



# The United Church of Canada

## Living Skies Regional Council

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### Call for a provincial ban on conversion therapy

**From:** Living Skies Regional Council of The United Church of Canada,  
Rev Tricia Gerhard, chairperson.

**To:** Hon Scott Moe, Premier; Hon Paul Merriman, Health Minister; Hon Gordon Wyant,  
Attorney General; Hon Everett Hindley, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.  
**CC:** Leader of the Opposition; Human Rights Critic

Dear Premier Moe, Minister Merriman, Minister Wyant, and Minister Hindley,

We write to you as representatives of The United Church of Canada within Living Skies Regional Council, which comprises 215 Communities of Faith and over 20 additional ministries or shared partnerships within the province of Saskatchewan.

Living Skies Regional Council of the United Church of Canada, acting on a motion to its membership that passed with over 95% approval in November 2020, **calls upon the Government of Saskatchewan to:**

- a) Enact legislation banning “conversion therapy” for people of all ages in Saskatchewan, thus making it illegal for individuals or entities to engage in the practice of conversion therapy or to refer an individual to practitioners of conversion or reparative therapy;
- b) Include conversion therapy and bans on it in the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code;
- c) Ban health coverage for conversion practices.
- d) Ensure that the Government of Saskatchewan does not provide grants or contracts to any entity that engages in or refers individuals to practitioners of conversion or reparative therapy.
- e) Make a public statement against conversion therapy.

### Our faith belief

Living Skies Regional Council stands against the harmful practice of conversion or reparative therapy for LGBTQIA+ and Two Spirit persons in Canada. Such practices are hostile to a person’s identity, an affront to their dignity, and an assault on their well-being.

Many conversion therapy proponents use the Christian faith and specific interpretations of our scriptures to argue that only heterosexual and cisgender identities and expressions are acceptable to God and to the Christian tradition. We disagree.

It is the belief of The United Church of Canada that our faith tradition affirms the dignity of all people, including people across the LGBTQ2SIA+ spectrum. We believe that LGBTQIA+ and Two Spirit people are an expression of God's diverse creation, and share with cisgender and heterosexual people an equal place in God's love. We recognize that members of the LGBTQ2SIA+ communities continue to disproportionately experience marginalization, family estrangement, violence, and exclusion in a predominantly heterosexual and gender-binary culture. Knowing that our Christian tradition has been used to cause great harm, we commit to making amends, and to challenging these beliefs.

### **Our view on conversion therapy**

Conversion therapy<sup>1</sup> seeks to change core elements of individuals by attempting to change, suppress, eliminate or deny their sexual orientation, and/or their gender identity or gender expression. The United Church of Canada, both nationally and regionally, does not support this dangerous and abusive practice.

There is no credible research to support the discredited and dangerous idea that anything can change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. Rather, what research does tell us is that these so-called change efforts frequently have devastating impacts on their survivors, including increased anxiety, depression, self hatred, compromised mental health, post traumatic stress disorder, suicide or suicidal thoughts, and many other negative and lifelong psychological, spiritual, and social impacts.

### **Our call to the government**

We call on the government of Saskatchewan to do its part, within its powers and responsibilities, to ensure the equality and human rights of all communities and residents. The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code, 2018 (page 5) names sex, sexual orientation and gender identity as among the prohibited grounds of discrimination. Conversion therapy is a profoundly discriminatory act. It is seriously harmful to individuals and is opposed by the Canadian Psychological Association, the World Health Organization, the American Psychiatric Association and others; and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child indicates that children should not be discriminated against based on what gender they identify with.

Provincial action in Saskatchewan to combat conversion therapy would follow in the footsteps of many other jurisdictions in Canada that have taken similar action. Conversion therapy bans at a provincial, territorial and municipal level are a common and important tool for ensuring the safety and freedom of LGBTQ2SIA+ communities.

Provinces and territories that already have, or are in the process of developing, their own legislation include the Yukon, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and PEI. In addition, we have seen communities across Canada take this issue up by introducing municipal bans through bylaws, policies, or declarations.

These include the communities of Vancouver, Wood Buffalo, St. Albert, Edmonton, Spruce Grove, Beaumont, Strathcona County, Rocky Mountain House, Calgary, Strathmore, Lethbridge, Saskatoon, Montreal, and Saint John. Canadians from coast to coast to coast are united in

ending these abusive practices, and they have continued to show their support for leaders who have committed to doing so.

Therefore, Living Skies Regional Council and its members look forward to hearing the response of the Government of Saskatchewan to our call for a province-wide ban on conversion or reparative therapy. We thank you for your attention to this crucial matter, and would be honoured to be in further conversation with the government.

Sincerely,

The Executive of Living Skies Regional Council:

Rev. Tricia Gerhard, chairperson

Ron Brandow

Tim Ellis

Cam Fraser

Linda Gunningham

Brian Maitland

Yujene Oh

Rob Reed

Dave Whalley

Shannon McCarthy, Executive Minister