



June 27, 2021

Why do we need to say we are Open and Affirming?

"We are a warm, open and welcoming congregation. Why do we need to say we are Open aNd Affirming?" No that 'and' spelled 'aNd' is not a typo. It is emphasized for ONA...Open aNd Affirming.

Every congregational profile has a section where a congregation indicates if it is affirming of various designations by our denomination. ONA is one of them. Without fail, congregations who are not ONA ask the previous question. Why?

I remember the former General Minister and President of our denomination Rev. John Thomas. He was addressing an annual meeting in a different Conference and what stood out for me the most was his statement that our understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is what leads us to hold the positions we hold. As a people of faith, the United Church of Christ is called to live out the Gospel in the world. We don't take positions and then look for biblical support for them. We sit with, ponder and grow in our understanding and application of the biblical texts that reveal for us how Jesus is calling us to live in the world. So, our "positions" on social justice "issues" is really our response and testimony to The Way of Jesus Christ in the world and our call as baptized disciples to do the same.

Back in the 90's I served Tabernacle United Church in Philadelphia. TAB made the prayerful decision to become an ONA congregation during the Interim season just before my arrival. When I interviewed with them, I asked where they saw the largest growth after becoming ONA. Their response surprised me at first. They said they grew more in the age group of infants to 5 year old children. Then they said, families wanted to raise their children in communities that were inclusive, welcoming and safe. Parents wanted to attend a congregation where their grown children who are Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex; would feel safe, affirmed and loved. TAB has been on the cutting edge of that hospitable, welcoming and affirming ministry ever since and their ministry has been richer for it.

When I was about 7 years old, my mother was an electrologist. I used to play receptionist in the front part of her office. Those were the days with the pink "While You Were Out" pads. I loved taking or making up messages for her. She had clients/patients mainly from dermatologists and other physicians. She was very intentional about a clinical approach instead of a beauty industry approach to permanent hair removal. One client was referred to her from a doctor who

specialized in gender reassignment surgery. This was in the very beginning stages of such surgeries.

One day a person left and I turned to my mom and said, "Mom, I thought that was a he but now he looks like a she. What is he?" Without missing a beat, my Jesus loving, Sunday School teacher, choir singing mother said, "She is trying to become who God created her to be." I said, "OK" and went on with my day. My mother saved lives. She didn't charge those clients because she knew they didn't have insurance for their surgery and this was a part of her gift to others.

The church should be a place where we are all trying to become who God created us to be. We are Open AND Affirming because we are not just opening the doors and "allowing" people to be in our congregations, we are called to welcome all who seek to learn, grow and serve in the Way of Jesus. In the Gospel of Matthew (22:36-40) we receive The Greatest Commandment from Jesus: **Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest? He said to them, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hand all the law and the prophets.** That's why we are Open aNd Affirming. It isn't a political statement. It is a testimony of love that is life giving. Thanks be to God! May it be so!

- Rev. Dr. Susan Minasian
 Interim ACM for Search and Call



Unique Opportunity to Attend General Synod

From July 11 – 18, 2021, Special Edition General Synod, will include powerful worship, not-to-miss keynote speakers, 50 workshops, youth programming and business sessions. Because it is 100% online, this makes it possible for everyone to attend! To accommodate different time zones, many sessions will take place in the afternoon and evenings.

A Congregational Challenge is being offered to encourage and promote participation from as many different congregations as possible. Although we never discourage healthy competition, we think the actual opportunity for you to attend a General Synod without having to travel is the important component. In order to support that thought we are offering the following assistance for you to attend General Synod.

The cost to sign up for General Synod as a visitor (non-delegate) is \$100. **The first 25 people to contact Sue Creswell by email (susan@psec.org) will have their entire \$100 paid for by the Conference.** The next 200 individuals who sign up for General Synod and submit to Sue Creswell their receipt, will receive a \$50 rebate on their \$100 registration fee. This is a wonderful opportunity for those who might not be able to afford attending a General Synod....possible!

