

OPEN AND AFFIRMING FACT SHEET

(From Connecticut Conference Website: www.ctucc.org)

We Are an Open and Affirming Conference

The Connecticut Conference is “Open and Affirming,” or ONA, which is the designation for congregations, campus ministries, and other bodies in the United Church of Christ which make public covenants of welcome into their full life and ministry to persons of all sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions.

The national ONA movement in the United Church of Christ (UCC) began in 1985, when the UCC General Synod adopted a resolution, "Calling on United Church of Christ Congregations to Declare Themselves Open and Affirming".

The Connecticut Conference Annual Meeting voted in 1989 to become Open and Affirming.

Building on this welcome, the 2003 General Synod adopted a resolution "Affirming the Participation and Ministry of Transgender People within the United Church of Christ and Supporting Their Civil and Human Rights."

What is Open and Affirming?

The essence of an Open and Affirming covenant is the full welcome into the life and ministry of the church for "people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions" (or "lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people").

The spirit of ONA is more than affirming people of all sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions. The meaning of an ONA declaration should be the commitment to affirm every person because they are children of God - those of any age, ability, race, culture and ethnicity, family configuration, health status, immigration status, whether with children or not, as well as any other description that might separate us.

A true welcome respects and honors every person, their story, their gifts and their needs. A welcome to some but not others is no real welcome.

ONA Covenants

In order for a church to be listed ONA by the Coalition, it must present a covenant that makes reference to the inclusion of people of all sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions. An Open and Affirming covenant is more than a statement, policy, declaration or an amendment to a congregation's by-laws. In the UCC's Reformed tradition, a covenant is an act of faith, a solemn promise to God in response to God's holy Word. An ONA covenant is a serious step for a congregation in its life of faith.

In a church covenant, a congregation seeks "to walk together in all God's ways" (Constitution of the United Church of Christ).

The first Reformed covenant in North America was the Mayflower Compact (1620): "[We] solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God, and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic." In one of the first church covenants in New England, the congregation gathered in Dedham, Mass., professed in 1638 "through the help of the Lord to live together in this our holy fellowship according to the rule of love." In 1648, Congregationalist theologian Thomas Shepard grounded church covenants in Christ: "Members [of the church are] bound to cleave only to Christ, their head ... and to one another by [mutual] love, which they are bound to strengthen and confirm ... by a Solemn Covenant."

In New England, a church covenant was affirmed by the congregation as a body after a time of prayerful discernment. As a contemporary expression of this tradition, an ONA covenant is grounded in prayer, Bible study and dialogue "according to the rule of love" (Dedham church covenant).

SAMPLE STATEMENTS

THE COMMUNITY CHURCH OF WASHINGTON, DC

We seek to be an expression of God's Love in the world. We are an inclusive and diverse church; a place of unconditional love that inspires all individuals in our community, regardless of race, culture, age, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, ability, and socio-economic status. Partnering with the Holy Spirit and the community, we are committed to

fighting and eradicating social ills that oppress God's children, preventing them from experiencing a fulfilled life. Following the example of our Savior Jesus Christ, we declare ourselves to be an Open and Affirming Church.

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL, BOXBOROUGH, MA

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." (John 13:34)

We, the United Church of Christ, Congregational, Boxborough, value and welcome a diverse congregation. We are an Open and Affirming (ONA) church, believing that each of us is created in God's image. We celebrate everyone, including people of all ages, races, cultures, sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, family configurations, economic circumstances, physical, cognitive or emotional abilities, education, or spiritual and religious traditions.

All are welcome to participate fully in the life, leadership, ministry and mission of this church as we seek to grow together in a safe and nurturing community of faith. We strive to demonstrate in all ways that "no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here!"

We commit ourselves to the ongoing work of being an ONA congregation, one that lives out the belief that God is still speaking. With God's grace, we journey together in Christian faith.

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF PINEHURST, NC, UCC

The Congregational Church of Pinehurst, UCC, is called to follow Jesus' way of love, justice and inclusion. We do this by:

- facing issues of faith openly and honestly
- nourishing the spirit of God within us all
- creating a caring community that celebrates human diversity
- respecting the wisdom of other religious traditions
- working with others to create a just society
- promoting the sustainable and equitable use of the earth's resources

To that end we receive with respect, and nurture with intention, the gifts of all who come to us on the journey of faith. We invite everyone, regardless of age, race, gender, physical or mental challenges, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, to join us in the life and leadership of our congregation, and in our ongoing commitment as an Open and Affirming Congregation.

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC, CHAPPAQUA, NY

Jesus said: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

Paul wrote: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

Taking scripture as our guide, and mindful of our mission to be a caring community, we acknowledge, accept and affirm that all people are equal children of God. We welcome into the worship, work and fellowship of this congregation all people.

People of every race and mixture of races.

People of every ethnic background and nationality.

People who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and straight.

People in any economic situation.

People, regardless of physical or mental prowess or limitation.

Trusting in God's grace and with the hope of guidance from the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to strive to fulfill this affirmation.

PROPOSED STATEMENT ~ SALISBURY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

As a congregation, the Salisbury Congregational Church seeks to love God with all their hearts, souls and minds and love their neighbors as themselves.

This Church declares itself to be Open to all for participation, membership, leadership and employment regardless of race, ancestry, class, gender identity, physical/mental ability or sexual orientation.

We further declare ourselves to be Affirming of each individual as a child of God, celebrating the total identity of each person.

As a declared Open and Affirming Congregation, we commit ourselves to work toward ending ignorance, fear, hatred, prejudice and discrimination against people considered to be different including our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender sisters and brothers.

The following Connecticut Conference churches have voted to be Open and Affirming:

1. Hartford, CT : Asylum Hill Congregational Church
2. Avon, CT : Avon Congregational Church
3. Meriden, CT : Center Congregational Church of Meriden
4. Manchester, CT : Center Congregational Church, Inc.
5. Goshen, CT : Church of Christ, Congregational
6. Norfolk, CT : Church of Christ, Congregational
7. New Haven, CT : Church of The Redeemer
8. Colchester, CT : Colchester Federated Church
9. South Glastonbury, CT : Congregational Church in South Glastonbury
10. Brookfield, CT : Congregational Church of Brookfield
11. Marlborough, CT : Congregational Church of Marlborough
12. New Fairfield, CT : Congregational Church of New Fairfield, Inc.
13. North Stonington, CT : Congregational Church of North Stonington
14. Hamden, CT : Dunbar United Church of Christ
15. East Woodstock, CT : East Woodstock Congregational Church
16. West Hartford, CT : Elmwood Community Church, Inc.
17. Fairfield, CT : First Church Congregational
18. Middletown, CT : First Church in Middletown
19. Windsor, CT : First Church in Windsor
20. Bethlehem, CT : First Church of Bethlehem, UCC
21. Simsbury, CT : First Church of Christ
22. West Hartford, CT : First Church of Christ Congregational

23. Hartford, CT : First Church of Christ in Hartford
24. Mansfield Center, CT : First Church of Christ in Mansfield Congregational
25. New Haven, CT : First Church of Christ in New Haven
26. Glastonbury, CT : First Church of Christ, Congregational
27. Bethany, CT : First Church of Christ, Congregational
28. Farmington, CT : First Church of Christ, Congregational, 1652
29. Woodbridge, CT : First Church of Christ, UCC, Woodbridge
30. Danbury, CT : First Congregational Church
31. Stamford, CT : First Congregational Church
32. Bristol, CT : First Congregational Church
33. Bloomfield, CT : First Congregational Church in Bloomfield
34. East Hartford, CT : First Congregational Church of East Hartford
35. Essex, CT : First Congregational Church of Essex
36. Granby, CT : First Congregational Church of Granby
37. Old Greenwich, CT : First Congregational Church of Greenwich
38. Griswold, CT : First Congregational Church of Griswold
39. Guilford, CT : First Congregational Church of Guilford, Inc.
40. Haddam, CT : First Congregational Church of Haddam
41. Ledyard, CT : First Congregational Church of Ledyard UCC
42. Lyme, CT : First Congregational Church of Lyme
43. Madison, CT : First Congregational Church of Madison
44. Norwalk, CT : First Congregational Church of Norwalk, Inc.
45. Old Lyme, CT : First Congregational Church of Old Lyme

46. Portland, CT : First Congregational Church of Portland
47. Southington, CT : First Congregational Church of Southington
48. Stratford, CT : First Congregational Church of Stratford
49. Willimantic, CT : First Congregational Church of Willimantic
50. Woodstock, CT : First Congregational Church of Woodstock, Inc.
51. Hebron, CT : Gilead Congregational Church, Inc.
52. Hampton, CT : Hampton Congregational Church
53. Hartford, CT : Immanuel Congregational Church, Inc.
54. Kensington, CT : Kensington Congregational Church
55. Danbury, CT : King Street, UCC
56. West Hartford, CT : Manantial de Gracia (Spring of Grace), UCC
57. Monroe, CT : Monroe Congregational Church, Inc.
58. Niantic, CT : Niantic Community Church
59. North Haven, CT : North Haven Congregational Church
60. Rocky Hill, CT : Rocky Hill Congregational Church
61. Westport, CT : Saugatuck Congregational Church of Westport, Inc.
62. Manchester, CT : Second Congregational Church
63. Coventry, CT : Second Congregational Church of Coventry, Inc.
64. New Haven, CT : Shalom United Church of Christ
65. Middletown, CT : South Congregational Church
66. Waterbury, CT : South Congregational Church
67. Granby, CT : South Congregational Church of Granby
68. New Britain, CT : South Congregational/ First Baptist Church

69. Hamden, CT : Spring Glen Church
70. Storrs, CT : Storrs Congregational Church, Inc.
71. Plainville, CT : The Congregational Church of Plainville, UCC
72. West Hartford, CT : The Flagg Road United Church of Christ
73. Cornwall, CT : The UCC in Cornwall, Congregational
74. Chester, CT : The United Church of Chester
75. Rowayton, CT : United Church of Rowayton, Inc.
76. New Haven, CT : United Church on the Green
77. Norwalk, CT : United Congregational Church of Norwalk
78. Avon, CT : West Avon Congregational Church
79. Danielson, CT : Westfield Congregational Church
80. Hamden, CT : Whitneyville United Church of Christ
81. Milford, CT : Woodmont UCC