

The Study Group also sincerely thanks the following:

- The Open and Affirming Committee at First Church of Christ, Congregational, Glastonbury, for help with this brochure
- The [Connecticut Conference] Committee on Homosexuality for serving as discussion leaders or panelists and for educational materials
- Five resource persons who answered a form letter seeking direction for our Study Group—namely Rev. Ann B. Day, coordinator of the [United Church Coalition for Lesbian/Gay Concerns] Open and Affirming Program; Dr. James B. Nelson, author and lecturer at United Theological Seminary in Minnesota; and the three clergypersons in the California UCC churches depicted in the video *Journey of Faith*—Rev. Mary Ellen Kilsby, Rev. Fred Plummer, and Rev. Gerald M. Stinson
- Those who delivered 90-sec. spots in worship services:
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words and the simple readings of those texts. Just as we have had to reconsider, in the light of new evidence, the apparent biblical endorsement of slavery and the subordinate status of women, so we have good cause to rethink the commonly held assumption that all contact between persons of the same gender is automatically sinful. A closer look at the whole scriptural record is essential on this issue.

The Scriptures at no point deal with homosexuality as an authentic sexual *orientation*—a given condition of being. The languages in which the Scriptures were written thousands of years ago—Hebrew and Greek—contained no word for homosexuality. The few references deal with homosexual acts performed by heterosexuals. These acts were perceived to be idolatrous, exploitative or pagan. Loving and mutually respectful relationships shared by same-sex partners are not dealt with in the Scriptures. Jesus did not even mention the subject of homosexuality.

The spirit of the Scriptures reminds us that we cannot love God whom we have not seen if we do not love our brothers and sisters whom we have seen. By God's grace we are called to respond compassionately toward others.

How will being an open and affirming congregation affect our children?

We will help foster in our children standards of justice and compassion and provide for them a more loving and equitable environment than is possible in a setting of silence. We will begin to break down walls of prejudice as we learn to accept each other for our God-given gifts and honor one another for our God-given differences. No child is too young to understand that each one is part of God's mosaic.

What does "affirming" mean?

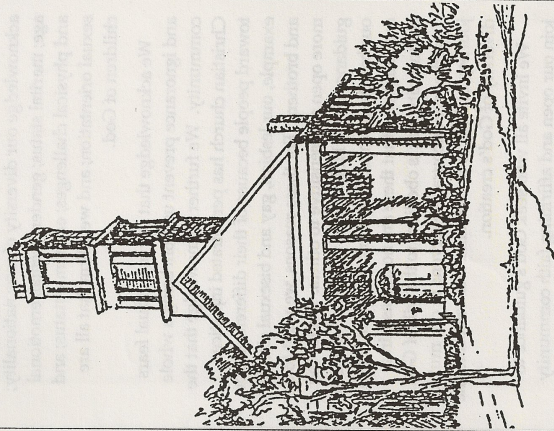
In the context of our statement, affirming means asserting that all are equally children of God. An affirming church declares that all are entitled to the same rights, privileges and responsibilities. We want to value, uphold and support each other in our church family with dignity and equality.

What changes might occur when we become Open and Affirming?

We will seek to combat negative stereotypes, derogatory language and other forms of bias which deny full potential and keep people in the shadows. We aim to better understand the realities faced each day by others in our midst. For example, if we are willing to look, we will see that families are configured in many ways (even as they have been since ancient times) and will recognize that one particular way is not necessarily superior to others. Equal opportunity will be extended to all persons seeking employment, volunteering for church work, or desiring to participate in other ways in the life and ministries of First Church.

We will look for ways to make known in our community and denomination the fact that we are an open and affirming congregation and called to live in ways that will make new differences for justice and understanding.

Proposed OPEN AND AFFIRMING STATEMENT with responses to the most commonly asked questions



First Church in Windsor, UCC

FOUNDED IN 1630

Windsor, Connecticut

September 1994

Open and Affirming Statement of
FIRST CHURCH IN
WINDSOR, UCC

as proposed by the Open and Affirming
Study Group for approval by the
church body after further study

We, the First Church in Windsor, following our Lord Jesus Christ, declare that we welcome all to share in our community of faith. We acknowledge our diversity of race; nationality; age; marital status; gender; mental, emotional and physical challenges; economic status; and sexual orientation, and we affirm that all are children of God.

We acknowledge that our individual fears and ignorance prevent us from being a whole community. We further acknowledge that the Christian church has perpetrated injustices toward people because of their differences, for example, our lesbian, gay and bisexual sisters and brothers. For these reasons, we want to be more open and sensitive to others. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we seek to live out our belief—at church, at work, at school, and in our families—that there are no outcasts in a community that is obedient to the will of God. Together we encourage everyone in our mutual journey of faith to understand and celebrate the diversity of God's creation.

We invite all who seek God's guidance to join our open and affirming faith community and share fully in our church's life and opportunities for ministry. We come from different perspectives and experiences and pray for courage, blessing, and God's unifying love as we respond to God's call.

Commonly asked questions about "Open and Affirming"

Why are we involved in Open and Affirming?

In response to the call of the Gospel and the leadership of the United Church of Christ, our own Connecticut Conference, other local churches and interdenominational groups, and the pastoral needs of people we know and love, we join with our sisters and brothers everywhere in the continuing struggle to build communities of justice and understanding for all people.

Do we need a public statement?

Yes. Just as we have other statements that capture the essence of our basic beliefs as members of the family of God, so there is a need to declare publicly some important practical conclusions that arise from our beliefs about our life together. The open and affirming statement puts us on record as committing ourselves not to prejudge each other on the basis of color, ethnic background, age, economic or marital status, physical/mental/emotional situation, gender, or sexual orientation. The welcome and affirmation we extend reflects God's grace and love made known in Jesus Christ. Jesus ministered mainly to the outcasts, but he also preached to insiders.

Are we focusing only on gay, lesbian and bisexual persons in the statement?

No. The statement includes others as well since all are called into unity with Christ. However, the primary thrust of the open and affirming statement is to proclaim to today's cultural insiders that we withdraw our moral support from our culture's and bisexuals. Adopting an open and affirming

statement serves notice that we reject homophobia for being incompatible with the commandment to love one another. We affirm that God intended each one of us to become the whole person we were created.

Isn't Open and Affirming simply a reaction to pressure from militant gays and lesbians and their families to endorse a homosexual lifestyle?

No. Open and Affirming is a response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is based on careful and prayerful study of the Scriptures and of the Christian calling to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:34-40). Open and Affirming is about our responsibility as Christians "to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, to the glory of God" (Romans 15:7). As for "lifestyles," the open and affirming statement endorses only a Christian lifestyle for everyone, whatever one's sexual orientation may be. It does not endorse promiscuity, exploitation and abuse of others by anyone. It is intended to be a call to value people by the signs of the Spirit, including faithfulness and Christ-like loving-kindness. It is based on the belief that the blessing of God is intended for all who "keep God's covenant," whatever their status (Isaiah 56:1-8), and obey the Commandment of Jesus to love one another (John 15:17).

What does the Bible say about homosexuality?

Several biblical passages have been interpreted as condemning homosexuality. Many Bible scholars, however, have either overturned or profoundly questioned both the common translations of key

OPEN AND
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