

Annual Report to Northern Spirit Region of the United Church of Canada from the Northern Spirit Affirming Task Group

At the November 2019 meeting, the Executive of the Northern Spirit Regional Council approved the formation of an Affirming Task Group answerable to the Executive of Northern Spirit Regional Council.

The objectives of the task group are: 1. To conduct an educational/discernment affirming process engaging the Northern Spirit Regional Council and, 2. To bring a recommendation/process to the Northern Spirit Regional Council regarding becoming an Affirming Regional Council.”

In January of 2020 the Affirming Task Group was formed and currently consist of the following members:

Rev. Linda McLaren, Minister Jasper United Church, Jasper, Alberta. Chair.

Rev. Cathy Kinsman, Minister at Grace United Church in Lloydminster, Alberta.

Rev. Monica Rosborough, Minister at Athabasca United Church in Athabasca, Alberta.

Louise Rogers, Lay member of Sherwood Park United Church, Sherwood Park, Alberta.

Wilson MacLennan, Lay member of Robertson Wesley United Church, Edmonton, Alberta.

Julie Graham, Justice and Communications Minister, Northern Spirit Regional Council, Prairie to Pine Regional Council, and Living Skies Regional Council, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

The Affirming Task Group has met regularly since its formation in January of 2020. The task group made a presentation to the Northern Spirit Regional Council at the 2020 Annual General Meeting and received the blessing of the AGM to continue moving forward with bringing the matter to a future AGM for a vote.

In the past years there have been presentations explaining affirming made to several Communities of Faith throughout the region, the presentations were well received and, in many ways, satisfied the hunger for education. Presentations were also made together with Regional Committees and Communities of Faith from Chinook Winds Region and Pacific Mountain Region.

A presentation, including worship, was made at the 2021 AGM and followed by education programs during the year. In 2022 a presentation regarding transgender issues within the community and the church, based on the Jewish faith and from an Old Testament perspective was made via Zoom to United Church members in Northern Spirit Region.

The Affirming Task Group has not been able to hold in person events during the past two years. The meetings have been held electronically and we continue to be pleased with the way that people in our church embraced this form of technology.

The task group believe that the 2023 Annual Meeting of the Northern Spirit Region is the appropriate time to bring the question of becoming an Affirming Region of the United Church of Canada to the floor of the meeting for a vote for the approval of the court.

Becoming an Affirming Region will make a public statement that the governance of the region is welcoming and supportive to all people. Welcoming and supporting all people means that all people in our church community, and the greater community, are welcome and supported. This includes people

regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, age, differing abilities, ethnic origin, economic circumstances and other conditions that may be seen to separate people from the greater community. Being an affirming region does not affect or cause the Communities of Faith to become affirming. Affirming is a choice that each Community of Faith makes for itself.

In the next year, prior bringing the question of being affirming to the floor of the annual general meeting, there is much work for the affirming task group to undertake.

The affirming task group will:

- Write a vision statement that will state that all people regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, age, differing abilities, ethnic origin, economic circumstances are included in the life and work of the region, the statement will be approved by Affirm United/S' affirmer Ensemble and by the Northern Spirit Regional Council Executive prior to the presentation to the Annual General Meeting.
- Develop a continuing plan of action for the region when it becomes affirming. The action plan will include the continuing existence of the affirming task group, or the formation of an affirming committee, to continue the welcome and support of all people into the future.
- Establish the relationship between the Northern Spirit Region and Affirm United/S' affirmer Ensemble.
- Write an inclusive building user policy that will give guidelines for the need for accessibility to buildings or locations that the Northern Spirit Regional Council holds meeting.
- Organize a Service of Celebration at the 2025 annual general meeting of Northern Spirit Region Council.
- Undertake any other tasks that arise during the year.

The Affirming Task Group ask for a motion of continued support and blessing of this work as it goes forward.

Prayerfully submitted

Affirming Task Group