



An Open and Affirming Church

Welcoming and celebrating the gifts of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer people

The Open and Affirming Project is an invitation to live out the mission of the Church as a welcoming community with specific recognition of the gifts brought by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people, same-sex relationships and rainbow families.

The Project is a step by step process developed through local congregations to demonstrate how Churches can intentionally live out their welcome, in all areas of their life and mission. Once a Church Council agrees to become an Open and Affirming Congregation resources are available for their ongoing learning and discussion.

Some local churches have been open and affirming for many years. Others are beginning to think about what that might mean. The Project is flexible and recognises the different stages a local church is at.

Uniting Network

The Project is supported by the Uniting Network Australia (UNA), a national network within the Uniting Church in Australia working for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer people in the life and mission of the Church.

The role of the Uniting Network has been to advocate for the full participation in the life and ministry of the Uniting Church of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer people.

Seeking to follow the Way of Jesus this is a vision that:

- affirms the value of the diversity in the Church,
- advocates for a more tolerant and compassionate way of being,
- welcomes the gifts that such diversity brings.

Open and Affirming Project

The Open and Affirming Project is one expression of working towards a more welcoming Church that receives the gifts and lives of all people. This project offers a means for a local congregation to engage in

study, reflection and action towards living out a more generous and welcoming environment for LGBTIQ people. The process has five parts:

Step One: Accessing Resources for Reflection and Study

The Uniting Network offers a variety of resources on its website under the heading of the Open and Affirming Project. These resources can be downloaded and used for information or as study resources for church councils, study groups, worship leaders, Sunday school and family ministry leaders, etc. They can be used to guide education and awareness on a wide variety of issues. A congregation wishing to become an Open and Affirming Congregation would begin this process by promoting these resources to all areas of its life and ministry for study and action. The Uniting Network can also provide experienced speakers or workshop leaders to facilitate this process or to share their stories for deeper understanding and learning. A local church contact person is nominated to facilitate communication.



Step Two: Facilitate study and awareness groups

This step will vary from church to church and may be important where a range of views or concerns are being expressed. The study might be on a particular issue. Some churches have discussed and thought a lot about issues for lesbian and gay people, but may not be aware of issues for transgender and intersex people for example.

Step Three: Church Council agrees to become an Open and Affirming Congregation

Following a period of study and reflection, the Church Council may agree that it wishes to become an Open and Affirming Congregation. This decision can then be used as part of the Church's public identity and signifies its welcome to all people. Such a decision of Church Council would stand for a three year period before needing to be renewed and re-affirmed. Uniting Network can provide a draft of a possible proposal and rationale to be circulated to Church Council members prior to the meeting.

Step Four: The Church Council advises the Uniting Network.

The Congregation would advise the Uniting Network of this process of study, reflection and the decision of the Church Council. The Congregation would then be listed on the official list of Open and Affirming Congregations being developed by the Uniting Network as a service to those looking for a church to attend. This helps build an ongoing awareness of issues related to the lives of LGBTIQ people in the life of the Uniting Church.

Step Five: Church Council creates an awareness of Open and Affirming Status

After a decision has been made, the Church Council advises the members of the congregation. Options to enable an awareness of the decision include: permanent notice in weekly news sheet; changes to home and other website pages; an external sign; conducting an open and affirming worship service; including prayers for LGBTIQ people in regular prayers of intercession; include information in the Annual Report or reports to Presbytery; writing to local LGBTIQ groups to let them know; media release for the local community newspaper or radio station.

If you have any questions about the Open and Affirming process please contact the Uniting Network: uniting.network.australia@gmail.com

