

PROPOSAL TO TORONTO CONFERENCE #3

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| Title: | Becoming an Affirming Ministry |
| Original Source: | Executive of Toronto Conference |
| Financial Implications: | none |
| Source of Funds: | none |
| Staffing Implications: | none |
| Volunteer Implications: | none |

MOTION by __/__ that Toronto Conference...

1. become an Affirming Ministry within The United Church of Canada;
2. approve the vision statement found in PTC #3; and
3. receive for information the plan of action found in PTC #3.

Background:

1. What is the issue?

For many years The United Church of Canada has spoken about God's vision of inclusion of all people including those who are marginalized because of sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or mental abilities, etc.

For the last two years the Conference has been engaged in conversation about whether to become an Affirming Ministry within The United Church of Canada, as have many communities of faith, presbyteries and Conferences, and other institutions and organizations.

Affirming Ministries have a particular focus on being open and welcoming to people of any sexual orientation and gender identity, but the focus is also on those who are marginalized in other ways. Some resources for this conversation have come from Affirm United at <http://affirmunited.ause.ca/affirming-ministries-program/>.

2. Why is this issue important?

In a world with increasingly overt forms of intolerance and prejudice, it's important that Toronto Conference join others in declaring that Conference is a safe and welcoming place for those who may experience discrimination in other parts of their lives. Conference can make such a statement on its own behalf, but it does not presume that others in the church take a similar action. Each part of the church's conciliar system has the right to make its own decisions. If approved, the vision statement and plan of action would outline what Toronto Conference itself is going to do; it is not what we're telling others to do.

A task group was appointed to guide the process. They conducted conversations at previous annual meetings, met with all Conference committees and/or working groups, drafted a vision statement and a plan of action, and gave all this work to the Conference Executive for consideration. The material was translated into a number of languages, was put on the Conference's website, and a request for feedback was sent out. The Executive reviewed the feedback on the Affirming Ministry vision statement and plan of action and engaged in extensive discussion and changes to the documents that had been circulated.

The Executive discussed numerous practical ways in which the vision statement and plan of action could become living documents that reflect changes in attitude and practice. Some of those ideas include:

- Review all policies with an affirming lens
- Maintain its properties, striving to ensure accessibility for all people
- Hold Conference events and meetings in locations that are accessible
 - Prepare and publicize an inventory of accessible locations within Toronto Conference communities of faith
- Engage guest speakers/preachers at events to reflect diversity
- Follow the practice of having introductions/name tags that indicate gender pronoun preferences.
- Monitor diversity in its nominations procedures
- Identify, challenge and/or eliminate barriers in hiring or ministry development processes
- Develop consistency in signage acknowledging the Conference as being an Affirming Ministry

3. How might Toronto Conference respond to this issue?

The Conference's Executive is proposing that the annual meeting vote to become an Affirming Ministry within The United Church of Canada, and consider the following Affirming Ministry vision statement and plan of action:

Vision statement

Striving to be faithful followers of Jesus in our time and place, Toronto Conference will continue to remove barriers to participation in the life and work of the Conference and society, committing itself to be open to the Spirit. Resisting all forms of oppression, we welcome and celebrate people of any sexual orientation and gender identity, and those who are marginalized.

And that the annual meeting approve the plan of action

Plan of action

The Executive and Executive Secretary will report annually on actions taken to fulfill the vision statement: “Striving to be faithful followers of Jesus in our time and place, Toronto Conference will continue to remove barriers to participation in the life and work of the Conference and society, committing itself to be open to the Spirit. Resisting all forms of oppression, we welcome and celebrate people of any sexual orientation and gender identity, and those who are marginalized.” The reports will focus on...

Removing barriers to participation in the life and work of the Conference

Toronto Conference will...

- Review all policies and actions with a view to removing barriers
- Commit itself to relationship building in its business and activities
- Engage in education continually

Removing barriers to participation in society

Toronto Conference will...

- Advocate for municipal, provincial and federal government policies and laws that reflect a diverse and inclusive society
- Speak out on current events that demean, stigmatize or incite violence against others
- Encourage conversation with interchurch or interfaith groups

Being open to the Spirit

Toronto Conference will...

- Listen together for God’s on-going revelation
- Discern new voices and seek them out
- Strive to hear and engage the diverse voices within the Conference

Welcoming and celebrating people of any sexual orientation and gender identity

Toronto Conference will...

- Encourage communities of faith to engage in conversations about being safe spaces for people of any sexual orientation and gender identity within the church and community
 - Provide education on evolving gender identity language

Celebrating and acknowledging diversity

Toronto Conference will...

- Conduct its business and activities in a respectful manner that allows for open discussion and shared opinions

