

UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns

Strategic Plan

2010–2013

Background

In 1985, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ accepted a resolution that called on congregations to declare themselves open to and affirming of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people in the full life and ministry of the church.

In response and to shepherd churches in this process, the organization that would later be named the UCC Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns began offering guidance and resources and established the means by which congregations might fulfill this resolution. In addition, the Coalition included a focus on ministry to youth and young adults and those who work with them.

The Coalition has seen significant changes in church and society over the past decades. These changes have included additional resolutions passed by the UCC General Synod that recognize and affirm transgender persons, the integration of LGBT issues and concerns into the portfolios of many of the UCC national staff, and an expansion in the number of those congregations who have gone through the open and affirming (ONA) process. Currently over 10% of UCC churches declare themselves to be open and affirming.

With these watershed changes have come additional openings for the Coalition to provide meaningful and prophetic witness to God's extravagant welcome in the UCC. The Coalition has expanded ways to work ecumenically and cooperatively through an emphasis on organizing and outreach; continued the work with young people and those who work with them; extended its relevance through work on issues of import to the community such as marriage equality, immigration, racial injustices, and other issues; and continued the ONA program's work within UCC settings, both to expand the number of churches that become ONA and to deepen the extravagant welcome of those who have already become ONA.

Currently, the Coalition, the LGBT community, and the United Church of Christ stand at a crossroads near the beginning of a new millennium. In this strategic plan, the Coalition turns its attention to the needs of the current day and the ways in which it continues to be called to witness the good news of God's extravagant welcome.

Mission

The UCC Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns is dedicated to living into Christ's call for love and justice by working to transform the United Church of Christ, Christianity, and society into an expression of God's extravagant welcome, especially for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and others who have felt excluded and alienated.

Vision

The UCC Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns envisions a church, and a world, in which no matter who a person is, or where they are on life's journey, they are extravagantly welcomed.

In partnership with others within and beyond the United Church of Christ, the Coalition is committed to building beloved community where diverse people join together to worship, grow, and dream.

This mission and vision will overlay and drive this plan. All activities and opportunities will be measured against this mission and vision. Only activities that build toward this mission and vision will be pursued. The degree to which an opportunity or potential activity helps the UCC Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns create the envisioned result will determine the priority level of that activity.

GUIDING VALUES

The UCC Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns' work is guided by the following core values:

1. Extravagant Welcome

The Coalition commits to embody a welcome that includes everyone and to interact with competency across the lines that can keep us apart, such as race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and other aspects of potential difference. We acknowledge that the table is not ours. God has set the table, and it belongs to all of us who are both strangers and children of God. We recognize that practicing *Extravagant Welcome* may bring us beyond our own comfort level. We commit to having the willingness and commitment to live and worship in this place of tension.

2. Transformation

We strive to live Christ-centered lives that celebrate the divinity in each person and their unique path. Through our journey to live authentic lives that honors the power of love, we respond to God's call.

3. Equality and Justice

We commit to bringing about access, full participation, and fairness for all in the life of the church and its rituals and to apply these same principles in the policies and practices of the Coalition.

4. Pastoral Presence

The work of the Coalition will be grounded in prayer, meditation, and song. We will witness and claim the spirit that undergirds our work and engage in a practice of advocacy that comes out of a quality of care that recognizes the potential consequences of our actions and is concerned with the whole health and well-being of the individuals and the communities with whom we interact.

5. Courage

The Coalition will practice courage by demonstrating the willingness to take bold steps and actions and by being among the first to stand for a principle or against a wrong.

6. Compassion and Empathy

We commit to remain open to others' pain and experiences and to provide space for authentic witness and the sharing of stories as the context for solidarity.

7. Humility and Accountability:

The Coalition will pursue self-reflection to insure that it is living and following through on these values and commitments to the Body by developing, maintaining, and modeling relationships that express *Extravagant Welcome* and ONA values.

STRATEGIC ORGANIZING CRITERIA

The UCC Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns has observed that, despite positive and transformational policies and culture change at the national level, there is currently a disconnection and gap between this environment at the national level and how local UCC congregations are living into the promise of *Extravagant Welcome* for LGBT people and others who feel excluded and alienated.

In executing the work of this plan, the following Strategic Criteria will guide the Coalition's work.

1. The Coalition will articulate and disseminate a transformative worldview based on its core frame of *Extravagant Welcome* in a way that activates participants' key beliefs, values, and convictions; elevates and promotes core themes in all that it does; links issues to a broader social and faith agenda; shapes public debate and thinking; and challenges the dominant worldview that creates fragmentation in the church and in the world.
2. The Coalition will analyze and distinguish policy and cultural issues at multiple organizational levels within the church (i.e., national, conference, and local congregations) and determine the most strategic use of its resources to impact change at the right organizational level.
3. In the ONA program, the Coalition will attend to local congregations that are at different points in the ONA journey including those who are:

- Not yet ONA
 - Living open and affirming, but not ONA
 - ONA but need support to live into *Extravagant Welcome*
4. The Coalition will communicate its plans and actions with its stakeholders in a proactive fashion.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The following Strategic Directions will guide The UCC Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns work and priorities over the next three years. These strategic directions will be considered in developing the organization's program priorities and annual budget.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1: National Gathering

- Utilize the gathering's keynote addresses and worship services to disseminate the church's framing of *Extravagant Welcome* and its connection to the ONA process.
- Provide networking and support for LGBT people, their family, and friends and those working toward embodying *Extravagant Welcome*.
- Provide tools to be used to expand welcome at the local level.
- Provide developmentally appropriate skills to help people live into *Extravagant Welcome*.
- Intentionally utilize National Gathering, and all Coalition events, to live into and model creating a community that demonstrates *Extravagant Welcome*.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2: Increase intentional partnership with denominational staff to deepen the connection between the ONA project and the denomination's focus on *Extravagant Welcome* to help bring ONA to scale.

- Form deep and ongoing partnerships with national ministries and others to contribute knowledge and experience and provide input into the work of the national church regarding inclusion of ONA values and their connection to the church's goal of extending *Extravagant Welcome* to all (e.g., integration of LGBT concerns and ONA values into ASIST suicide-prevention training).
- Partner with Conference leaders to assess the developmental needs of their regions and local congregations to support ONA values and bring ONA involvement to scale throughout the denomination.
- Continue to provide expertise to develop and disseminate ONA materials to support congregations in their ONA study process.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3: Support LGBT and questioning youth.

- Provide pastoral care to support vulnerable youth.
- Empower youth and young adults.
- Support skill building to assist youth to formulate responses to anti-LGBT messages.
- Engage and support UCC-related universities and campus and youth ministers to reach out to and support LGBT and questioning youth.

- Provide education for the general public so that they are able to provide extravagant welcome to LGBT youth.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4: Support current ONA congregations to live fully into *Extravagant Welcome*.

- Gather data about what is currently occurring in ONA congregations to benchmark what inclusion means in various locations and how it is being practiced at the local congregational level (e.g., congregation's history of having LGBT pastor, performance of same-gender commitment ceremonies, support of LGBT youth and young adults, gender-neutral bathrooms, etc.).
- ONA consultants provide follow-up support for ONA congregations to create plans to address "gaps" so that congregations can live more fully into consistently practicing an open and affirming *Extravagant Welcome*.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 5: Transgender inclusion in new ONA congregational statements and support for current ONA congregations to live into the fullness of *Extravagant Welcome*.

- Announce a deadline for new ONA congregations to include transgender inclusion to their ONA statements.
- Provide education and materials to existing ONA congregations to support their study of trans inclusion and the addition of trans inclusion to their welcoming statements.
- Develop a signifier to identify which ONA congregations are trans-inclusive.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 6: Extend *Extravagant Welcome* to the broader community.

- Engage in ecumenical partnerships to build the welcoming-church movement.
- Support ONA congregations to be active in the political process regarding LGBT issues.
- Support participation in Building Inclusive Church Trainings (with the Welcoming Church Program Leaders).

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 7: Enhance the Coalition's organizational effectiveness and sustainability.

- The Coalition recognizes that commitment to values, vision, and program cannot alone ensure success. The Coalition is committed to building the organizational and professional skills to implement and support these efforts. The Coalition believes that investing resources in organizational capacity is a prerequisite for successful programs and services.
- Working together, the board, staff, and Coalition members will commit honestly and professionally to assess the Coalition's capacity to carry out its mission and programs and to identify potential barriers to its collective success and achievement. This will include, but not be limited to, increased integration of the Coalition's fundraising and organizing strategies and nurturing a climate of self-care.