

Iridesce: The Living Apology Project Final Report

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BACKGROUND

The United Church of Canada has had a long history of challenging itself to examine issues that have allowed it to explore how it might respect, support, encourage, and engage the gifts of all of its members in the life and work of the whole Church. Reports on sexuality that were compiled in the 1980s, lead to the 1988 Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality decision at General Council 32, that “all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, who profess their faith in Jesus Christ are welcome to be or become members of The United Church of Canada” and that “all members of the United Church are eligible to be considered for ordered ministry.”

In 2009, the 40th General Council, in response to a perceived lack of movement on the 1999 consultation with LGBTQ+ ministry personnel and the continued emergence of challenges related to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ and Two-Spirit members, mandated a National Consultation on Homophobia and Heterosexism in the Church. The final report from this consultation was presented to the General Council Executive in January of 2012. This final report speaks to the work undertaken in the following way, “The participants in this consultation believed that the goal of creating an inclusive church is a broad agenda that is critical to the future development and soul of the United Church. Ultimately, the participants reminded us that inclusion is not about providing some members of the Church with special treatment, but rather recognizing all people, including people in the sexual orientation and gender identity continuums, as vital members of the family of God.”¹ Iridesce: The Living Apology Project (Iridesce) grew out of the 2012 consultation as a way for the church to examine, through the sharing of stories, lament, education, and prayer, what next steps were needed and how the Church might best move forward.

After further consultation and consideration, it was felt that a process was needed to determine what an apology might look like. As a result, in 2015, the 42nd General Council approved a motion (GC42 2015-060) directing the General Secretary to partner with Affirm United/S’affirmer Ensemble to create the process of a [Living Apology](#) art installation project “as a vehicle for dialogue, story-telling, education and reconciliation with persons who identify as sexual or gender diverse including but not limited to Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Two-Spirited, Queer persons.”

This project would invite the church “into a journey of dialogue and reconciliation with LGBTQ2S+ persons, that would involve: creative opportunities for conversation, worship and education; and opportunities to explore concepts such as lament, reconciliation and justice, to be reported and celebrated at the 43rd General Council (2018) in acknowledgement of the 30th Anniversary of the 1988 decision”.

¹ Brian Mitchell-Walker, GLBTT National Consultation (United Church of Canada, 2012) 12.

Iridesce: The Living Apology Project was launched in September 2017 in partnership with Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble and the church—as a mechanism to gather personal stories of being: trans, bisexual, Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, queer (or another gender or sexual identity/expression) within the United Church past or present; and, allies, friends, family members, ministers and community members to LGBTQ+ and Two-Spirit persons within the United Church. The project welcomed stories from 1925 up until the 1988 decision, and the almost thirty years since then.

In 2018, the General Council Executive approved a motion (GCE 13 - PMM 15) to extend The Living Apology Project, to report to the spring 2020 meeting of the Executive of the General Council. Due to COVID-19 this was extended to the fall of 2020.

The motion requested that the Executive / General Secretary appoint a group to work with the outcomes of The Living Apology Project, to offer an apology to the LGBTQ+ and Two-Spirit community at the Denominational Council in 2021 (rescheduled to 2022). The approved motion also reaffirmed the church's endorsement of the Affirming Ministries Program and invited all communities of faith to participate; and directed the General Secretary, General Council to develop resources for ministers, church leadership, and the wider church in their ministry with LGBTQ+ and Two-Spirit communities that: offer pastoral care, create opportunities for healing and reconciliation, and demonstrate respectful engagement in conflict/disagreement.

METHODOLOGY

Iridesce was intended to be a vehicle in which the entire Church would have the space and availability to share their stories, feelings, and thoughts around the events leading up the General Council vote in 1988, the “Issue” years 1988-1998, and from 1998 to the present day.

The Iridesce project was created to be intentionally grassroots and as such it was hoped that the ownership of this project would be held by the entire Church and not by one specific group within the Church. Affirm United was asked, as partner, to take lead on hiring, supervision, and budget management, for the project (funded by the church and in partnership with GCO staff). As a result, one of the questions that emerged at the beginning of the process was; should the LGBTQ2S+ community be taking the lead in this project? Was it appropriate to ask an oppressed group within the Church to provide leadership and understanding of this issue to the entire Church, or is that just another way that a marginalized group becomes re-traumatized?

The project was intentional in its invitation for participation from the whole Church. Iridesce was explicit in its desire to be open to hearing the stories of affirmation around the vote in 1988 and since, open to hearing from those who struggled with the vote of the Church in 1988, and from those who were in outright disagreement with the vote. In that vein, the invitation stated explicitly that this project wanted to hear from all members of the Church regarding the impact of the 1988 decision. According to the interim report of Iridesce, the project “was opened as a conversation with the church at the grassroots, with a strong value on personal relationships. Statements and directions were responses to emerging questions and issues—and always

considered drafts. This work-in-progress style of project experimented and challenged usual hierarchical structures and logic-based work flow.”²

Historically much work in the church had been top down, and there can be an issue with information not filtering down to the grassroots level. In the Iridesce Project the conversations were treated as emergent conversations, in an emerging process, with each conversation not having a literal agenda but rather having the agenda emerge out of the lively conversations and interactions that took place.

The intentionality and explicitness of the invitation was to encourage dialogue and story-telling from all members of the Church in order for the Church to have a fuller picture of the results and ramifications of the vote in 1988, and to help the Church to make decisions as to how it might proceed in response.

Iridesce By the Numbers³

- Throughout the project, 3,677 people were reached through workshops, worship, and interviews conducted in communities of faith, youth events, theological schools, one on one interviews, and Conference AGMs.
- Ten of the thirteen Conferences, within the previous structure of the Church, received a visit during the first two years (2017-18).
- There were 270⁴ stories, reflections, prayers, laments, poems, and artwork collected from individuals throughout the course of the project.
- 57 testimonials were gathered and published from participants about the project itself.
- United Church media coverage included six video interviews, one video invitation by then Moderator Jordan Cantwell, and three articles published in United Church magazines.
- By the end of 2019 there were 5,582 people who had visited the Iridesce website at least once during the time period from 2017-2019.
- Submissions to the project included: eight original worship services, sermons, prayers and pray-poems; two original hymns; and ten theological essays.
- 335 people were members on the Iridesce Facebook Group.⁵
- A total of 318 people subscribed to the Iridesce E-Newsletter.
- A Theatre Play was written and performed at GC43 in 2018 reaching over 500 people in person, and viewed 793 times on YouTube.
- A total of 47 volunteers were involved with the project, including 13 families who provided billeting, and one official chaplain who supported the Project Coordinator.

FINDINGS

² Aaron Miechkota, “Iridesce: Living Apology Project” (United Church of Canada, December 2019) 1.

³ All statistics were compiled in the “Interim Report of the Iridesce: Living Apology Project,” Aaron Miechkota, December 2019, page 2.

⁴ It is important to note that although the project was intentional and explicit in the invitation to hear all stories, reflections, or thoughts around that time in the church of the 270 submissions there was only one that was considered to not be in favour of that decision. The individual who submitted these comments continues to disagree with that decision to this day, as well as some of the decisions that came later in the Church.

⁵ 335 members and 150 regularly active members of the Iridesce Facebook Group

The findings of the Iridesce project have been categorized in the following way: affirmations in/for the Church, the response of the Church, and the resulting ramifications for individuals within the Church. There also seems to be an understanding that for the Church, what transpired in 1988, was the culmination of the work, that the work was completed at that point. The following group of findings are more foundational in nature and include: a sense of privilege/entitlement within the Church, compromise and concession as a way to keep unity, and finally how the Church has addressed conflict or disagreement.

Affirmations for the Church

There is an acknowledgement in the Church that the events of 1988 were both a challenge and a blessing. In a number of ways, the Church was on the forefront of many of these conversations and as such we could not follow the lead of another denomination to help us through this time. Our only guide was found in our faith in Jesus. Those who were involved in these conversations brought forward the truest expression of their faith, as they understood it at that time. The work that was done by the Church was, therefore, faith-filled and needs to be celebrated for its importance in the life and work of the Church, as well as its importance in civil society. It was important work which was and continues to be extremely transformative for many people in the Church and should be acknowledged as such.

In addition, the vote occurred in the midst of the AIDS crisis. As one theologian wrote: "After the doubling-down on the ostracizing of the LGBTQ2S+ community in the wake of the AIDS crisis, to state that there existed no barriers to the baptized queer community regarding participation in the life of the Church was nothing short of 'gutsy.' For this work, I am thankful."⁶

There is also a great deal of gratitude within the Church for those individuals who struggled with the events at General Council in 1988 but chose to stay within the Church and continue to bring their gifts and skills to the Church. As Iridesce has shown, this goes beyond gratitude, "The project has identified a continued need to acknowledge the pain of those who wrestled deeply with their faith and chose to stay despite disagreeing with the decision. To acknowledge the pain of those who wrestled deeply with their faith and found no commonalities to continue their relationships with the United Church."⁷

In the years since 1988 many LGBTQ2S+ people, family, friends and allies, have found a home in the United Church.⁸

- I am a refugee who feels more and more at home here in the UCC. I am grateful for a church who recognizes the need to talk about its past failings. I am grateful for a church that seeks to build relationships and connections between its many and diverse members. And I am grateful for those who led the UCC to the decision in 1988, and for those who continue the discussion today. GRATITUDE. – Svinda
- I am a trans non-binary person who was introduced into the United Church of Canada when I met my amazing and wonderful partner. I wasn't expecting to be so openly accepted and it fills my heart to know that I can love God & be proud of my gender

⁶ See Appendix 1 for Morgan's story as well as quotes from additional stories.

⁷ Aaron Miechkota, "Interim Report of the Iridesce: Living Apology Project" (United Church of Canada, December 2019) 5.

⁸ See Appendix 1 for more quotes from Iridesce stories

identity.... As someone who was against organized religion because I didn't believe I could be accepted, I'm happy to admit I was wrong. – Dani

- I think, finally, that the very appearance of “Iridesce: The Living Apology Project” is a sign that the UCC is attempting to learn from its past and to be a more loving, compassionate and embracing kind of denomination. Surely this is good news! – Scott
- I am a parent of a trans child. I am relatively new to the United Church, but when my child came out, our church was the place she came out. The church was so amazing and so accepting. Sadly, to say, my parents and family were not. Myself, wife and our child have basically been disowned by my parents. Without the support and help of the United Church I would be very lost. – Wes

Response of the Church

Iridesce has helped to highlight that there have been many ways in which the Church might have fallen short both before and after the General Council meeting in 1988. One of these pieces was that, although there were educational resources disseminated to the church, there was no way to ensure that these resources were used. As one participant stated, “The church we were attending at the time had not dealt with any of the resources on sexuality prepared by the UCC prior to 1988, nor any of the study material prepared on ordination of homosexuals. – Anonymous”⁹

Even if a congregation was going to use the resources provided, there appeared to be little in the way of support or guidance on using the resources, “Neither at the Conference level or from the national staff. There really was nothing. I wish there had been more guidance on procedure of introducing this to our congregations and supporting us as we had these conversations in our churches.”¹⁰ There was also a feeling that those who did engage in the resources did so because they already were in agreement with the issue to begin with, “My discovery was only those who agreed were open to the studies.”¹¹

There was a feeling that the Church was ill-prepared to entertain the 1988 vote, “I wish there had been, or rather that the General Council had included, training sessions on how to handle ‘the Issue’... or how to deal with the fall-out from the ’88 decision (a year before it came about). I feel ‘they’ needed to think it through. I don’t disagree with ‘the decision’ but I didn’t feel prepared for the fall-out that came from it.”¹² Even after the vote there were more missing pieces. One of these missing pieces was the lack of support from the Church for those who returned to their congregations, presbyteries, and conferences after the General Council in 1988. There was little support in offering ways to help them engage in conversations around what had happened at the General Council meeting.

⁹ Anonymous, *Iridesce: The Living Apology Project Memories, Stories, Prayers, Laments and Poems* (2017-2020), “1988: A deeper understanding” (United Church of Canada, 2020) 52.

¹⁰ *Iridesce: The Living Apology Project Memories, Stories, Prayers, Laments and Poems* (2017-2020), “Scott’s Story” (United Church of Canada, 2020) 160.

¹¹ Rev. Janet Walker, *The Living Apology Project Memories, Stories, Prayer, Laments and poems* (2017-2020), “From Rev. Janet Walker” (United Church of Canada, 2020) 59.

¹² D, *Iridesce: The Living Apology Project Memories, Stories, Prayers, Laments and Poems* (2017-2020), “I wish there had been training sessions” (United Church of Canada, 2020) 103.

“The delegates from Kent presbytery went thinking that they were going to vote NO; however, even the delegates from Kent who went to vote no....voted yes, all but one. Coming back to presbytery was very difficult. I remember people sharing experiences, saying that it was so clear that the Spirit was telling them that they have to vote in favour. It was like a conversion experience for people. They said that in that moment-in-time it was like the Holy Spirit just showed up for people. I remember people coming back and sharing this vulnerable experience of voting in favour. And then someone got up and said, “If you went here would you just change your mind, if you went there would you just change your mind...you betrayed us.”¹³

Not only were clergy and members facing the conflict within local congregations, but they also had to face the anger being expressed by individuals, clergy, and other churches within their local communities.

Resulting Ramifications for Individuals within the Church

One of the other important findings from the Iridesce project was around the theme of support and safety in the church and the resulting ramifications to members of the Church on both sides of this issue. Immediately following the General Council in 1988, there was a perceived lack of support for members of the LGBTQ2S+ community within the Church, “There was really no institutional support for LGBTQIA2S+ order of ministry folks.”¹⁴ There were, and still are, feelings of not being safe in the Church for members of the LGBTQ2S+ community, “So, 16 years after 1988, there wasn’t acceptance of me as a gay minister. There was still a long way to go.”¹⁵

According to the participants of Iridesce, these experiences continue to this day, “I have heard today still tell of hatred, violence, prejudice and discrimination, especially directed to transgendered people. They seem to be the next new targets. What have we learned since 1988?”¹⁶

These feelings also extended to those who found themselves on the other side of the issue, “Many people who were not thrilled about the 1988 decision but stayed in the church felt muzzled, afraid to speak their point of view.”¹⁷ Feelings of safety allow an individual to live into their whole selves, while feelings that one is not safe jeopardizes the ability of individuals to live authentically. Similarly, for members of the LGBTQ2S+ community the tensions in the Church discouraged them from living authentically too. “I feel sorry that it was on ‘your’ individual

¹³ Sue Browning, *Iridesce: The Living Apology Project Memories, Stories, Prayers, Laments and Poems* (2017-2020), “Remembering the impacts around 1988 for my church, my family, and myself.” (United Church of Canada, 2020) 14.

¹⁴ Anonymous, *Iridesce: The Living Apology Project Memories, Stories, Prayers, Laments and Poems* (2017-2020), “From 1988, Fear and Anger at the Institution and Its Representatives” (United Church of Canada, 2020) 74.

¹⁵ Rev. Jenni Leslie, *Iridesce: The Living Apology Project Memories, Stories, Prayers, Laments and Poems* (2017-2020), “My year of pain” (United Church of Canada, 2020) 108.

¹⁶ Anonymous, *Iridesce: The Living Apology Project Memories, Stories, Prayers, Laments and Poems* (2017-2020), “1988 and trans people today.” (United Church of Canada, 2020) 49.

¹⁷ Diane, *Iridesce: The Living Apology Project Memories, Stories, Prayers, Laments and Poems* (2017-2020), “Lingering fear and trauma over 1988” (United Church of Canada, 2020) 85.

experience that United Church congregations made their move to be inclusive...even after '88 I'm sure, you had to choose between being exactly who you were and staying involved with your congregations I'd like to thank you for your grace, your kindness, your resilience, but I don't think that will bring you much comfort-that was not supposed to be your job."¹⁸

From the previous findings through the Iridesce project, we found what appears to be a lack of support in the Church. One might wonder if there might have been a sense in the Church that the work had been already been completed, "Once you do the work of Affirm what does it mean? Once we have been through the process, been through everything that the church has been through on this issue, the real work begins and this work is not done. This new life will require nurture, feeding, caring, love and everything else that fosters growth. Lack of love results in failure to thrive."¹⁹ If there was an understanding that the work had been completed, then that would explain the lack of support in the Church. Yet the findings of Iridesce speak to the understanding that, like many issues in the church, 1988 was only the beginning of the process and there is much work left to do, "Our Church is on a journey, not unlike each of us, evolving and growing.....maturing."²⁰

Not only is this process ongoing, there was a learning within Iridesce that the issues facing the LGBTQ2S+ are part of a much larger picture. There is a recognition of the intersectional nature of oppression and privilege and how the experiences facing the LGBTQ2S+ are faced by many other marginalized and privileged groups within the Church, "So, this is a woman thing? A black thing? An age thing, a style thing? It is some kind of intersection of all of these things?"²¹

Yet even as the Church struggled while working its way through this time, it appeared to some people as if these conversations around the place of LGBTQ2S+ persons and the Church were not needed or that they should have ended with the General Council meeting in Victoria. That sentiment is summarized in the following comment, "Do we really want to open this can of worms."²² In many ways, for members of the LGBTQ2S+ community, these statements can be perceived to be coming from a place of entitlement or privilege because, for LGBTQ2S+ members of the church, there is no "moving on" from who they are in the church. To move on would be to over-simplify these issues and not allow the Church to explore the deeper underlying issues of who was impacted, and how, after the 1988 vote.

Our *Song of Faith* speaks to the importance of grace in the life and work of the Church; "Challenging it to live by grace rather than entitlement." (*Song of Faith*, 2006) One of the recurring themes that had been a part of the Church even before the General Council in 1988 was

¹⁸ Mary McNairnay, *Iridesce: The Living Apology Project Memories, Stories, Prayers, Laments and Poems* (2017-2020), "I feel sorry that it was on you..." (United Church of Canada, 2020) 61.

¹⁹ Cpt. Niles, *Iridesce: The Living Apology Project Memories, Stories, Prayers, Laments and Poems* (2017-2020), "Canadian Armed Forces chaplain responds pastorally to all God's people" (United Church of Canada, 2020) 25.

²⁰ Anonymous, *Iridesce: The Living Apology Project Memories, Stories, Prayers, Laments and Poems* (2017-2020) "From Connie" (United Church of Canada, 2020) 182.

²¹ Sue, *Iridesce: The Living Apology Project Memories, Stories, Prayers, Laments and Poems* (2017-2020), "Interview with Sue" (United Church of Canada, 2020) 125.

²² Karen, *Iridesce: The Living Apology Project Memories, Stories, Prayers, Laments and Poems* (2017-2020), "The Can of Worms" (United Church of Canada, 2020) 37.

a sense that we need to “move on” as a Church and that the Church has spent enough time examining issues around sexuality and LGBTQ2S+ inclusion. However, “‘sexual issues’ would continue to be discussed at General Councils well into the next decade, as would heated decisions about sexuality and sexual orientation. Conferences and congregations from across the country expressed frustration that the National Church was mandating seemingly endless and difficult conversations about sexuality *for* the whole church, without this being the desire *of* the whole church.”²³ This feeling, for many, persists to this day and this project has illustrated that these are current thoughts for some individuals in the Church. Some of the responses from Iridesce highlight this way of thinking. “It is not necessary to dredge up the past; We need to put this behind us and move on; I am much more interested in moving on than in dwelling on past wrongs done to people such as me and my congregations (left the UCC).”²⁴

At Church union in 1925 the Church became focused on the unity of the whole and was founded under the principals of concession and compromise. As the Church continued to live into this vision of itself, it became more difficult to engage in conversations around difference. Now in 2020 we understand the concession and compromise are highly rooted in power and privilege, also called entitlement. In regards to the theme around entitlement, when we speak of engagement with the question of “moving on,” it indicates that, in some ways, many in the United Church of Canada continue to hold tight to a narrative that came into being with church union in 1925. This narrative continues to hold sway over how we exist as a Church today. Phyllis D. Airhart in the prologue to her book *A Church With The Soul Of A Nation* stated, in regards to the formation of the Church, that “The next step was obvious: to set aside the doctrinal differences of the past by professing a ‘common faith’ that emphasized their theological harmony.”²⁵

The implications of this cultural history, while useful in the past have not been useful in addressing our current challenges. “Instead, we seem to have retreated into a state of permanent pastoral care, in which being soothing and kind-hearted has taken the place of being prophetic and provocative, and I think it has diminished us as a denomination.”²⁶ It is this fundamental disconnect that contains within it the opportunity to challenge the Church to grow in a new way and to exist in a new way, if only we would engage in those conversations, but that has proven to be a challenge in the Church,

- “I lament that the Presbyteries that clung to their comfort, misusing and abusing policies and procedures to crush those who sought a newer vision. I lament those Courts of the Church that stood back and said, ‘but it is our policy’ as another person was burnt at the stake. I lament those persons who were spoiled and selfish, and I lament that they were not called on it. I lament the leadership abdicated its

²³ Samantha Cavanaugh, “Iridesce: Archival Research Report (United Church of Canada, December 2019) 17.

²⁴ Carolyn Hoessler, “Final Report on Iridesce Project” (United Church of Canada, 2019) 4.

²⁵ Phyllis D. Airhart, *A Church With The Soul Of A Nation* (McGill-Queen’s University Press: Montreal, 2014) xviii.

²⁶ Anonymous, Iridesce: The Living Apology Project Memories, Stories, Prayers, Laments and Poems (2017-2020), “Alice’s Story” (United Church of Canada, 2020) 187.

responsibility to love and said, ‘there is nothing we can do’ when there was everything they could do.”²⁷

Regarding the period around the 1988 General Council, there was a sense that the unity of the church was what was important over and above all else, even for groups like the Community of Concern, “The Community of Concern understood themselves to be “within the mainstream” of the United Church, and were organized around the goal of fighting for “the unity and well-being of our Church in the midst of the present disruption” caused by the NCG’s Report.”²⁸

In the aftermath of the vote at the General Council meeting in Victoria in 1988, the Church struggled with how it was to engage in difficult conversations and so appeared to continue to live into its history of concession and compromise after that General Council meeting. This is shown by the response of the national church to the divisions that were emerging after the General Council meeting in 1988, “What is clearly apparent is that immediately after the 1988 General Council, the National Church was preoccupied with: attempting to keep the institution of the church intact, calming the Community of Concern, and counteracting the economic boycotts and threats of disbanding that congregations across the country were issuing.”²⁹

This continued on in the proceeding years as individuals within the Church seemed to struggle with finding a way forward as is illustrated from this excerpt from the “Iridesce: Archival Research Report” regarding an incident in 1990: “General Secretary Howard Mills made a number of statements during this period, perhaps the most impactful having to do with comments he made in an interview when asked about the Community of Concern. After being quoted in the publication *Credo* as having said that the COC was “very dangerous,” and “seemingly demonic or possessed,” Gordon Ross (on behalf of himself and other clergy members who were members of the COC) filed a \$1 million libel suit against Mills and the United Church of Canada.³⁰ Mills argued that he had been misquoted, and his statements to *Credo* were withdrawn. Ross and Mills made a mutually agreed upon statement to the Church and public media on May 25, 1990 that announced the withdrawal of Mills’ words, as well as Ross’ termination of legal action.³¹ This issue, the challenge of deep conversations within the Church, continues to be felt today in many places in the Church and this has important ramifications for the Church, “At the same time, however, the battles of 1988 left behind one legacy that I think has not served us well—a legacy of fearfulness of conflict.”³²

In reviewing all of the information generated through Iridesce, it appears as if this focus on the unity of the Church has prevented the Church from engaging in deep meaningful, difficult conversations on a Church-wide level. A result of this has been that the Church, as a whole, has

²⁷ Anonymous, *Iridesce: The Living Apology Project Memories, Stories, Prayer, Lament and Poems* (2017-2020), “I Lament” (United Church of Canada, 2020) 150.

²⁸ Letter from Bill Fritz (chairperson for the Community of Concern) and Ken Barker (Secretary for the COC) to all members and clergy in the United Church of Canada, 1988.

²⁹ Samantha Cavanaugh, “Iridesce: Archival Research Report (United Church of Canada, December 2019) 11.

³⁰ Gordon Ross’ lawsuit against defendants Howard Mills and The United Church of Canada, Outerbridge Barristers & Solicitors, March 1990.

³¹ Joint Statement to Media from The United Church of Canada, May 25, 1990.

³² Anonymous, *Iridesce: The Living Apology Project Memories, Stories, Prayers, Laments and Poems* (2017-2020), “Alice’s Story” (United Church of Canada, 2020) 187.

not developed skills that will enable it to engage in conflict within the Church in healthy and productive ways. This persists to this day in the courts of the Church.

It seems as if we still are not sure how, as a Church, to overcome our fears and enter into difficult conversations. Had we been able to have those conversations in 1988 there was still more support required to allow the Church to move forward in a healthy way. One participant noted that there was, “a sense of fear of causing another split over a controversial issue-almost a reaction to the trauma of 1988 and the succeeding years. This feeling was underlying much in the church. Fear of losing members, fears of losing financial support, fear of the demise of the church, fear of argument, fear of disagreement... a form of PTSD for the entire United Church as a result of the 1988 schism in the church.”³³

Theology

“We are called together by Christ as a community of broken but hopeful believers, loving what he loved, living what he taught, striving to be faithful servants of God in our time and place.... The church has not always lived up to its vision. It requires the Spirit to reorient it, helping it to live an emerging faith while honouring tradition, challenging it to live by grace rather than entitlement, for we are called to be a blessing to the earth. We sing of God’s good news lived out, a church with purpose: faith nurtured and hearts comforted, gifts shared for the good of all, resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize, fierce love in the face of violence, human dignity defended, members of a community held and inspired by God, corrected and comforted, instrument of the loving Spirit of Christ, creation’s mending. We sing of God’s mission.” – *Song of Faith*, 2006

The Iridesce Project included the collection of a number of theological and academic writings (see <https://www.iridesce.ca/theology>). Each work is unique and explores theological perspectives in gender and sexual diversity and expression. All academic work is copyright of the author. In addition, a variety of spirituality and worship resources were collected (see <https://www.iridesce.ca/spirituality>).

The following was submitted to Iridesce by Morgan Bell, a theology student at the time of his submission.³⁴

We read in 1 Peter: 14-15: “Even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.”

That is to say, as followers of Jesus Christ we must account for the entirety of our lives – including our convictions and our subsequent actions – in light of our faith in him. As I found myself beginning to wrestle with why it was that I believed what I believed – and I certainly believed that the inclusion of queer Christians was “right” in light of the God revealed in Jesus – I realized that I had to abandon my preconceived notions about “rights” that were

³³ Diane, Iridesce: The Living Apology Project Memories, Stories, Prayers, Laments and Poems (2017-2020), “Lingering fear and trauma over 1988” (United Church of Canada, 2020) 85.

³⁴ “A Theology Student Reflect” by Morgan Bell <https://www.iridesce.ca/theology>

somehow normative or self-evident aside from God-in-Christ and to allow “Jesus, crucified and risen: our Judge and our Hope” to take the center of my theological consciousness from which all ethical and social considerations find their bearing. Certainly, this seemed at first to be a “non-position” – and perhaps it was – yet in the end, I must say that I am grateful that I have and am taking such a posture. For I truly believe that it is only through Jesus Christ that the acceptance and full inclusion of our queer siblings in the Church are intelligible

As shared in [an Iridesce story by Ken](#), “And in the very place where it was said, ‘You are not my people, ’there they shall be called children of the living God.” Romans 9:26 (also in Hosea 1:10)

The Issue of an Apology from the Church

Should the Church offer an apology? There is no easy, quick answer to this question. In responding, any answer will be multi-layered and nuanced, rather than a straight-forward, yes or no. It is important to consider whether the Church is in a position to make an apology to the LGBTQ2S+ community, as any apology must be followed up with actions that underscore the validity and honesty of any such apology. According to Aaron Lazare, a leading scholar on apology, an apology is not a onetime event but rather the agreement and understanding that one enters into a place of transformation of future being, “Apology is more than an acknowledgement of an offense together with an expression of remorse. It is an ongoing commitment by the offending party to change his or her behaviour.”³⁵ Is the Church in a position to offer an apology when the reality is that not every community of faith is open to being engaged in the transformational aspect of any such apology. According to Lazare there are times when offering an incomplete apology might be worse than offering no apology at all, “an apology that fails is potentially more destructive than no apology at all. With no apology, one can hope for a future apology, but with a failed apology, one often concludes the matter is hopeless.”³⁶

There might also be logistical implications for offering an apology to the LGBTQ2S+ in terms of who offers any such apology and who receives the apology on behalf of the LBT2SQ+ community. One of the challenges is that the LGBTQ2S+ community is not one single community but is rather made up of persons with diverse experiences, understandings, and relationships to the Church. There are many in the Church who have lived experiences from 1988 and as such have deep hurt and laments over that time in the Church. There are many others who are members of this community but have a very different experience in the Church. Who would accept an apology on behalf of all of these different groups? There are also those who are not in the community, such as family members, friends, and allies who were deeply hurt by the events at and following the General Council vote of 1988, do they also receive an apology?

In place of an apology, the Church might consider offering a statement of lament to the Church itself. This statement could recognize, give voice to, the inability of the Church to enter into deep meaningful, transformational conversation around disagreement. Acknowledge the Church’s challenges in dealing with conflict and disagreement and how this has stopped the Church from

³⁵ Aaron Lazare, *On Apology* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2004) 263.

³⁶ *ibid*, 73.

moving forward on the transformational work of justice in its own midst. This statement could be patterned after the Call to Purpose that was issued for the 39th General Council.³⁷

If the people of the United Church feel called to an apology, it is strongly recommended that there be a consultation with wise and knowledgeable people and resources pertaining to “apologies by institutions”. From Aaron Lazare’s book “On Apology,” the following are the 4 things necessary for an apology; “1) correctly identifying the party or parties responsible for the grievance, as well as the party or parties to whom the apology is owed; 2) acknowledging the offending behaviours in adequate detail; 3) recognizing the impact these behaviours had on the victim(s); and 4) confirming that the grievance was a violation of the social or moral contract between the parties”.³⁸

Most importantly in apology, words matter and, even more, words with appropriate action and change matter more.

POSSIBLE STEPS TO CONSIDER

The following areas for the church to consider and for continue ongoing conversation within the church, are brought forward from Iridesce: The Living Apology Project.

1. **Draft an Apology and/or Lament for GC44:** Encourage the formation of a small working group to draft an apology and/or church-wide participation in lament around both its historic and ongoing relationship with its LGBTQ community.

The following are the specifics that have been recommended for inclusion in any such Apology. These come directly from those who participated in the Iridesce project.

- a. Erasure and exclusion of bisexual people, and of trans and non-binary people, and the tendency to uphold heteronormative relationships.
- b. Shifting message, abandonment and lack of support, after the 1988 decision
- c. Privilege and power of primarily heterosexual men.
- d. Lack of leadership, and social and financial support
- e. Preventing calls of ministers, blocking or ordinands, intimidations, threats, and violence

See Appendix II for quotes from Iridesce stories that are focused on Apology.

2. **Recognize with Gratitude all those in the church who have and continue to offer support:** It is imperative that the church recognize all those in the church who offered support, those who were open to the Spirit in 1988, and those who continued to offer to be engaged in the church even when challenged by the vote in 1988. It is recommended that the church recognize with gratitude those who acted in faith-filled ways to find a way forward from 1988 to the present time.

³⁷ See Appendix B

³⁸ *ibid*, Chapter 4.

The following groups of people should be included in such a recognition:

- people who were open to the Spirit at the GC of 1988.
- the youth who made such an impact on the 1988 vote.
- people who stayed, despite differences.
- people who found commonalities, despite differences.
- people who argued for justice for gay and lesbian and, later, for trans people; their families, friends, allies, and communities.
- heterosexual allies of LGBTQ2S+ people who had nothing to gain and everything to lose.
- people who continue to paint the United Church with colours of justice for people of emerging gender expressions and romantic and sexual identities.
- All ministers, but particularly LGBTQ2S+ ministers, who so faithfully served their congregations with a deep pastoral care, making space for people to grapple with the issues, to dialogue and to dissent.

See list of names found in Appendix IV: Iridesce Archival Research Report

3. **Name and intentionally affirm bisexual people who have never been intentionally named and affirmed within the church.** Also affirm other less-recognized parts of the LGBTQAI+ community such as intersex, asexuals, pan romantics, demisexuals, aromantics, and others who often feel excluded within their own communities.

- I self-identify in two ways. Both as a bisexual which was my first self identification, and also as “queer” which came much later but genuinely in my life. As a bisexual in the church, I often feel invisible and the ways in which I choose to live out my identity have not made it into general discussions. I celebrate, however, that I have always found a few fellow travellers in the church where I could be myself and raise my issues. Many of my “bi” companions are still deeply in the closet and choose to be invisible (and there are many reasons for this), which heightens my vulnerability... I am thankful for the steps that the church has taken in the past but realize that we are still on a journey and my hope for the Iridesce project is that it’s efforts will help us move forward together and hope for the day when everyone can feel more comfortable to be out of the closet. I am surprised by how many times I have been moved to tears in this [Iridesce] workshop. Feelings run deep. – Roy

4. **Address why being affirming and conducting same-sex marriage is a choice within the church:** LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit people, their families, friends and allies within the church struggle with communities of faith being able to “choose to discriminate”. Why is being affirming a choice for UCC congregations, and not a requirement?
5. **Continue the Lament through the Collection & Sharing of Stories:** Encourage the whole church to engage in the stories currently posted on the Iridesce website, and continue to encourage the collection and sharing of stories. This might include the creation of a story database that collates and tags all stories collected (tags should include individual apologies

offered through Iridesce; calls for an apology; those who don't feel the need for an apology; clergy experiences; etc.).

“What often led to people changing their opinions from a conservative position and towards an acceptance of homosexuality and the ordination of homosexual ministers were face-to-face encounters and meaningful exchanges” with LGBTQ people. “It was consistently recognized that genuine and lasting changes of heart were best secured through real-life interactions.” Keep in mind however, that “The fear of repercussion consistently loomed for gay and lesbian church members and clergy (including job security), and many often did not feel safe enough to participate in discussions and decisions that impacted them most directly” – a reality that continues for all too many today.³⁹

- Energy needs to be put into moving and educating more congregations to live a positive inclusion. Knowing confident out LGTB people as “people” is the strongest mover and dispeller of fears and prejudice. – Anonymous
- I have been part of an excellent Affirming Congregation for several years and am concerned with harassment experienced by committed gay and lesbian members within the congregation now. Knowing strong, out gay, lesbian and trans people is the deepest way to change beliefs and prejudices. Families also deserve more support as they support their families and cope with attitudes, real or perceived, within congregations. – Anonymous
- The fact that those of us who are “out” keep coming back to the church or staying, provides ongoing opportunity for the church to heal, for hearts that were once stone to soften and change. The Spirit of Life has not let me go, has not let the church go, has not let go of anyone on either side of the debate. The Living Apology Project is a courageous opportunity for stories to be told — some of them painful. But our God is a God of story and relationship and repeated call to faithfulness. I pray that this project if it results in apology... hmmm... that seems less important than the opportunity that has been created for the sharing and telling of stories. I guess if an apology develops out of this — okay, but the healing is in the storytelling. I am grateful and I need to heal by God's grace. The apology might be part of that healing. May it be so. – Marilyn

6. **Animate and support the Affirming Ministry Program of Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble.** The Affirming Ministry Program of Affirm United provides the process, resources, and assistance to all church ministries who request to engage on this issue and work towards living into the 1988 policy. The United Church relies fully on an independent, volunteer-based organization of LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit people and their allies, to do this important work.

To live more fully into the 1988 decision, the church should better support the Affirming Ministry program of Affirm United and the work of the Affirming Ministry Coordinators:

- a. Provide funds to staff the Affirming Ministry Program Coordinator position

³⁹ See Appendix IV: Iridesce: Archival Research Report (United Church of Canada, December 2019)

- b. Encourage all Regional Councils to work with the Affirming Ministry Coordinators to encourage all United Church ministries to become Affirming.
 - c. Encourage all Regional Councils to go through the Affirming Program to become Affirming Ministries.
 - d. The General Secretary to consult with the Affirm United Council on the issue of the General Council already being an Affirming Ministry (was actually the first Affirming Ministry as a result of the vote in 1988 prior to the Affirming Program being created), and that the General Council Office be allowed to put up an Affirm United Banner permanently.
 - I believe that every committee, council, region, or Presbytery should take the journey to becoming Affirming. I want all who seek to offer their time and talents to the ministry of our church to know from the outset that being LGBTQ+ is something we affirm and celebrate. – Anonymous
 - As a queer youth in the United Church I want the church to know that it has made progress however we still have some way to go... I learned today that only 6% of churches are [officially] Affirming [in 2017], and while that does not mean that 94% of churches are homophobic, it certainly does mean that some are. Something needs to be done to fix that. Some balance must be struck between allowing each congregation the right to worship God in the way that they are most comfortable, while ensuring that the humanity and identity of all people are respected. I do not have an answer to offer in this moment, and I don't imagine that one will be found easily, however one needs to be found if we as a church want to call ourselves affirming and call ourselves advocates for the rights of LGBTQ people. – Navan
 - Some would say [6%] that's enough, and that if people want to attend an Affirming United community they can simply drive to one. But there's only ONE Affirming Church in all of Labrador. So saying that we are doing enough as a national church is simply not justified nor true. – Skyler
 - I'm still running into opposition with becoming Affirming... I've had several church members tell me they don't want us to be seen as "the gay church" and several people are against even forming a committee to explore the option of becoming an Affirming congregation. This is in 2018. – Mallory
 - I was there in '88 and was obviously not aware of the dissent that existed within our congregation. Many people were upset when discussion ensued while studying sexual orientation. People were very set in their opinions and not open to any opposing views. Some decided to leave the church on account the mess they saw us in. Ten years later, after church board decision lead by our minister, we held our first gay wedding. Again many members were disgusted and again left the congregation. Thirty years later we are still having the same discussions but have progressed somewhat. More needs to be done. – Anonymous
 - I look forward to the day we will not need to identify congregations as Affirming—because we all are. – Anonymous
7. **Education on how to respectfully engage in conversation on sexual orientation and gender identity from a faith perspective:** Develop resources for use within every Regional Council on how to engage in conversation within the United Church and outside the church

with people of other faiths, with family, friends, neighbours. Resources may include key staff, contact people, webinars, online resources, etc.

- I wish there had been, or rather that the General Counsel had included, training sessions on how to handle “the Issue”... or how to deal with the fall-out from the ’88 decision (a year before it came about). I feel “they” needed to think it through. I don’t disagree with “the decision” but I didn’t feel prepared for the fall-out that came from it. – D (at an Iridesce workshop)
- I am sad that my grandchildren are being raised in a Baptist home. They are taught that homosexuality is a sin, that homosexual person should “become Christians” and deny/forsake their true sexuality. I feel helpless to counter this teaching because I don’t want to cause a break in our family’s relationship. – Anonymous
- 1 Peter: 14-15: “Even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.” – Morgan

8. Education on how to deal with conflict (both for clergy and for lay members):

- ...the battles of 1988 left behind one legacy that I think has not served us well – a legacy of fearfulness of conflict. My experience in the church in the 25 years since 1988 has been one in which I’ve been increasingly discouraged by both congregational and denominational lassitude in making hard decisions and demanding tough action, both of ourselves and others. Instead, we seem to have retreated into a state of permanent pastoral care, in which being soothing and kind-hearted has taken the place of being prophetic or provocative, and I think it has diminished us as a denomination. – Alice
- I remember when my last pastoral charge was reviewing marriage policy and I asked if they wanted to discuss same-gender marriage — the answer was that they were not sure the congregation was ready (the congregation WAS ready, and it would not have been an issue in my opinion) largely because there was a memory of how people had reacted in 1988-89. So there is still work to do. There are still conversations to be had. And given that heterosexism is still rampant in our society as a whole (and plausibly in many of our pews) in both open and hidden forms we who believe that God calls all people good, need to push for the conversations to happen. If our beliefs mean anything they need to be lived out. It has always been tempting to let people for whom the question is more pressing take the lead. Or try to not talk about it until we have no choice. And to be honest I believe that has been how the church has approached many issues (race, human sexuality, interfaith dialogue) over the generations. And that is not enough. – Doug

9. Encourage a conversation on human sexuality: Begin with adult members of the church. This should include addressing the intersections between sexism / transmisogyny and sexual orientation; sexual violence/abuse and its conflation with the LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit community.

- I went back into the ministry in 1982 and was in Aylmer, Quebec. I was also president of Conference, and I went to the 1988 vote at General Council. My experience is that the whole issue was a shock to many congregations, including mine. I wasn't out at the time. The horrific and interesting thing was that people were shocked about talking about sexuality in general, never mind gay issues. The fact that this was openly talked about in the church was shocking to many people. At that time I had my picture in the newspaper, with the headline, "Minister preaches free sex from the pulpit". This was untrue. I never preached that. All I preached was the love of God. But everybody latched on to the "sex" topic, it was so attractive [for scandal]. – Richard
- I wonder how I can meet the responsibility to understand and accept my core. I think it's a matter of more experience and more discussion around sexuality. I have lots of friends who are lgbtq, but we never talk about it. Why is that? How can I open the dialogue because I feel that just not acknowledging our individual differences does not lead to the best healthy attitude and understanding. We talk about our dietary choices and haircuts but never sexuality. – Lynne
- I think there is a link because I think that all homophobia is somehow linked to misogyny, the idea that men are better than women. Men who are effeminate are deemed not okay, and women in leadership are thought to be stepping outside their "role". For example, when a United Church called a new minister who was a woman, I heard the question, "Didn't any men apply?" As if a woman-minister would be a last resort or Plan B. That misogyny took me by surprise. It is still quite common that women in ministry do not get paid as much as men, even when they adjusted for everything imaginable... I continue to watch congregations wrestle with that. Things like sexuality, being a person of colour, or being a person with a disability, for example, are almost handled as if they are faults or something that needs to be handled delicately. But why! So, is this a woman thing? A black thing? An age thing, a style thing? It is some kind of intersection of all of these things? It's hard to know. In the circles I live in this has become a non-issue, and if someone does have an issue it is clear that it is their issue. In 2008, General Council Executive without feeling the need to consult the church said that sexual identity and gender are not the same thing, people of all genders can be members, and all members can be considered for clergy. For me *that* was the real apology. – Anonymous

10. **Outreach / Evangelism to the LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit community beyond the church:** Reach out to the wider LGBTQ and Two-Spirit community with special services for those who don't feel safe in a church, even in an affirming ministry (especially Indigenous communities). This should include outreach to people who have experienced trauma or harm, and is recommended to be done in partnership with Affirm United and Generous Space Ministries.
11. **Research on LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit Ministry Personnel:** How many clergy had to move in 1989? How many clergy today, continue to experience judgment, harassment, and are refused employment by United Churches? What were the actual statistics on clergy

leaving the church after 1988? What were the statistics on membership leaving?
Congregations leaving?

- Sixteen years after 1988, in 2004, I was two years into my first pastoral charge... and was excited by the General Council/church's decision to allow gay marriage! The caveat was that each church could and would decide from themselves. (There was no education prescribed, just the vote). My small four-point pastoral charge was keen to vote immediately. Many folks were expressing their displeasure about the General Council/church's decision to accept gay marriage. One gentleman, our Treasurer, sat at my kitchen table in the manse and exclaimed, "Why not call them civil unions not marriages?" Most people, if not 99%, had no idea I was a lesbian, DESPITE being "OUT" in ALL my documents for Settlement. I would guess in hindsight, less than a dozen people talked to me directly, ALL were disparaging. A vote happened in each church. One church had called all the members who hadn't darkened the doors in years, to come vote. These churches voted "no" to gay marriage in their church. Our church voted only on blood relatives [of members of the congregation]. It was like they were worried gay people would flock to them wanting to be married. As if! Eventually, in 2004 all the votes were completed and people started to gossip about me. One farmer, who was quite lovely to me previously, said "We told the Settlement Committee we didn't want a gay minister." I said, "Well, you've had me for two years!" I became angry and eventually depressed over time. I left on sick leave in September 2004. I was off work for 9 months. During a conversation, the insurance person through the UCC said, "You have to decide if you will go back to your pastoral charge." I was RELIEVED. I had no idea how I would minister to those folks who had been so opposed to me, so openly against my sexuality, my love, my ministry. They had loved so many aspects of my ministry, I know this now—they appreciated my creativity and education, my leadership. Their prejudice got in the way of us working together though... and I couldn't go back. So, 16 years after 1988, there wasn't acceptance of me as a gay minister. There was still a long way to go in Rural Eastern Ontario. Thankfully, after questioning my gifts and skills, after situational depression, after looking at other options, after a voluntary placement with a church in a suburban area... I returned to ministry with a renewed sense of purpose, a renewed sense of call, a renewed hope for people and the church that I so loved and felt so called to serve. I have learned so much, but I know I will never hide who I am again. – Jenni
- Doing pulpit supply is increasingly uncertain for me. I never realized how homophobic some churches were until people reacted in shock that I, an out queer person, was preaching at a particular local church. It was only then that I learned that the previous minister had been actively preaching that being gay or lesbian was a sin, actively preaching homophobia from the pulpit. I was shocked! First, I was shocked that it was commonly known, meaning that the congregation and Presbytery were okay with these messages; and then, even more shocked when I learned that being homophobic is okay according to our church policy. It made me feel betrayed about being part of what I thought was the LGBTQ justice church. I am still trying to reconcile my expectations with the human reality of our church. – Elsbeth

12. Identify regionally the status or policy of all communities of faith on the issue of sexual orientation and gender identity:

- a. Conduct research in each Region to identify: all communities of faith who are “affirming in practice” but have not yet gone through Affirm United’s Affirming Ministry Program; and, all official Affirming Ministries as well as those in process to become an Affirming Ministry. This will give us a better sense of where the church is on this issue.
 - b. Request that all communities of faith and Regional Councils, be transparent to the public regarding their status or policy on whether or not they are affirming to LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit people. This should become a part of the covenant that each community of faith enters into with their Regional Council.
 - c. Request that all communities of faith be transparent to the public regarding their status or policy on whether or not they offer same-sex marriage. This should become a part of the covenant that each community of faith enters into with their Regional Council., and a part of each community of faith’s yearly self-assessment.
 - d. Request that The United Church of Canada’s website be more transparent by clearly stating where the church is at, in living out the 1988 policy, including a clear explanation of the United Church’s congregational model and the implications of this model on welcome and inclusion for LGBTQ2S+, thus addressing the misperception that the United Church is consistently welcoming or affirming
- “What we need now is... to have clarity at the local level about who stands where so we are not assuming we know who is on board, and who is not. Stir the pot. Facilitate honesty within congregations and let the evolution of faith continue rather than stagnate or be extinguished.” - Anonymous
 - I know personally how hard it is to find a safe place to worship, pray and feel a part of a community of faith. I am very lucky that I belong to a church that is Affirming... I am truly blessed. I know once I step outside the walls of St. Andrews United Church to go to another United Church or to attend a Conference function I have to be careful as I may not be accepted as I am. There have been many times during our travels we have attended other churches although they are welcoming you can feel the tension in the air. This is an opportunity for change. A chance for open and honest dialogue. - Peter

13. Research on United Church participation in conversion therapy: How many LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit people experienced some form of conversion therapy in United Church communities of faith? How many United Churches conducted some form of conversion therapy? Before 1988 and after 1988? How many LGBTQ people were harmed by such abusive therapy?

- “When I was a teenager in 1998 at a United Church in Alberta, I was struggling with homosexuality... I went to my church and told them about this, and they decided to do a kind of exorcism on me, thinking that it was the devil or spiritual forces that had taken hold of me and was bringing on my same sex attraction. “One day, I went to church and a group of people and I were in the hall. I sat in the middle of the group and everyone put their hands on me to pray for me. They were praying and singing,

trying to draw the devil out of me. It got really intense and I started moving around trying to get up. But the people around me wouldn't let me get up. They kept pushing me down, and all the hands on me pushing their group weight on me to keep me sitting down. They wanted to hold me down so that the devil would run out of me. But I couldn't take it anymore... so I finally got up and ran away as fast as I could. They thought this was proof that the devil had taken hold of me. I ran out of the church... and I never came back to that church.” – Tara

- “Will there ever be apologies for United Church of Canada run conversion therapy that I personally can attest was happening all throughout the 90's? I left the church in 1999 because of this. I know that you are a very open and progressive organization. That's exactly why I don't want to seem threatening, but there is a very strong correlation between the churches involvement with organizing and operating some of the residential schools and how conversion therapy was used. I have no plans to make anything public, just urging the church to publicly acknowledge past actions taken by individuals in the name of your organization.” – Mattie
- When I eventually came out of the closet, I received no help from my minister other than recommending that there were places that cured people like me. - David

CONCLUSION

The Iridesce Project has highlighted the need for the Church to find a better way of communicating and disseminating education to the varied courts of the Church, especially to communities of faith, around issues that are of importance to the Church.

As the church considers this report and its recommendations, communications from the General Council, General Council executive, staff resources, reports, and policies need to be intentional in its focus and written in such a way that it will be accessible to all courts of the Church and its members, and written in easy to understand language to help to facilitate the use of these resources in a broad fashion within the Church.

Communication to those in paid accountable ministry should be facilitated through the Office of Vocation, and their oversight of Continuing Education requirements and standards, to ensure that reports and educational resources are disseminated to members of paid accountable ministry in the Church.

It is important for the Church to be intentional in reaffirming the work of justice towards and with marginalized communities, knowing that there are many at the grassroots level of the church who are unaware of what is meant when the Church speaks of intersectionality and the nature of justice and oppression in the Church.

Affirm United and the Affirming Ministry Program are integral to the church engaging in ongoing justice work, the recognition of marginalized communities within the church, and the call to be a witness to the life stories of those within marginalized communities.

While acknowledging all those within the Church who are engaged in conversations and deep, intentional listening around difference, disagreement, and conflict, the Iridesce Project has

highlighted the challenge about how the Church deals with both conflict and disagreement. “The business of the ministry is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.”⁴⁰ Iridesce has highlighted that with its history of compromise and concession, the Church has in essence comforted the comfortable and afflicted the marginalized. In not addressing conflict and disagreement, within the Church, it has allowed the Church to live into its privilege as a white heterosexual middle-class institution rather than entering into places of disagreement and conflict. By not entering into these difficult conversations, the Church has been prohibited from entering into spaces where it might be transformed in deep meaningful dialogue.

Iridesce calls the church to identify and bring together those who are already engaged in the work of change in the Church, either in person or via electronic means, to develop the skills necessary to lead the Church, at a grassroots level, through conversations, workshops, and strategies for engaging in tough conversations, which can help deal with disagreement and conflict in the Church.

Iridesce is calling the church to respond.

"Are you going to wash your hands? Or are you going to wash feet?" – Eric Fullerton⁴¹

Online Links

Website: [irdesce.ca](https://www.irdesce.ca)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/irdesce/>

Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzPcYLIKJ4icxqdC_2Zuw2Q

Theatre Play on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_WPStoEeD0

⁴⁰ 1944 July 28, Naugatuck Daily News, As We Were Saying, Quote Page 2, Column 1, Naugatuck, Connecticut. (Newspapers_com)

⁴¹ “The Do Not Hire List” <https://www.irdesce.ca/single-post/2018/05/02/Threats-The-Do-Not-Hire-list-Studying-MMHS-And-other-memories-of-1988-period>

APPENDIX I: Stories of Affirmation

From Morgan Bell

<https://www.iridesce.ca/single-post/2017/10/14/From-Morgan-Bell>

I have wondered at the appropriateness of my writing a reflection of this nature as a straight white male. Surely there are more voices that have direct experiences on this matter and I am convinced that the LGBTQ2S+ community does not need any more unaffected individuals to tell them about their experiences or identity. As such, I decided to write my reflection in address to other straight Christians.

I consider myself fortunate to not remember a time in the life of the denomination when, at least in policy, the LGBTQ2S+ community was not fully included in the life of the Church. Now that I am older (and hopefully wiser), I see that this has not always been the case – nor is it yet a universal standard to which The United Church of Canada adheres. However, I still count myself lucky to have never been in a denominational body (local or larger) that had to second-guess its involvement in a small-town Pride picnic or its affirmation of the legalization of gay marriage in Canada.

As a teenager, I found it a relief to not have to make some convoluted intellectual and theological defence of a “traditional understanding of marriage” to my affirming-yet-secular friends in high school. In fact, I took it as a point of pride that “my church” (though I now cringe at such possessive pronouns) took a “progressive” (equally cringe-worthy) path on the “issue” (still cringing) of LGBTQ2S+ inclusion. However, when I reached university and made friends from other Christian denominations that were not of one mind with The United Church of Canada in this matter – not to mention friends from diverse faith communities whose traditions are also not of the same mind – I realized that a simple “well, my church accepts gays and lesbians” was not a sufficient theological account for our affirmation of LGBTQ2S+ Christians. Indeed, I was rendering a theological disservice to those individuals with whom I claim to ally. I needed to go deeper, as we all must, and so I turned to where all Christians must turn: prayer and Scripture.

We read in 1 Peter: 14-15:

“Even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.”

That is to say, as followers of Jesus Christ we must account for the entirety of our lives – including our convictions and our subsequent actions – in light of our faith in him. As I found myself beginning to wrestle with why it was that I believed what I believed – and I certainly believed that the inclusion of queer Christians was “right” in light of the God revealed in Jesus – I realized that I had to abandon my preconceived notions about “rights” that were somehow normative or self-evident aside from God-in-Christ and to allow “Jesus, crucified and risen: our Judge and our Hope” to take the centre of my theological consciousness from which all ethical and social considerations find their bearing. Certainly, this seemed at first to be a “non-position” – and perhaps it was – yet in the end, I must say that I am grateful that I have and am taking such

a posture. For I truly believe that it is only through Jesus Christ that the acceptance and full inclusion of our queer siblings in the Church are intelligible.

I am glad that The United Church of Canada is following what I believe to be the Holy Spirit's promptings toward a greater inclusion of the wider Body into the light of Christ. Looking at today's global ecumenical landscape (not to mention the ecumenical landscape within this country), we can reasonably deduce that this was not a popular theological conviction to articulate nor to continue to defend. Furthermore, though being "affirming" (as we say in church-land) is an increasingly accepted secular conviction, it is well worth noting the risk that the United Church took in solidarity with our queer siblings in 1988. After the doubling-down on the ostracizing of the LGBTQ2S+ community in the wake of the AIDS crisis, to state that there existed no barriers to the baptized queer community regarding participation in the life of the Church was nothing short of 'gutsy'. For this work, I am thankful.

However, having grown up in the post-1988 church, I was under the distinct impression that "1988" and "The Issue" (as I understand it was then called) was a *fait accompli*. It was assumed – or at least, I assumed that it was assumed – that framing gay marriage or the ordination of a trans* Christian as a "rights issue" or a matter of "justice" was a sufficient basis for their acceptance into the denomination and enough to suppress any naysayers. In my circles, that seemed to work. To my friends who were already "converted" on the matter, it certainly worked. Yet, when I came against theological or secular opposition to the matter, I realized that LGBTQ2S+ identity and inclusion is not *prima facie* accepted as a matter of rights or justice; that is to say, borrowing from our siblings to the south, they are not truths which we hold to be self-evident. (Perhaps that is among the reasons why I have come under the wing of Karl Barth and his fervent rejection of natural theology.) Admittedly, theological resources which give a robustly scriptural and faithful account of our denominational stance on LGBTQ2S+ identity and inclusion exist and have existed for some time within our denomination and in the wider Church, though I do wonder about their accessibility to lay-people, clergy, and to the non-catechized individual.

I will not go into detail of my theological formation on the matters of LGBTQ2S+ identity, ecclesiological inclusion, and marriage; I presume that whomever happens to read this has also been "converted" on the matter and there are many more authoritative and experiential voices on the matter than mine. Suffice it to say that it was a process saturated in prayer, Scripture, community engagement, and above all growing in closer relationship with queer friends from diverse backgrounds and contexts. Those individuals showed me that they are not a "problem to be solved" or an abstract theological quandary to be entertained at leisure; indeed, they showed me that they are not a disembodied "they". Their stories and experiences were and are real and I have come to believe that the Living God has something to say to them and to all of us who have never had to share their experiences.

I have mentioned to friends before that my generation (the Millennial generation) seems to be more-or-less open to gays, lesbians, and bisexuals – but it is transgender identity and genderqueer expression that we seem to have difficulty understanding, encountering with generosity, and accepting in the same way we accept the individuals who identify with the former labels. It is my growing feeling, therefore, that the Church needs to be able to articulate

its hope in the Triune God and how that hope sheds light on the issues that members of any marginalized or opposed community – in this case, our queer and trans* siblings – such that we might be able to speak the liberating and life-giving word of the Gospel into a world that so desperately needs it. This is work being pioneered by queer theologians and their allies, by clergy and Church leaders on the ground in congregational ministry, and by queer Christians who offer a witness to the world simply by their existence qua queer Christians. It is my belief that the Holy Spirit sustains especially this latter group whose situation and position within the Church and the world is contested and questioned, if not threatened.

It is my hope, then, that The United Church of Canada will not simply take for granted its denominational policy regarding queer inclusion. It is my hope that we will recognize how far we are from embodying that policy and how much farther yet we are from assimilating it into the earth-shattering welcome of the people of God through the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ. It is my hope that we will not simply rest on LGBTQ2S+ inclusion as a *fait accompli* or as a self-righteous symbol of our “progressivism”, but as a corollary statement of the Christian faith at the center of our denominational identity; a faith which (though it may seem counterintuitive to some both within and outside the Church) makes intelligible our celebration and acceptance of the LGBTQ2S+ community. It is my hope that we will continue to atone for the sins which we have committed and continue to commit against our queer siblings in Christ in the name of a Gospel which we believed and believe somehow limits their humanity. It is my hope that we can recognize that our reconciliation to God in Jesus Christ stands as our mandate to effect that reconciliation with a community we have wronged and which we continue to wrong; for to inaugurate a Living Apology which would result in a richer, more faithful Body of Christ.

Quotes from Additional Stories:

- No, we, the UCC are not perfect, we are a body of “broken, but hopeful believers” striving to live into the call of grace and love of Jesus. Love made flesh and dwelling among us. In our brokenness, we fail to listen, we lack compassion, in our striving we live more fully into the Love we have received from God. I am grateful that my home is here. I am a refugee who feels more and more at home here in the UCC. I am grateful for a church who recognizes the need to talk about its past failings. I am grateful for a church that seeks to build relationships and connections between its many and diverse members. And I am grateful for those who led the UCC to the decision in 1988, and for those who continue the discussion today.
GRATITUDE. - Svinda
- I am a trans non-binary person who was introduced into the United Church of Canada when I met my amazing and wonderful partner. I wasn't expecting to be so openly accepted and it fills my heart to know that I can love God & be proud of my gender identity. I have walked in 2 Pride Parades with my home church, and walked in the Montreal Pride Parade during Canada Pride with the Right Rev. Jordan Cantwell, her partner and others from the United Church. As someone who was against organized religion because I didn't believe I could be accepted, I'm happy to admit I was wrong. I hope other people within the LGBTQ community can do what I did, and open themselves up to God's love. – Dani
- I am proud that This United Church of Ours has inclusivity as a value, even though we stumble along the way. – Pegi

- I think, finally, that the very appearance of “Iridesce: The Living Apology Project” is a sign that the UCC is attempting to learn from its past and to be a more loving, compassionate and embracing kind of denomination. Surely this is good news! – Scott
- I am a parent of a trans child. I am relatively new to the United Church, but when my child came out, our church was the place she came out. The church was so amazing and so accepting. Sadly to say, my parents and family were not. Myself, wife and our child have basically been disowned by my parents. Without the support and help of the United Church I would be very lost. A rejection from the church would have been a huge blow for me. The United Church to me, shows unconditional love for all, something I strongly believe in. I am very grateful to have found the United Church and have it a part of my life. To me the United Church has become an important ally for LGBTQ2 people and those who love and care for them. - Wes
- I think that 1988, or at least the few years following, probably sharpened my faith – overlaid it with a sort of ‘take no prisoners’ unwillingness to allow for fine words belied by unjust actions. Of course it’s possible that the issues of 1988 simply crystallized or intensified what would have happened with greater maturity anyway, but nevertheless it definitely proved to be a decisive element in clarifying for me what exactly God’s call to justice and right-relationship means on the ground. – Alice
- I think that we lost a lot of people over the decision and it was the right decision to make. I think we can stand on justice issues and people of other denominations have followed. I think this is the classic United Church story where we ordain women and gays and lesbians, and trans people. We lead the way. We get lots of slings and arrows and then twenty-some years later even evangelical churches are looking at this and are rethinking their policies. Some of their documents look very similar to the documents that we saw leading up to 1988. As a denomination we have led the way. We have suffered. Not just because of 1988, but it was the tipping point. The inerrancy of scripture fell around that time too and people who were not willing to give that up. It was falling away and making room for a movement toward trusting the Spirit. That is why people can no longer buy-in to the bible as every word as literal truth. I am still proud that, in my work as a psychotherapist, I can say “that church right there has a gay minister who is married to a woman.” People are still shocked because they don’t know that there is a denomination that does that. I feel proud to be able to say that.
– Sue <https://www.iridesce.ca/single-post/2019/11/15/Remembering-the-impacts-around-1988-for-my-church-my-family-and-myself>

APPENDIX II: On an Apology

Erasure, Exclusion

- “Acknowledgement of erasure of trans people”
- “Acknowledge tendency to uphold heteronormative relationships”
- “Erasure of bisexual people by GC and Affirm communities”

Shifting Message, Abandonment and Lack of Support

- “I think the focus switched to having to save the church, instead of aligning with those of us who were on the front lines who were getting chewed up.”
- “Thirty years later, the only place I have pain and anger is toward the national church. That is what needs to be acknowledged. We had courage up until the decision was made, and then afterward, we lost our courage. We stopped speaking truth to power.”
- “After the 1988 vote, in the rush to clarify what the decision didn’t signal, it failed to hold up what the vote *was* about. The emphasis was placed on reassuring people with prejudices that they could hold on to them. Churches were reassured that they did not have to call gay or lesbian ministers. People became much more afraid of losing donors and congregants than of losing gay Christians.”
- “But for the national church there has been no healing moment... They have never owned that they did nothing for us and that they were not there for us. When I listen to First Nations people I think, that was what it was also like for us. We were abandoned by the body that put us in this place.”

Privilege and Power

- In theology and learning documents prepared in the lead-up to 1988: Responses of church groups was devalued and perceived to be devalued. Instead, “Authority was given priority to biblical and scientific experts and inadvertently to the interest and biases of these writers” who were primarily male and heterosexual”.⁴² “We found a way to come together, but our voices were hampered by angry, hateful men. The angry-man syndrome during 1988-1989 was so extreme.”
- “I have never figured that out. Whether they themselves were threatened? Or maybe they were just angry to begin with and this gave them an opportunity in the church to direct their anger in a way that was considered acceptable.”

Lack of Social and Financial Support

- “For the national church abandoning us. The General Council voted yes, but then there was no support. There was no help line or people to contact. There was no standing up publicly to acknowledge, urge or direct people to stop how they were treating us. They left us struggling to find support for ourselves. There was an extreme lack of leadership through the General Secretary role. If anyone could have done something it was the General Secretary or the Moderator. They should have spoken up and told people to stop.
- During this time the Church policies and procedures were experienced as roadblocks for those persons who were attempting to find professional support and help for themselves.

⁴² MacKenzie Shepherd, Loraine. (2008). "Feminist Theology and the Church: A Postmodern Alternative for Canadian Christian Communities," in *Feminist Theology with a Canadian Accent: Canadian Perspectives on Contextual Feminist Theology*. Mary Ann Beavis et al., eds. Michigan: Novalis. page 43.

This came in the form of limiting financial support through the Church benefit program to having to pass funding applications through the courts of the Church. The experience robbed people of their dignity and privacy.”

Intimidations, Threats, Violence

- Some people of the United Church intentionally and collectively engaged in psychological, emotional and physical intimidation and threats towards those who were, or were perceived to be, members of the LGBTQ2S+ community, towards those who voted “yes” in 1988, and towards those who were perceived to be in favour of LGBTQ2S+ membership and ministry.
- Stalking of LGBTQ2S+ persons, or people suspected to be LGBTQ2S+ persons.
- Blocking ordination of LGBTQ2S+ persons; sometimes blocking entire groups of ordinands to block the sole LGBTQ2S+ person in the group.
- Some people of the United Church created secret “no hire lists” of LGBTQ2S+ people, people suspected of being LGBTQ2S+, or people who were allies to LGBTQ2S+. These “no hire lists” were to prevent calls of ministers, thus preventing employment and/or threatening their livelihoods and the ability to support themselves and their families. No member of the United Church stood up to this “no hire list” behaviour, although in some areas it was prevalent.

Additional Quotes on Apology, from Iridesce Stories:

- I would like to apologize to God. I am intersex, bisexual & transgender, and I would like to apologize to God. I grew up in another orthodox Christian community and we were wrong. I didn’t know who you were and I never spoke to You. My prayers were to an imposing totalitarian, phallic leadership and not to You. I hated them in Your name for so long, because they struck me with an iron rod they named after You. This was a blasphemy my mind is hardly able to grasp, and which language is even less qualified to capture. Since escaping my church prison, I have seen you in the grass-wind, felt you cradle my heart in my dreams and despair. I have heard You in my voice when I speak truth and love. I have felt you in my countenance when I have needed to be brave. When I have needed to be brave. I have felt You in my hands when they needed guidance. When I am alone, You are there, and one day, I hope to see You in the eyes of a community. I aspire not to be alone. ~ L.C.
- Intentionally creating space for lament would be an essential asset in ensuring that people’s stories of injustice are heard. Without truth-telling and lament, the apology runs the risk of making people’s pain feel erased or overlooked. In this sense, engaging in an apology speaks to the mission of the church as a truth-telling institution.” [Lament and Reconciliation as Essential Components to a Theology of Apology](#), by Michiko Bown-Kai (2014)
- Thanks for staying, for sharing your stories, for your grace and resilience – BUT that was not supposed to be your job. - Mary
- I think an apology is due to the LGBTQ community from the church for the way we have treated people of this community in the past and the way some of us continue to regard them. We refuse to learn the lessons of the past, and some minds are closed and hardened. I pray that all may be open to acceptance of God’s great diversity, that all who are made in God’s image be accepted as our brothers and sisters regardless of sexuality. – Anonymous

- I think the church needs to apologize —and I need to apologize— because I think we lost our witness. For a time we were so traumatized by what happened in 1988. I think we let our voice be silenced on other political issues because we didn't want any other controversy. We made the decision in 1988 but I wonder how well we actually walked with other people. I thought, we've made this decision to be welcoming but what if people believe us and vulnerably come into our churches; and then we don't follow through? And I think that has happened. I'm here now, [at this particular church], but all of the other churches I have served in my life, I have led them through the discussion about gay and lesbian marriage, and each one of them has said no. Keep in mind I was ordained in 1984. So, for the past 30 years since our welcoming decision none of my churches (except this last one) has been okay with gay and lesbian marriage. That really says something. Because of our congregational approach, support for gay and lesbian people has been spotty. I think of people going into ministry at that time. For example, Tim Stevenson, who was the first openly gay person to be ordained. We've been ordaining gay and lesbian people, but I wonder, are there United Churches that will call you? People are getting the education and the degree, they are passing through Presbytery and Conference, but are there churches that will call you? We needed to make the decision we did; but were we messing with people's lives by setting up a false expectation? To think that we are welcome when we really weren't or aren't. [Interviewer: So you think that may be where an apology may reside, that we set an expectation of welcome that we have not fulfilled?] Yeah, I do. – Anonymous
- Apology to the LGBTQ leaders in 1988 and the early leaders of Affirm
- I worry that this Iridesce apology project may not adequately reach sufficient people to result in a total convincing of United congregations to lean further toward an “Affirming” attitude. – Keith
- I think the church should apologize to the LGBTQ2 community for all the past indignities—that’s not much, but is better than nothing. “We the United Church of Canada extend our sincerest apology to all the LGBTQ2 people we have hurt for so many years. We ask for your forgiveness.” ~ Anonymous
- I think that when we apologize, we need very much to go beyond saying we are sorry for overt acts of exclusion, for equating being LGBTQ2+ as sin or wrong or not in God’s plan. We need also to say we are sorry for saying we love people despite them being LGBTQ2+, for pretending LGBTQ2+-ness isn’t there or important, for side-stepping discussion of sexuality and gender. Having done these things is tantamount to loving only 1/2 or 3/4 or 7/8 of the person instead of loving the whole person. - Signed, Alyce Dunnewold
- Dear United Church, After today’s [Iridesce] workshop, I am more discouraged than ever about the future of our church. I heard the recent (!) stories of homophobia across the country, of the abuse, neglect, and shameful responses to our LGBTQ2+ sisters and brothers. I belong to a welcoming community — rainbows are everywhere in my church... Hearing the background history of the 1988 decision was very enlightening and eye-opening. I did not realize that it was such a division — one that still have not healed and is still wide open. I am so proud to talk about how open and welcoming my UCC church is — or I was until I heard the stories today. What I feel is shame and anger for our current way of thinking. I don’t believe that an apology of words is the way to go unless it is followed by action. And if the stories continue to be aired and become public is an indication of the grassroots of the church, then we are in deep trouble. - Anne, a straight woman who loves her LGBTQ2 friends

- United Church, I feel an apology is owed to all 'gay' people, however I feel that only the churches that are Affirming should make an apology to their congregates and community in general, via the local media, as the non-Affirming church are not sorry and carry on as per the past. I wish I had known that 'gayness' could not be 'cured' by psychologists. I believed the mis-informed thinking of the day. LGBTQ persons, I am sorry for the way the United Church is still treating you. By allowing congregations to not 'Affirm' 30 years since the clergy vote is disrespectful and shows a lack of commitment. Which is more important the congregates who are homophobic or the gay people of God? Apparently the Old School people are winning, thus in 2018 only 6% of United Churches are officially Affirming of LGBTQ people. - Robert "Bob"
- Avoid being judgmental about 1988 from our 2017 perspective... Apologies should also be extended to family members who dealt with church "attitudes" and reactions. – Anonymous
- Dear United Church, The thing that hurt the most was the way our minister, in Ottawa, a member of the Community of Concern, manipulated my mother. He used his power to hurt our family. His charisma and charm drew her in and created a crisis for her — that lasted the remainder of her life even as she experienced dementia. The thing I want [the United Church] to apologize for is allowing Community of Concern ministers to continue in the United Church after the United Church voted to affirm those in the LGBTQ community and take a stand against the hate/exclusion. - Anonymous
- Dear United Church, I worry that this apology, if it is given, will be motivated by many people who for the most part should be the recipients of the apology... Those people are looking for an apology but should not be voting on whether they get one. The process to attain this "so called" apology is flawed, however well meaning! – Anonymous
- Dear United Church, I will accept your apology if you put your words into action by no longer allowing churches a choice of performing same-gender marriage, and make the Affirming process mandatory at all levels, including General Council Executive. I feel an apology is owed in particular to the many gay clergy who have been harassed and vilified for their human condition, even after being fully "out" during the hiring process, and also to those who were afraid to be out, and were "discovered". I feel the United Church, for all its stance on justice for the gay community, does a disservice to those seeking a safe haven, when they discover that they have chosen a congregation that is not really affirming, and then feel betrayed when they are rebuffed by someone or overhear homophobic comments. I worry that this apology will not have enough "legs" to bring it into reality in my lifetime. – Judy
- Dear United Church, I'm writing to inform you that I strongly believe that an apology is long due... the LGBTQ+ community deserve a lot better than what/how the United Church of Canada has treated them. In 2016 only... 168 out of the 2834 congregations are accepting to people who embrace the way God made them. Some churches have made these people feel as if they themselves are a sin and that God himself didn't love or didn't accept them which is an unthinkable thing but it's very true for these people because of how the United Church of Canada has treated them. - Anyanna
- Dear United Church, I feel an apology is owed to those affected by homophobia preached from the pulpit. I feel an apology is owed for how long it took, and how some parts of us still have not practiced the courage to soundly and clearly condemn this. I want to thank those who have stood fast in the Love gospel all these years: who have stayed faithful to that call that comes as a loving, open heart. To those, like Anne Squire and all of the GLBTQ pastors

who *braved* the stings of hate as they stood on the front lines, creating a space for us to be. I want to apologize for every time I lied or denied God's own reflection in my most loving places, as a lesbian, Christian, feminist, maternal, woman. – Serena

- Is an apology needed? No, I think people did what they did according to the cultural norms of the time and no apology is needed. We would be better to get our theology down as to what we might do and believe, instead of beating our breasts about what we did wrong. Sure gay people have been abused all along, but now it is better because of what we did. Never mind the apology. – Richard
- It is imperative that we find a way, in our church community (both local and global) to truly listen to each other about our varied experiences and perspectives. Especially where there was been hurt, that the wounded ones feel their hurt is acknowledged as real and those who have hurt them (whether through ignorance or not) acknowledge what they have done and a door is left open for reconciliation through authentic listening. Such is the route for compassion to set in and for mutual understanding and joint action for healing. – Carolyn
- Dear United Church, The things I want you to apologize for are not having insightful conversations with 1) the people who fill the pulpits at Worship, and 2) the people who fill the pews at Worship. These conversations should have taken place immediately following the General Council of 1988. Since 1925 and even prior to this, people have always considered what was said from the pulpit was what they should believe and practice. Not many, if not most, of our preachers believed that the scriptures were inviolate and to be taken literally. I fully agree with the decision made in 1988, but I didn't at the time... Properly explained, Christians will see that, in Christ's teachings of Love, there are no ifs, or buts, or exceptions. – Noreen
- Dear United Church, I feel an apology is owed for how long it took, and how some parts of us still have not practiced the courage to soundly and clearly condemn homophobia. I want to thank those who have stood fast in the Love gospel all these years: who have stayed faithful to that call that comes as a loving, open heart. To those, like Anne Squire and all of the GLBTQ pastors who *braved* the stings of hate as they stood on the front lines, creating a space for us to be. I want to apologize for every time I lied or denied God's own reflection in my most loving places, as a lesbian Christian feminist maternal woman. - S.
- I don't think the UCC owes LGBTQ+ people much of an apology—except for not handling the emotional fall-out of '88 better. What I want is true transformation from the Community of Concern & those who supported it. And I think that non-Affirming churches should be as readily identifiable as Affirming ones are. So-called “welcoming” churches that aren't self-aware need to understand that they are often a problem as well. – Dixon
- After the 1988 vote, in the rush to clarify what the decision didn't signal, it failed to hold up what the vote was about. The emphasis was placed on reassuring people with prejudices that they could hold on to them. Churches were reassured that they did not have to call gay or lesbian ministers. People became much more afraid of losing donors and congregants than of losing gay Christians. It really highlighted to me the absence of welcome and the absence of safety for myself as a lesbian Christian. It took me a number of decades to want to come back to church. – Anonymous
- I lament 1988 but for the wrong reasons. I lament those Education and Students Committees that squashed like bugs rainbow folk and their allies because they proclaimed a Jubilee for diverse sexual expressions. I lament the scrutiny under which the single, newly ordained and commissioned were put, because they might be “one of them”. I lament that the Courts of the

Church did not offer them support or sanctuary. I lament the Presbyteries that clung to their comfort, misusing and abusing policies and procedures to crush those who sought a newer vision. I lament those Courts of the Church that stood back and said, “but it is our polity” as another person was burnt at the stake. I lament those persons who were spoiled and selfish, and I lament that they were not called on it. I lament the leadership that abdicated its responsibility to love and said “there is nothing we can do” when there was everything they could do. I lament the hypocrisy of love the sinner, hate the sin. I lament that we still tolerate hate and injustice. I lament the vision too many have the impression that our Church is uniformly progressive and loving. I lament that fewer than ten percent of our congregations are Affirming. I lament those who proclaim inclusion while living with exclusion. I lament because I must still lament. – Anonymous

- Dear United Church, The thing that has hurt the most is that almost 30 years ago after the 1988 decision, there are still congregations and faith communities that hold on to views and beliefs that stand in contrast to that decision. One example being my former congregation that I was forced to leave because it was not a safe place for myself or my family. That congregation to this day remains relatively unchanged in its stand, belief and views of LGBTQ2 people and their place in the United Church. At the same time, I find comfort and a sense of great safety in the congregation that I joined in 1998. – Tony
- Dear United Church, I am thinking of ways we could acknowledge the trauma and harm done to LGBTQ folks in the past and maybe ongoing in a way that enriches our relationships with them and among all members. If it is a form of lament can it address the general tribal fear of others who differ — can we see in our sorrow over the past and the ability to imagine being on the receiving end of our past exclusion/vitriol/cold-heartedness... and the possibility of when we tend toward the same behaviour again? Can we do it as a sort of “note to self”? Can we acknowledge not only the diminishment to “the other”, but also diminishment of ourselves as individuals and communities. And acknowledge that the possibility to turn around and in so doing fulfill becoming our best selves? May we open our eyes and hearts to the hurt we have caused by excluding or ridiculing LGBTQ folks. May we be aware of our cowardly fear of supporting LGBTQ people, aware that we might attract condemnation or ridicule of people ignorant of what they are doing to these folks. May we find our compassion, our back-bone and our best creative skills for dialoguing and communicating and lobbying for inclusion of member of all LGBTQ communities and practice these new inclusion approaches always. – Anonymous
- I think it is important to remember that there are people in many congregations for whom becoming a church that welcomes people with various sexual identities (and other forms of diversity) has not been a traumatic experience. They don’t have painful experiences nor are they angry. The United Church needs to learn to be a church on the margins. – Anonymous
- I was there in 1988, and I remember how things were. It was all in the closet so to speak and fairly new to “come out”. I think anything that is such a change takes time. However, after saying that, I feel very sad and angry, and ashamed because I brought up my children to do onto others, as they do onto you. Feeling very ashamed right now. – Anonymous
- My first husband was the late Rev Peter D. Fraser. We were in pastoral charges in Saskatchewan and Halifax before moving to Pictou Presbytery in 1986. We had discussions on “the issue” in both congregations of our pastoral charge, and, to tell you the truth, I don't really recall how each of the congregations voted. But I am still, painfully, very aware of the effect on my husband - not the congregational discussions, which were civil, but the negative

attitude of Presbytery. Peter felt as if he was the only one to speak in favour of the ordination of what we were then calling "self-declared" homosexuals. He received phone calls and letters that made him feel under attack for his views. Peter was not a robust man and the onset of heart trouble in 1990 may have been inevitable; but the strain of "going to the wall", as he would put it, took its toll. He went on a disability pension in 1994 and died in 2003. —

Libby

- I believe not only the United Church but all churches need to acknowledge that they have not always been safe places for the LGBTQ & 2 Spirited clergy and members. - Peter

A Prayer, by Dan Peace

God help us to be slow to chide and swift to bless
To help us confess
Our foolishness.

God forgive us as we know not what we do
When we injure the different few
We injure you.

God, give us the courage to roll back the stone,
To stand with those who feel so alone.
Make your justice, our own.

God teach us to celebrate the fullness of creation
To replace condemnation
with celebration.

A Minister's Prayer of Lament, by Anne Hoganson

O God, where were you when...?

We distorted your message of love
and mistakenly believed it to be narrow and scarce and
meant only for those who look and act and smell and feel
just the way we do...

When we were challenged in our narrow interpretation
of your grace and presence—
and instead of opening more fully to your embrace,
we entrenched ourselves in fear
and dug deeper into our rigid positions.

When we were offered more of your compassion
and still found it hard to soften our hearts.

O God where were you when cracks appeared...

July 16, 2020

and spread... and widened...
and hearts were broken,
lives torn asunder,
communities estranged.

You were there in the shards,
gathering us back together.
You were there in the clay—
when the form grew distorted
you rolled us back into a ball,
threw us back on the wheel,
reshaped us anew into vessels of your holy light.

Your light that shines in the darkness,
shines out of our cracks and broken places,
reminding us that your love remains even in the ashes.
The fires of your justice burn
in the hearts of those who challenge our assumptions,
and draw us forward into Love.

The queer prophet who opens our hearts and minds
to see you in new and surprising ways...
teaches us to recognize you in the most unexpected faces.

O God you are there in the anger and the fear and the uncertainty.

Hold us
Mold us
Release us from our fear
Love us back into the Light.

APPENDIX III: Additional Iridesce Stories and Quotes from stories

- I like being honest with people. I just want to be open with people and I don't want to be hiding anything from anyone. I have been doing alot of that where I am from... Our youth group leader just moved away from the town... There are not alot of youth, or even people trying to include youth, except for when the youth group leader was there. In the youth group we had what we called a "safe space" where it was okay to talk about things. But now that the youth group is gone it won't be the same. She was very open, a good person to have discussions with. She is also part of the LGBTQ community, so she is able to relate... It's a little difficult talking about these things with people at church. Especially the old people who don't have an interest in youth. Also, people at church act so perfect... I wish people at church were comfortable to be vulnerable and less guarded, to share when they are not perfect. That way I would know that I could be vulnerable with them too, cause I have alot of questions. Also, my parents go there, so without the safe space of the youth group it makes things a little difficult. I think eventually they will accept me, but I don't think now is the time... I don't think they are ready yet. – Kai
- the holy in you is as precious as the holy in me. - Min-Goo
- In the past 17 years I've been discovering the legacies of pain, silence, yet also the hope and risk found in opening the tomb. I seek to live in love, grace and peace... - Melanie
- "This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning" (Winston Churchill) - Deb
- I'm an unbeliever — I left the church years ago, and see no reason to return. I no longer understand what the church is for. I don't understand worship. That said, I'm supportive of the UCC 1988 decision and its continuing efforts. I encourage you to be braver still, and take your message to congregations, denominations, "and to all the world" to paraphrase he whom you claim as leader. The church needs continually to heal itself, reform itself, and to right the wrongs done it its name. Good luck! - Nick
- I was there in 1988 and I remember it as a very challenging and divisive time in our church. The church we were attending at the time had not dealt with any of the resources on sexuality prepared by the UCC prior to 1988, nor any of the study material prepared on ordination of homosexuals. Thus when we tried to deal with "the issue," we were thrust into a situation with no previous experience of how to have respectful sharing of different views. – Anonymous
- I am sorry, also, for the ways, even after '88 I'm sure, you had to choose between being exactly who you were and staying involved with your congregations I'd like to thank you for your grace, your, kindness, your resilience, but I don't think that will bring you much comfort—that was not supposed to be your job. - Mary
- Over the years we learned not to trust the institution and its representatives. It's been a tough sell for "long in the tooth" folks like us to trust that the "church" is really interested in dialogue, let alone trust in the authenticity of an apology. – Anonymous
- ...we are unevenly affirming, and we are homophobic, transphobic, racist, classist, sexist. But as long as we continue to struggle, to love deeply, hope strongly, open exclusively we attempt to continue to align ourselves with the energy and love of the holy. We make a difference. - Anonymous
- What 1988 did was create a climate of survival, or a climate of resilience. - Maureen

Appendix IV: Iridesce Archival Research Report

Background

Over the course of six months, I engaged in research at the United Church of Canada Archives pertaining to the 1988 Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality (MMHS) decision at General Council 32, that “all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, who profess their faith in Jesus Christ are welcome to be or become members of The United Church of Canada” and that “all members of the United Church are eligible to be considered for ordered ministry.”

In order to understand the context for this decision and the most immediate aftermath of this decision, the research period covered was between the years 1978 and 1992. While the conversation leading up to 1988 certainly extends before this period and the impact of this decision continues to reverberate, these dates mark significant periods within the record; in 1978 the Division of Mission in Canada’s Working Unit on Sexuality, Marriage and Family established a 10 member task force to work on a comprehensive statement on human sexuality, which was eventually presented in 1980 in the form of *In God’s Image...Male and Female*. In the conclusion to this report is the suggestion that “on the basis of this report there is no reason in principle why mature, self-accepting homosexuals, any more than mature, self-accepting heterosexuals, should not be ordained or commissioned.” It was not until 1992 that the first openly homosexual person (Tim Stevenson) was ordained as a minister in the United Church of Canada.

Research Questions

My research sought to answer 12 questions. These were:

1. Who are the leaders/elders that we should thank?
2. What skills or actions were impactful (good/bad) and why?
3. In what ways did discrimination present itself (institutionally and individually) and how was it addressed?
4. Did the messaging from the national church shift post-1988? How did the priority shift show itself? Who benefitted from this shift?
5. Was the national church aware of the issues facing some people post-1988? Did it act on this awareness to inform, help, etc.?
6. Were there public supports or statements from the General council commissioners? From the GCO office? The moderators? Gen. Sec.?
7. Were there financial or other resources available for ministers, lay people, presbyteries, etc., to have meaningful, ongoing personal support?
8. Were there any measures that were taken to hold Presbyteries or Conferences accountable for the bullying, etc. that was happening? Has the question ever arisen of the need to find ways as church to hold lay people accountable for their decisions, deeds, and words, etc.?
9. What was the anger about? Was it biblical? Was it about procedure? Was it something else? Did the church have any concern that there might be anger before, during or after the vote? How did the church address/support this concern?
10. Was there known and intentional bi-phobia within organizing groups around the 1988 vote? How have we served bisexual people in GCs and the Affirm community? How would we respond today, if faced with a similar dilemma?

11. We would be interested in learning how and when *Affirm* and *Friends of Affirm* became institutional – when first recorded. Was it an adversarial relationship with the church to start, as pertaining to the 1988 vote?
12. Community of Concern: how did they try to influence the vote? What communication methods were used?

In order to investigate these questions, my research required attention to: meeting minutes and public documents from various working groups (with the most in depth attention to the National Coordinating Group for the Study/Dialogue Programme on Sexual Orientation, Lifestyles and Ministry's process in creating the *Sexual Orientation, Lifestyles and Ministry* report), General Council procedural minutes, General Council Executive minutes, Moderator records, General Secretary records, relevant *Observer* media reporting as well as some attention to other media sources, AFFFIRM United meeting minutes and public documents, and some attention to the voluminous correspondence between Conferences, Presbyteries, pastoral charges, and individuals with the National Church in regards to homosexual ordination.

1. Who are the leaders/elders that we should thank?

There are certainly many, some of whom are named here.

Task Group on Commissioning/Ordination of Self-Declared Homosexual Persons

Marilyn Harrison (Co-Chair)	Sylvia Dunston (consultant)
Eunice Williams	Margie Whynot (consultant)
Re. Robert Stobie (co-chair)	John Howard (consultant)
Rev. Dale Irving	Glenys Huws (co-deputy secretary)
Marilyn Anderson Corkum	
Rev. Harry Oussoren (co-deputy secretary)	
Rev. Gary Patterson	

National Coordinating Group for the Study/Dialogue on Sexual Orientations, Lifestyles and Ministry

B.J. Klassen (Chair)	Doris Major
Charles Bidwell	Malcolm Spencer
Pam Brown	Christine Weymark
Daphne Craig	Duncan White
George Hermanson	Peter Williams
John Howard	David Ewart (staff)
Linda Hunter	

From Sessional Group 8 at GC 32

Marion Best (Chair)	Vera Simons
Peter Scott (Secretary)	Marjorie Robinson
Ross Wiseman	Donna Mann
Allen Tysick	Edward Erion
John Lawson	Patricia Krug
Evelyn Miller	Deborah Suddard

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William Fulford	James Beal
Donald Collett	Janice Scrutton
Sidney Newbury	Peter Scott
Helen Budd-Hannah	Elizabeth McKinley
Lenore Beecham	Audrey Smith
George Tuttle	
Barry McConnell	
Dale Morrison	
George Searcy	

Members of Affirm, including (but not limited to): Eilert Frerichs, Bill Siskay, Heather Smith, David Hallman, Sally Boyle,

National Church Staff, including (but not limited to):
Rev. Robin Smith, Division of Mission in Canada
Howard Mills, General Secretary
Mary Frances Denis, publicist for the United Church of Canada
Moderators: Rev. Clarke MacDonald, Dr. Anne Squire, and Rt. Rev. Dr. Sang Chul Lee

All of those (frequently unnamed) gay and lesbian United Church members and clergy, many of whom took great risks in becoming a ‘face’ to the issue, and their allies.

2. What skills or actions were impactful (good/bad) and why?

The following are thematically organized features, each of which includes skills and actions that were impactful in either/both constructive or/and destructive ways during this period.

The Study Process

At the 30th General Council in Morden in 1984, the Division of Mission in Canada and the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education were requested to “develop an educational program with thorough and well developed biblical, ethical and theological components reflecting in a balanced way, theological diversity of the United Church of Canada, enabling Church members, pastoral charges, Presbyteries, Conferences and General Council to study homosexuality in the context of human sexuality.”⁴³ Between March 1985 and January 1988, The National Coordinating Group for the Program and Study on Sexual Orientation, Lifestyle and Ministry (NCG) met 13 times (and communicated by letter and phone diligently throughout) to develop, guide and facilitate this study/dialogue process.

The NCG created two study kits, which were made available through the twelve regional Conferences. The study kits contained information about how to effectively engage in discernment and theo-ethical reflection and dialogue across difference. The NCG included information and resources from multiple sides of the debate, and from opposing perspectives on homosexuality. They included “ex-gay” writing, information on conversion/healing therapy, insights and practices from Homosexuals Anonymous, as well as resources on homophobia, heterosexism, and the gay liberation movement. While the purpose of the NCG’s inclusion of

⁴³ Memo from Gerry Hopkirk to David Ewart, NCG Background, July 5, 1988.

multiple perspectives within the study kits was to illustrate and expound upon the various viewpoints that existed within the church in order to facilitate effective dialogue, some argued that “a ‘balanced view’ is not being presented to the church,” but rather a collection of opinions—each seemingly equally as valid as the next—that perpetuated misunderstanding and harm.⁴⁴

For example, included in the study kits was the film “Homosexuality: A New Direction,” (produced by the United Church Renewal Fellowship) where it is suggested that lesbianism is a consequence of the sexual molestation of young girls. In instances such as this and more, sexual abuse, rape and heterosexist logics were presented to the wider church as adequate for consideration and relevant to questions about homosexual love and homosexual ordination. The NCG attempted to correct this by placing words of warning on the UCRF video, but included it in the study kits nonetheless.

The NCG’s church wide study process included a wide breadth of the Church in dialogue; their approach was invitational (i.e. congregations could opt in), and study groups were asked to offer feedback, or “affirmations.” As the NCG came to prepare a comprehensive statement, all notes, calls, letters, papers, petitions and affirmations that were sent to the NCG were read by at least four, if not more, members of the group.⁴⁵

A majority of NCG believed that these affirmations were intended as insight into the Church, not as quantitative data, and that their comprehensive statement and report ought to emerge through the guidance of the Holy Spirit present in the deliberations of the NCG itself. Two members of this committee did not agree to this conception of affirmations; they believed they ought to be reflecting back the majority opinion expressed in the affirmations (which were overwhelmingly negative) in their final recommendation.⁴⁶

This contradictory understanding of the purpose of these affirmations reflects a wider conflict; in submitting these affirmations, and in writing letters to the effect of “We, as a Session, and as individuals, unanimously agree that the ordination of practicing homosexuals is totally unacceptable,”⁴⁷ many members and congregations were under the impression that the study process the NCG was inviting them into was a kind of referendum on homosexual ordination. After the release of their report, the NCG was frequently criticized for their lack of adequate integration of the affirmations, which largely opposed homosexual ordination; “rather than relying on the broader community you would rather trust a small select group with “special” knowledge and revelation.”⁴⁸

Media and Communication

For each Report authored and released, as well as after significant decisions were made at General Councils, there were hundreds and sometimes thousands of written responses sent to the

⁴⁴ Letter from Charlotte Caron to National Coordinating Group, March 9, 1987.

⁴⁵ DMC/DMPE Presentation to General Council, August 1988.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Letter from Kathleen Conrad, Clerk of Session Lawrencetown-Lake Echo Pastoral Charge, Nova Scotia to members of the NCG, November 10, 1986.

⁴⁸ Letter from Rev. John Hogman of Pilot Mound, Manitoba to Rev. David Ewart (National Coordinator for NCG), April 7, 1988.

National Church. The degree of engagement from the broader church during this period demonstrates a clear investment in the life of the Church.

The quantity and quality of written communication during this period out of the National Church (including task and study groups) to Conferences, Presbyteries, congregations and individuals is astounding. The National Church offered detailed replies to letters (from across the theological spectrum), which consistently reflected pastoral sensitivity. It appears as though even the most accusatory and condemning of letters was responded to with care.

After the release of *In God's Image* in 1980, the mass media's coverage in response to the report resulted in a great deal of misinformation and fear in advance of the 1980 General Council where the report was discussed. Seeking to learn from this media frenzy and avoid it going forward, when the National Church released both *Sexual Orientation and the Eligibility for the Order of Ministry* and *Gift, Dilemma, and Promise* in 1984, and when in 1988 they released *Toward a Christian Understanding of Sexual Orientation, Lifestyles and Ministry*, they were more aggressive with a media release plan.

Between 1984 and 1988, a considered and thoughtful release process developed in which summaries of Reports, complete Reports, summaries of what happened at specific General Councils, and oftentimes, pastoral letters to accompany these Reports and Decisions was instituted. The National Church sent copies of Reports to conferences, Presbyteries, and pastoral charges and they frequently made use of *The Observer* to disseminate appropriate information as inserts, full and half page announcements. This consistent effort of making information available was an attempt at "ensur(ing) that all members of the Church have access to the Report so that debate may centre on what the Report says—not what it is presumed to say."⁴⁹ There was a steady effort on behalf of the National Church to inform all members of the Church in order to focus discussion on relevant material.

This consistent attempt at clear and regular communication was especially required during this period given the oftentimes-hyperbolic and sensationalized voice of much—but certainly not all—of mass media's coverage of this Issue. While the mass media certainly attended to the UCC's reports, decisions and contexts during the Issue Years with occasionally dramatized and/or distorted summaries or fragments of information, as UCC Publicist Mary-Frances Denis remarked after General Council 32, "I'm not sure it's fair to lay the blame entirely on the media's shoulders. After all it has been United Church people themselves feeding the news media much of the information they have reported. If a United Church congregation says there is a crisis, whether there is or not, that's reportable news."⁵⁰ Many individuals (both lay and ordained) and congregations were speaking *as* the United Church of Canada, and despite concerted attempts, the voice(s) of the National Church often became muted in light of all of these voices. I did not have the opportunity to go through most of the mass media coverage during this time; for March of 1988 alone, The Clipping Service prepared by Information Services (of the UCC's Division of Communication), was roughly 6cm high.

⁴⁹ Memo from Harry Oussoren and Glenys Huws to The Conference Executive Secretaries, June 4, 1982.

⁵⁰ Letter from Mary-Frances Denis (Publicist for the United Church of Canada) to Rev. Doug Paterson, January 30, 1989.

A Diversity of Issues

The study/dialogue and decision-making processes regarding homosexual ordination acted as a lightning rod for a diversity of issues. Conversations and deliberations about homosexual ordination brought up preexisting and/or ongoing conversations and deliberations about a variety of concerns and tensions such as: the authority of Scripture, the understanding of ministry (and whether there is one standard of morality for clergy while a different one for lay members), the relationship between faith and ethics, marriage, inclusive language and more. As NCG chair B.J. Klassen argued, as long as gay ordination was considered a single issue, “we can’t really address it.”⁵¹

In recognition for the fact that ‘the issue’ required conversation about a diversity of issues, the National Church sought to attend to this range in a variety of ways. For instance, the NCG included information and conversation prompts about this wider web of concerns in study kits, including Scripture. At GC 32, in light of the assortment of interpretive lenses for Scripture (often opposing) operative within the Church’s deliberations on homosexual ordination, church-wide study on the authority of scripture was approved.

More Education?

There was an operative belief in the National Church that more education, more study, and more dialogue would lead to changing people’s minds and hearts about homosexuality and the ordination of homosexuals. This was sometimes correct, and even an approach that led to much change. However, the various courts of the Church remarked on this period as tiring and arduous. As then co-chair of Affirm Bill Siskay noted of proposed further church wide study regarding homosexuality in 1989, “after ten years of it, there’s not a lot more educating you can do.” And as Hugh McCullum noted of this period, “the problem stems from a liberal assumption that, given enough educational material, people will surely change.”⁵²

Face-to-Face Encounters

What often led to people changing their opinions from a conservative position and towards an acceptance of homosexuality and the ordination of homosexual ministers were face-to-face encounters and meaningful exchanges with lesbian and gay people.⁵³ From the “Hidden Christian Adventure” weekend as part of the Manitoba Experience at General Council 30 in Morden (where commissioners were invited into relationship with gay and lesbian Christians), to organized opportunities in the NCG study/dialogue process for ‘out’ Christians to visit and talk with study groups about homosexuality and faith, it was consistently recognized that genuine and lasting changes of heart were best secured through real-life interactions. Where it was not possible to meet with an ‘out’ gay Christian within the NCG study process, included in NCG study kits were video-taped personal interviews with gay and lesbian Christians.

The power of personal accounts was illustrated again in 1990, when in preparation to meet with General Council Executive, Affirm submitted narrative documents from gay and lesbian United

⁵¹ B.J. Klassen in Muriel Duncan’s ‘Gay Ordination: the debate continues,’ *The Observer*, February 1988.

⁵² Hugh McCullum in Michael Riordon’s *The First Stone*, 268.

⁵³ There was no discussion or inclusion of any other sexual identities at any point in the period covered.

Church life, many of which included experiences of “direct oppression,” as well as “fear, pain and anxiety for both openly homosexual and closeted people.”⁵⁴

At the same time as it was recognized that face-to-face encounters and personal narratives were the most successful means by which actual people could be considered rather than the broad and depersonalized category of *homosexuality*, “for lesbians and gays to participate in the (NCG) study at all would mean having to ‘come out’.”⁵⁵ No formal safeguards seem to have been provided at the General Councils of this period, or in the study/dialogue processes within this period. With this oversight (or, perhaps, given this impossibility of promised security), there was nothing established that could have ensured that lesbian and gay members of the Church could be agents in this discussion and decision making process, rather than subjects within it. The fear of repercussion consistently loomed for gay and lesbian church members and clergy (including job security), and many often did not feel safe enough to participate in discussions and decisions that impacted them most directly.

3. In what ways did discrimination present itself (institutionally and individually) and how was it addressed?

The discrimination that many gay and lesbian people in ministry experienced throughout this period most obviously took the form of job insecurity.

The omission of gay and lesbian voices, and the lack of protection for participation of gay and lesbian Church members, was echoed in different ways throughout the period. On multiple levels, conversations were being had and decisions were being made about gay and lesbian life oftentimes without gay and lesbian people at the table and able to safely speak. As Bill Siskay of Affirm articulated,

the debate has been a struggle for lesbian and gay members. We have had difficulty being recognized by the church—we have often been denied direct participation in the debates and studies because the church perceived that because we were gay and lesbian we were too ‘partisan’ to have the welfare of the church in mind in our work. Despite its social activism, the United Church still tends to do what it thinks minority groups want, rather than dialoguing directly with them and acting in light of their call to justice.⁵⁶

It is also true that the Church did get better at including and supporting gay and lesbian voices in the latter stages of this period, seemingly learning from earlier oversights.

As bookends to this change-arc, when the Task Group for *Sexual Orientation and eligibility for the order of ministry* was formed in 1978, there were no out lesbian or gay members in the group. Recognizing this as a failure in 1984, when the NCG was formed it was agreed that lesbian and gay people must be “significantly present.”⁵⁷ Members of the NCG included two members (one lesbian and one gay) of Affirm, an ex-gay minister, as well as one other gay man.

⁵⁴ Report from the Executive General Council dialogue with representatives from Affirm, convened by moderator Rt. Rev. Doc. Sang Chul Lee, March 16, 1990.

⁵⁵ Eilert Frerichs to NCG, April 15, 1986.

⁵⁶ Bill Siskay memo to David Hallman, September 1989.

⁵⁷ Memo from Gerry Hopkirk to David Ewart, July 5, 1988.

Relatedly, at General Council in 1984, there were no openly gay commissioners present for the decision regarding *Sexual Orientation and the Eligibility for the Order of Ministry*. As a homosexual minister who attended General Council describes (identity protected), “for the lesbian and gay commissioners it was a matter of debating one’s identity without ever feeling the freedom to put a human face on the issue. This lost opportunity to incarnate the ministry of gays and lesbians in our church is a sad commentary on the timidity and lack of trust which is a part of the fullness of the United Church of Canada.”⁵⁸

At General Council 32 in 1988, Sessional Committee 8 (where *Sexual Orientation, Lifestyles and Ministry* was being discussed) was deliberately constructed with gay and lesbian representation in mind, as well as more conservative representation. As Marion Best, chairperson of Sessional committee 8 noted, this group’s “members were a microcosm of Council.”⁵⁹ Tim Stevenson and Allison Rennie were made corresponding members of Sessional Committee 8, and while there was the recognition that it was difficult for some on the committee to talk with them present, Best argued, “we’re going to have to sit with the pain. We can’t make decisions about people’s lives until we’ve experienced the pain.”⁶⁰

While there was gay and lesbian representation on the NCG, these members experienced the intolerance within the Church, as did many openly gay Church members. As part of the study/dialogue process, members of the NCG would visit study groups to help facilitate discussion. On one such visit, Charles Bidwell (a gay member of the NCG) was explicitly asked by a parishioner to discuss the details of his sex life. What can be clearly recognized today as a boundary violation was unfortunately commonplace for those gay and lesbian United Church members who were willing/able to be a ‘face’ to the issue.

4. Did the messaging form the National Church shift post-1988? How did the priority shift show itself? Who benefitted from this shift?

After the 32nd General Council in August of 1988, the National Church sought to pacify and address the outrage that many in the Church, often under the umbrella of the Community of Concern, vocally expressed. On September 30th 1988, General Council executive met with Rev. Ralph Garbe regarding the Community of Concern’s *40 Articles of Concern*. In November of 1988, General Council Executive met with presidents of all thirteen Conferences and representatives from the Community of Concern. At this meeting the Community of Concern implored General Council Executive to facilitate a balloting process across the Church; the COC believed the whole church ought to have a direct vote about the MMHS statement, because it did not represent most of the Church’s beliefs. Rather than conceding to this request entirely, General Council Executive formally asked Presbyteries to invite congregations to consider the MMHS statement “in the light of their understanding of the Gospel and their personal experience.”⁶¹ Without dictating a format for response, General Council invited Presbyteries to

⁵⁸ Anonymous, ‘A homosexual minister who attended General Council describes the rejection caused by fear and presumed threats to the church,’ *The Observer*, October 1984.

⁵⁹ Marion Best in Muriel Duncan’s ‘A Decision to live with some ambiguity,’ *The Observer*, October, 1988.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ General Council Executive pastoral letter to all Presbyteries, November 25, 1988.

“gather information in ways appropriate to their own contexts,”⁶² which would be used for information purposes—rather than the referendum that the COC requested—at the 33rd General Council.

The decision to invite further responses to the MMHS statement was disappointing for Affirm, who interpreted the move as a concession to the COC. As Don Gillies of Friends of Affirm noted, he was heavy hearted after this decision was made “not because it is irresponsible but it’s the ‘give them an inch and they’ll take a mile’ story. I saw an inch in that statement.”⁶³ More egregious than this concession to the COC for Affirm, however, was General Council’s denial to meet with Affirm. While the General Council met with the Community of Concern a few months after the 1988 decision, it took until March 16, 1990 for an official meeting between General Council Executive and Affirm, after repeated attempts on the part of Affirm.⁶⁴ This meeting was prompted after a protest that Affirm staged the previous year, referred to as *Vigil for the Voiceless*, where over 40 people from Affirm and Friends of Affirm peacefully protested at Council, joined by members of the Executive (including then moderator Rt. Rev. Dr. Sang Chul Lee).

What is clearly apparent is that immediately after the 1988 General Council, the National Church was preoccupied with: attempting to keep the institution of the church in tact, calming the Community of Concern, and counteracting the economic boycotts and threats of disbanding that congregations across the country were issuing. It appears as though there was little attention paid to ensuring reconciliation for gay and lesbian members of the Church, let alone those seeking ordination.

As Muriel Duncan noted, “so much had changed since Victoria. Lesbians, gays, their families and friends who had heard a word of welcome had seen that it didn’t translate into earlier church life.”⁶⁵ Following GC 32’s MMHS statement, many gay and lesbian voices in the church continued to remain silent in fear; “absent from the public proceedings have been the gays and lesbians of the church. They are suffering, their leaders say, but unable to speak openly for themselves in the present climate. Some are leaving the church.”⁶⁶

5. Was the national church aware of the issues facing some people post-1988? Did it act on this awareness to inform, help, etc.?

And

7. Were there financial or other resources available for ministers, lay people, presbyteries, etc., to have meaningful, ongoing personal support?

There are a few indications that the National Church was aware of some of the issues that gay and lesbian members and clergy in the church were facing, and there is some evidence of support offered to gay and lesbian clergy.

⁶² General Council sub-executive minutes, January 30, 1989.

⁶³ Don Gillies in Muriel Duncan’s ‘This is a debate over what it means to be a member of the United Church of Canada,’ *The Observer*, January 1989.

⁶⁴ Letter from Bill Siskay (National Chairperson for Affirm) to Rt. Rev. Dr. Sang Chul Lee, September 11, 1989.

⁶⁵ Muriel Duncan, ‘A welcome unrealized,’ *The Observer*, May 1989.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

In the meeting General Council Executive had with Affirm in March of 1990, while there was not adequate time to attend to this matter, it is recorded that the meeting agenda included a discussion point on the increased risk of suicide for gay and lesbians within the Church.⁶⁷

In 1992, at the 34th General Council, two petitions were passed which secured health benefits for partners of lesbian and gay employees of the Church.

In 1993, the National Coordinating Committee of Affirm sent a letter to the Division of MP&E to express gratitude for “the support which has been provided by National to those gay and lesbian persons in ministry who have been adversely affected by the present circumstances within the United Church of Canada.”⁶⁸ Specific thanks were given for the financial assistance provided by the National Church to Tim Stevenson, as well as other unnamed gay and lesbian persons in the ordination process, who were all “struggling with the refusal of congregations to allow them to fulfill their call within the United Church of Canada.”⁶⁹ I did not discover any financial records detailing this financial support.

6. Were there public supports or statements from the General Council commissioners? From the GCO office? The moderators? General Secretary?

Notable public statements were delivered from moderators (and former moderators) during this period in regards to the ‘the Issue’.

Former moderator and member of the Community of Concern Rev. Clarke MacDonald together with Eilert Frerichs (spokesperson for Affirm) developed a statement pledging to “pray and work for an open and inclusive church.”⁷⁰ MacDonald and Frerichs agreed on the position: “that sexual orientation in and of itself is not a barrier to participation in the life and ministry of the church, including order of ministry.”⁷¹ Key to this phrasing was the term *orientation*, which for some signified that those who *practice* their orientation would not necessarily be accepted.

At the 32nd General Council, former MacDonald made a statement on the floor that *Toward a Christian Understanding of Sexual Orientation, Lifestyles and Ministry* did not give conclusive evidence that homosexuality is ‘inherited.’ As Ann Naylor later wrote in a letter to MacDonald, as the former moderator his opinion held a great deal of sway, thus making this public statement a questionable choice.⁷²

Dr. Anne Squire’s address at the 32nd General Council also made clear her position on the MMHS, while maintaining that as moderator she had attempted to “remain neutral on the recommendations of the report.”⁷³ Pointing to what she believed the heart of the issues were, Squire clarified that

⁶⁷ Meeting minutes, General Council Executive and representatives from Affirm, March 16, 1990.

⁶⁸ Letter Eleanor Belfry-Lyttle (National Secretary, AFFIRM) to Don Gilles (Division of MP&E), May 4, 1993.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Public statement between Eilert Frerichs and Clarke MacDonald in Muriel Duncan’s, ‘A search for common ground on gay issue,’ *The Observer*, July 1988.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Letter from Ann Naylor (Associate Secretary, Women in Ministry) to Clarke MacDonald, August 14, 1988.

⁷³ Anne Squire, Moderator Address to General Council 32, August 1988.

it is not a question of whether or not the church should ordain candidates who have a homosexual orientation. The church has been doing that for years, and will not doubt continue to do so, the question is whether it will do so consciously or not. The question is whether those who publicly acknowledge and practice their homosexuality should be ordained. The question is whether we in the church can accept the ministry of gay and lesbians, or whether we can tolerate erecting barriers to ministry. The question is whether we plan to change the Basis of Union to place limitations on those whom Christ may call.⁷⁴

What was at stake in the decision according to Squire was whether the church would be an exclusive or an inclusive body.⁷⁵

In his candidate speech at the 32nd General Council and throughout his term as moderator, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Sang Chul Lee publicly reflected upon the issue, making frequent note of the complexity and the pain experienced during this time. In his nomination statement, Lee remarked that “sexual orientation is an important issue facing the church today. It is a sensitive issue, and each member must try to study it with honesty and courage, and try to understand the people who are affected....As we deal with questions related to sexual orientation, we must remember that we are concerned with our brothers and sisters’ life situations.”⁷⁶ In his pastoral letter to the whole church in October 1988, Lee⁴⁵ noted “these are difficult times for many in our Church. All of us are struggling to understand, and sort out our feelings...I urge you all to understand our disagreements as a quarrel within the extended family and to commit ourselves anew to our covenant of fellowship and mission together.”⁷⁷ On the whole, Lee’s public voice regarding the Issue attended to the widespread pain and hurt for the whole church, with a kind of subtle swing towards a prioritized concern for gay and lesbian Church members.

General Secretary Howard Mills made a number of statements during this period, perhaps the most impactful having to do with comments he made in an interview when asked about the Community of Concern. After being quoted in the publication *Credo* as having said that the COC was “very dangerous,” and “seemingly demonic or possessed,” Gordon Ross (on behalf of himself and other clergy members who were members of the COC) filed a \$1 million libel suit against Mills and the United Church of Canada.⁷⁸ Mills argued that he had been misquoted, and his statements to *Credo* were withdrawn. Ross and Mills made a mutually agreed upon statement to the Church and public media on May 25, 1990 that announced the withdrawal of Mills’ words, as well as Ross’ termination of legal action.⁷⁹

8. Were there any measures that were taken to hold Presbyteries or Conferences accountable for the bullying, etc. that was happening? Has the question ever arisen of the

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Rt. Rev. Dr. Sang Chul Lee, nomination statement, General Council 32, August 1988.

⁷⁷ Rt. Rev. Dr. Sang Chul Lee, ‘A Brief Message from the Moderator,’ October 1988.

⁷⁸ Gordon Ross’ lawsuit against defendants Howard Mills and The United Church of Canada, Outerbridge Barristers & Solicitors, March 1990.

⁷⁹ Joint Statement to Media from The United Church of Canada, May 25, 1990.

need to find ways as a Church to hold lay people accountable for their decisions, deeds, and words, etc.?

There were a few instances where such action was insinuated, however nothing in my research suggested that this was a regular occurrence.

After General Council 1988, General Secretary Howard Mills communicated to Presbyteries that their “disciplinary role includes a range of formal and informal hearings, as well as an appeal process,” which ought to be exercised “when presbyters (ministers and other paid staff) evidently misrepresent the action of General Council, or promote disrespect for General Council.”⁸⁰ Some presbyteries and ministers from across the country interpreted Mills’ letter as a threat, which some reported led to a ‘witch hunt’ of conservative clergy in the Church.⁸¹ Confirmation of this was not discovered in the archives.

Within the Community of Concern itself, Rev. Richard Fairchild of Sambro Nova Scotia, a founding member of the Maritime Community of Concern (and who had led the opposition to the NCG Report in that part of the country), wrote a public letter to the members of the various COC’s and to all other Members of the UCC condemning the actions of some members of the COC. In the May of 1988, Fairchild recounts that members of the COC sought to “drive a homosexual person out of his job in our General Council office,” through drawing attention to his sexuality and employment to the media.⁸² Fairchild called upon all members of the COC to “repudiate this action and any others like it.”⁸³

9. What was the anger about? Was it Biblical? Was it about procedure? Was it something else? Did the Church have any concern that there might be anger before, during or after the vote? How did the Church address/support this concern?

Biblical

Anger regarding biblical interpretation was a common theme across this period. When *Sexual Orientation and the Eligibility for the Order of Ministry* was released in 1984, within the first two months National Church received 3200 pieces of mail, the majority of which were opposed to the Report’s suggestions based on the Report’s engagement with Scripture.⁸⁴

This anger concerning the use and interpretation of the Bible was repeated with the NCG’s study/dialogue process, when it became increasingly clear via the affirmations that were being sent in that “the issues of biblical interpretation and understanding of United Church polity are foundational.”⁸⁵ When the Report *Toward a Christian Understanding of Sexual Orientation, Lifestyles and Ministry* was released in March of 1988, many people were angry that the NCG’s position “denigrated what Scripture and the church have said about family and marriage.”⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Michael Riordon, *The First Stone*, 266.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Letter from Rev. Richard Fairchild to the Members of the various COC’s and to all other Members of the UCC, May 17, 1988.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ MP&E minutes, March 1984.

⁸⁵ Letter from B.J. Klassen to Charlotte Caron, May 23, 1987.

⁸⁶ David Allen, ‘Gay ordination draws broad criticism,’ *The Observer*, May 1988.

Many people believed that the NCG had not taken the bible seriously in the writing of their Report,⁸⁷ and had moved away from “the fundamentals of Scripture.”⁸⁸

Conciliar System and Study/Dialogue Processes

During this period, there were observable tensions within the various courts of the Church. Many felt disjointed from national decision-making bodies; 85 St. Clair was sometimes imaged as a hyper-urban civil servant body disengaged from often rural and/or conservative leanings. Misunderstandings, frustration and anger about the governing structures of the Church existed across Canada; many believed that the central office did not in fact reflect the whole, diverse or the majority Church. This tension is not unique to this period, but it was certainly pronounced given the volume and degree of heated church-wide participation and deliberation during this time. From across the country, conferences, congregations and congregants were expressing “increasing distrust in the church system.”⁸⁹ There was a “widespread belief that national staff are seizing control of the church and making decisions without regard to people in the pews.”⁹⁰

Decision-making procedures within the NCG as well as at General Council 32 were both said by members and commissioners to have been impacted by the inspiration and activity of the Holy Spirit. While this *ought* to have been the case (as it coheres with the intention, process and worldview of these bodies), explanations of this sort often did not prove a satisfactory rationale for many who were not present, as it were, for such presence. The intervention of the Holy Spirit in decision-making insinuated to some by default that the Holy Spirit had not also been at work in study groups, congregations, Presbyteries and Conferences who had sent affirmations of dissent to the NCG, and authored petitions to *Toward a Christian Understanding of Sexual Orientation, Lifestyles and Ministry* to General Council 32.⁹¹ When, how and in what direction the Holy Spirit inspires was a source of conflict for those on either side of this issue.

The frustration with the conciliar system was evidenced clearly post-1988's General Council. Many people not present at General Council were disappointed at how commissioners voted. While the conciliar system is based on the assumption that “there are not party politics in the church,” and “General Council commissioners are not expected to represent particular points of view” or be “directly accountable to the membership,”⁹² in the aftermath Conferences and congregations from across the country were frustrated by how their elected commissioners had voted, and were advocating for structural reform. In a response to just such a demand, Rt. Rev. Dr. Sang Chul Lee replied, “no amount of structural or organizational change (though there is always need for some periodically) will solve the malaise of our society or of our church members. Every system must engage in consultation with those to be affected by decisions. But because that inevitably produces a range of suggestions and reactions, the final decision is usually going to leave some unhappy with the results.”⁹³

⁸⁷ David Ewart memo to NCG, June 24, 1988.

⁸⁸ Rev. Ken Emmons in Muriel Duncan's ‘A search for common ground on gay issues,’ *The Observer*, July 1988.

⁸⁹ Letter from B.J. Klassen to Vancouver Affirm, May 23, 1987.

⁹⁰ Muriel Duncan, ‘A search for common ground,’ *The Observer*, July 1988.

⁹¹ Minutes from meeting between Rev. Ralph Garbe, spokesperson for the Community of Concern, with General Council Executive, September, 1988.

⁹² David Ewart

⁹³ Letter from Rt. Rev. Dr. Sang Chul Lee to Mr. E.J. Kipping of Saint John, NB, March 13, 1990.

Other sources of anger

Many people were frustrated that ‘The Issue’ felt like it dominated local, regional and national Church life for more than a decade. At the 30th General Council in Morden in 1984, many commissioners were already feeling monopolized by ‘The Issue’, expressing “frustration and anger that this was now the third General Council in a row in which sexual issues dominated.”⁹⁴ ‘Sexual issues’ would continue to be discussed at General Councils well into the next decade, as would heated decisions about sexuality and sexual orientation. Conferences and congregations from across the country expressed frustration that the National Church was mandating seemingly endless and difficult conversations about sexuality *for* the whole church, without this being the desire *of* the whole church.

The distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual behavior—or between gay and lesbian sexual identity and sexual practice— was a site of significant linguistic and theoretical debate and anger throughout this period. When *Sexual Orientation and the Eligibility for the Order of Ministry* was being debated at General Council 30, a stumbling block for many commissioners was their ability to accept gay and lesbian orientation but not gay and lesbian practice. The nuances of what ‘practice’ in fact included were not attended to adequately at this General Council, and would certainly resurface at General Council 32, as well as directly after.

On the floor of General Council 32, a motion was debated but eventually defeated that a definition of sexual orientation be made. Since no definition was developed, as United Church minister Rev. Glen Ashford noted, many people felt that “this deliberate ambiguity was intended to be conciliatory, to allow a variety of understandings and interpretations rather than trying to impose another one. But in practice, it has had exactly the opposite effect; exacerbating tensions instead of relieving them, further polarizing the church instead of uniting it.”⁹⁵

Refraining from defining sexual orientation in distinction from sexual practice, however, stands the test of time from a progressive perspective; outlawing sexual behaviour for groups of consenting adults while at the same time proclaiming acceptance of these same groups is a conditional, prejudiced and restrictive form of ‘acceptance.’ Being and doing, or identity and practice, are much more experientially bound up than such a clear-cut identity/practice distinction would have allowed for.

National Church’s awareness of the Anger

The National Church was certainly aware of the anger throughout this period. For instance, before the 1988 General Council, the National Church received a flood of angry letters and a variety of documents supporting the Community of Concern’s *Declaration of Dissent*, and some considered putting off the discussion of *Toward a Christian Understanding of Sexual Orientation, Lifestyles and Ministry* until another General Council. I located a draft proposal that General Secretary Howard Mills at least considered circulating, that in light of a variety of developments, a moratorium on action with regard to the Report be issued until 1992. I was unable to confirm whether or not Mills disseminated this proposal.

⁹⁴ Hugh McCullum, ‘A Church in crisis,’ *The Observer*, October 1984.

⁹⁵ Letter from Rev. Glen Ashford to General Council Executive, September 30, 1988.

10. Was there known and intentional bi-phobia within organizing groups around the 1988 vote? How have we served bisexual people in GCs and the Affirm community? How would we respond today, if faced with a similar dilemma?

I found no mention of bisexuality during this period.

11. We would be interested in learning how and when *Affirm* and *Friends of Affirm* became institutional—when was it first recorded? Was it an adversarial relationship with the church to start, as pertaining to the 1988 vote?

Affirm became institutionalized in 1982, when a number of gay and lesbian members of the United Church of Canada (many of whom had already been meeting locally⁹⁶) “decided to organize themselves nationally so as to be able to speak on behalf of gays and lesbians at the General Council in Montreal.”⁹⁷ Affirm was set up as a national organization for gays and lesbians in the United Church with a two-fold mandate: to be a support group for gay and lesbians in the United Church of Canada, and to lobby where necessary on behalf of gay and lesbians in the United Church.⁹⁸

The relationship between Affirm and the National Church during this period was at times strained and/or adversarial, and at others respectful. When the Task Group on the *Commissioning/Ordination of Self-Declared Homosexual Persons* was formed without any gay or lesbian representation, members of Affirm expressed dismay at the fact that they were being treated as “the objects of study.”⁹⁹ Affirm was “at a loss to understand the reasons for this serious omission; we hope it is an oversight.”¹⁰⁰

In response to this serious omission and/or oversight, the Task Group reached out to Affirm to invite their feedback on their work at various points throughout the study/writing process. The Task Group also received position papers from Affirm on the question of Lifestyle, which would help to formulate the task group’s statements. Midway through the Task Group’s writing, Affirm wrote that they felt the task group had “taken seriously many of our (earlier) suggestions and criticisms...the interim report clearly demonstrated the care you have taken in listening to our position.”¹⁰¹

In preparation for General Council in 1984, Affirm requested they be granted corresponding privileges for that year’s proceedings in Morden, Manitoba.¹⁰² This request was denied, to the chagrin of Affirm who were seeking out a means by which to formally participate in debate and

⁹⁶ Groups included: UC Gays and Lesbians of B.C., One Loaf from Regina, The Council on Homosexuality and Religion from Winnipeg, TOUCH from Toronto, and United Church Gays and Lesbians of Quebec.

⁹⁷ Graham Down, ‘The Future of Affirm: A position paper,’ for The National Coordinating Committee off Affirm, March 1989.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Letter from Eilert Frerichs, Sylvia Dunstan and Sue Miller to members of the task group on the ordination/commissioning of self-declared homosexuals, 1983.

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Rev. Ronald Coughlin (Secretary/Treasurer of Affirm) and Rev. Brian Thorpe (Chairperson for Affirm) to Rev. Frank Meadows (DMPE), 1982.

¹⁰¹ AFFIRM Gays and Lesbians in the United Church of Canada, ‘A Discussion paper on Lifestyle,’ submitted to the Writing Team of the Human Sexuality Report, April 1983.

¹⁰² Memo from Christine Waymark of Affirm to Howard Brox, Robin Smith, David Hallman, Anne Squire, et.al. May 7, 1984.

decisions regarding the *Sexual Orientation and the Eligibility for the Order of Ministry* report. While they were not allowed to attend as corresponding members, there were representatives from Affirm at a booth outside of the proceedings at the 30th General Council.

When the NCG was formed in 1984, Affirm was invited to nominate members to be a part of the group, as explored above. However, Affirm did not interpret these members to be representatives of or for Affirm.¹⁰³ A similar process employed by the sexuality task group of sending early documents and inviting response from Affirm was employed by the NCG in their study/dialogue. However, as Frerichs argued, “lesbians and gays have not been partners in the process,” but rather as a sort of position representative existing alongside of other position representatives—each seemingly as valid as the next—such as Homosexuals Anonymous and ex-gay writers.¹⁰⁴ Affirm felt that the final report *Toward a Christian Understanding of Sexual Orientation, Lifestyles and Ministry* in fact continued to marginalize lesbian and gay Christians.¹⁰⁵

At General Council 32, Affirm’s request to be granted corresponding member status was again denied. However, as noted above, Sessional Group 8 requested that three corresponding members be added to their committee at GC 32, two of whom were openly homosexual (Alison Rennie and Tim Stevenson) and possibly members of Affirm. They were able to participate in deliberations within Sessional Group 8 without being able to vote or contribute to consensus agreements.¹⁰⁶

After GC 32, Affirm’s repeated requests to meet with General Council were rebuffed until November, 1989 after they staged *The Vigil for the Voiceless*. The *Vigil* “was an opportunity to support the General Council Executive as it receive(d) response from congregations across the country regarding the Victoria 1988 statement...the vigil also focused on the fact that while the responses to the statement were gathered, lesbians and gays have been silenced.”¹⁰⁷ After this peaceful protest, two spokespersons from Toronto Affirm were invited to meet informally with Rt. Rev. Dr. Sang Chul Lee and other members of the Executive. At this informal meeting, the moderator agreed to a formal dialogue with Affirm in March of 1990.

Affirm submitted 14 pages of personal stories written by gay and lesbian United Church members and clergy for the General Council Executive to consider in preparation for the March 1990 meeting. At this dialogue, more personal stories were shared (many about the direct oppression of gay and lesbian members and clergy in the United Church), issues pertaining to the pastoral needs of gays and lesbians in the Church were discussed (particularly those living in rural communities without easy access to a local AFFIRM group), and the nature and goals of Affirm were considered.¹⁰⁸ Affirm offered a series of recommendations to the Executive in order to help the church “move ahead in relation to its gay and lesbian members.”¹⁰⁹ These included:

¹⁰³ Letter from Eilert Frerichs to NCG, November 18, 1987.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Minutes from National Coordinating Committee of AFFIRM, March 4-5, 1988.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Riordon, *The First Stone*, 118-119.

¹⁰⁷ News Release from Affirm, November 30, 1989.

¹⁰⁸ A Report to the General Council Executive from the Dialogue with representatives of Affirm convened by the Moderator, March 16, 1990.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

that the GC Executive consider ways in which “lay ministry roles of gays and lesbians can be supported by challenges to unfair treatment,” that gay and lesbian concerns ought to be “included in the human rights portfolio” of the church’s structure, and that GC Executive ensure that any accusations leveled against clergy be challenged “by peers at the court level where the perpetrators are accountable,” and more.¹¹⁰

12. How did the COC try to influence the vote? What communication methods were used?

The Community of Concern understood themselves to be “within the mainstream” of the United Church, and were organized around the goal of fighting for “the unity and well-being of our Church in the midst of the present disruption” caused by the NCG’s Report.¹¹¹ The COC’s *Declaration of Dissent*, which was signed by thousands of United Church members and clergy from across the country, included the statement that “we do hereby express our opposition to essential thrusts, directions and conclusions of the report...believing them to be contrary to God’s claim upon our obedience in Jesus Christ.”¹¹²

The Community of Concern frequently used advertisement in mass media to disseminate their messaging, and in order to invite and invoke support to their cause. Leading up to GC 32, they ran a series of advertisements in local papers across the country with an image of the United Church of Canada’s crest being torn in two. The add included a mail-in response form that could be sent to show support for local COC chapters.¹¹³

During the proceedings at GC 32, members of the COC attempted to amend, clarify the recommendations, and pass motions to defeat that MMHS statements that Sessional Group 8 presented. For instance, members of the COC: sought to have the direct recognition of “the history of injustice and persecution against gay and lesbian persons in violation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ” deleted from the Confessional Statement, they sought to have the clause “regardless of sexual orientation” removed from the recommendations entirely, and pressed for a definition of ‘sexual orientation’ in order to distinguish it from sexual practice.¹¹⁴

Behind the scenes at GC 32, Riordon notes that the COC “strategized continuously throughout Council, running out of the hall, across the gallery, and back again and again.”¹¹⁵ Riordon also makes mention of Marion Best (Chair of Sessional Committee 8) negotiating privately for several hours back and forth between COC’s chair Bill Fritz and Affirm spokesperson Eilert Frerichs in order to find common agreement.¹¹⁶ I did not find anything that elaborates on either of these claims.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Letter from Bill Fritz (chairperson for the Community of Concern) and Ken Barker (Secretary for the COC) to all members and clergy in the United Church of Canada, 1988.

¹¹² Community of Concern’s *Declaration of Dissent*, 1988.

¹¹³ Community of Concern’s advertisement in *London Free Press*, June 10, 1988.

¹¹⁴ United Church of Canada, Record of Proceedings of the 32nd General Council, August 1988, 95-112.

¹¹⁵ Michael Riordon, *The First Stone*, 154.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.