

Documentation of Affirm Discernment Process St. George and St. Andrew United Church, Annapolis Royal

2012: Joint needs assessment recommends that the church explore the affirm process and make mention of that exploration in the church profile.

2015: Under a new minister a “Vision team” is constituted.

2016: Minister is on LTD during 2015-16 . A draft report of Vision team is presented to the congregation.

2017:

Vision Team final report presented to the congregation. “Open doors. Open minds. Open hearts.” is accepted as guiding statement for our church.

On “Becoming an inclusive and affirming church” the report reads from congregational survey results: “Although a majority of respondents indicated that they wished our church to begin the process of become an affirming church by forming an Affirm Committee, opinions on this were split 2 in favour to 1 against. Some respondents were not clear what “affirming” means.”

Comments:

“We’re already affirming!”

“Define “affirming” more fully.”

“Affirming” is a separate issue from “inclusiveness.”

“Continue being an inclusive church. Affirmation could be a divisive issue. Proceed with care!”

“Is this another ‘special’ group?”

“Rather than form a committee, we should always be open to concerns about how we have not been affirming. If anyone has such concerns, let’s hear them and discuss them openly.”

2017: The Session/Board of St. George and St. Andrew adopts equal marriage policy (see attached)

2019

On March 21st 2019 a core group of people who are enthusiastic about St. George and St. Andrew United Church becoming an Affirming Ministry met to form a committee and develop a plan of action to move forward on this project. The committee had the Blessing of the Official Board.

Beginning on April 30th, Rev’d Elisabeth led a four week Bible Study with the focus on Bible texts that focus on diversity and conflict resolution. The program was designed to be interactive and those in attendance willingly participated. Approximately twelve people attended these sessions.

On May 19th committee members organized a pot luck supper and story-telling circle. Following a delicious meal, everyone was invited to share a story about a time they felt accepted in a particular situation or a time when they didn’t feel welcome. A seashell was passed around and participants were welcome to share a story when they were handed the shell or they could simply pass it on if they didn’t wish to speak. Almost everyone shared a personal story and the evening was considered an opportunity to become better acquainted. Approximately twenty people attended.

On July 5th Homer Nobel, from Kingston United Church, met with a group of people interested in the project. Homer was instrumental in the Kingston United Church achieving their Affirming Ministry

status. He shared some of the experiences, both positive and negative, experienced by his church as they worked their way through the project. Kathy Bright and Noel Gray, both members of an Affirming Church in their winter residences, offered to join our committee. This informal meeting was open to anyone interested in attending and the others who were present agreed to have their names added to a distribution list to be notified of any future events related to the project. The list, including committee members, numbers fifteen people.

On July 27th a group of supportive members of the congregation joined in the Annapolis Royal Pride Parade.

On July 28th, Mike McDonagh and his son, Kristen, were guest speakers during the morning worship service. Kristen is intellectually challenged and Mike spoke about the importance of advocating for people like Kristen who are unable to protect their own rights.

At our meeting in August two new members joined the committee. We organized a “Dessert and Discussion” event based on a project outlined in the Affirming Ministry manual. This event got postponed because of a hurricane but was eventually held on September 29th with 18 people participating. The discussion was an examination of what being an Affirming Church would mean for our church and what changes may result. This was an opportunity for people to express any concerns or questions they had regarding the process.

Attendance at events has been consistent with a core group of interested people participating. Much of the discussion at the event on September 29th focused on how we might be able to have an open discussion with those in the congregation who have concerns about this project and are not supportive of the concept. The purpose of taking a considerable amount of time to work through the steps is to give everyone an opportunity to share their points of view in hopes of reaching an outcome that will be a positive one for us all.

Several bulletin inserts with material from AFFIRM UNITED were handed out during Sunday services (Summer/Fall 2019)

A report on these activities was presented to and received by the Official Board in October.

2020 First pandemic Year

From the Session/Annual report: “At the beginning of 2020 it was felt that it was time to work on a statement of the church’s values and beliefs in regards to being affirming and to present this to the congregation for discussion ; however due to the pandemic the team was inactive for most of the year.” “A very active affirm member moved to a sister congregation and other members suffered health issues. “No pride events were held in town due to the pandemic.

2021

The Official Board agreed to have a Rainbow Flag flown from the church during Pride week. August 7, 2021 several supportive members of our church walked in the Annapolis Royal Pride Parade August 8, 2021: Guest speaker Magdalena Jennings, educator and LBGTQ+ activist from the UK spoke on “What is affirming and why it is important for a church to become affirming”. There was an opportunity for questions afterwards. The talk was well received and there were about 30 people present.

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2022

February:

A reconstituted working group develops a Statement of Beliefs and Values around Affirming Diversity. A draft statement reads:

“In keeping with the example set by Jesus during his ministry, the congregation of St. George and St. Andrew United Church offer our ministry as a sanctuary for all of God’s children. We warmly invite within our midst all persons regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social and economic status, physical and mental health diversity.

We recognize the challenges in extending this our invitation of “Open Doors, Open Minds, Open Hearts” and we trust the strength to rise to the challenges will come from within our church community as well as from spiritual guidance provided by our faith.

We will welcome all members to become full members of our church community, to participate in church governance and committees, and to celebrate rituals including marriage, baptism and funeral services. “

The above document is sent to AFFIRM UNITED.

Their liaison person, Linda Hutchinson, responds with detailed and excellent commentary on our process.

Mainly:

- Compliments us on “sticking with the process” over the years
- Statement of beliefs good but slight changes in wording suggested
- Equal Marriage police acceptable, but slight wording change suggested
- Asks if we have heard enough personal stories from LGBTQ+ and other marginalized folk, and especially if those who might be against becoming affirming have heard some of these stories
- What remains to be done is a proposed action plan- concrete actions we would undertake once we are affirming
- Reminds us that the vote will be on 2 things
 - a) on a Statement of Beliefs and Values and
 - b) on congregation’s willingness to join Affirm United with an Annual membership fee of \$100.
- Reminds us that a vote should be at least 75% in favour in order to become affirming and that members and adherents should vote, i.e. everyone who is regularly involved in the life of the church
- That once a positive decision is made a celebration will follow which declares our ministry as affirming to all the United Church across the country.