

February 2024 Open and Affirming Task Force Article in "The Caller"

WHAT IS "OPEN AND AFFIRMING" AND WHY ARE THOSE PARTICULAR WORDS IMPORTANT?

The term "Open and Affirming" is the realization of the efforts of various member churches of the United Church of Christ to welcome into full community persons of all gender identities and expressions. The Open and Affirming Coalition, which is not an official board or agency of the UCC and is not financially supported by the UCC, administers the program; provides educational resources and guidelines; maintains and publicizes the registry of churches who have declared themselves to be Open and Affirming (ONA) congregations.

The following is excerpted from the Open and Affirming Coalition website, openandaffirming.org:

After a time of study, dialogue and prayer, churches adopt an Open and Affirming "covenant" committing their members to welcome LGBTQ+ seekers, support their relationships, and advocate for their basic rights. All sacraments and rites of an ONA congregation are available to LGBTQ+ people, including baptism, confirmation, communion, and marriage. ONA churches take seriously the Bible's admonition to "accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." (Romans 15:7, NIV)

The words "Open and Affirming" are important because they convey fully the nature and depth of the commitment that we are making, and because they are signposts clearly understood by those who need to understand that commitment. Borrowing again from the ONA Coalition website:

LGBTQ+* people of faith often experience emotional and spiritual injury in churches that condemn their capacity to love and seek love. Because they've learned that "All Are Welcome" usually doesn't apply to them, they can't assume that any church will be safe for them and their families.

And paraphrasing for us:

A public welcome by an Open and Affirming (ONA) church sends a clear message to LGBTQ+ seekers that they have a home in the First Congregational Church of Meredith, New Hampshire, a United Church of Christ congregation.

From your O&A Task Force, as we seek to walk with our congregation toward a deeper understanding of this expression of our Christian faith.