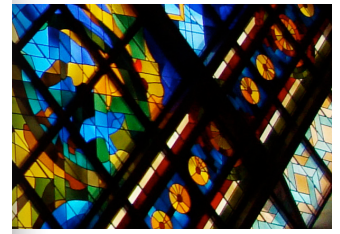




# 40 DAYS OF ENGAGEMENT on *Anti-Racism*



## Transform Your Religious Organization

DAY 28

*Adam Kilner*



### Learning

*Adam Kilner*

One of the most important things that I have ever done as a minister is to start hinting that our church should start an Affirming process. This would have our church begin self-reflecting on our internal culture, and how we might adapt our church culture to become a safe and affirming space for Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ people, racialized people, Indigenous people, and other marginalized peoples—in a city that was reported to have the second highest number of hate crimes reported per capita in Canada.

This began after a few years of being told we had a wedding policy at the church, yet I still did not have one on paper. This led to our Worship & Music Committee drafting an inclusive marriage policy. A member at the meeting then wondered, “Does this mean we are now an Affirming church?” To which I said, “No. But it is a good step to make if we would like to move in that direction.” That member was

surprised by my response, as they weren’t aware of what it means for a community to become [Affirming Ministry](#).

Eventually that person came to meet me in my office to begin mapping out what needed to be done in order to begin moving in that direction.

It has become clear to this church that one cannot simply put an “All are welcome” sign out and do none of the investigative work of self-reflection that will lead to ways of engaging healthily with difference and diversity.

The process our church is going through is already two years in the making. It will likely continue for at least several more years because of the incredible learning taking place (and the challenges of a pandemic). But beginning this

process has been instrumental to the church self-reflecting on issues of race, sexuality, and gender-identity.

The work began with having committee members reading books by Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+, racialized, and Indigenous authors, as well as viewing films and documentaries with similar content. It also has included invitations to racialized, Indigenous, and Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ people to share their stories with the committee and in other venues. Doing this work has helped congregation members share their own stories of inclusion and marginalization with each other, their minister, and with the wider community, helping us contribute to the transformation of our local church culture and our wider community.

In June 2021, our church (Dunlop Central) collaborated with Grace United in Sarnia and the local non-profit Diversity Ed to offer

a Gender, Sexuality & Faith Forum. This event also included partnership and sponsorship from more than a dozen social agencies in our community, the Sarnia Community Foundation, and [Edge: A Network for Ministry Development](#). Additionally, these churches, along with Courtright-Sixth Line United,

worked with Indigenous leaders to offer the community what we called “A Canada Day Acknowledgment Ceremony” where survivors of residential schools and community leaders were able to share their stories and paint a picture of what an inclusive and shared future could look like.

We at Dunlop Central are still on the journey of our own transformation. We share these stories so that others can realize that it is possible to leverage the gift of your own church community or organization to facilitate dialogue and self-reflection both within your organization and beyond it.



## Faith Reflection

*Adam Kilner*

Liberator,

our freedom is tied up in mutual love and care.

Our calling is to acknowledge each other

and to build up larger capacities for empathy

so that we can hear the stories of those who have been marginalized.

We recall early on in the exodus story that after

Pharaoh began increasing oppressive policies on the enslaved Israelites

that the Israelites “groaned under their slavery, and cried out”

and that “out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God”

and upon hearing the pleas for divine help

“God heard their groaning, and God remembered the covenant

with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.”

We have a God who knows us and acknowledges us.

We have a God who receives the voices of marginalized people.

We have a God who remembers the rich promises made

to our faithful ancestors and, likewise, invites us in as well

lesbian, transgender, two-spirit, gay, bisexual, asexual, questioning, and more.

Black, Asian, White, Indigenous.

God hears our calls for help and takes notice.

we, the church, hear the cries of our neighbours

and we remember God’s faithfulness to us.

We move forward with kindness and justice

deeply embedded in our spirits

for we share in the promise of a good way moving forward.

Amen.



## Children's Activity

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Discuss these questions together:

- Do you know anyone who is different than you? Have you talked about how there are many different kinds of people in the world? What kinds of differences do you notice?
- Did you know that God has made us all to be different?
- Have you ever noticed a garden full of violets, daffodils, roses, tulips, geraniums, daisies, and other kinds of flowers? How does variety make the garden more beautiful?
- How could this be the same with people?



## Group Commitment

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When different social categorizations interconnect, we call it “intersectionality”. For example, this recognizes that there are Indigenous and racialized people who are also part of the Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+? and Two-Spirit community. Discuss or journal these questions.

- Did I hear a perspective today from a racialized or Indigenous person or group? Did I hear from a person who identifies as Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+? If so, was their experience similar to mine or different?
- How did I react to hearing another person's story?
- Was I able to notice the goodness of the person as they shared their perspective? What did I observe or hear?
- How might I continue a conversation with that person to learn more about their perspective?
- Did I learn anything about myself as I listened? Do I need to be open to changing anything about myself having now heard another person's story?



## Advocacy

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If you are not an Affirming Ministry, consider contacting [Affirm United](#) to explore how your congregation or community organization might begin the process for becoming an Affirming Ministry.

Contact [Diversity Ed](#) for information on education, training, programming, conferences, and advocacy on improving the lives of Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ people, their families, friends, and allies across Canada.

Develop a consultation with either or both of these organizations in order to begin the work of transformation in your church, social agency, or advocacy group.



**Adam Kilner** is a United Church of Canada minister and community activist. The focus of his work has been on developing just and healthy relationships, especially in regard to race, gender, orientation, and interreligious dialogue. Adam received the In-School Mentor of the Year Award from Big Brothers Big Sisters of Lacombe, Alberta in 2011 and a Distinguished Alumni Award from St. Paul's University College at the University of Waterloo in 2015 for his commitment to youth and social justice.

