

**Report to the Toronto Conference Executive  
From the Affirming Task Group  
August 23, 2017**

Background

At the November 12, 2014 meeting, the Toronto Conference Executive established a task group to make recommendations for taking initial steps to becoming an Affirming Conference.

The task group put forward the following suggestions which were accepted by the Executive at its meeting on February 11, 2015:

1. Regardless of entering into a formal Affirming Process, Toronto Conference should look at its mission and policy to the end of including a strong and proactive statement affirming the acceptance, value and celebration of all persons as God has made them and what they may bring to the life and work of the Conference.
2. If Conference Executive wishes to take further action, it should establish an Affirming Task Group within the Executive with powers to add members to ensure that it is more broadly representative of the communities whose concerns affirming action might address. The task group would bring recommendations to Executive and organize any programs of education and discernment for the Executive.
3. At the 2015 AGM, provide within the agenda a session to allow for information, discussion and feedback on the concept of TC becoming an affirming conference. It could include stories and perspectives from the UCC LGBTQ community and the affirming process. To the extent that the AGM may offer seminars perhaps there could be one on the experiences and what's involved for congregations seeking affirming status.
4. Devise a process that brings an affirming vote to the 2016 AGM.
5. Consider whether it is possible and feasible to bring the Presbyteries into the process so that Conference and Presbyteries do this together. As an initial step could there be a conversation with Presbytery Chairs?

The task group, under the leadership of Anne Hepburn, engaged the Conference in a process to consider becoming an Affirming Ministry. At the 93<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting in May 2017, the Conference voted to become an Affirming Ministry.

At the June 19, 2017 meeting, the Executive agreed to ask the Affirming Ministry task group to continue to give leadership in the work of the Conference by the following motion:

...that the current Affirming Ministry task group be asked to continue its work on LGBT issues with an awareness of intersectionality with other areas of marginalisation, and that the task group prepare a draft mandate and recommendations to be presented at the September meeting of the Executive, and that the task group has power to add to its membership ensuring diversity.

Some of the questions/comments raised by the Executive included:

- How will non-LGBT issues be addressed as part of being an Affirming Ministry?
- Should the Executive hold onto the “and other marginalised groups” aspect of the statement?
- Who are the marginalised? What are we doing already?
- What needs to be done?
- What resources are available?
- What is specific Conference work?

On August 22, 2017, the Executive Secretary met by conference call with Anne Hepburn and Cynthia O’Connell who, along with Warren McDougall, are willing to continue as members of the task group.

#### Suggestions for the ongoing Mandate of the Affirming Ministry task group

- 1. That we work with Susie Henderson to identify additional members for the task group from the four presbyteries.**
- 2. In preparation for the move to regions in the new structure, that we engage in conversation with our neighbouring Conferences through the Executive Secretary to find out if any of them are in the process of becoming Affirming Ministries, or have had conversations about it (other than Bay of Quinte which is already an Affirming Ministry). Also that we offer to be a resource to other Conferences by sharing our experience if that would be helpful.**
- 3. In response to the Action Plan, that we act as a resource and prepare a list of resources (including process suggestions and sample statements) for communities of faith within the Conference and assist them to engage in conversations about being safe spaces for people of any sexual orientation and gender identity within the church and community.**
- 4. In response to the Action Plan, that we assist the Conference to engage in education focusing on LGBT issues with an awareness of intersectionality with other areas of marginalisation.**