



Dear Open and Affirming family!

As I begin to write this letter, I'm feeling both a sense of loss and a sense of expectation. Loss, because at the end of this year, I retire from my ministry as Executive Director of the Open and Affirming Coalition. **But also expectation, because with new leadership in 2023 our movement will continue to grow from strength to strength.**



Andy Lang

We often use the metaphor of “journey” for the path along which God leads us from the past to the future. Sometimes journeys have a clear goal, and sometimes the destination is unknown. When the Coalition called me to this ministry in 2010, I had no idea how deeply I would be changed. Serving as Executive Director has been a conversion experience—opening my eyes to the incredible diversity of God’s LGBTQIA+ family, and God’s incredible generosity to us as we struggle together for a world where everyone is wanted, everyone is needed, where no one is left outside the Body of Christ.

When we celebrated the Coalition’s 50th anniversary in August, we honored the brave first generation who founded the Coalition in 1972, and listened to the challenging voices of a new generation who urged us to build our future with greater courage and wider vision. Courage and wisdom—we will need both. Rights that we thought were secure are now under attack, including our right to marry and the right of parents to make life-saving medical decisions for their transgender children. Laws in many states seek to erase the stories of LGBTQ+ families from public libraries and schools, and LGBTQ+ youth continue to live with the risk of suicide and self-harm. **There is no reason to believe that the rising tide of hatred unleashed by political and religious extremism will recede on its own accord. More than ever, we need strong movements of faith to advocate with and for our LGBTQ+ neighbors.**

Earlier this month, the Coalition certified ONA church #1785. That means we’re the fastest-growing LGBTQ+-affirming church movement in the world: a fact worth celebrating as we begin our 51st year as a movement! By early next year, when a new Executive Director takes office, we will welcome ONA church #1800. **But most UCC congregations still have not joined our family. We will need your support to grow our movement until the words “United Church of Christ” on a sign will always mean, everywhere, that this is a church where LGBTQ+ seekers are safe.**