

This is the report on the GLBTT 2011 National Consultations received by the Permanent Committee on Programs for Mission and Ministry (PC-PMM) in January 2012 and sent (as an appendix to its accountability report) to the General Council Executive (GCE) in March 2012.

This report was offered to the GCE as accountability for the directions of the 40th General Council 2009. The proposals" will be carried forward by the PC-PMM into the next triennium beginning at their November 2012 meeting. *In other words, there is much work to be done, and we'll get to it after General Council 41.*

A study guide is being developed to be used with a DVD created by consultation participants and facilitators (available early 2013).

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Communities in Ministry Unit/Unité Communautés et ministères

GLBTT NATIONAL CONSULTATIONS

We sing of God's good news lived out, a church with purpose: faith nurtured and hearts comforted, gifts shared for the good of all, resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize, fierce love in the face of violence, human dignity defended, members of a community held and inspired by God, corrected and comforted, instrument of the loving Spirit of Christ, creation's mending. We sing of God's mission. (A Song of Faith, 2006)

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The United Church of Canada has a long history of addressing issues that hamper that ability for the gifts of all of its members to be shared for the good of God's mission. Specifically, regarding gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit (GLBTT) people, and their families and friends, The United Church of Canada addressed and corrected a number of discriminatory policies that prevented the participation of talented clergy and committed, faith-filled congregants.

During the 1980s, the United Church committed to examine many issues relating to human sexuality and relationships. In 1988, the 32nd General Council affirmed "that God's intention for human relationships is that they be faithful, responsible, just, loving, health-giving, healing, and sustaining of community and self." In addition this Council affirmed that "sexual orientation in and of itself is not a barrier to participation in all aspects of the life and ministry of the Church, including the order of ministry."

As dialogue about the 1988 statement on "Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality" proceeded, congregations across Canada continued to be in different places regarding the welcoming of gay, lesbian, and bisexual clergy. As a result, the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education commissioned a consultation. The goals of this 1999 consultation were to

- become more aware of the difficulties facing lesbian, gay, and bisexual ministry personnel
- determine concrete actions to deal with violations of church policy regarding sexual orientation
- encourage ongoing education with congregations, presbyteries and conferences regarding church policy

- establish safe pastoral care for lesbian, gay, and bisexual ministry personnel, candidates, and laity throughout the church
- identify and address other outstanding issues regarding sexual orientation, such as analysis of systemic discrimination and human rights

Sixteen ministry personnel participated in this one-day consultation on April 19–20, 1999. Thirty-six recommendations were proposed. For many reasons, only partial and sporadic progress was made on implementing these recommendations. As will be noted below in the discussion of the findings of the 2011 consultation, some of these issues remain, some have been transformed, and some new issues have emerged. In 2000, partly in response to the findings of this consultation and in response to Petitions 125, 126, 127, 128, the 37th General Council passed the following motions:

- Renounce the 1960 statement¹ that homosexuality is a sin²
- Encourage courts, congregations, and members to learn ways to offer healing for the damage inadvertently caused by the historic stance of our church on homosexuality³
- Affirm that human sexuality orientations (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and heterosexual orientations)⁴ are a gift from God, part of the marvellous diversity of creation.⁵
- Affirm lesbian and gay partnerships, actively work for their civil recognition, and recognize them in church documentation and Services of Blessing.⁶
- Direct the Division of Mission in Canada to find new and creative ways to encourage congregations of the United Church of Canada to enter into the Affirming Congregation⁷ study process⁸

At the same time, the church also committed itself to work for the civil recognition of same-sex partnerships. These commitments led to the church's advocacy in 2003 to call for the federal government to recognize same-sex marriage.

Despite these advances, by 2009 the church body had not yet lived into the goal of being an “instrument of the loving Spirit of Christ” where all “human dignity [is] defended” (A Song of Faith, 2006). As a result of this recognition, the 40th General Council 2009 directed the church:

“to host a national consultation within the next three years, with gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and two-spirited members of the United Church to discuss homophobia and

¹ Homosexuality was named as a sin within the “Report on Christian Marriage and Divorce” (*Record of Proceedings* 1960, page 163).

² *Record of Proceedings* 2000, page 166.

³ *Ibid*, page 166.

⁴ At the time of this motion transgender was listed as a ‘sexual orientation.’ We now have a better understanding of transgender as one gender identity within the *gender continuum*, and not within the continuum of sexual orientation. (see Recommendation 4).

⁵ *Record of Proceedings* 2000, page 168.

⁶ *Ibid*, page 169.

⁷ *Affirming* means to be fully inclusive of all people in the sexual orientation and gender identity continuums. “Affirming Congregations” was renamed “Affirming Ministries” in 2003. This program encourages United Church bodies (congregations, presbyteries, Conferences, educational centres) to study what it means to be publicly welcoming and inclusive.

⁸ *Record of Proceedings* 2000, page 170.

heterosexism in the church, and that Affirm United be invited to name at least three people to be on the planning committee.” (GC40 2009 – 083)

The goal of this consultation was to collect usable data regarding current conditions within the United Church for all people in the sexual orientation and gender identity continuums, and regarding where the church needs to be in the future. In addition, as the church strives to become an intercultural church welcoming all people, including GLBTT members of the United Church, this consultation sought ways to address individual and institutional homophobia, heterosexism, transphobia, and other forms of oppression in the church. The consultation was called to report to General Council 41 in 2012.

METHODOLOGY

The consultation was planned by a team of five people. Three were appointed by Affirm United/S’affirmer Ensemble: Sally Harris (BC), Linda Hutchinson (ON), and Brian Mitchell-Walker (SK). Two were appointed by the General Council Office: Tristin Chapman (ON) (Trans/Gender Diversity Task Group rep), and Moses Kanhai (SK) (PC-PMM rep). The team received the support of two General Council staff. In addition, a professional consultant, Beth Zemsky, who has extensive experience working with the GLBTT community from an intercultural perspective, was invited to join the team. Jamie Armstrong was invited to conduct the data analysis that helped formulate recommendations for this report.

The goal of this consultation was to engage the church in an ongoing journey toward broader inclusivity by building on the foundational policy work described above to examine the life of people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities in the church. Toward that end, the process of this consultation was intentionally constructed to be as inclusive as possible. The objective was to hear from as many people as possible across the country, both people in the GLBTT community and others who care about these issues. In addition, recognizing that people hold multiple identities—sexual orientation and gender, age and stage of life, race and class, cultural and linguistic diversity—and that these identities inform diverse experiences in the church, recruitment of facilitators and participants was designed to broadly reach across networks. The hope was that as the participants listened and shared their stories throughout the consultation, everyone involved would be strengthened in their resolve to offer radical hospitality to all.

The consultation began with a national gathering from June 16 to 19, 2011, in Guelph, Ontario, that provided intensive training for 12 people who would serve as regional facilitators. In addition, the participants created a framework for regional gatherings and processes for data gathering.

Regional gatherings were held between August and October 2011 in Vancouver, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, London, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal (English language), Montreal (French language), Quebec City, and Halifax. Two smaller gatherings were also conducted in conjunction with the Rendez-vous and Imagine events.⁹ Finally, additional data was collected via an online consultation and an online survey.

⁹ Rendez-vous 2011 was a gathering of youth, young adults, and their leaders held in Toronto (August). Imagine was held at Naramata Centre as a GLBT Retreat for people of all ages (May 2011).

Participants were invited to “help to shape an open, welcoming, and affirming United Church of Canada.” Over 380 people responded to this invitation and participated in the consultations. The participants represented a range of sexual orientations (i.e. gay, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual), gender identities (male, female, transgender, and gender queer), and age ranges. With over 80% of the participants identifying as Caucasian, the racial/ethnic profile of the participants was much less diverse. While mirroring the demographic profile of the Church as a whole, the racial and age profile of the participants does pose a limitation to the generalizability of these findings and points to the need for different strategies to reach diverse audiences—specifically youth, people living with HIV, and Aboriginal people.

FINDINGS: RESPONSE THEMES

Participants were engaged in three- to five-hour gatherings that asked them to consider times when they felt like they mattered or experienced marginality in their interactions with the church. In addition, participants discussed the following questions:

- In the context of The United Church of Canada, what does “welcoming” mean?
- Who might be missing in the church because of transphobia, homophobia, heterosexism, or other forms of oppression that impact welcoming in your community?
- What in your church ministry would you need to authentically be your full self?
- What role would you like others to play in supporting the ongoing transformation of The United Church of Canada?

Below is a thematic synopsis of participant responses.

Theme: The church has made progress

The church has made progress in providing welcoming and affirming environments, particularly in those churches affiliated with Affirm United/S’affirmer Ensemble as an Affirming Ministry. The welcome respondents found in the United Church mattered deeply to them. The most frequently mentioned ways welcome was expressed was through intentional personal connection with newcomers, overt displays that indicated GLBTT welcome, invitations to bring personal gifts to the church community, and drawing from scripture to include GLBTT issues in worship, hymns, and conversation. Those who experienced this welcome found healing, wholeness, and spiritual fulfillment in their connection to the United Church. Respondents also reported deepening their involvement and their commitment to the church as a result. Many participants suggested that the church should do more to celebrate, brag more about the progress it has made, and do more to get the word out that The United Church of Canada is a safe place for all people in the sexual orientation and gender identity continuums.

Sample Responses¹⁰:

- I was brand new to UC after being kicked out of an Evangelical church. A family that usually sat on the far side of the church would come and sit with me to make me feel welcome and connected... I responded by getting more involved in the church. (Gay male lay leader, Edmonton)

¹⁰ All sample responses were drawn directly from participants’ comments. The only editing was regarding verb tense and prepositions to make the comments more readable. In all cases, the meaning and intent of the comments were not altered.

- I was told by church to “come just as you are.”‘ It meant so much. I was stunned by the acceptance...the moment before elation when something so incredible has happened it’s taken your breath away...when you can barely grasp the gift you’ve just been given. Like on a cold winter day, that “turned to spring” (Male to female [MTF] trans member, Online consultation)
- The minister at my church welcomed all to communion, and he included “regardless of sexual orientation”! This caused a real change in my feelings about church involvement. For the first time I dared to consider that this could be a spiritual home for me. A huge heavy door opened a bit and said “Come in.” I reacted by increasing my involvement in church groups, in projects and activities. I feel that my contribution is now accepted and has value. (Gay male United Church staff member, Ottawa)
- My Pastoral Charge accepted me and my family. They hired me full time, knowing my kids have two moms. I am an ordained woman with only a few years’ experience and they put their faith/trust in me. People have treated my children and spouse with love and care. It makes me feel extremely cared for, loved, HEALED. The healing continues from the marginalizing I’ve encountered. I feel wonderful—able to fulfill my calling without the bullshit about sexuality getting in the way! (Lesbian clergy, Ottawa)
- I wanted to join the UCC because it welcomed gay, lesbian people through the Rainbow flag on the sign outside the church. The enthusiasm of the minister and excitement of the congregation led me to becoming a member. I felt like a family member being welcomed into a community. Felt like I “belonged.” I became very much involved; joined church groups; participated in services (lay-leader); assisted in workshops; invited new found friends into my home. (Lesbian member, Ottawa)
- I heard “We welcome you as the person you are, and ask you share your gifts with us.” It was such a gift to be welcomed as I was, to share what I knew as a gift. I wasn’t even a member of the UCC yet. I felt really and truly valued—that what I had to say would be received with respect; that my journey up until that point was honoured, and my journey with them would be honoured as well. It was one of the most incredible experiences I’ve had in my life. It led to how I could now live into who I truly was—honestly and truthfully. As a result, I could begin to deal with the stuff associated with being a minister in the church, freely and openly, and truthfully discern what God was calling me to do. (Gay clergy, Online consultation)
- February 2011 my pastor met with the congregation to tell them I am transgendered and how I wished to present myself in the future.... I was WELCOME! just as I am!!!! No qualifications, no restrictions. Now here is the astounding part—the congregation extended their apologies for me even feeling I had to ask! Now there is love! There is acceptance!! I will forever treasure that. (Male to female transgender member, Online survey)

Theme: The progress is not uniform across the denomination

Despite developing church-wide welcoming policies, the experience of GLBTT clergy, congregants, their families, and their friends varies tremendously across contexts in the church. Their lived experience in United Church of Canada settings is dependent upon a number of factors including location, congregational leadership and practices, and the attitudes and behaviours of congregants. Unfortunately, in a number of these settings, marginality based on sexual orientation and gender identity continues.

Sample Responses:

- When I was applying for call as an out person in a same-sex relationship, I received fewer interviews than my straight colleagues, who often only applied to one or two places. I had three interviews from twelve applications. (Queer clergy, Edmonton)
- I used to replace my minister for worship three times in one of his parishes. When the minister informed them that I was going to do worship, people refused because I got married to a woman. I felt upset because I thought that in all congregations people were inclusive. (Female bisexual lay leader, Edmonton)
- At a fundraising meeting we were invited to state pronouns and someone made a joke about it. The person said their gender was “brilliant.” I felt like my concerns about being differently gendered didn’t matter. I felt erased. (Transgender member, London)
- I had a wedding to my spouse when it was legalized. Our minister never asked if we would like to be married. I felt betrayed and not fully part of church; not celebrated or affirmed. I was told it was better to have the wedding done at another church. (Lesbian member, London)
- I was “settled” to a very isolated and conservative community. Within the first week of arriving I was told “It’s okay you are gay, just don’t shove your lifestyle down our throats.” There was an assumption that my husband and I were going to force people to change. I was rejected before they knew me based on sexual orientation. I felt angry because I was rejected and isolated. I worked hard to become a minister and now my ministry was being shut down before it could even begin! I withdrew and became depressed. I kept going but knew the limits of my freedom. (Gay male clergy, Saskatoon)
- I was serving a congregation in a fairly isolated part of BC. Within the first few weeks of my arrival I had heard lots of homophobic comments, even though (or because?) I had come out in the interview process. The tipping point was when a leader said to me, “Gays belong in Vancouver.” It wasn’t only this single comment, but an accumulation of such comments. Within about 6 months I went on medical leave for severe depression, and left completely after one year. (Gay member clergy, Online survey).
- I heard numerous comments by people that were condemning of GLBTTA¹¹ people, and nothing positive or welcoming was present. If we are to make movement from being a church associated with society and empire to a church that recognizes and owns being a church of marginality, we need the tools to speak our truth. We are a closeted church. We need to begin the difficult journey of losing our liberal attitude. (Gay male United Church staff, Ottawa).

Theme: Call for the church to move from a welcoming stance to embracing affirmation of clergy of all sexual orientations and gender identities, congregants, and their families and friends.

Historically the church has developed GLBTT welcoming policies, but deferred adherence to these policies to the attitudes and readiness of local leaders and congregations. Thus, while the church has taken a stance for welcoming all people in the sexual orientation and gender identity continuums, conceding implementation has had the impact of affirming and reinforcing the continuation of transphobia, homophobia, and heterosexism as the norm at the local level.

¹¹ The ‘A’ in GLBTTA refers to people who are asexual (sometimes referred to as non-sexuality). In its broadest sense, it is the lack of sexual attraction to others, and, in some cases, the lack of interest in sex.

Organizational cultural change requires behavioural, attitudinal, and systemic change and, like most change, often produces discomfort for those involved. As the church moves toward actualizing the goal of being an intercultural church, it will be important for it to examine who structurally is being asked to hold the discomfort for the denomination. The current system of local implementation of the church's GLBTT welcoming policies privileges the discomfort of those in the dominant culture who are opposed to these policies or not yet ready to embrace radical welcome for all people in the sexual orientation and gender identity continuums. As a result, GLBTT people are invited into a system in which they are asked to absorb the discomfort and the consequences of congregations not living into the call for the church to embody Christ's radical welcome.

Sample Responses:

- When same-sex marriage became legal in Canada, the congregation felt the need to “discern” whether to marry, rather than celebrating that same-gender marriage was now legal, and discerning HOW to bring this into congregation life. All the discussion was focused on the problems of same-gender marriage for the congregation. (Lesbian clergy, Ottawa)
- The pastoral charge I served voted not to do same-gender marriage. There was no discussion when the motion was presented. When I asked afterwards what did it mean about me and my relationship, I was told not to take it personally. I felt rejected—they hired me knowing I was married to a person of the same gender. I tried to carry on. It became psychologically and spiritually more difficult. I left a great team and both churches. (Lesbian clergy, Montreal/French)
- I tried to approach my current congregation about updating their marriage policy. Many people on the board kept saying, “people will leave our church.” I felt like I was not in a safe place. What about my GLBTQ friends leaving? Would they be welcomed there? (Heterosexual clergy, London)
- I applied for a ministry position in a congregation. I was interviewed, offered the job, came out to the selection committee, and then told “oh—this is not going to work.” I was told outright that being a lesbian was not welcomed in their community or pulpit. I felt rejected, angry, shocked. But I was spared an unhealthy pastoral relationship and was grateful that they knew themselves well enough to know it wouldn't work. I am pissed off that this is still a reality! (Lesbian clergy, London)
- I was told that it would be difficult to find a settlement site for an openly lesbian candidate. During interviews, the search committees debated if their congregation was ready for a lesbian minister. The church is not really committed to eliminating homophobia, but is waiting for it to die out. This halfway acceptance means that one United Church is welcoming and accepting, while another requires a board meeting to allow a same sex couple to marry, and still a third has hate. (Lesbian clergy, Online survey)

Theme: Church governance needs to take a leadership role

Respondents reported a clear desire for the national church to take a leadership role in moving the denomination from welcoming policy to affirming practice. Indeed, independent of the question asked, responses related to the need for the national Church to take a stronger leadership, governance, and enforcement role were among the top concerns of all participants.

Sample Responses:

- I was bullied from my pulpit that I faithfully served for over ten years upon my ‘coming out.’ I was isolated at every level of church governance. Absolutely devastated morally, physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. I felt lost, alone, set into the wilderness with no map or provisions... We say we are ‘welcoming’ but we have no idea what that means. (Gay male members, Online survey)
- I was accepted and about to sign a Call, and then talked about my spouse and identified their gender. I was then being refused the position. What is the responsibility in that moment to say that this is an illegal action? There’s a balance of safety and faithfulness, justice and health. Is it right to be exempt from the Human Rights Code because you’re a religious order? What is the church’s theology...the news headlines versus theology in individual pastoral charges? What does the church stand for? (Gay clergy, London)
- It is way past time some of the regional and national leaders of our church raised their voices in support of GLBTT persons and presence... (Gay male member, Online survey)
- United church says we support same-sex marriage. Don’t let congregations make a choice. (Gay male member, Saskatoon)
- Nothing can be done without considerable support from the national church in the form of a policy that is enforced. We cannot afford to sanction homophobia any longer. (Gay male member, Quebec City)
- As an institution, The United Church of Canada must publicly stand against homophobia—in word and deed, through letters to the editor, public policy positions, and other demonstrable gestures. (Lesbian member, Montreal/English)

We sing of a church seeking to continue the story of Jesus by embodying Christ’s presence in the world. We are called together by Christ as a community of broken but hopeful believers, loving what he loved, living what he taught, striving to be faithful servants of God in our time and place. (A Song of Faith, 2006)

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations emerged from the planning team’s analysis of the data collected through the consultation process.

1. The United Church should *stand in and for* its core identity as a justice-seeking and non-discriminatory welcoming church, as it lives into its mission concerning sexual orientation, gender identity, and intercultural inclusion.

We call for the United Church to take a stand for its identity (theology, values, and deepest aspirations) by living into *God’s mission* for the church as it strives to practice the radical inclusiveness that is embedded in story of Jesus’ life and teachings.

A consistent theme voiced by participants throughout this consultation was a love of God and a commitment to the church, despite sometimes experiencing painful encounters associated with their church interactions. They envision a church that “embodies Christ’s presence in the world” by living into the mission and theology articulated in the United Church’s New Creed and Song of Faith. They desire a church that articulates its God-centred values and principles, and then

judges its behaviour against that standard. We recommend that the church frame all issues concerning inclusion, sexuality, and gender within the context of this call from God to be hopeful and expansive believers.

Suggested Interventions: orientation and gender identity

- Recommended resources to explore the history and theological narratives of the church's identity around sexual orientation, gender identity, and intercultural inclusion:
 - *Open Hearts: Resources for Affirming Ministries in The United Church of Canada* (Affirm United/S' affirmer Ensemble, 2011)
 - *Moving Toward Full Inclusion: Sexual Orientation in The United Church of Canada* (2010)
 - *Of Love and Justice: Towards the Civil Recognition of Same-Sex Marriage* (2003)
 - *That All May Be One: A Resource for Educating toward Racial Justice* (2000)
 - *The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture* (1992)
 - Encourage all United Church ministries/courts— including the General Council Office—to undertake the Affirming Ministry process.
 - Include more explicit declarations of inclusion on the websites of all courts which
 - state the church's identity around its welcome, inclusion, and affirmation of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities
 - list all Affirming ministries and link to congregational websites—or link to unitedchurch.ca and/or affirmunited.ca,
 - endorse the Affirming Ministry process and encourage all United Church ministries/courts to undertake the process
 - An ad campaign launched by the national church to state its policy and practices regarding sexual orientation and gender identity.
- 2. We call for the church to re-emerge as a leader for justice by undertaking specific actions to move local congregations to embrace the United Church's welcoming policies for all people in the sexual orientation and gender identity continuums.**

We acknowledge that the history and culture of the United Church is to value freedom of religious expression throughout the denomination. And yet, as the findings of this consultation highlight, our church polity (based on freedom of religious expression) still encourages congregations to make a choice as to whether they discriminate or not in policies associated with worship (i.e., whom we will marry, baptize, etc.—and whom we will not).

We would like to think, given its prophetic mission, that the United Church is a leader in working toward justice in the world. However, many participants shared stories that reflected the discrimination (e.g., lack of safety, non-welcoming atmosphere, inability to participate in worship, refusal to marry, discriminatory comments) that is a reality in many of our congregations. The United Church today finds itself in the position of allowing discrimination toward GLBTT people, even while this is outlawed in civil society.

Engaging in the kind of cultural change throughout the denomination that would lead to full implementation of GLBTT welcoming policies, and acknowledge the negative impact of homophobia, heterosexism, transphobia, and other forms of oppression, is difficult and long-term

work. This work will require active leadership from every level of the church governance and leadership structure. We do not believe that the call to be “faithful servants of God” regarding these issues will be possible without it.

Suggested Interventions:

- General Council to offer a formal statement of apology to all people that have been hurt by the practices and polity that encourage and reinforce the right to discriminate based on sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Conferences and presbyteries to provide support to congregations as they develop welcoming practices, through oversight, workshops, and facilitation/sharing of resources.

3. Reflect on practices of inclusion and discrimination, intentionally increase expressions of welcome and opportunities for all to participate in the life of the church, affirming the realities of all people in the sexual orientation and gender identity continuums.

“There is a strong correlation between people’s sense of community and what they identify as key attributes for a church. These include:

- Being a welcoming place for all
- Providing fellowship and support
- Committing to serve others
- Transforming faith into action”¹²

Respondents noted that affirming the realities of GLBTT people in worship, hymns, inclusive language, congregational events, and conversation was an important indication of welcome. Further, several respondents wished for more opportunities to express themselves, tell their stories, participate in worship, take on leadership roles in their congregation, and share their gifts in other ways that would benefit their church communities.

Suggested Interventions:

- All church courts to develop and implement additional affirming worship resources (print and online) for all people in the sexual orientation and gender identity continuums.
- General Council to direct
 - the coordination and sharing of affirming worship resources
 - the development of guidelines regarding the effective use of affirming worship resources, in diverse United Church settings
- Congregations to implement signs of welcoming symbols, pictures, outdoor signage, language, pronouns, bulletins, mission statements, conversations, all gender washrooms, pride parades, community outreach, small group ministry, church partners, etc.—that includes all people in the sexual orientation and gender identity continuums.
- Congregational resources to reflect on practices of inclusion and discrimination:
 - *Open Hearts: Resources for Affirming Ministries in The United Church of Canada* (Affirm United/S’affirmer Ensemble, 2011)
 - *Challenging Empire:*

¹² The United Church of Canada 2011, Identity Survey, Executive Summary page 2

- Stories and Activities to Transform Your Community
 - Power and Diversity workshop
 - Tools for Congregational Welcoming (Emerging Spirit’s *Living the Welcome—The Journal*, Workshop #4, Module #4, pgs. 167–178).
 - “Reviewing Policies through the Lens of Inclusiveness,” Saskatchewan Conference Affirming Ministries Committee.
- 4. We recommend educational and relationship-building initiatives, coordinated with the efforts toward creating an intercultural church, that create safe environments where differences are celebrated, affirming relationships are nurtured, and all can be their authentic selves in their relationship with God and each other.**

Despite the significant progress the United Church has made toward inclusion (i.e. General Council 40’s Commitment to Inclusion), individuals tend to remember and give more weight to their experiences of marginalization than they do to their experiences of mattering.

Unfortunately, as the respondents in this consultation reported, experiences of marginality for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities are still widespread throughout the church. A barrier for many GLBTT people in their relationship with the church is that the United Church’s policies have changed at a faster pace than the change in relationship between GLBTT members and some clergy and people in the pews. This situation can create fear and anxiety because GLBTT people, their families, and their friends do not know what to expect as they enter new contexts within the United Church. The changes that are now necessary to achieve full inclusion are both attitudinal and behavioral.

Many of the responses were clear that this goes beyond the marginalization of GLBTT people only. This level of change requires opportunities for everyone to be able to affirm their own identities and learn how to be allies to each other. The church has already made some progress toward this goal. The fact that almost half of the participants in this consultation were heterosexual indicates that there is already a strong sense of ally-ship in the church that can be expanded upon to remind the church body that the issue of inclusion belongs to all who are called to God’s mission.

Suggested Interventions:

Education:

- Mandatory online/webinar training for ministry personnel, on sexual orientation and gender identity justice (i.e., homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism).
- General Council support for Affirm United’s volunteer-led Affirming Ministries program, in order to build the capacity to support an increased number of ministries entering into the process:
 - Administrative support for the volunteers who coordinate the national Affirming Ministries educational process
 - Assist Affirm United/S’affirmer Ensemble in the development of resources to support Affirming Ministries in living out their commitment.
- Development of an affirming “ally” program to support those who wish to live into the values of radical inclusion, whether or not their home congregation has become an Affirming Ministry.

- Support the educational recommendations made in the following reports:
 - Trans/Gender Diversity Task Group
 - Commitment to Inclusion
 - Covenanting for Life
 - Intercultural Task Group
 - Youth & Young Adult Ministry Strategy
- Listen to the experience of transgender people in the United Church and their concrete suggestions to transform church environments to affirm transgender people and gender diversity.

Relationship-Building:

- Integrate the work of Affirm United/S' affirmer Ensemble into the core structure and work of the church. Affirm United needs to be more utilized, championed, and resourced in a way that supports intercultural change in the church.
- All courts of the United Church to partner locally and globally with those in civil society and other faith groups who speak out against institutionalized homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism.
- Create a variety of forums (in person, online, etc.) in which people of racial/ethnic and age (youth) diversity can express opinions/concerns and grapple with diversity in the areas of sexual orientation and gender identity.

In and with God, we can direct our lives toward right relationship with each other and with God. We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life. We can grow in wisdom and compassion. We can recognize all people as kin. We can accept our mortality and finitude, not as a curse, but as a challenge to make our lives and choices matter. (A Song of Faith, 2006)

CONCLUSION

This consultation provided a vehicle for 383 participants from across Canada, many of whom had to travel long distances, to come together to share their pain, faith, hope, and commitment to build a truly inclusive United Church. The participants were grateful to have had this opportunity to speak about their experiences. They perceived the consultation as an important first step. The next equally important step is for this consultation to be followed by the development of a concrete five-year work plan to do the necessary work to bring about the suggested changes.

The participants in this consultation believed that the goal of creating an inclusive church is a broad agenda that is critical to the future development and soul of the United Church. Ultimately, the participants reminded us that inclusion is not about providing some members of the church with special treatment, but rather recognizing all people, including people in the sexual orientation and gender identity continuums, as vital members of the family of God. As one participant said “[I] pray that in 20 years we will not use the rainbow symbols in the Christian Church” [because they are no longer necessary.]

Conducting this consultation was a tremendous learning experience for all involved. We suggest that the United Church consider utilizing the methodology and framework of this consultation as a template to continue the conversation in Conferences, presbyteries, and congregations. In

addition, we cannot presume, despite the success of this consultation, that we have all the information we need to move the church forward toward full intercultural inclusion. As the church and society continue to change, this experience will need to be refreshed and renewed. Therefore, we recommend that the church hold another round of consultations in five to seven years.

Respectfully submitted,

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