complete list of Affirming Ministries can be found on the Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble website <http://affirmunited.ause.ca/find-a-ministry>

Breakdown of the new Affirming Ministries into communities of faith and other ministries follows:

Communities of Faith of The United Church of Canada – 29 new in 2019

Name/Location	Date of Celebration
Burton Avenue UC in Barrie ON	Jan 27, 2019
Bridgewater UC in Bridgewater NS	Jan 27, 2019
St. Paul's UC in Perth ON	Feb 24, 2019
St. Andrew's UC in Mission BC	Mar 3, 2019
Riverbend UC in Edmonton AB	Mar 3, 2019
Cole Harbour Woodside UC in Dartmouth NS	Apr 7, 2019
St. Andrew's UC in Spruce Grove AB	Apr 28, 2019
Queen Street UC in Lindsay ON	Apr 28, 2019
Knox UC in Russell MB (Russell-Silverton PC)	Apr 28, 2019
Silverton UC in Silverton MB (Russell-Silverton PC)	Apr 28, 2019
Trinity UC in Smith's Falls ON	Apr 28, 2019
Riverside UC in Ottawa ON	April 28, 2019
Eglinton St. George's UC in Toronto ON	May 5, 2019
Sylvan UC, Mill Bay BC	May 26, 2019
Emmanuel UC, Sault Ste. Marie ON	May 26, 2019
Grace UC in Sarnia ON	Jun 2, 2019
Gower Street UC in St. John's NL	Jun 5, 2019
Silver Spire UC, St. Catharines ON	Jun 9, 2019
Smithers UC, Smithers BC	Sep 15, 2019
Westminster UC, Shoal Lake MB	Sep 22, 2019
Pacific Spirit UC, Vancouver BC	Sep 22, 2019
First UC, Waterloo ON	Sep 22, 2019
Rideau Park UC, Ottawa ON	Sep 29, 2019
Windermere UC, Toronto ON	Sep 29, 2019
Knox UC, Fernie BC	Oct 13, 2019
St. James UC, Dartmouth NS	Oct 20, 2019
Trinity UC, Edmonton AB	Oct 20, 2019
Ralph Connor Memorial UC, Canmore AB	Oct 27, 2019
Trinity Grace UC, Vancouver BC	Nov 17 2019



Other Ministries of The United Church of Canada – 1 new in 2019

Name/Location

UCC Chaplaincy Dalhousie University
Multifaith Services, Halifax NS

Date of Celebration

Wed. Oct 16, 2019

The number of 30 new Affirming Ministries in 2019 is an increase of 3 from 27 for the year 2018. The geographic breakdown for new ministries is:

BC – 6; AB – 4; MB – 3; ON – 10; QC - 2; NS – 4; NL - 1.

The total number of Affirming Ministries as of December 31, 2019 was 228, including communities of faith, learning centres, one university chaplaincy and one assisted living facility.

Types of Ministries:

Regional Councils 0; Educational Institutions 4; Educational Centres 2; Chapter (Peterborough ON) 1; National Organization 1; University Chaplaincy 1; Assisted Living Facility 1; Communities of Faith 218.

Geographical location:

NL 2; PE 1; NS 18; NB 7; QC 9; ON 94; MB 23; SK 11; AB 35; BC 26; NWT 1; Nat. Org. 1.

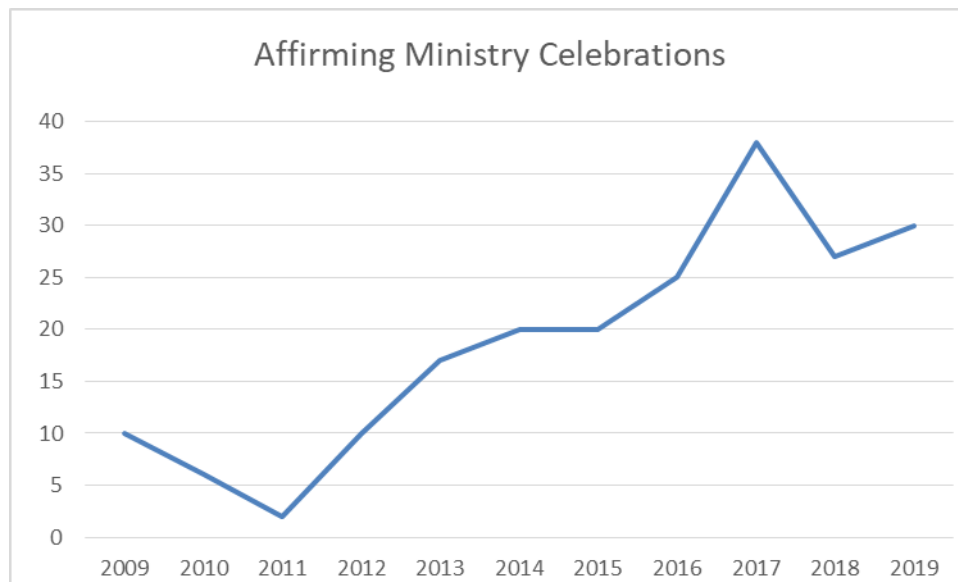
The number of ministries in the Affirming Ministry Process was 155 at the end of December 2019.

Ministries proceed at different rates through their process for various reasons – change in pastoral relations in a congregation, need to take more time due to the culture/experience of the ministry, and hesitancy/need for encouragement to proceed, etc.

Summary of the numbers for the last 11 years:

Year	Celebrations	In Process
2009	10	
2010	6	36
2011	2	50
2012	10	68
2013	17	80
2014	20	91
2015	20	90
2016	25	110
2017	38	120
2018	27	143
2019	30	155





Coordinators for the Affirming Ministry Program:

Coordinators for the program are Liz Carter-Morgan for western Canada (MB and west); Linda Hutchinson for Ontario and Jackie Harper for eastern Canada (QC and east). It has been wonderful to have a third person to share the work. Linda Hutchinson oversees the program - keeping lists up to date, attending Council meetings, writing reports, preparing details for celebrations, etc.

Resources used in the Affirming Ministry Program:

- *Open Hearts* found at <http://ause.ca/wp-content/pdf/OpenHearts.pdf> is our main resource in which the Steps for Becoming an Affirming Ministry are found on pages 8-9
- *Celebrating Gender Diversity – Trans and Gender Identity Kit* is a second excellent resource found at <http://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/resources/trans-kit.pdf>
- Other very good resources for study and education, exercises, etc. are found on the AU/SE website <http://affirmunited.ause.ca/>

Although all the work of ministries is noteworthy, activities of special note in 2019 are:

1. **A First** – The Affirming Ministry Program took part in a **Webinar – Becoming an Affirming Senior’s Facility**: Linda Hutchinson represented the Affirming Ministry Program in a webinar with Laurie Winder, Executive Director of Ashbourne, Assisted Living Facility for Seniors in Edmonton, AB (became Affirming in May 2017) about their process to become an Affirming Ministry. This webinar was organized by Bev Oag, General Council Office staff person who oversees “OUCH” (Organization of United Church Homes). It aired on March 26, 2019. https://unitedchurchofcanada.adobeconnect.com/_a974744807/pyt1mp38udhc/?proto=true
2. **Another First** - UCC Chaplaincy Dalhousie University Multifaith Services in Halifax, NS under the leadership of Rev. Robyn Brown-Hewitt became an Affirming Ministry on October 16, 2019. We hope other universities, colleges and learning centres will see this as a model for their institutions.

3. **Impact of restructuring of The United Church of Canada on January 1, 2019:**

a) Numbers of Affirming Ministries:

January 1, 2019 brought huge changes to our number of Affirming Ministries with the demise of presbyteries and conferences in the restructuring of The United Church of Canada. December 31, 2018 we had 224 Affirming Ministries. With the loss of 18 Affirming presbyteries and 8 Affirming conferences, and 1 Conference UCW and 1 Presbyterial UCW in limbo re name changes, we had 196 Affirming Ministries on January 1, 2019. The good news is that by December 31, 2019, with 30 additional new Affirming Ministries throughout the year, we had a total of 228 Affirming Ministries.

b) The Affirming Ministry Designation for the new Regional Councils (Replacing presbyteries and conferences)

Cindy Bourgeois, Secretary of Affirm United/S' affirmer Ensemble Council, and Linda Hutchinson, Affirming Ministry Coordinator, with input from the Council, prepared a 22 page document about the Affirming Ministry Program for new Regional Councils. This included two main options for regional councils:

- 1) An Interim Affirming Ministry Status for 9 of the regional councils with significant Affirming Ministry experience (as conferences & presbyteries) and
- 2) The regular Affirming Ministry Program for 5 of the regional councils with very limited Affirming Ministry experience. A third option of being in conversation with AUSE about the most suitable path to take to being Affirming was offered to the two remaining regional councils. This document was sent to Regional Council Executive Ministers and elected chairs of the regional councils' transition teams on February 22, 2019.

By December 31, 2019, three regional councils had submitted the required documentation and thereby achieved Interim Affirming Status. They are Prairie to Pine, Shining Waters and East Central Ontario Regional Councils. Some of the other regional councils are working on the Affirming Ministry Program at various stages, and some regional councils have not initiated the process.

This initiative of engaging the new regional councils has taken a huge amount of time on the part of the Affirming Ministry Program and the results are slow in coming. However, through our contact with the regional councils, we realize better the complexity of the restructuring process and the great amount of energy required for designing the basics of these councils . . . leaving less time and energy for the important work of Affirming. We think it will take time and ongoing encouragement.

4. **A major change for the Affirming Ministry Program in 2019** was the decision of the Annual General Meeting to change the **fee structure** for ministries/individuals joining Affirm United. This will be reported in detail in the Treasurer's Report but given the time it required of the treasurer, Affirming Ministry Program Coordinator, the Membership Convenor plus others to implement this change, it is suggested that any further major changes in policy be more thoroughly researched and when presented be accompanied by a detailed plan for implementation.

Gratitude:

We are very grateful for:

- the support given to this program by **Julie Graham, Communications and Marketing Coordinator until her resignation in late 2019** . . . wonderful publicity for the Affirming Ministry Program, great follow-up with pictures/news of celebrations, liaison with General Council Offices for letter of congratulations, development of new resources and exciting ideas to further our work with United Church Ministries. . . . and a source of experience invaluable to all of us in the Affirming Ministry Program. Thank you, Julie . . . and very best wishes to you in your new position as Regional Minister: Justice and Communication for Living Skies, Northern Spirit and Prairie to Pine Regional Councils!
- the support given to this program by **Jordan Sullivan of the General Council Office** in collecting annual reports from Affirming Ministries, sending on this information to our Communications/Marketing Coordinator and the Affirming Ministry Coordinators, and for his general knowledge and wisdom which is immeasurable. Thank you, Jordan!
- the support to this program of the **General Council Office of the Moderator and the Moderator**, who send a letter of congratulations from The United Church of Canada (with whom we are in partnership) to each new Affirming Ministry, to be presented at their Service of Celebration.
- the support and encouragement of the **Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble Council**
- the **Action Groups and Affirming Ministries** in various regions of the country who promote our program, offer workshops, speak and coach local ministries through the process. Grateful also to **individuals** who speak, coach and support the program.
- **all those ministries in The United Church of Canada who are willing to take on the challenge of offering radical hospitality for all of God's people and to do so publically, intentionally and explicitly P.I.E.**

A quote about the Affirming Ministry Process to end this report:

“This process has led to good conversations and to making new and important connections with other groups on campus and nearby that are also committed to creating safe spaces.”

Gratefully, Rev. Robyn Brown-Hewitt
UCC Chaplaincy Dalhousie University Multifaith Services
Halifax, NS

May it be so for all of us!





Affirming Ministry Celebration for
UCC Chaplaincy Dalhousie University Multifaith Services
Halifax, NS

Report respectfully submitted by Linda Hutchinson, Liz Carter-Morgan and Jackie Harper on behalf of
the Affirming Ministry Program.

June 12, 2020

Affirm United / S'affirmer Ensemble

Membership Statistics – As of February 27, 2020

Most Recent Membership	Individuals	Affirming Ministries	Other Org's
2020	51	5	2
2019	97	211	4
Total of above	148	216	6
<i>Year ago total</i>	152	210	10
2018	40	10	1
2017	17	1	0
Total this group	57	11	1
Total of all above	205	227	7
<i>Year ago total</i>	209	219	12
2016 & before	172	0	8
<i>Year ago</i>	146	0	8
Grand total	377	227	15
<i>Year ago total</i>	355	219	20

Notes:

- “Most Recent Membership” is the most recent year paid or a waiver granted.
- Individuals have been sent tax receipts since charitable status was achieved.
- In December 2019, individuals and non-Affirming organizations that did not have 2019 memberships were asked for renewals; those who did so were given 2020 memberships.
- Affirming Ministries were sent invoices for their memberships in April 2019.
- Some “Other Organizations” with paid memberships are ministries on the journey to Affirming; they are not invoiced but are asked for membership renewals. Some have been Affirming but are renewing the process during reorganization.
- “Year ago” numbers reflect the same number of years as the current, and were reported in the 2019 Annual Report. For example, the first “Year ago” numbers are for 2019 and 2018.
- The 2016 and before listings remain on the database but will rarely be used for mailing.
- Receipts, invoices and most other membership correspondence were bilingual.
- The number of Affirming Ministries increased, even though 28 former Affirming Conferences, Presbyteries and Presbyterials in 2018 no longer existed in 2019.

John R. Calhoun
Membership Coordinator



Treasurer's Report

2019 brought changes to Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble that will allow us to move forward with additional support for the Affirming Ministry Program in 2020.

The income from Affirming Ministry Memberships increased very little in 2019, due to the restructuring of the United Church of Canada, and the resulting loss of Affirming Conferences and Presbyteries.

The first AUSE PIE Day was held in March, and many Affirming Ministries took part in the event. We were pleasantly surprised to receive donations from several of the churches that held PIE Day events.

AUSE supported the creation of the PIE Day videos and other promotional material during late 2018 and early 2019. The program was funded initially using funds that we had received from Gifts With Vision (\$2367). In preparation for PIE Day 2020, additional work was done in late 2019 and early 2020 to edit the videos and to add worship resources. Although many 2020 PIE Day events were cancelled, the videos and resource materials are being used by ministries in the Affirming Ministry Process.

At the AGM in July, I presented a narrative budget which described the work that the Council would like AUSE to be able to do, starting in 2020.

Three options were described, based on Affirming Ministry membership fees, as our primary source of income. The options were to increase the membership fees to \$150, \$200 or \$250 per year. The membership fee had been set at \$100 for at least 20 years.

Instead of voting on one of the options, the AGM chose to change our funding model in an attempt to make the fee increase equitable for all Affirming Ministries. The new funding model states that the membership fee will be 1/20 of 1% of the ministry's net revenue. The minimum AM membership fee remains at \$100. Individual memberships were increased to \$50 and Regional Council memberships were increased to \$1000. Other Affirming Organizations and Ministries were offered a pay-what-you-can option within a suggested range of \$100 to \$500.

The income that we anticipate receiving in 2020 from AM memberships, based on the 220 memberships on record at the end of 2019, is \$32,720. This is an average of \$145 per AM. 90 AM's will pay the \$100 minimum fee, and 3 will pay the \$500 maximum fee.

As a result of these changes, the Membership Form was redesigned, and an explanatory letter was mailed in December to all individual members and to all Affirming Ministries and Organizations. Thank you to Linda Hutchinson, Julie Graham and John Calhoun for working with me on this writing project. Thank you to Diane Skomash and her family, and to John Calhoun, for their work stuffing envelopes, and mailing approximately 440 letters.

In the fall, we applied for and received a one-time Emergent Grant of \$5000 from the United Church of Canada. This will be used to fund the rewriting of the Open Hearts resource, and to support the Affirming Ministries program.

We also applied for and received a one-time increase of \$2000 to our annual grant from the United Church of Canada. This grant was to be used to help fund a Visioning Process that would include both the AUSE council, and AUSE members attending the 2020 summer conference and AGM. That work has been deferred to 2021.



Anne Wood, Treasurer, Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble

3:14 PM
2020-06-12
Accrual Basis

affirm united /s'affirmer ensemble
Statement of Operations Budget vs. Actual
January through December 2019

	Jan - Dec 19	Budget	\$ Over Budget
Income			
4000 - Memberships			
4010 - Affirming Ministries	22,100	26,000	(3,900)
4030 - Individual /Households	3,990	3,000	990
4050 - Institutional	400	500	(100)
Total 4000 - Memberships	26,490	29,500	(3,010)
4100 - Donations			
4190 - Trans. from Gifts Fund	867	867	0
4170 - Trans. from Liv'g Apology Fund	0	0	0
4160 - Other - non receiptable	0		
4110 - Individual receiptable	5,649	6,000	(351)
4130 - PAR	3,675	4,000	(325)
4140 - Donations from other charities/	3,749	1,500	2,249
Total 4100 - Donations	13,939	12,367	1,572
4200 - UCC Grant			
4210 - Emergent Grant	0		
4200 - UCC Grant - Other	2,000	2,000	0
Total 4200 - UCC Grant	2,000	2,000	0
4500 - Annual Conference			
4510 - Annual Conference Surplus	1,000		
Total 4500 - Annual Conference	1,000		
4700 - Merchandise Sales	1,672	1,000	672
4800 - Other Income			
4850 - Interest	251	0	251
4800 - Other Income - Other	147		
Total 4800 - Other Income	398	0	398
Total Income	45,499	44,867	632
Expense			
VOID CHEQUE	0		
6000 - Education/Research			
6015 - Annual Conf. surplus - Expense	0		
6020 - Gifts to Qualified Donees	979		
6010 - Annual Conference Expense	1,540	1,000	540
6050 - Affirming Ministries - Expense	3,505	4,500	(995)
6080 - Other Educational Initiatives			
6085 - Living Apology Project	0		
6080 - Other Educational Initiatives - Other	1,133	1,000	133
Total 6080 - Other Educational Initiatives	1,133	1,000	133
Total 6000 - Education/Research	7,157	6,500	657
6200 - Communications/Promo/Networking			
6295 - MARKETING COORDINATOR- OTHER	840	3,000	(2,160)
6290 - MARKETING COORDINATOR SERVICES	18,299	17,220	1,079
6030 - Website	806	3,500	(2,694)
6230 - Observer/Classified Ads	740	750	(10)
6250 - Translation	428	500	(72)
6260 - Print Materials	842	500	342
6280 - Canadian & Int'l Networking	0	2,000	(2,000)
Total 6200 - Communications/Promo/Networking	21,955	27,470	(5,515)
6300 - AU Council			
6310 - Winter Meeting- Other	452		
6315 Winter Meeting Travel	2,370	8,500	(6,130)
6330 - Summer Meeting & AGM-Other	910		
6345 Summer Mtg & AGM Travel	4,284	7,000	(2,716)
6350 - Teleconference Meetings	43	350	(307)
Total 6300 - AU Council	8,058	15,850	(7,792)
6400 - Merchandise Costs	2,151	500	1,651

Page 1



affirm united /s'affirmer ensemble
Balance Sheet
As of 31 December 2019

	<u>31 Dec 19</u>
ASSETS	
Current Assets	
Chequing/Savings	
1150 - SAVINGS	45,262.09
1010 - Petty Cash	100.00
1100 - Chequing	<u>46,309.22</u>
Total Chequing/Savings	91,671.31
Accounts Receivable	
1200 - Accounts Receivable	<u>3,566.10</u>
Total Accounts Receivable	3,566.10
Other Current Assets	
12000 - Undeposited Funds	<u>100.00</u>
Total Other Current Assets	100.00
Total Current Assets	<u>95,337.41</u>
TOTAL ASSETS	<u><u>95,337.41</u></u>
LIABILITIES & EQUITY	
Equity	
3360 - Emergent Grant Fund	5,000.00
3350 - Conference Surplus Fund	1,175.00
3200 - United in Marriage	13,834.00
3600 - Unrestricted Net Assets	72,648.23
Net Income	<u>2,680.18</u>
Total Equity	<u>95,337.41</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY	<u><u>95,337.41</u></u>

Galt Associates Accounting Services

138 Robert Wallace Drive
Kingston, ON K7M 1Y2
613-545-3313

June 8, 2020

Anne Wood, Treasurer
Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble
7 Windsor Drive, Kingston, ON

This letter is in response to a request to provide an Independent review of the financial records of Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble. The United Church of Canada provides guidance on procedures that are usually carried out to perform this independent review and I have tried to follow these procedures.

I have reviewed the records and bookkeeping information as provided to me for the year ended December 31, 2019.

My review consisted of checking entries and supporting documentation as I deemed necessary to offer my opinion of the record keeping. I have also reviewed the minutes of Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble meetings and checked that any significant transactions discussed in the minutes were recorded appropriately.

I have found nothing in my review that would indicate that the records are inaccurate or incomplete.



G. William Galt
B. Comm.

I have not performed an audit or a review engagement on these financial statements and, accordingly, I express no assurance thereon. Readers are cautioned that these statements may not be appropriate for their purposes

Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble (AUSE) Budget 2020

For the first time AUSE thought we would give you a narrative budget to help you understand the opportunities and their corresponding numerical value as Council envisions them. We hope this adds value to the conversation we are about to have and the decision-making process.

Our signature program is the Affirming Ministries Program. Ministries (Communities of Faith, Camps, Seniors Residences, and Regional Councils) enter into a covenant with AUSE locally to educate and equip themselves to be a safer place for Two Spirit and LGBTQ folk. This is a process that can take one to three years and has been shown to be a life-giving, spirit filled endeavor. An Affirming Ministries Regional Coordinator walks with them in this process. The main resource for this process is *Open Hearts* (which is a pdf on our website). At the moment, we have 216 Affirming Ministries and we add at least another 30 every year. We imagine this number growing at an increasing rate. This program is administered by three volunteers and one Communication/Marketing staff at 20 to 40 hours per month.

We are facing challenges around volunteer capacity, as the number of Affirming Ministries blossom. Another challenge is that our annual Membership Fee has stayed at \$100/year for Affirming Ministries for at least 20 years. Also, the individual Membership Fee has remained at \$40.

The projected budget (Membership Fees \$100) on the attached pages shows a deficit of \$16,893. This number includes a much need revision of *Open Hearts* which was written in 2003 and technology updates that will improve communication within the Council and with Affirming Ministries. But this budget does not have anything to address the challenges of our burgeoning Affirming Ministries program.

Here are a few scenarios:

Annual Membership Fees	Corresponding Outcome
\$150 per year	-\$5,074
\$200 per year	\$6,745 (This would allow us to offer honoraria to our Affirming Ministry Coordinators.)
\$250 per year	\$18,563 (This would allow us to hire a 5-7 hours per week Affirming Ministry Coordinator and reduced honoraria to our volunteer Affirming Ministry Coordinators.)

As you can see each \$50 increment has a significant impact on the bottom line.

Another factor is the \$2,000 annual grant from the United Church of Canada. Council is applying to increase this amount to reflect the snowballing workload of AUSE.

Council believes that the above numbers allow us only to maintain the status quo.

The Council also has some dreams for AUSE. If we were able to hire full time person, we could provide support and animation to existing Affirming Ministries as they live out their Action Plans. This might include providing resources so that Ministries could welcome LGBTQ refugees, respond to hate crime in their contexts, and embolden them to be a transformative force in the world. On a National level we could engage in advocacy, create connection and relationships with Two Spirit communities, and produce high quality liturgies and other resources.

These are the dreams we as a Council have for AUSE.

Michiko Bown-Kai (Co-Chair), Anne Wood (Treasurer), Cindy Bourgeois (Secretary), Jenni Leslie, Diane Skomash (Members at Large).

General Council Office Report

From: Jordan Sullivan, Ministry Partnership Animator, LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit Justice
To: Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble AGM
Date: June 16, 2020

My portfolio includes serving as the General Council Office liaison with Affirm United, and lead staff for the work of LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit Justice in Canada. The work highlighted in this report includes work of other staff at the General Council Office with whom I connect, the major pieces of my work since the summer of 2019, and the current and future work throughout 2020.

Grant & Staff Cuts: The United Church of Canada, like many Canadian churches, is experiencing a significant decline in both its financial and people resources, and its ability to contribute financially to the shared mission and ministry in Canada and the world. As it looked towards 2021, the Executive made the painful decision to reduce the overall General Council budget by approximately CAD\$4 million. The reduction will reduce financial resource sharing with global, Canadian and local ecumenical partners by approximately CAD \$780,000, or 25%, from 2020 to 2021. We will also lose a number of national staff positions and see several areas of program work eliminated. How COVID-19 will impact these numbers is yet to be known.

Staff Retirement: Jim Hodgson has for almost 20 years worked for LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit justice globally, in addition to his work as Regional Coordinator for the Latin American and Caribbean Partnership Program. Jim will be retiring at the end of August (his last day in "the office" will be July 17). Jim has been a passionate and tireless advocate for LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit people and worked against religious-based discrimination with United Church partners in Latin America and the Caribbean, but also in Africa, Asia and the South Pacific. He has worked with the World Council of Church's [Global Interfaith LGBTI Network](#), the Canadian [Dignity Network](#), and more recently, [Rainbow Faith & Freedom](#).



GLOBAL ADVOCACY

Conclusions of the International Consultation on Human Sexuality, Gender and Diversities

United Church of Canada – Reformed University, Barranquilla, May 22 to 25, 2019

Among the recommendations from the November 2017 Global LGBTQ Two-Spirit Dialogue (held in partnership with Affirm United) was that The United Church of Canada should support a series of South-South consultations among partners and related networks. Jim Hodgson reports that the first one was held in Barranquilla, Colombia, where they were welcomed by the Universidad Reformada (related to the Colombian Presbyterian Church). In the next two years or so, we hope to support similar efforts in other parts of the world.

Asian Consultation on Gender and LGBTQ+ Inclusion

Postponed due to COVID-19

This consultation was scheduled for Manila in March, but will be rescheduled. The event will gather partners from the National Councils of Churches (NCCs) of Korea, India and the Philippines. Staff in the Church in Partnership and People in Partnership Cluster of the Church in Mission Unit will work with colleagues in the Philippines, at Union Theological Seminary, to plan and host this consultation. This consultation follows the United Church's commitment to support and accompany global partners' efforts related to LGBTQ+ rights, dignity, and full inclusion.

Partnership with Dignity Network

The United Church (through the Church in Mission Unit) has formalized our partnership with the Dignity Network - a group of organizations across Canada involved in supporting the human rights of LGBTI people globally. The purpose of the network is to provide a platform for Canadian based-organizations and individuals and their global partners to support the human rights of LGBTI people globally, including issues related to LGBTI refugees.

CANADIAN ADVOCACY

Ministry in the Francophone Context

More than 50 years after the Quiet Revolution, Francophones in Québec continue to harbour anxieties and concerns about the church, but there is an openness among young people looking to explore their faith and spirituality. Léger Marketing did a poll of 2000 Francophones in the province of Québec in conjunction with the French Ministry team of the United Church of Canada. 92% identify as Roman Catholic, 65% as people of faith, 18% as practicing their faith. Significant majority of respondents wanted to see a church that was less dogmatic, open to exploration, welcoming of women leadership, affirming of the LGBTQ community, etc., but the vast majority had never heard of the United Church of Canada. The results are already being put to use in the creation of new ministries, church communications and helping us to respond to the spiritual needs of this population. Staff Contact: [Éric Hébert-Daly](#), Responsable, Ministries in French.



Conversion Therapy

- **2019 Letter to Prime Minister:** On January 18, 2019, a letter was sent from Michael Blair, Executive Director of The Church in Mission unit to Prime Minister Trudeau, stating that The United Church of Canada supports a ban on conversion therapy. This letter was written in support of the [E-1833 \(Conversion Therapy\) Petition](#). The letter was cc-d to Michiko/Affirm United. The letter encouraged the government to address the issue of conversion therapy, and requested a broadening of the focus. We recommended that the definition include “any formal therapy or practice that has the goal of changing a person’s sexual or gender identity through any treatment that is hostile to a person’s identity, is unethical, spiritually and psychologically damaging, and not supported by evidence.”
- **2020 Endorsement:** In May 2020 the United Church endorsed the revised edition of “Conversion Therapy in Canada: A Guide for Legislative Action” by Dr. Kristopher Wells. The endorsement reads as follows, “The United Church of Canada highly recommends the use of this informative, well researched, and thorough guide, to educate and assist people of faith to take action as they seek to affirm the value and dignity of all God’s children. The voices of LGBTQ2+ people impacted by conversion therapy, and the section on how to respond to common arguments against conversion therapy bans, will both inspire and resource individuals and faith communities in speaking out against this spiritually, physically, and mentally harmful practice.” The guide is available to download at <https://www.noconversioncanada.com>.
- **A new Conversion Therapy section** was added to the [Gender, Sexuality, and Orientation webpage](#). It provides a number of resources, and states that the United Church supports Bill C-8 the [Conversion Therapy Ban](#), which will likely result in a **Take Action** being created after the Second Reading of the bill, when it has been referred to a committee.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH AFFIRM UNITED

Update: [Iridesce: The Living Apology Project](#)

While the Iridesce three-year project came to a close last year, Rev. Patrick Woodbeck was hired to write the Final Report. It is important that we dedicate time and resources to ensure the project’s recommendations and learnings are shared in a manner that holds the sacredness of the stories received, honours the work of the project, and communicates the learnings efficiently and effectively. The Final Report will be submitted by Michael Blair (Executive Minister, Church in Mission Unit) to the General Secretary, Nora Sanders, later this summer. She will determine the next steps, including how the work will be reported to GC44 (likely to be postponed until 2022), or if there is some work that needs to be done in the interim.



Queering Christian Voices: An Ecumenical Coalition in Canada

Hosted by [Affirm United](#) and [Generous Space Ministries](#), and funded by Embracing the Spirit, two ecumenical gatherings of people committed to LGBTQIA2S+ justice were held in Toronto in 2019. The purpose was to leverage resources and strengthen understanding in dismantling barriers, knowing that increased solidarity will lead to more informed, effective, and sustainable action. In the fall of 2019 the formation of “Queering Christian Voices: An Ecumenical Coalition in Canada” was announced (shared with all Affirming Ministries in the UCC). A website is under construction, and a Public Media Release will be coming out in the near future.

Thanks to the leadership of Affirm United and The United Church of Canada, Queering Christian Voices is the first nation-wide ecumenical Christian organization in Canada engaging in LGBTQIA+ and Two Spirit justice. With connections already representing more than twenty (20) Canadian denominations, this coalition and its partners have the networks to identify affirming leaders in non-affirming church contexts and to provide them with support and resources to continue their work of advocacy. The coalition’s April 2020 gathering in Toronto was postponed due to COVID-19.

AFFIRMING MINISTRIES

National Affirming PIE Day

On Friday, March 13, 2020, GCO staff engaged in the Affirming PIE Day – with leadership provided by a number of LGBTQ+ staff.. The café was filled and overflowing with staff – not just for the sweets – but to watch the excellent videos created by Affirm United and Affirming Connections. Good table group conversations happened, before and after viewing the video, about what it means to be publicly, intentionally, and explicitly, affirming of LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit people. Alydia Smith (Program Coordinator for Worship, Music, and Spirituality) created an Upcoming Special Celebration web page for PIE Day - see <https://www.united-church.ca/worship-special-days/pie-day>.

2019 Affirming Ministry Reports

A letter from the Affirming Ministry Coordinators was sent to all Affirming Ministries in early March 2020 with a reminder email being sent in late May. The letter invited ministries to submit their 2019 Affirming Ministry Reports, update contact information, and share photos. All reports and photos have been shared with Affirm United. Throughout the year, Michele Petick will work to share the stories and photos received within these reports. Seventy-two (72) Affirming Ministries submitted a report, a 31%



return rate. While this low return-rate is likely due to COVID-19, it is consistent with the continued decline of submitted reports. Return rates over the past six years: 2019-31%; 2018-43%; 2017-33%; 2016-58%; 2015-63%; 2014-71%. In addition, there are 23 Affirming Ministries who have not submitted an annual report for the past 5 years or more.

RESOURCES

[Celebrating Gender Diversity: A Toolkit on Gender Identity and Trans Experiences](#)

In 2019 this resource was updated with a variety of new information, to help individuals and communities of faith to deepen their understanding of gender identity, help them create welcoming and affirming communities, and integrate trans people's gifts and capacities for ministry into the life of the church, including liturgy and expressions of worship.

First Official [Pride Sunday](#) in the United Church – June 2, 2019

Working closely with Affirm United and Alydia Smith, GC43 passed a motion to make the first Sunday in June one of the church's 'Special Sundays' – to be called Pride Sunday – first celebrated on June 2, 2019. While many communities of faith celebrate Pride Sunday at different times, having it declared an official Special Sunday allows for broader pick-up and awareness of Pride Sunday and the importance of celebrating and affirming LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit people.

A new theme page "Pride Celebration" can be found at <https://www.united-church.ca/worship-theme/pride-celebration> shares resources for Pride Celebrations held at any time during the year. Submissions are welcome at any time! Email to jsullivan@united-church.ca.

[A Trans Christian Faith Perspective](#)

Webinar Recorded: March 31, 2020

Christian faith is an important part of many trans and non-binary people's lives. Five trans and non-binary people will share a little of their personal stories, and how their Christian faith has made a difference along the way. Hear about how they understand their gender identity, and why the church has been an important part of their lives.

[Becoming a Trans Ally / Accomplice](#)

Webinar Recorded: May 25, 2020

This webinar addresses how to be an ally / accomplice, and shares ways to address the systemic and deeply embedded nature of transphobia. Learn what it means to stand in solidarity with trans and non-binary people, to speak-out consistently, address systemic transphobia, and actively participate in witnessing to and advocating with trans and non-binary people for their rights and human dignity.

GENDER IDENTITY WORK

Trans Advisory Group

In 2019 this advisory group, consisting of two trans ministry personnel and two Regional staff who have supported trans people in ministry, continued their work with GCO staff in the Church in Mission Unit



and the Ministry Employment Unit / Office of Vocations. They provided important insights, concerns, requests, and challenges related to policies, forms, pastoral relations, and much more.

Transgender Day of Remembrance 2019

With the assistance of Lori Neal and other colleagues, I led the GCO staff worship in chapel on November 20, 2019, which included a memorial slide show, and stations for learning and action. Submissions of worship services, liturgy, and other suggestions on how we might animate this day among the wider church in 2020, are welcome.

Email: jsullivan@united-church.ca



Communications Report:



Hi, I am Michele and I'm new here. I don't have anything to report for 2019 as I only started at AU/SE in May of 2020. But, I can tell you the foundation my predecessor Julie Graham left me is fabulous and rock solid.

A bit about me, I am a tech person with 30 years of experience in coding, websites, online marketing, networking, online presence, communications, content creation, graphic design, eNewsletters and 20 plus years of experience with churches and The United Church of Canada.

I thank you all for your wonderful welcome to me in this position with Affirm United / S'affirmer Ensemble. I have enjoyed getting to know you through your 2019 Annual Reports, emails, photos, special worship services, Pride Sunday celebrations and introducing new Affirming Ministries. I look forward to hearing more of your individual stories with all the joys and sorrows, challenges and triumphs they tell.

In my short time in this post I can tell you quite candidly that I have learned a deep sadness in the witness of fear and hatred directed towards LGBTQIA+ and Two Spirit communities that I had never known before. Marginalized people, specifically the Black and Indigenous communities, are suffering and we can help our siblings have equitable lives free from persecution, abuse, judgement and violence. No response --- is NOT a response. To be "Affirming", is to be called to speak up when you see injustices of any kind.

In my role as Communications and Marketing Coordinator I am here to help you navigate the sometimes murky waters of language, websites, social media and messaging. Please contact me anytime by email at communications@ause.ca I'd love to hear from you.

Read our eNewsletter, follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, we'll follow you back! Check out the website <http://ause.ca> "What's New" section for all of the latest happenings in our Affirming faith communities and above all remind yourself every morning when you wake that YOU have chosen to declare that YOU affirm another human being regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation as Jesus taught us through moments of love and welcome.

Thank you,

Michele K. Petick

Communications & Marketing Coordinator



Photo Gallery of Affirming Ministries:



1 Rainbow Cross - Trinity United Church, Edmonton, AB



2 Ivy League at Trinity United Church, Edmonton, AB



3 Trinity United Church, Edmonton, AB with Gary Simpson



4 Trinity United Church, Edmonton, AB



5 Scarborough United Church, Calgary, AB



6 Salt Spring Island United Church, BC



7 Knox United Church, Fort Frances, ON



8 Knox United Church, Fort Frances, ON



SEPTEMBER 1 2019 | 9:00 AM | KNOX UNITED CHURCH

CITY-WIDE PRIDE SERVICE

JOIN US FOR COFFEE AND MUFFINS BEFORE THE SERVICE

SPEAKERS



SOLO BY CHANTAL STORMSONG CHAGNON

9 Knox United Church, Fort Frances, ON

