

1. UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST <http://www.uccoalition.org/programs/ona/start/>):

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

Building on this extravagant 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](#)."

The central affirmation of an ONA congregation is that

"people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions" (or "lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people") are welcome in the full life and ministry of the church.

Note: This language reflects the [change in ONA policy](#), effective July 14, 2010.

How It Works

UCC settings (local congregations, campus ministries etc.) become "officially ONA" by adopting an "Open and Affirming" statement expressing this welcome and sending this (with date adopted, body which took the action, and request to be publicly listed as ONA) to The Coalition's ONA Program (address below). [Guidelines for ONA Statements](#) are included on this website.

Adoption of statements is usually preceded by a period of study, prayer, reflection, and discussion on the subjects of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, Biblical messages about sexuality, diversity and inclusiveness in the Church, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) life and relationships, how the church might live out an ONA commitment, and related topics. [Resources for helping you in this process are available](#).

Each setting composes its own **ONA statement** (often drawing upon the [1985 and 2003 resolutions of the General Synod](#)). [Sample statements are available on this site](#) or by [contacting The Coalition's Program Staff](#).

Why is it necessary to become ONA?

Since the beginning of the Open and Affirming (ONA) movement in the UCC, people have been saying: "We try to be friendly and welcome everyone. Anyone can join in our worship and activities! We just don't understand why becoming 'Open and Affirming' is necessary. Why should we make a statement saying we welcome persons who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (lgbt)?"*

Here are a few responses from UCC folks in ONA congregations and campus ministries:

Congregations:

“Gay and lesbian people are so accustomed to being the exception to that stated 'everyone,' that they and their loved ones have to overcome a tremendous internal barrier to take a chance on being open to a church. A statement makes that barrier much smaller.”

“Because GLB persons tell us it matters to them – a lot! Our Open and Affirming phrase (and explanation) on our website and the rainbow flag on the church sign tell people we intend to be welcoming. We don’t want to make them guess (if it’s safe and welcoming -- or not).”

“We believe that it is essential to verbalize clearly our intention to live as an ONA congregation so that people – LGB and straight – can hear and know it. We do this as much for ourselves as for those who hear us, for we know we are shaped by our words, and that is central to our understanding of growth and deepening commitment to justice for all people.”

“Because while we (inside the church) know we are ONA, those in the community may not – and because the church is for those in the community, it is critical that the community know here is a place of welcome and inclusion for all.”

“Because society and churches in specific have and continue to discriminate against the GLBT community in numerous ways – from rudeness to physical violence. Oppression of GLBT people continues to be the norm in many communities, workplaces, churches, and homes.”

“At our [ONA] vote, our elderly treasurer said, ‘The same was true of the Civil Rights Bills in the '60s. They should not have been needed (we have a Constitution), but they were needed and so is ONA!’”

“To be honest, my first reaction is ‘Why not?’ It seems almost self-evident that gay, lesbian and bisexual persons need to be welcomed intentionally and explicitly because they have been explicitly unwelcome for so long! ... Before and during our ONA process, I heard and felt what gay, lesbian and bisexual people feel and endure in many churches. I really believe that our effort to overcome that discrimination must be openly expressed. I also firmly believe that often what is not talked about is injurious to the community, whether it be family, congregation, or workplace.

Our congregation will be enriched by the contribution and presence of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. Their different (and similar) experiences of God, the church, spirituality and their reflections on the important questions in life will add to my life a dimension it might otherwise lack.”

Campus ministries:

“Support for LGBT rights is probably the most defining sign of an open and progressive religious institution. If you want to signal an open and affirming stance, get very public about welcoming us. Our campus has done this since 1978. It is responsible for significant financial

support and the willingness of faculty, staff, students, and community residents to serve on and work very hard on our Board.”

“You will, by including an ONA statement on your web site, program brochures, fliers, etc., make it easier for LGBT persons and their friends, family members, and allies (including pastors who want to refer students to a campus ministry) to find you and connect with you as a safe, welcoming, and affirming place.”

Note: These responses have been taken from various ONA Surveys and other Coalition ONA Program documents and publications in which people express personal responses to the “Why?” of ONA.

As you’ll note, individuals’ language varies - some mention a welcome to people who are “glb” others to those who are “glbt,” etc. Based on the [1985 General Synod ONA resolution](#), “sexual orientation” (glb) is the primary focus of Open and Affirming. Today, however, The Coalition also urges the inclusion of persons who identify as “transgender” (or those of all “gender identities”) in ONA processes and statements. Recognizing that all oppressions and liberations are interconnected, some churches choose to further broaden their processes and statements to include other characteristics as well (e.g., color, ability, age etc.).

2. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)

<http://www.mlp.org/article.php?story=2005071715043424>

Earn the "M" for your church: it's easy to become a More Light congregation

If you've looked through our [directory of welcoming churches](#), you've noticed that we have different letters designating different types of churches. "H" means that the church has affirmed a pro-LGBT hospitality statement, "D" means that the church has passed a dissent statement against the PCUSA's anti-LGBT policies, etc. The capital "M" is for More Light churches - churches whose sessions have formally voted to endorse the [mission statement](#) of MLP and declare themselves a More Light congregation.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, it's actually quite easy to become a More Light church. Here's how to do it in two easy steps:

1. Have your church session pass a motion that endorses the mission statement of MLP: "Following the risen Christ, and seeking to make the Church a true community of hospitality, the mission of More Light Presbyterians is to work for the full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people of faith in the life, ministry and witness of the Presbyterian Church (USA)."

Some sessions like to work through a period of congregational study on LGBT concerns before passing this motion, but for many churches, becoming More Light is an obvious step to take as part of your congregation's commitment to justice and equality.

2. Have your clerk of session send a letter or email message to MLP - see our [contact information](#) online. Annual church MLP membership dues are \$100, which you can send with your announcement letter to us if you like.

That's it, you're done! It's that easy.

Official More Light churches get a number of benefits:

- You "earn the M": we'll list you in our [online church directory](#) with an "M" by your church name, for More Light.
- We also list your church in our [Directory of More Light Member Churches](#).
- Your church becomes part of a national community of hope and equality - a network of churches that stand together to create an authentic and full welcome within an often-hostile denomination.
- You'll receive a print copy of our quarterly newsletter, the [More Light Update](#).
- We'll post an announcement and celebration of your new More Light status on our web site.
- As your church organizes LGBT-supportive events, we'll post news articles about your activities (with photos, if you can provide them) on our web site and in our periodic email update, [MLPnews](#).
- More Light churches get writeups in print in the pages of the [More Light Update](#), which features a More Light church profile in most issues.
- When your church is looking to fill a staff position, we'll list your job opening in our [jobs section](#), which is watched by people around the country who are looking for open positions at welcoming congregations.

For more information, take a look at our [resource page](#) on becoming a More Light congregation, and in particular take a look at the "[More Light on More Light](#)" document, which provides more detail beyond the thumbnail sketch provided here. Our field organizer [Michael Adee](#) is also ready and available to answer questions or assist any congregation that would like to organize a congregational discussion process.

At this point it's become obvious that soon, very soon, the PCUSA will eliminate its anti-LGBT policies and open the doors wider to the full participation of LGBT people. More Light churches are the leaders in this movement for justice and equality. You can help to make your church a leader: talk to your session about passing a More Light resolution so that you can take a stand and "earn the M" for your church.

3. ELCA <http://www.lcna.org/ric/about-reconciling-in-christ>

All people are welcome here. Why should we single out lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people?

The RIC Program doesn't seek special treatment for LGBT people. The reality is, however, that we live in a time where the voices of fear and misunderstanding often dominate the public discussion about sexuality. Tragically, these fearful voices are often all that are heard—and are sometimes taken to be *definitive* of what it means to be Christian. In fact, Lutherans Concerned continues to learn of Lutheran churches that shun LGBT people. Sometimes, even parents and other family of LGBT people are vilified.

As a result, it is assumed by many LGBT people that they are not welcome in any church unless told otherwise. Since even a general statement of welcome is heard as really meaning "everybody but me," it takes a special effort to communicate that a congregation is sincere in its welcome. The RIC Program seeks to make clearer the policy of congregations, synods, and other organizations where *all* people are welcome as fully participating members, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity or that of their children, siblings, and friends.

What is the Affirmation of Welcome?

The Affirmation of Welcome is central to the RIC program. It is simple, yet powerful in its witness. Any Lutheran group that adopts a statement that includes the naming of LGBT people as welcome to full participation is eligible to be designated as Reconciling in Christ after review by Lutherans Concerned. Making the Affirmation promotes a publicly inclusive ministry and helps heal the pain of doubt.

How do we become designated as RIC?

Most groups start the process of consideration by engaging in a study program or series of educational meetings. Hearing the experiences of GLBT people and their families often creates greater understanding and insights.

See [here](#) for a wonderful resource called "[Building an Inclusive Church: a Welcoming Toolkit](#)." Drawing upon twenty-five years of experience within a variety of Christian denominations, this Toolkit is a step-by-step guide to help facilitate a Welcoming Process in your local congregation. Biblically and theologically based, it uses tools of relational organizing, congregational assessment, conflict management, and change theory.

After completing a program of education, discussion, and mutual discernment, a congregation, synod, or other organization joins the program in one of several ways: by having its council (or equivalent body) approve the "Affirmation of Welcome" or by having a vote of the whole congregation. Once the Affirmation is adopted, the congregation, synod or organization sends a copy of the Affirmation statement, along with a signed letter, to LC/NA's Grassroots Organizer. After the Affirmation is reviewed and accepted, the congregation, synod or organization will be

added to the roster of RIC participants. The RIC roster is [displayed on our web site](#) and is distributed appropriately as a witness to the community and the church at large.

What will happen if we participate?

What you do once the Affirmation is adopted is up to your own congregation, synod or organization. Many churches post their Affirmation or include it in their bulletin. Others make an inclusive reference in their advertising or include the RIC Program in their annual budget. Once you adopt an Affirmation of Welcome, LC/NA will send you a resource called "[Your Church is RIC: Now What?](#)" a guide full of voluntary action steps for inclusive ministry.

Experience shows that any changes in your church or group will happen slowly, opening up individuals to healing and deep spiritual reconciliation. Perhaps parents with a gay son may finally be able to feel they are not guilty of failure in raising their child. Maybe a closeted lesbian member will bring her partner to church for the first time. A bisexual or transgender person, hearing of your congregation, might return to church after an absence of many years. It's amazing how the Holy Spirit works when we are willing to be an instrument of God's grace.

"All this is from God who reconciled us through Jesus Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." 2 Corinthians 5:18

A sample Affirmation of Welcome

As a community of the people of God, we are called to minister to all people in our world, knowing that the world is often an unloving place. Our world is a place of alienation and brokenness. Christ calls us to reconciliation and wholeness. We are challenged by the Gospel to be agents of healing within our society.

We affirm with the apostle Paul that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female" (Galatians 3:28). Christ has made us one. We acknowledge this reconciliation extends to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

Because gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons and their families are often scorned by society and alienated from the Church, we wish to make known our caring and concern. It is for this purpose that we affirm the following:

- that people of all sexual orientations and gender identities share the worth that comes from being unique individuals created by God;
- that people of all sexual orientations and gender identities are welcome within the membership of this congregation* upon making a common, public Affirmation of faith; and
- that as members of this congregation*, people of all sexual orientations and gender identities are expected and encouraged to share in the sacramental and general life of this congregation*.

4. EPISCOPALIAN <http://congregations.integrityusa.org/process>

Phase 1: Ready?

- Does your congregation already have a history of publicly welcoming and affirming lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender [LGBT] folk?
 - If the answer is NO, we strongly recommend you continue with Phase 1.
 - If the answer is YES, decide whether your congregation would benefit from continuing with Phase 1 or is ready to move to Phase 2.
- Attend a [Faith-Based Community Organizing workshop](#) offered by the [Institute of Welcoming Resources](#).
- Download and use IWR's [Building An Inclusive Church Toolkit](#) to evaluate, organize, educate, and prepare the congregation.

Phase 2: Set.

- Ask the vestry or annual meeting to adopt a public statement explicitly welcoming and affirming LGBT people. [Example statements can be found on page 28 of the [Building An Inclusive Church Toolkit](#).]

Phase 3: Go!

- Publish the statement.
- [Register](#) as an Integrity Believe Out Loud Episcopal Congregation.
- Work with [Integrity USA](#) to make your congregation even more welcoming and affirming.
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