

Kingsview United Church

Update on Kingsview's Affirming Ministries Process

An Affirming Ministry in the United Church is one that is public, intentional and explicit about being open and welcoming to all people regardless of race, gender, age, economic circumstances, physical or mental health challenges, gender identity or sexual orientation.

In the fall of 2020 the Kingsview Church Council approved the formation of a group to explore whether Kingsview would want to become an Affirming Ministry. This group is called the Kingsview Affirming Ministries Group and it continues to report back to the Kingsview Church Council on its progress.

Through 2021, the Affirming Ministries Group shared information regarding Kingsview becoming an Affirming church through the church bulletin, Affirming Minutes, a resource table and a guest speaker during in-person worship. Sharing information and making a space for heartfelt discussion is challenging in these times of infrequent in-person worship. Technology has helped us be more connected but is not equally available to everyone, so the group, with the encouragement of many of you, is sending this information letter to our whole congregation.

Kingsview started the Affirming Journey following the example of Christ's teachings of love and acceptance. The intention of this process is to help all of us understand how we can be an even more inclusive, welcoming church that is public, intentional and explicit about how we are trying to be a living example of God's love in the world. As group member Maureen Smith has shared: "To be Affirming, we would do what God wants us to do and that is love and care for others."

The Kingsview community of faith has taken many intentional steps over the years to make our congregation open and accessible: eliminating physical barriers by installing elevators and eliminating curbs in the parking lot, providing large print bulletins and hearing assist devices in the sanctuary, approving same sex marriages to take place in the sanctuary, providing financial aid for adults and youth to attend church events and ensuring communion and congregational meals include options that meet people's dietary needs are just a few examples. These are tangible ways we have sought to be inclusive and welcoming to all God's people. Becoming an Affirming congregation would continue and expand these steps in an even more public, intentional, and explicit way as we grow in our understanding of the diverse experiences and needs of all people and make room in our hearts and church to love and care for each other.

As we go through the Affirming process, we have had people ask us various questions, the most frequently asked are given below with answers. We hope this information will contribute to open and meaningful dialogues filled with love and respect for all voices.

Moving forward, the Affirming Ministries Group is working to offer more opportunities for us all to learn about groups that may feel unsure whether there is truly a place for them in our community of faith. We have been making presentations to church groups and committees, including information in the church bulletin, presenting Affirming Minutes, organizing a panel discussion with representatives from three different groups for March 13 and arranging a guest speaker, Rev. Elizabeth McDonald, for April 3. We look forward to continuing this journey with you.

You are always welcome to reach out to anyone in the Affirming Ministries Group to ask questions or make suggestions.

Blessings,

The Affirming Ministries Group

Rob Genung (905-924-3939), Vadette Issa (905-442-8210),
Maureen Smith (905-576-4763), Liz Thompson (905-431-7884).

Galations 3:28 *There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free,
there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus*



Congregation Information Sheet on the Affirming Process

1. What does it mean to become Affirming?

An Affirming Ministry in the United Church is one that is public, intentional and explicit about being open and welcoming to all people regardless of race, age, gender, economic circumstances, physical or mental health challenges, gender identity or sexual orientation. While Affirming Ministries make an explicit statement about issues of sexuality and gender identity, Affirming Ministries are not single-issue communities; they work on a variety of justice issues. They continually grow and change as they seek to live more fully into God's way of welcome, love and justice for all creation. Just as God rejoices in the goodness and diversity of creation, so too do Affirming Ministries honour and celebrate diversity.

2. We feel we are already welcoming...why do we need to become Affirming?

Going through the Affirming process and becoming Affirming lets people who are not already part of Kingsview know that we welcome and accept everyone and that we formally went through an educational process to open our hearts and minds in creating a safe place for all.

An important element of being Affirming is being public about our commitment to welcoming all. So that, for example, even before they enter our building, an LGBTQ person knows they are welcome, someone who is physically challenged knows they will find a place they can be accommodated and the parents of a special needs child know they will be supported.

3. What are the steps we need to go through to become Affirming?

- a. Start with a small group of interested individuals.
- b. Make contact with Affirm United.
- c. Gather information and resources
- d. Connect with other Affirming Ministries.
- e. Form an interest group or committee.
- f. Make a recommendation to the church governing body to begin a process of reflection and study to consider to become an Affirming Ministry.

- g. Draft an Affirming Vision Statement and Equal Marriage Statement. *See the end of this letter for these proposed documents drafted by the Kingsview Affirming Ministries Group and reviewed and approved by Affirm United.*
- h. Involve the whole community of faith in a process of learning and reflection. *This is the step that Kingsview is currently working on.*
- i. Seek approval of your community of faith to become an Affirming Ministry through a vote. A 75% majority is required to move forward with becoming Affirming. This vote will be run by the Kingsview Church Council.

The Affirm United document for the Affirming process is “Open Hearts” Resources for Affirming Ministries in The United Church of Canada. You can access it on-line at <https://affirmunited.ause.ca/announcing-a-new-revised-edition-of-our-open-hearts-resource/> or request a copy through the church office.

4. In going through this process, will we afterwards have to go through a process for every marginalized group?

No, this is the only process of its kind in The United Church of Canada. We hope that this process will reveal our strengths in the areas of social justice and identify the areas we still need to explore. The Affirming process is meant to help us listen to all marginalized voices so we may continue to grow in our relationship with God and with one another.

5. If there are people who do not agree with this process, how will they be treated?

The journey to becoming an Affirming Ministry will include opportunities to learn, question and respectfully discuss the purpose, reasons and meaning of becoming Affirming. We will respond with respect and love, listening to all opinions, not isolating anyone. The Affirming Committee will work to create opportunities for everyone to participate in these processes. For Kingsview to formally become an Affirming Ministry, there will be a congregational vote facilitated by the Kingsview Church Council. Whatever the outcome of this vote, all congregants are respected and we pray that everyone will feel God’s love as we continue to come together as part of the Kingsview community of faith.

6. If the vote is positive, will we be known as a gay church?

Affirming ministries are not gay churches or single-issue communities. They work on a variety of justice issues. They know that the work of healing and justice-making is an ongoing part of who they are, whether they strive to combat racism, addressing anti-poverty issues or provide space for addiction support groups, for example. Work for justice on sexuality or gender issues often supports or integrates with other work for justice—anti-racism, economic justice, or environmental justice.

Affirming communities of faith, like all other United Church communities of faith, have a wide diversity of members and adherents, including heterosexual couples, families, seniors, children, youth, singles, as well as members of gender and sexual minorities. Typically, in most Affirming Ministries the last two groups are usually more active in their community of faith than average because they're in a safe and supportive place. Often same-gender couples want their children to be part of an Affirming Ministry because of the supportive, non-judgmental atmosphere they find there. Many heterosexual people also choose Affirming Ministries for the same reason - it's a place where children, youth, and adults can grow in faith in an atmosphere of respect and justice for all people from all walks of life.

7. What might change in our church if we become an Affirming Ministry?

If Kingsview agrees to become an Affirming Ministry, we will develop an action plan to ensure our church is a safe, welcoming and inclusive space for everyone, including LGBTQ people. **This action plan would be reviewed and approved by Kingsview's Church Council.** Following are some *examples* of being public, intentional and explicit about being Affirming:

- Add the Affirm United logo (see below) and wheelchair accessible symbol to the exterior sign board and door entrances.
- Add the Affirm United logo (see below) to the church website, letterhead and bulletins.
- Place other Affirming symbols at Kingsview following review and approval by Church Council.
- Adopt the proposed Affirming Vision Statement and Equal Marriage Policy. *See page 6 for the draft versions of these documents.*

Affirm United Logo



Proposed Affirming Vision Statement for Kingsview United Church

Drafted by Kingsview Affirming Ministries Group, spring 2021

We are called to be the Church on Earth where all are welcome. “We are not alone. We live in God’s world.” We embrace people of all ages, races, sexual orientations, gender identities, economic circumstances, physical abilities, mental health challenges, working together in full participation in the life and work of God’s ministry. As the people of Kingsview United Church, we gather as an Affirming Community based on inclusion, while removing labels that segregate us from one another. We strive to build a church based on the ideals of equality, equity and justice and then use these ideals in our daily life and community. We, like Jesus, see whole people, acknowledging that we are the sum of many parts. With our voices raised in praise, we celebrate the uniqueness of each individual and the perfect harmony we make together, all to God’s Glory.

Proposed Equal Marriage Policy for Kingsview United Church

Drafted by Kingsview Affirming Ministries Group, spring 2021

At Kingsview United Church, we see people as unique, loved creations of God. As God desires a relationship with us, we desire a relationship with God and others. We acknowledge that developing and maintaining relationships is challenging. We also see relationships as living commitments that require time and nurturing.

We affirm that marriage is a gift of God through which Christians make a covenant with another person and with God. This creation of God is greater than the two individuals. Kingsview United Church’s marriage policy is inclusive of couples of all gender combinations and identities, divorced people, and couples of different faith perspectives. We believe God intends loving relationships to be faithful, responsible, just, healing, and sustaining of the couple and those around them.

Your marriage is an act of worship within a supportive Faith Community. We celebrate marriage as a covenant in which two individuals can live their love and their life-long commitment to each other.

You do not have to be a member of Kingsview United Church to be married here. We do ask, however, that you approach the ceremony with reverence. We offer the support of our Faith Community before, during and after your wedding day. We invite you to attend our worship services which are held on Sunday mornings. This will give you the opportunity to experience the worship life of our congregation, and to better understand your marriage as an act of Christian worship while belonging to a Faith Community. We welcome the opportunity to celebrate your covenant of marriage.