

Open Hearts

Becoming An Affirming Organization



Affirm United / S'affirmer Ensemble

David V. Hall
in conjunction with the
Affirming Program Coordinators

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With open hearts, open minds there is welcome in this place
there is welcome in this space
there is welcome with embrace
with open hearts.

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This new resource of **Open Hearts: Becoming an Affirming Organization** stands on the foundational work of **Alyson C. Huntly**, who, beginning in 2011, led the collaborative effort to develop the original *Open Hearts: Resources for Affirming Ministries in The United Church of Canada*.

That initial resource was made possible through the partnership of **The United Church of Canada** and **Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble**, drawing on the collective wisdom and lived experiences of Affirming Ministries across the denomination. We are grateful for the essential guidance and feedback provided by the members of the **Affirm United National Council** and **Affirm United Program Coordinators**, whose contributions shaped the path toward the inclusive framework we use today.

This new resource has been developed collaboratively by people committed to creating communities where all people are fully welcomed, affirmed, and celebrated. While initial resource was prepared to support Affirming Ministries within The United Church of Canada, it has been thoughtfully adapted for use by any group, organization, or community seeking to become intentionally inclusive, just, and equitable in its life and work.

While rooted in work toward 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion, this manual recognizes that true affirmation must be expansive. It can be used by and for communities seeking to honour people of every age, colour, race, ethnicity, culture, gender identity, sexual orientation, gender expression, ability, mental or physical health, family configuration, social or economic circumstance, political belief, religious or non-religious belief, and educational background. Becoming affirming is an ongoing commitment to ensuring that all people experience dignity, belonging, and respect.

Across many traditions and contexts, communities are recognizing the need for clear and public commitments to inclusion. This resource responds to that need. It offers reflection, guidance, and practical tools to support learning, dialogue, policy development, and meaningful action as communities grow in their capacity to welcome and celebrate diversity in all its forms.

At its heart, becoming affirming is about more than adopting a statement. It is about embodying values of justice, compassion, humility, and courage. It is a journey of transformation — one that invites individuals and communities alike to deepen understanding, confront barriers to equity, and actively create spaces where everyone can belong and flourish.

Open Hearts: Becoming An Affirming Organization

David V. Hall

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Affirm United

P.O. Box 57057,

Ottawa, ON K1R 1A1

www.affirmunited.ca

SECTION A - INTRODUCTION

Who is Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble

Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble (AUSE) is a justice-seeking organization independently affiliated with the United Church of Canada. Membership is open to people of all sexual orientations, gender expressions and gender identities who support its mission. AUSE is a worshipping, pastoral and prophetic community that celebrates God's call to liberation. It proclaims that all people are created in God's image and are unconditionally loved, and it works toward full participation and justice for people of all sexual orientations, gender expressions and gender identities in both church and society.

AUSE provides educational resources, pastoral care and support for 2SLGBTQIA+, gender non-conforming and genderfluid people as well as their families and friends. It builds networks through Affirming ministries, national and local groups, and encourages faith communities to act prophetically and pastorally in support of justice and inclusion.

Core Aims

Education – Promoting greater awareness and understanding of sexual orientation, gender expression and gender identity.

Action – Working to end discrimination in the church, society and within its own structures.

Support – Helping people of all sexual orientations, gender expressions and gender identity find community, belonging and affirmation.

Goals

Encourage ministries, communities, organizations and partners to grow in understanding issues of sexual orientation, gender expression and gender identity.

Support ministries, communities, organizations and partners in creating safe, inclusive and affirming spaces.

Identify and connect ministries, communities, organizations and partners willing to publicly, intentionally and explicitly affirm the full participation of people of all sexual orientations, gender expressions and gender identities.

Broaden justice efforts to address intersecting forms of oppression.

While the program focuses on gender identity and sexual orientation, it recognizes that exclusion and discrimination harm many communities—not only LGBTQIA2S+ people, but also Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) and others marginalized by class, age, ability, culture, gender, ethnicity, or physical and mental health.

The program affirms that justice work must address intersecting forms of oppression. Gender- and sexually-diverse people from racialized, Indigenous, Métis, or First Nations communities may face multiple layers of marginalization—both within their cultural communities and within predominantly White LGBTQIA2S+ spaces. Affirming communities are therefore called to confront racism, White privilege, and systemic barriers, and to build partnerships that challenge sexism, classism, ableism, and other injustices—working toward dignity, belonging, and justice for all.

Background

Affirm was founded in 1982 as an organization for gay and lesbian members of the United Church of Canada. Soon after, *Friends of Affirm* was formed to support its work.

In 1991, *Affirm* creates the *Affirming Ministry Program* (originally called *The Affirming Congregations Program*), creating a network of United Church ministries that publicly affirm people of all sexual orientations, gender expressions and gender identities. The Program was launched in 1992 with Augustine United Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba becoming the first Affirming congregation on February 26, 1995. Today, there are more than 250 in nearly every province and territory across Canada and the number continues to grow.

Affirming Ministries openly advocate for the inclusion of people of all sexual orientations, gender expressions and gender identities. They provide information, support, advocacy and justice-making inviting the wider church and society to do the same.

While rooted in this denomination, the Affirming framework can be adapted for other churches, faith traditions, and community-based organizations.

Purpose of This Guide

This resource aims to help communities of faith, spiritual groups, and secular organizations—within and beyond The United Church of Canada—grow and change, moving from merely “welcoming everyone” toward truly opening their hearts. Opening our hearts, as communities and organizations, entails unlocking the closet doors of silence, oppression, and shame in our congregations, institutions, workplaces, and neighbourhoods; opening hearts and minds to a shared vision of justice and wholeness; celebrating the full rainbow spectrum of human diversity; and responding to the call to love, dignity, equity, and compassion.

This resource provides information, workshops, and educational materials for communities of faith, ecumenical and interfaith partners, para-church groups, camps, chaplaincies, campus ministries, small non-profits, schools and educational institutions, community groups, workplaces, regional bodies, retreat centres, and other volunteer- or lay-led organizations that:

- want to learn more about what it means to become an Affirming or intentionally inclusive community or organization

- are ready to begin a process of becoming Affirming or publicly inclusive of people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities
- are discerning what it means for their community or organization to become Affirming, and how to live that commitment in policy, practice, and culture
- are existing Affirming or inclusive communities seeking to learn, grow, or recommit themselves to a practice of inclusion and justice-making

This guide is written especially with volunteer- or lay-led groups in mind—particularly those that may have limited experience with structured programs, policy development, or equity work. Becoming Affirming does not require professional expertise or large budgets. It begins with a sincere commitment to welcome, learn, and grow. This is a journey, not a one-time decision. Small, thoughtful steps matter.

While this resource was developed in the context of The United Church of Canada and references the work of AUSE, its principles and practices can be adapted for use in other denominations, faith traditions, secular organizations, and community-based settings.

The educational suggestions and program ideas in this resource assume that participants already have a basic level of understanding of issues related to sexual orientation and gender diversity.

We're Already Welcoming, So Why Become Affirming?

Many churches and other community organizations believe they are already welcoming and may question the need to become Affirming. If everyone is included, why specifically name sexual orientation and gender identity?

The difference is that being “welcoming” is often passive and assumed, while becoming Affirming is active, public, intentional, explicit, and accountable. Simply saying “all are welcome” does not address the history of harm many 2SLGBTQIA+ people have experienced in churches and other organizations. Silence, even when well-intentioned, can still exclude.

Terms like “welcoming” can also reflect a subtle power imbalance—suggesting that those already inside grant access to others. In faith communities, the parable of the great dinner (Matthew 22:1–14) reminds us that Christ is the host, and the invitation to God’s table is already extended to all, especially those who have been pushed to the margins. In non-faith settings, this same principle applies: inclusion is not about gatekeeping, but about recognizing inherent dignity and belonging.

Becoming Affirming means intentionally naming and celebrating diversity, recognizing that each new person changes and enriches the community. It means standing publicly with those who have too often heard messages of exclusion, and offering not just welcome, but repair, equity, and solidarity.

In a world where condemnation and silence still cause real harm, Affirming communities—whether churches or other organizations—offer visible hope by modeling what it means to live with courage, accountability, and genuine inclusion.

What Does “Affirming” Mean?

An affirming organization makes a clear, public commitment to include and support people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

This means:

- LGBTQIA2S+ people are not merely tolerated—they are welcomed and valued.
- They can participate fully in leadership, programs, and community life.
- The organization works to create a safe and respectful environment.
- Inclusion is expressed in both words and actions.

While affirming work explicitly addresses gender identity and sexual orientation, it is part of a broader commitment to justice and inclusion for all people.

Understanding the Bigger Picture

Injustice is rarely isolated. Discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender expression or gender identity often overlaps with racism, ableism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of marginalization.

An affirming organization strives, within its capacity, to:

- Challenge bias based on appearance, age, culture, ethnicity, class, family configuration, social or economic circumstance, beliefs and education.
- Work toward racial justice.
- Improve accessibility (physical, social, and communication).
- Address harmful stereotypes or exclusionary practices.
- Care for the environment and the wider community.

You do not need to solve every issue at once. Start where you are. Growth happens over time.

You Don’t Need to Be Experts

Many volunteer or lay-led groups worry:

- “We don’t know enough.”
- “What if we say the wrong thing?”
- “We don’t have formal policies.”
- “We don’t have staff.”

These concerns are normal.

Becoming affirming is not about having perfect language or polished systems. It is about:

- A willingness to learn.
- Humility when mistakes are made.
- Openness to listening.
- A commitment to keep improving.

Education can be simple: reading articles together, inviting a speaker, watching a webinar, or using resources from AUSE or established affirming networks.

Affirming Language: Policies, Statements and Communications

Affirming Ministries, guided by AUSE, commit to public, intentional, and explicit inclusion in all policies, statements, and communications. This commitment must be clearly reflected in vision and mission statements, marriage policies, action plans, and all related documents.

Phrases such as “regardless of”, “not limited to”, “also including” or “with no exception” are not permitted in official documentation. Although often used with good intentions, this language can imply a passive or neutral approach that fails to acknowledge the specific identities and systemic barriers experienced by marginalized communities. It may suggest that differences do not matter, rather than affirming that diversity is valued and celebrated within our ministry.

Instead, Affirming Ministries will use language that is specific, inclusive, and rooted in justice. All documentation must clearly express a theological and social commitment to equity and belonging. For example:

“People of every age, race, belief, culture, ability, income level, family configuration, gender, gender identity, and sexual identity fully participating in all aspects of the life and work of the ministry.”

Such language makes our commitments visible and accountable, and grounds them in the lived realities of the diverse individuals and families we serve. It affirms that full participation in the life and work of the ministry is a right, not a privilege, and that inclusion must be clearly named, actively embodied, and consistently practiced.

Affirming Language: Pronouns

Language is constantly evolving, and the words we use shape how we understand one another. *Open Hearts* seeks to foster thoughtful, respectful conversations about gender and sexuality.

No resource can ever be perfectly up to date. Terms change over time, take on new meanings, or fall out of use. People also choose different words to describe themselves and

their relationships based on personal preference, culture, or generation. When in doubt, respectfully ask individuals what language they prefer.

AUSE emphasizes the broader language of *sexual orientation* and *gender identity* to include the full diversity of human experience. For brevity, this resource often uses the abbreviation **2SLGBTQIA2S+** (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and Two-Spirit). While widely used, this abbreviation is imperfect and not universally embraced. No acronym can fully capture the diversity it seeks to name.

The following brief definitions are not exhaustive but offer general guidance:

- **Asexual:** A person who does not experience sexual attraction. They may or may not experience romantic or emotional attraction.
- **Bisexual:** A person attracted to more than one gender. Some may also use terms such as *pansexual*, *omnisexual*, or *queer*.
- **Cisgender:** A person whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned at birth.
- **Gay:** Often refers to men attracted to men; sometimes used more broadly.
- **Lesbian:** A woman attracted to women.
- **Gender:** A person's lived experience and social identity (e.g., woman, man, non-binary).
- **Gender Identity:** One's internal sense of being male, female, both, neither, or another gender.
- **Gender Expression:** How a person outwardly expresses gender.
- **Gender Non-Conforming:** Describes people whose gender expression does not fit societal expectations.
- **Genderfluid:** A person whose gender identity shifts over time or context.
- **Homosexual:** A formal term many avoid, preferring *gay* or *lesbian*.
- **Intersex:** A person born with physical sex characteristics that do not fit typical definitions of male or female. (This term replaces outdated and offensive language.)
- **Non-binary:** An umbrella term for people who do not identify exclusively as male or female.
- **Pansexual:** A person attracted to others regardless of gender.
- **Queer:** Once derogatory, now reclaimed by many as a broad or political identity; still considered offensive by some depending on context.
- **Questioning:** A person exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- **Sex:** Refers to biological characteristics (male, female, intersex).
- **Sexual Orientation:** A person's pattern of romantic or sexual attraction.
- **Trans or Transgender:** A person whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned at birth.
- **Transsexual:** An older, primarily medical term that many consider outdated.
- **Two-Spirit (2S):** A term used by some Indigenous peoples to describe culturally specific gender and spiritual identities. It is not interchangeable with other LGBTQIA+ terms and should not be used by non-Indigenous people. 2S is placed at the beginning to recognize that Two-Spirit are Indigenous to the land and to center Indigenous communities.

Language matters. Our goal is not perfect terminology, but respectful, attentive, and inclusive communication that honours each person's lived experience

SECTION B – THE AFFIRMING PROCESS

A Step-By-Step Process for Volunteer or Lay-Led Groups

Becoming an Affirming group is a journey of learning, listening, and commitment. For volunteer or lay-led groups, this process can be practical, manageable, and deeply meaningful. While each community's timeline will differ, many take up to two years to fully explore, discern, and formalize their commitment. Take the time you need to ensure you can truly offer a safer, more welcoming space for all.

Step 1. Form a Small Working Group

Gather 2–5 committed people who are passionate about becoming an Affirming community. This group does not need special credentials—just care, openness, and commitment.

Note: In churches, because ministers and staff may move to other positions, this process should be lay-led to ensure continuity.

The working group's role is to:

- Learn about affirming principles.
- Build trust with one another.
- Facilitate education and conversations.
- Bring recommendations to your leadership body (Council/Board).

Step 2. Make Contact with AUSE

Get in touch with AUSE (affirmingministries@ause.ca) as early in the process as possible, preferably when the idea of becoming Affirming first surfaces. You will be directed to an Affirm Program Coordinator to:

- Advise and support.
- Help locate resources and resource people.
- Provide information on the process and criteria for becoming Affirming.
- Help avoid some common pitfalls and minefields.

Step 3. Begin to gather information and resources

Familiarizing yourselves—individually and together—with available resources for Affirming ministries and groups. This will be an ongoing activity but should begin in the early stages.

- See the Resources Appendix and the AUSE Website (affirmunited.com/resources).
- Contact or visit other Affirming Ministries (affirmunited.com/affirming) to learn about their journey and what it meant to become Affirming.

Step 4. Seek Leadership Approval

The working group should present to the Council/Board (or governing body) to request approval to explore what becoming Affirming would mean for your community. This is not yet a final decision—simply permission to begin a thoughtful process of learning and discernment.

Specifically, the working group should recommend that the governing body:

- Approve the initiation of a process of study, discernment, and reflection on becoming an Affirming Ministry.
- Authorize the formation of a Committee or Steering Group, possibly the working group members, to lead and coordinate this work.
- Approve a budget to cover the costs of events, educational opportunities, and related resources needed throughout the process.

It is important that the governing body clearly supports the process from the outset. The Steering Group should provide regular updates to keep them informed of progress, key learnings, and next steps as the work unfolds.

Step 5. Learn and Educate

Start with accessible, foundational education:

- What do terms like sexual orientation and gender identity mean?
- What does genuine inclusion look like in practice?
- What are common experiences of LGBTQIA2S+ people in faith and community settings?
- What are the personal stories from within your ministry or community that lead to an understanding of the need for becoming Affirming?
- What are the theological and cultural teachings and beliefs that have been used for years and still today to discriminate.
- What has the impact of the decision to become Affirming had on other ministries or community groups?
- What are the social justice aspects of why becoming Affirming is important?

Provide space for honest questions and respectful dialogue. See the Appendices for ideas on workshops, discussions, and study.

Many communities find storytelling circles especially meaningful. Hearing one another's journeys often deepens understanding and strengthens relationships.

Step 6. Listen and Reflect

Listening builds trust. Consider:

- Inviting LGBTQIA2S+ members (if they are willing and feel safe) to share their experiences.
- Reflecting on your current culture: Who feels fully welcome? Who might not?
- Reviewing your language, imagery, and assumptions.

This stage is about awareness, not defensiveness.

Step 7. Review Current Practices

Most volunteer groups do not have extensive policies—and that is okay. Start by reviewing what already exists:

- Leadership selection processes
- Volunteer guidelines or codes of conduct
- Registration or membership forms (e.g., chosen names, inclusive gender options)
- Facility use (such as washroom access)
- Website, brochures, and social media messaging

Ask: *Do any of our practices unintentionally exclude someone?*

You do not need to change everything at once. Identify two or three priority areas for improvement.

Step 8. When You Are Ready to Make a Public Commitment

When your ministry or organization feels ready to make a public declaration of its commitment to inclusion, several important steps must be completed.

All draft documents must be sent to your Affirming Program Coordinator for review and approval before being formally approved by your ministry.

There are **three required commitments**:

Commitment 1. An Affirming Vision Statement

Your Vision (or Affirming) Statement is a short, public declaration that expresses:

- Your commitment to welcoming people of all sexual orientations, gender expressions and gender identities.
- Your belief in human dignity and justice.
- Your intention to continue learning and growing.

The statement must clearly affirm the **full participation of people of all sexual orientations, gender expressions and gender identities** in the life and work of your ministry.

It may also reflect your broader commitments to inclusion across areas such as race, class, age, ability, sex, and other dimensions of diversity. Writing your own statement—rather than adopting one from elsewhere—helps ensure it reflects your community's unique context, gifts, and calling.

Keep the language clear, authentic, and grounded in your values.

Commitment 2. A Continuing Plan of Action

Becoming Affirming is ongoing work. Alongside your statement, you must develop a **continuing Plan of Action** outlining how you will live out your commitment.

This plan, which should be shared widely within the ministry, may include:

- Ongoing reflection by your Affirming committee or working group on areas where inclusion can deepen.
- Cooperation with other ministry groups to educate and orient new members.
- Continued educational events for your ministry and/or the wider community.
- Exploring mission and ministry opportunities with people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in your community.
- Offering workshops within your Regional Council or wider network.
- Active involvement in the broader community.

Refer to "Open Hearts Resource A: Action Plan Ideas" for further plan ideas.

Commitment 3. An Equal Marriage Policy (If Applicable)

If your ministry offers marriage services, you must adopt an **Equal Marriage Policy** stating that couples of all gender combinations are treated equitably.

Going Further

The three commitments above are required. Some ministries choose to go further by developing additional policies, such as:

- Inclusive building-use policies
- Expanded anti-harassment policies
- Broader equity and accessibility practices

Going beyond the minimum requirements is always encouraged.

Final Reminder

Before final approval by your ministry:

- Send **all draft documents** (Vision Statement, Plan of Action, and Marriage Policy if applicable) to your Affirming Program Coordinator.

Clear communication, thoughtful preparation, and careful review will help ensure your public commitment is strong, authentic, and sustainable.

Step 9. The Vote

When a community of faith or organization is holding a vote to adopt its Vision and/or Mission Statement, Marriage Policy (if applicable), Action Plan, and to become an AUSE certified Affirming ministry or organization, the vote shall be conducted by secret ballot at a duly called meeting of the congregation or membership.

For United Church communities of faith, the meeting must be held in accordance with The United Church of Canada's polity. For non-United Church groups, the meeting must be conducted in accordance with the organization's governing documents and established decision-making practices.

Only those present at the meeting (in person, by telephone, or via an approved electronic platform such as Zoom) are eligible to cast a secret ballot. There shall be no advance polls or proxy votes. Members are expected to be present to hear the motions, participate in discussion, and then cast their vote.

At a minimum, two motions must be presented to the congregation or membership, either at the same meeting or at two separate meetings:

1. A motion to adopt the Vision and/or Mission Statement.
2. A motion to become an Affirming ministry or organization by joining AUSE and committing to the annual membership fee (see below).

The Marriage Policy (if applicable) and Action Plan may be adopted either by the full congregation/membership or by the governing body (e.g., Church Board, Council, Session, Board of Directors, or equivalent), in accordance with denominational requirements or the organization's governance structure.

When counting ballots, the positive percentage is determined by dividing the number of affirmative votes by the total number of affirmative and negative votes cast. Abstentions are not included in the calculation. It is strongly recommended that a minimum affirmative vote of at least 75% be achieved to demonstrate broad and substantial support within the community.

Regarding the annual membership fee: the initial membership fee is \$100.00. Thereafter, subject to a maximum of \$500.00, the annual AUSE membership fee is based on annual net revenue figures, as reported through denominational statistics (for United Church

communities of faith) or through the organization's regular financial reporting processes (for non-United Church groups).

Once the vote has been held and the ballots counted, the results are to be forwarded to the appropriate AUSE Affirming Program Coordinator for the next steps in the Affirming certification process.

Step 10. Make the Commitment Real

Being Affirming is more than words. Consider practical signs of welcome:

- Inclusive language in worship or public communications
- Visible symbols of welcome (as appropriate to your context)
- Clear anti-harassment expectations
- Leaders prepared to respond to harmful comments or discrimination

Refer to "Open Hearts Resource A: Action Plan Ideas" for further signs of welcome.

Affirming organizations aim to provide:

- Acceptance and belonging
- Respect for chosen names and pronouns
- Support for those exploring identity
- A clear process for addressing concerns safely and fairly

You are not expected to be counselors or specialists. Know your limits and refer individuals to trusted professional or community resources when needed.

Step 11. Continue the Journey

Affirming work is ongoing. Leadership turnover makes intentional continuity important. To sustain your commitment:

- Revisit your Affirming Statement every few years.
- Include affirming commitments in new leader orientation.
- Continue learning.
- Stay connected to affirming networks for support.

Growth does not need to be fast—but it should be faithful and consistent.

What Success Looks Like

For a volunteer-led group, success does not mean perfection. It means:

- People feel safe.
- Harmful behaviour is addressed.
- LGBTQIA2S+ individuals can participate fully.
- Leaders remain willing to learn.
- Inclusion becomes part of your identity—not an add-on.

Final Encouragement

Becoming Affirming may feel daunting, especially for small or volunteer-run communities. Remember:

- You can start small.
- You can grow gradually.
- You can ask for help.
- You will make mistakes—and you can learn from them.

The heart of becoming Affirming is simple: to embody welcome, justice, and love in ways that are visible, practical, and ongoing.

Your willingness to begin is already a meaningful step.

SECTION C - WE'RE AFFIRMING, SO NOW WHAT?

Becoming an Affirming Ministry—or Affirming organization—is just the beginning. It is a commitment to ongoing justice work and the celebration of diversity within your community and in wider society. Here are clear next steps:

1. Participate

Join Affirm United.

- Initial membership fee: \$100.
- Annual fee (up to \$500), based on annual net revenue (for United Church communities).
- Fees support national communications and resources.
- Membership includes program updates, resources, and the opportunity to send two voting representatives to the Affirm United AGM.

2. Celebrate

Mark your Affirming vote publicly. Affirm United will contact you with next steps to help plan a celebration and provide a representative to present your Affirming certificate.

- Invite the broader community, local faith groups (where applicable), and especially the local 2SLGBTQIA+ community.
- Afterward, your ministry or organization will be listed on the Affirm United website.

3. Announce

Make your Affirming commitment visible:

- Display the Affirm United logo and your Affirming statement in publications, bulletins, newsletters, promotional materials, website, social media, and signage.
- Post your Affirming Vision Statement prominently in your building or shared space.
- Share the news through local media, newsletters, or community networks.
- Publicly affirm that leadership, staff, volunteers, and members from marginalized communities are welcome.

4. Act

Live out your commitment.

- Form a small team (Justice, Equity, or Affirming Group) to guide ongoing work and keep your Action Plan current.
- Keep it simple. You don't need a large team or extensive resources. Start small, meet when you can, and take meaningful steps forward together. Progress matters more than perfection.

Affirming is part of a broader commitment to justice. It includes:

- Addressing barriers, prejudice, and historic injustices within your community or organization.
- Listening to and learning from diverse voices across race, culture, age, ability, gender identity, sexual orientation, and economic background.

Show Up in Solidarity. Visibility matters. You might:

- Join anti-racism, disability justice, or other equity coalitions.
- Partner with local congregations, nonprofits, or community groups for shared events.
- Host simple gatherings—conversation circles, workshops, or film nights on inclusion.
- Support other communities beginning their Affirming journey.
- Stay connected with regional bodies or networks and share what you're learning.
- Subscribe to the Affirm United newsletter for ideas and resources.

Be intentional about diversity in speakers, educators, and leaders. Representation matters.

5. Grow

Deepen your understanding of justice issues such as racism, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, economic inequality, and accessibility. Develop action plans where needed.

Continue learning together through workshops, discussion groups, film events, book studies, and resource libraries.

- In faith communities, include conversations about justice and inclusion in children's, youth, and adult formation.
- In non-faith organizations, integrate these conversations into staff training, leadership development, and community programming.

Becoming Affirming is not a one-time achievement. It is an ongoing practice of learning, accountability, courage, and hope—lived out step by step, together.

SECTION D - RESOURCES

[Open Hearts Resource A – Action Plan Ideas](#)

[Open Hearts Resource B – Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[Open Hearts Resource C – Media and Print](#)

[Open Hearts Resource D – Sample Vision Statements](#)

[Open Hearts Resource E – United Church of Canada: Gender Diversity and Sexual Orientation](#)

[Open Hearts Resource F – Workshop Case Studies](#)