

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

What About This Word "Affirming"?

During our Special Church Meeting, a concern was raised over the possible implications of the word "affirming" in the proposed declaration to become an "Open and Affirming Church." Before exploring what "affirming" might mean in the context of a such a declaration, we need to remind ourselves that those 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 that are clearly recognized by those who need to understand that commitment.

So – what about the word, "affirming": Validating, confirming; asserting something; showing or expressing as a strong belief in or dedication to...

Also, to express (or expressing) agreement with or commitment to...

Saying "yes" to...

Stating firmly or publicly that something is true, or supporting something strongly...

Providing emotional support or approval...

Publicly showing support for an opinion or idea...

Showing a strong belief in or dedication to something...

What is this idea, belief, person or persons, that we are committing to providing emotional support or approval of? Why is simply "open" – or "welcoming" – not sufficient?

Welcoming – declaring ourselves to be welcoming – is something we do for ourselves. It allows us to feel that we have done what we need to - it describes (we hope!) us.

Affirming is something we do for the other. We validate everyone as who they are; as they perceive themselves to be, as they perceive they are intended to be. We make no judgement, we see them like we see ourselves, as children of God, equally recipients of God's boundless grace; fully worthy to love and be loved, to work with us, as we seek, together, to become the people God needs us to be in this time and place.

Affirming anyone in this manner is not an endorsement of that person's actions or behavior toward others. We are all, regardless of who we are or see ourselves to be, held to the same standards of fairness, civility, and concern for each other.

As "*The Story of the Hands Banner in the Fellowship Hall*" in last month's issue of *The Caller* so wonderfully illustrates, we are and have been a welcoming congregation. Can we not also become an affirming congregation?