

## Frequently Asked Questions about Conversion Therapy

### What is conversion therapy?

Conversion therapy is the widely discredited practice of trying to change someone's sexual orientation or gender identity, based on the premise that being gay or transgender is disordered and can be cured.

### Why does the United Church support bans against conversion therapy?

The United Church of Canada, in policy and principle, affirms that human sexual orientations and gender identities are gifts from God, part of the marvellous diversity of creation. We affirm the value and dignity of all people. Therefore, the church rejects any therapy or practice that labels LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit people as abnormal, broken, or otherwise not whole individuals. Any therapy or teaching that does not affirm the value and dignity of all God's people and the truth that all are loved by God and bear God's image—will not set a person free—will enslave them to “a gospel of good works that chases grace away.”

### Are bans for minors enough?

While bans on conversion therapy for minors have been an effective legislative route, the United Church believes they do not go far enough. The church believes that any proposed legislation should be broadened to include people of any age, as well as condemn any therapy or practice where the goal is trying to change someone's sexual orientation or gender identity. By criminalizing this practice the government provides more protection to vulnerable children, youth, and adults' mental and spiritual health.

### Do faith communities in Canada offer conversion therapy?

Yes. However, religious groups, churches, Christian counsellors, and ministers do not run programs or counselling that are easily identifiable as conversion therapy. They may fall outside the accountability of credentialing bodies. They may brand their programs as sexual healing, breaking sexual addictions, or submitting to scripture to obscure their efforts to change sexual orientation or gender identity.

### What is so harmful about conversion therapy?

Religious-based efforts include such practices as intensive prayer regimens that often result in deep shame and internalized self-hatred, applying discredited psychoanalytic theories about causation, referring to LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit identity as demonic and conducting exorcisms, and/or attempts at gender-conforming behaviour modification. This toxic combination leaves individuals deeply wounded and often traumatized. We must therefore do everything we can to work toward preventing further trauma.

As Pam Rocker writes in her article [“Beyond the Ban,”](#):

Attempts to change someone's sexual orientation are not only futile and rooted in toxic theology, sometimes they're lethal. They result in LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit people having to live in perpetual shame and precarity, forced to choose between conforming to the

beliefs of their church or family, or losing everything and everyone. If those are the only options it's no wonder that so many people attempt conversion therapy. When our core desire to belong is at risk, we will try almost anything to maintain a sense of rootedness.

### **What about religious liberty?**

As Dr. Wendy VanderWal Gritter (Executive Director of Generous Space Ministries) states,

Religious liberty offers the freedom to believe and practice the tenants [sic] of one's faith. Religious liberty does not provide free reign to harm vulnerable individuals or remove their autonomy in making life-affirming decisions.<sup>1</sup>

### **What can I do?**

- Respond to [Affirm United's Action Invitation](#) and write letters to MPs now in support of Bill C-8, "An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conversion therapy)."
- [No Conversion Canada](#) provides a variety of ways to engage, including sharing your conversion therapy story.

If you have more questions, please check out the United Church's [Conversion Therapy](#) webpage and the resources listed.

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<sup>1</sup> "Preventing and addressing the harm caused by sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts: A brief submitted to the Standing Committee on Health for the committees' study of LGBTQ2 health in Canada," by Dr. Wendy Vanderwal Gritter (Generous Space Ministries), page 6.