

The United Church of Strafford

*P.O Box 124
Strafford, VT 05072*



June, 2023

Dear Church Family,

We are writing to invite you to a conversation after refreshments on Sunday, July 9th, where we will talk about the draft Open and Affirming covenant and implementation plan that you will find below.

We will be asking ourselves at Annual Meeting this September whether to adopt them and become officially open to and affirming of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions. It is very important that we think carefully now about these documents and work to get them just right before they come to a vote.

We also will talk at the meeting on the 9th about what other churches have experienced when they have become Open and Affirming and what we might experience in our congregation.

July 9th will be the last Sunday Tom is with us before the sabbatical time begins, so this is our chance to talk with him about Open and Affirming congregations. He has been pastor of two other churches in the area that have gone through this process and voted to approve a similar covenant and plan.

Please feel free to send in your responses to the covenant and implementation plan below by mail or email before the meeting—we are still in a drafting mode and will carefully consider all suggested improvements! You can send your comments to unitedchurchofstrafford@gmail.com or PO Box 124, Strafford, VT 05072.

Thank you very much!

The Fulfilling Our Vision Committee: Danette Harris, Joey Hawkins, Maggie Hooker, Tom Kinder, Kate Reimanis, Debby Richie, Christina Robinson, Jim Schley, Cameron Speth, Amber Wylie, Glenn Wylie

*page 2 Draft Open and Affirming Covenant for the United Church of Strafford
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Open and Affirming Covenant and Implementation Plan
June 17, 2023 Draft

We, the members of the United Church of Strafford, Vermont, regard all people as beloved children of God. We give thanks for the many and diverse gifts of God among us.

We declare ourselves to be an Open and Affirming congregation, welcoming and accepting into full participation, membership and leadership people of every sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, race, ethnicity, faith background, age, marital status and family structure, physical or mental abilities, education and economic status. We honor the worth and dignity of all people. We affirm all relationships founded on the principles of love, justice and the Golden Rule.

We commit ourselves to integrate the spirit of this covenant into all aspects of our church life. We pledge to work to end oppression and discrimination whenever we encounter them, and, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, to help create the beloved community of God's realm on earth.

Whoever you are, wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

Please see the draft Implementation Plan on the next pages.

Proposed Open and Affirming Implementation Plan
United Church of Strafford, Vermont
June 17, 2023 Draft

As an Open & Affirming church, we commit to seek ways continually to incorporate the spirit of our Open and Affirming covenant in our church life, including worship, mission, outreach, advocacy, education and mindfully crafting our interior space to reflect the covenant.

We recognize that in order to achieve our goals, we must also evaluate our fulfillment of the Open and Affirming covenant at Annual Meeting each year, as well as look for ways to live it as fully as possible, which could include seeking feedback on our progress from the communities we wish to be open to and affirming of. The Fulfilling Our Vision Committee will also evaluate our implementation of this Covenant and continue to offer educational workshops for the church family and community on related issues.

This implementation plan is meant to be a guide. It is also meant to be reviewed and amended as an iterative process as we strive to achieve our goals.

We will remind our congregation of our ONA status and commitments by:

- posting the covenant in the church building, such as on a prominent bulletin board;
- having a sentence about it in the bulletin each week (for example, saying “An Open and Affirming Congregation” in the heading, or saying, “We are an Open and Affirming Congregation. Whoever you are, wherever you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.”);
- putting the covenant on a pew card and reading it in worship on appropriate occasions;

We will share our commitment with our larger community by:

- publishing our Open and Affirming covenant on our website and in our newsletter;
- putting the words “Open and Affirming” on the church sign;
- putting symbols such as a rainbow on the sign or church building to indicate our allegiance with marginalized groups;

continued

In order to fulfill our Future Directions Vision, “to be a force, not just a presence, responding to wrongs, threats and destructive forces in the world and effecting positive social change, connecting religion to issues of peace, justice and the care of God’s creation,” we will live into our Open and Affirming commitment by:

- supporting or partnering with groups like local Gay Straight Alliances or anti-bullying efforts and other churches working on these issues;
- supporting other anti-discrimination efforts relating to race or economic status or any of the other groups sometimes treated as unequal or inferior;
- performing weddings for all orientations and genders;
- continuing to educate ourselves and our community about the issues surrounding this commitment.