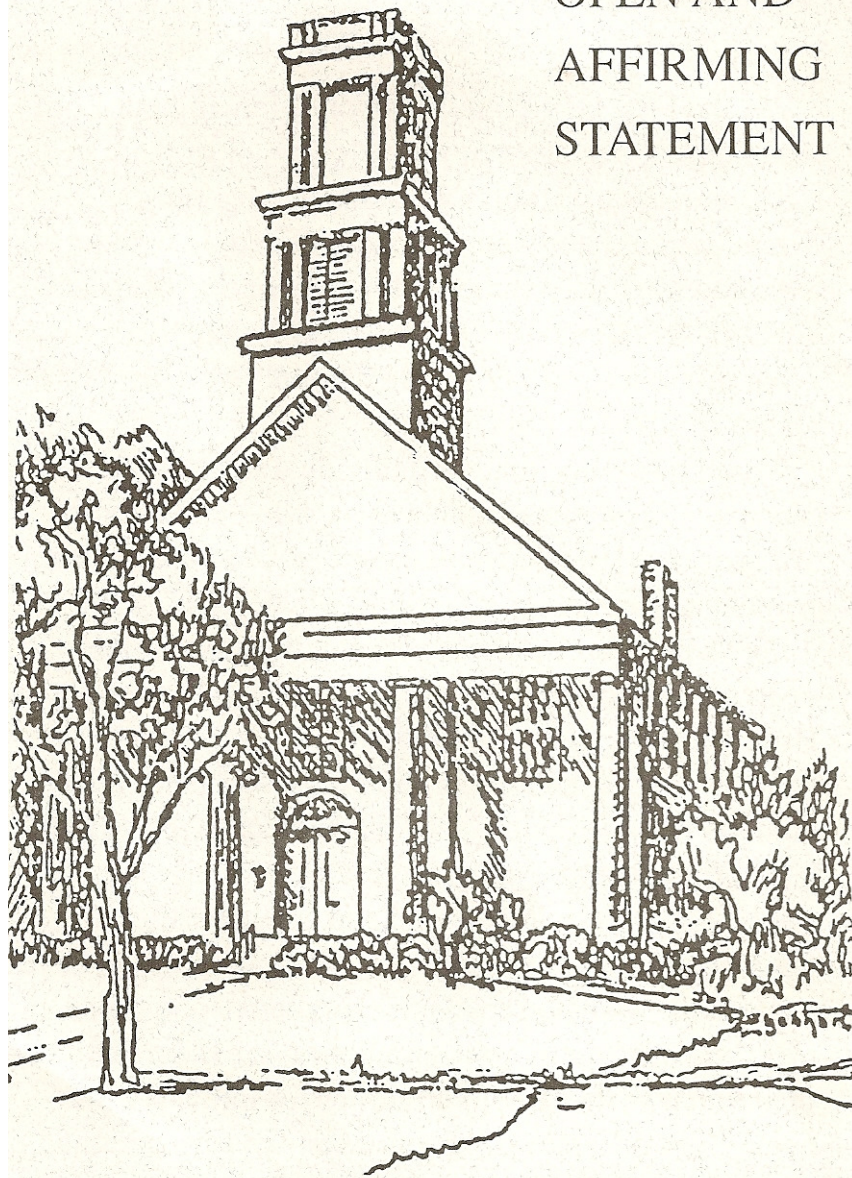


OPEN AND
AFFIRMING
STATEMENT



First Church in Windsor, United Church of Christ
107 Palisado Avenue, Windsor, Connecticut

OPEN AND AFFIRMING STATEMENT

as approved at a church meeting Dec. 11, 1994

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 diversities, and our welcome is to all people without regard to their race; nationality; age; marital status; gender; mental, emotional, or physical challenges; economic status; or sexual orientation. 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 perpetuated injustices toward people because of their differences. For these reasons, we want to be more open and sensitive to others. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we seek to live 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.

Background to the statement

The decision to become an open and affirming church evolved out of the church's concern that many persons of lesbian, gay and bisexual orientation feel judged and excluded by Christian churches and also face much injustice by our society. The phrase "open and affirming" is used by the United Church of Christ to indicate that a church welcomes this frequently excluded group.

Following two years of study, an "Open and Affirming Study Group" proposed a statement of commitment to be voted upon by our whole church. Our Cabinet wished to broaden significantly this statement of welcome to include other diverse groups of people who have often felt unwelcomed by both churches and secular groups. The statement printed here was approved in December 1994 by a church vote and reflects that extended commitment.

Our challenge as a church continues to be to live into a fuller affirmation of the diversities among us so that other persons who have felt excluded will also feel welcomed. Presently, we are seeking ways to do this in all aspects of our church's life.

Why are we open and affirming?

In response to the call of the Gospel, the leadership of the United Church of Christ, our own Connecticut Conference, other local churches, 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 for all people.

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. We affirm that God intended each one of us to become the person we were created to be.

Why make a public statement?

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.

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

We 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 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 changes do we hope will occur as we move into our commitment to be 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 hope to understand better the realities faced each day by others in our midst.

We commit to extending equal opportunity 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 look for ways to make known in our community and denomination that we are an open and affirming congregation and are called to live in ways that promote understanding and justice for all people.

Our hope

A newer member, who uses a wheelchair, expresses our deepest hope:
"I would not have had the courage to become a member of First Church if the Open and Affirming Statement had not been under study by this congregation. I had lost so much (after a spinal cord injury) . . . I lost the faith of my childhood and the security of being accepted as a whole and well woman. I decided if they could accept others on the margins, they might accept me! I truly needed sanctuary."