

**OPEN AND AFFIRMING COALITION**



**ONA**

**101**

**ONA 101**



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**ONA 101**



**WHY?**

WHY



“Accept one another, just as  
Christ accepted you,  
in order to bring praise  
to God.”

Romans 15:7 NIV

WHY



“But everyone knows  
we welcome everybody!”

# WHY



- ▼ Most LGBTQ seekers know from painful experience that the words “you are welcome” usually don’t apply to them.
- ▼ “Church” is a damaged brand not only to LGBTQ seekers, but to straight millennials who identify with the values ONA represents.
- ▼ A public welcome sends a clear message to LGBTQ seekers that they have a home in your congregation.
- ▼ A congregation’s affirmation and support through an ONA covenant can be a life-saving experience, especially for LGBTQ youth and seniors.

# WHY



- ▼ Rural churches have become the cutting edge for the ONA movement. In rural America, LGBTQ neighbors often lack resources and support structures.

# WHY



*Bob and Nancy Smith  
1500 Any Street  
Anywhere, OH 44120*



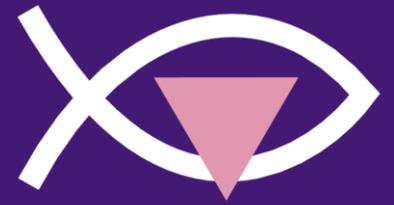
*Occupant  
145 Any Lane  
South Anywhere, OH 44122*

## WHY



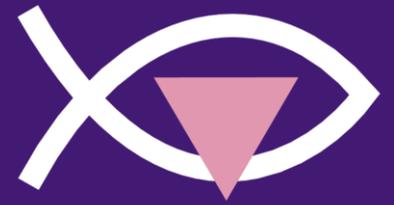
ONA congregations are part of a growing movement that has restored thousands of LGBTQ Christians, who aren't wanted by other churches, to the family of faith.

WHY



Imagine if this were the vocation  
of your church: to restore  
wholeness to the broken body of  
Christ!

WHY



“But if we become OONA,  
we’ll lose members and  
money!”

# WHY



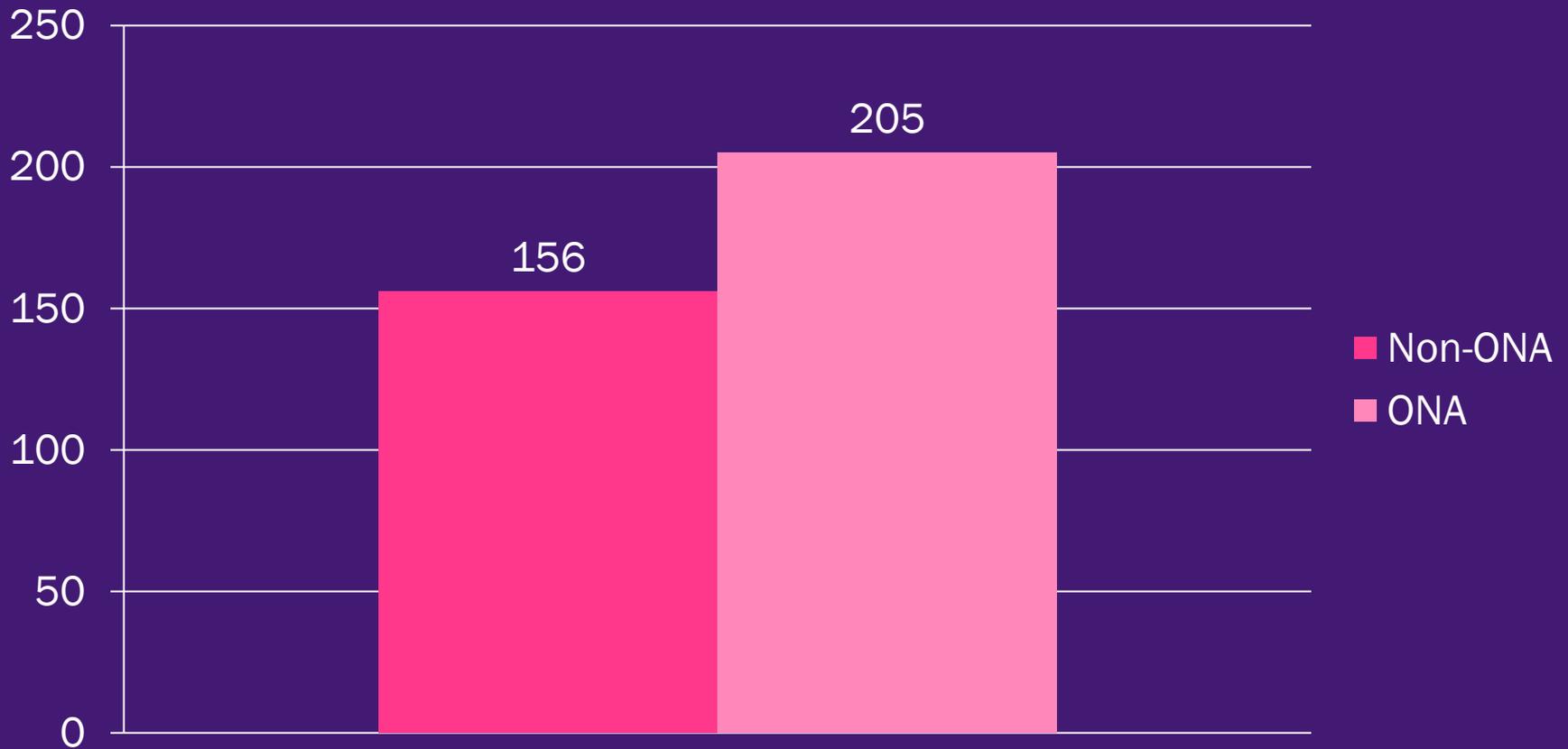
Compared to non-ONA, ONA churches on average:

- ▼ have more members.
- ▼ attract more new members.
- ▼ report higher worship attendance.
- ▼ report higher budgets, therefore higher income.

# WHY



ONA churches average 33% more members than non-ONA. (2018)

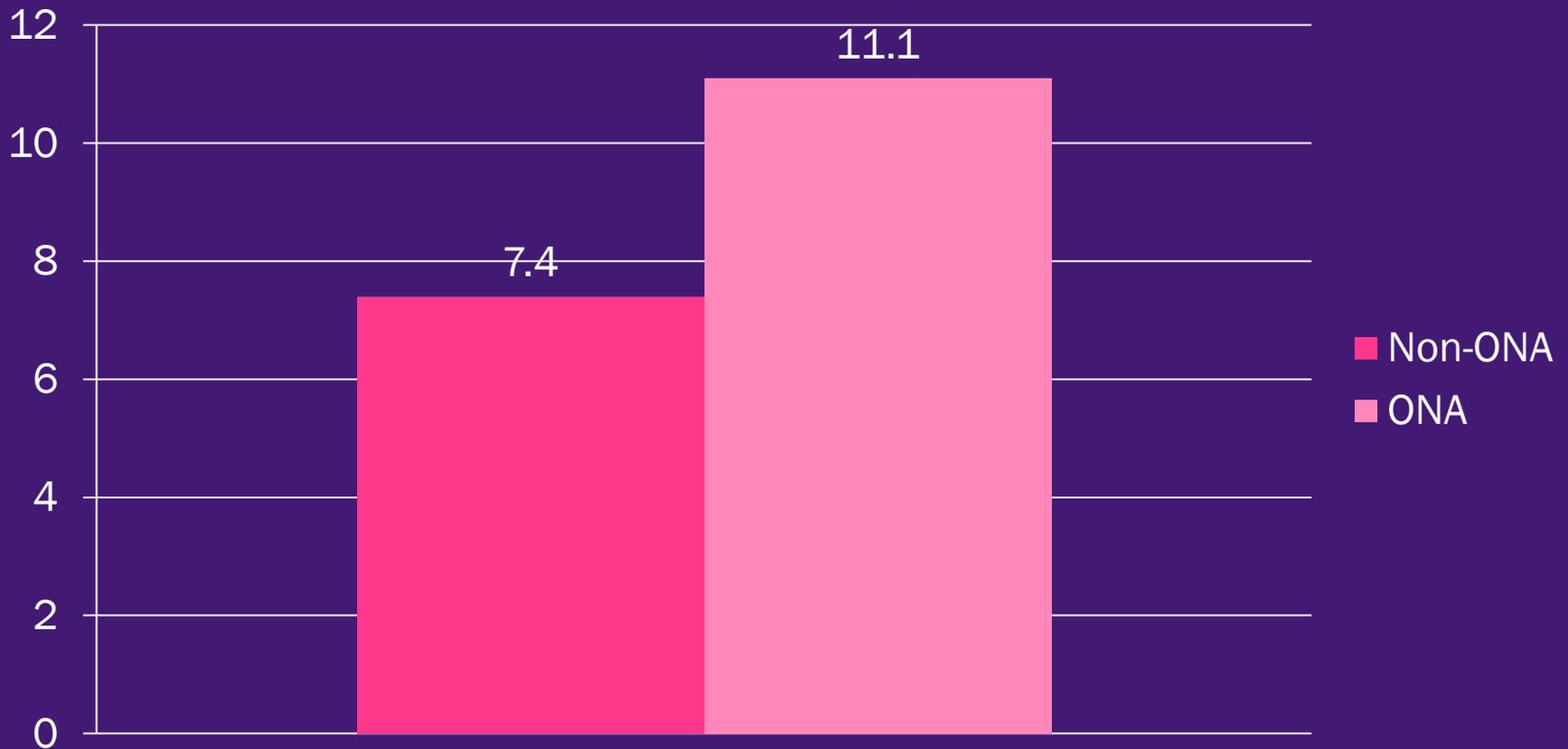


Source: CARDD 2018

# WHY

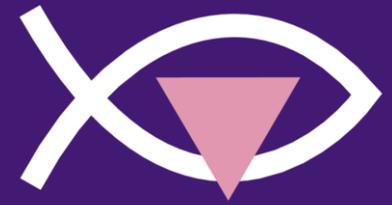


ONA churches reported 50% more new members than non-ONA. (2018)

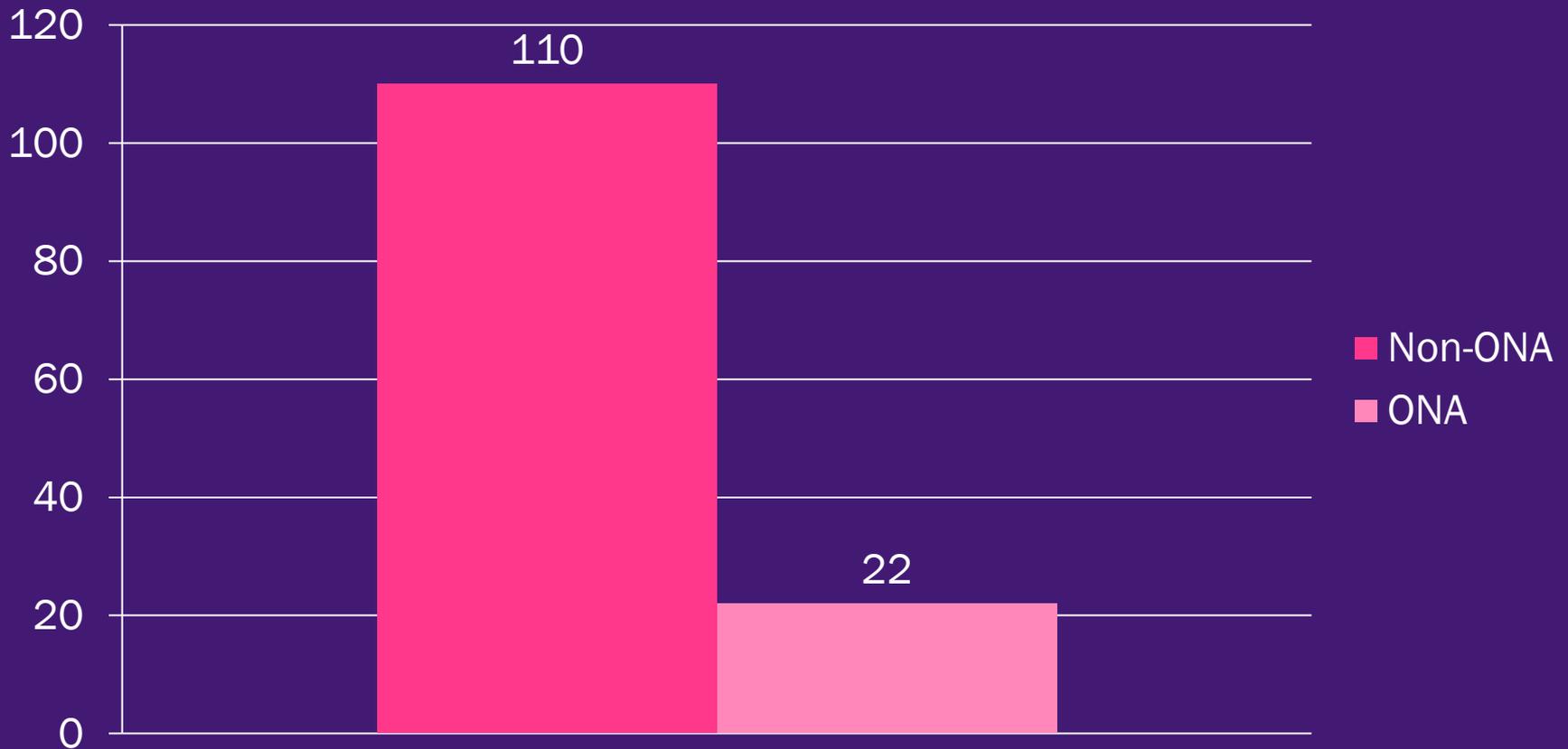


Source: CARDD 2018

# WHY

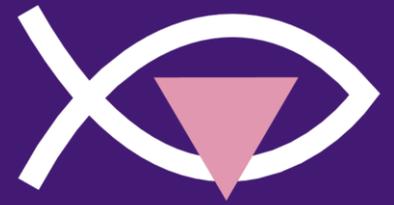


ONA churches are closing at a lower rate (1.8%) than non-ONA (3.2%). UCC average is 2.4%. (2014-2018)

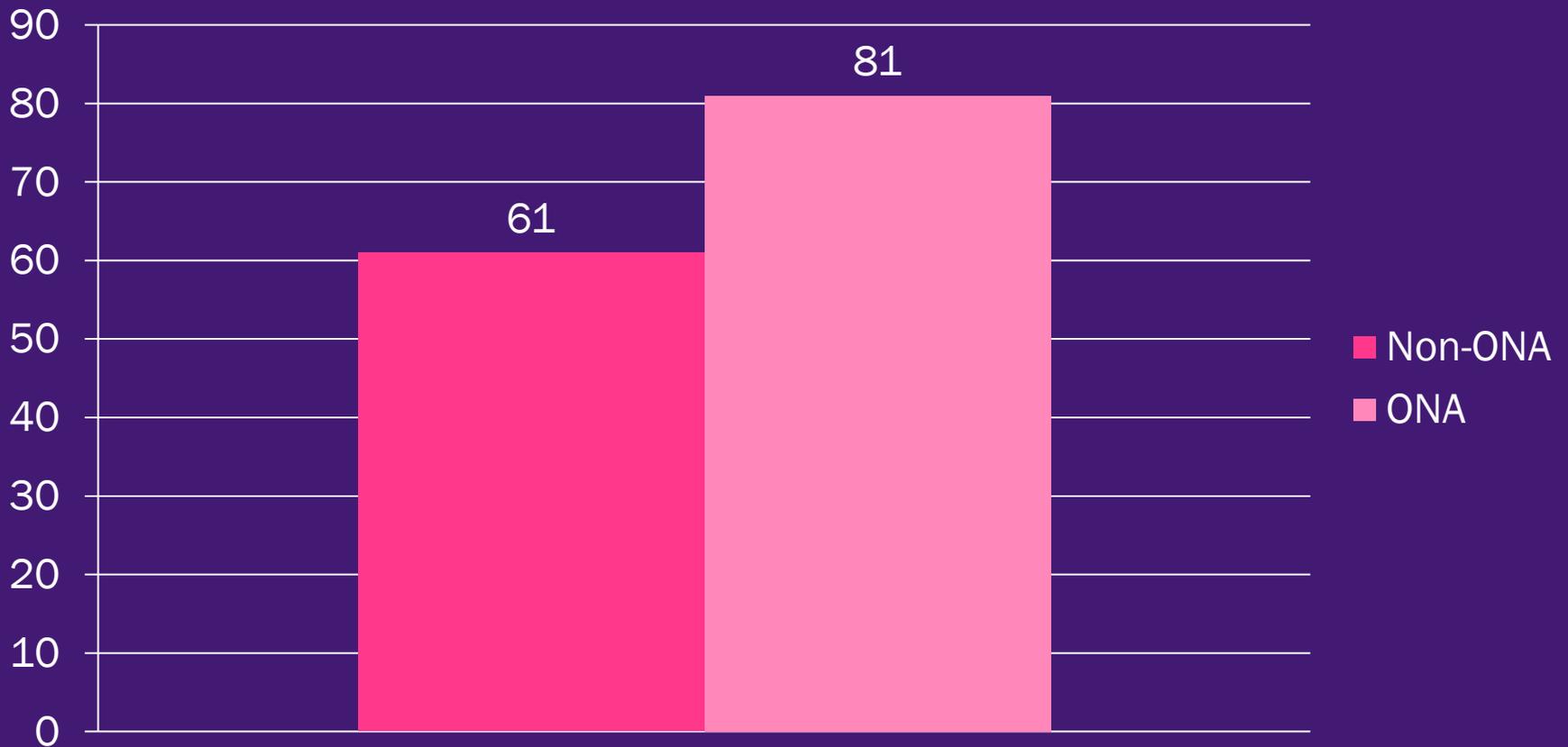


Source: CARDD 2018

# WHY

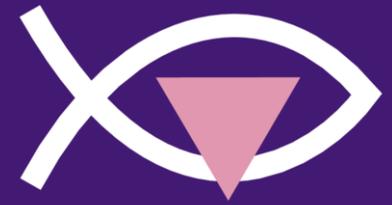


ONA churches averaged 33% higher worship attendance than non-ONA. (2018)

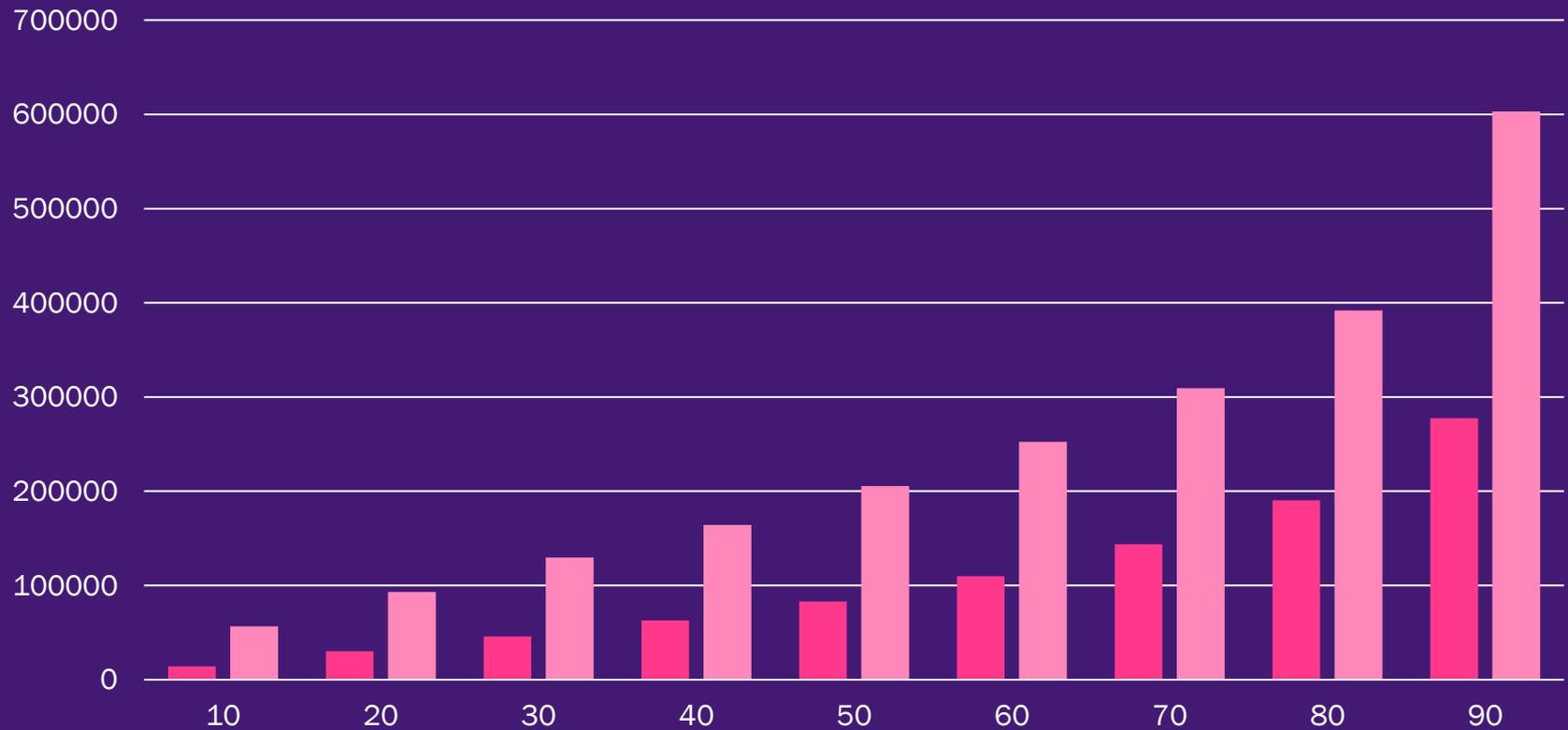


Source: CARDD 2018

# WHY

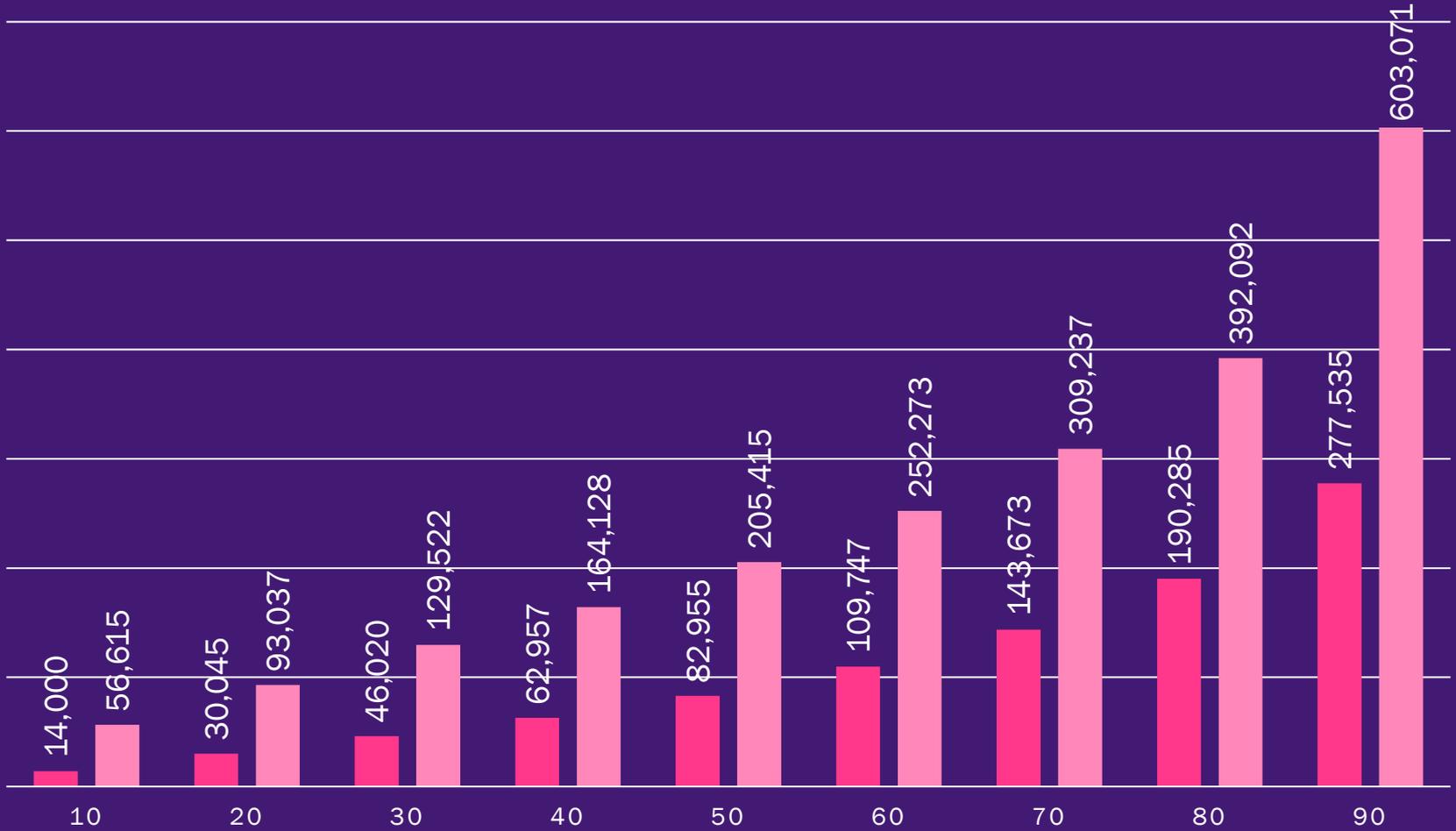


## ONA congregations report higher budgets than non-ONA (by percentile)



Source: CARDD 2018

# WHY



Source: CARDD 2018



“But, Andy, won’t we become a ‘gay church?’”

# REACHING MILLENNIALS



The growing edge for many new  
ONA churches:  
young heterosexual adults who  
identify with ONA values  
(especially couples with children)!

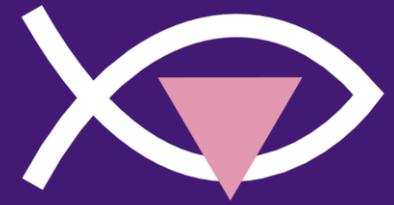
# REACHING MILLENNIALS



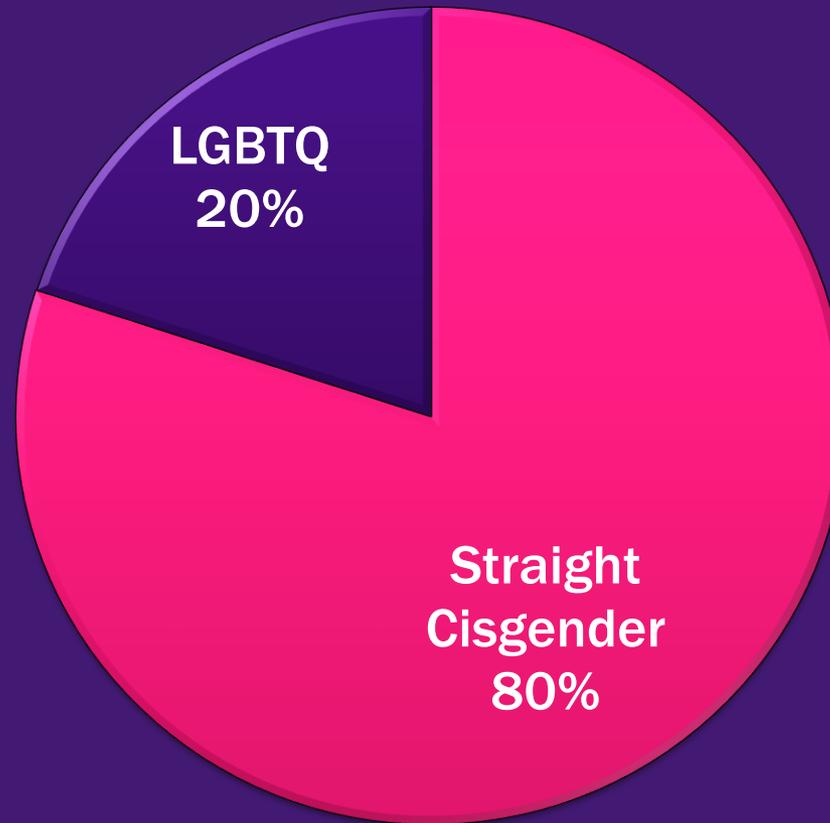
One-third of millennials (ages 25-40) say they left churches because of homophobic or transphobic practices and teachings.

(Source: Public Religion Research Institute, 2014)

# REACHING MILLENNIALS



Of 76 million millennials, 15.2 million identify as LGBTQ

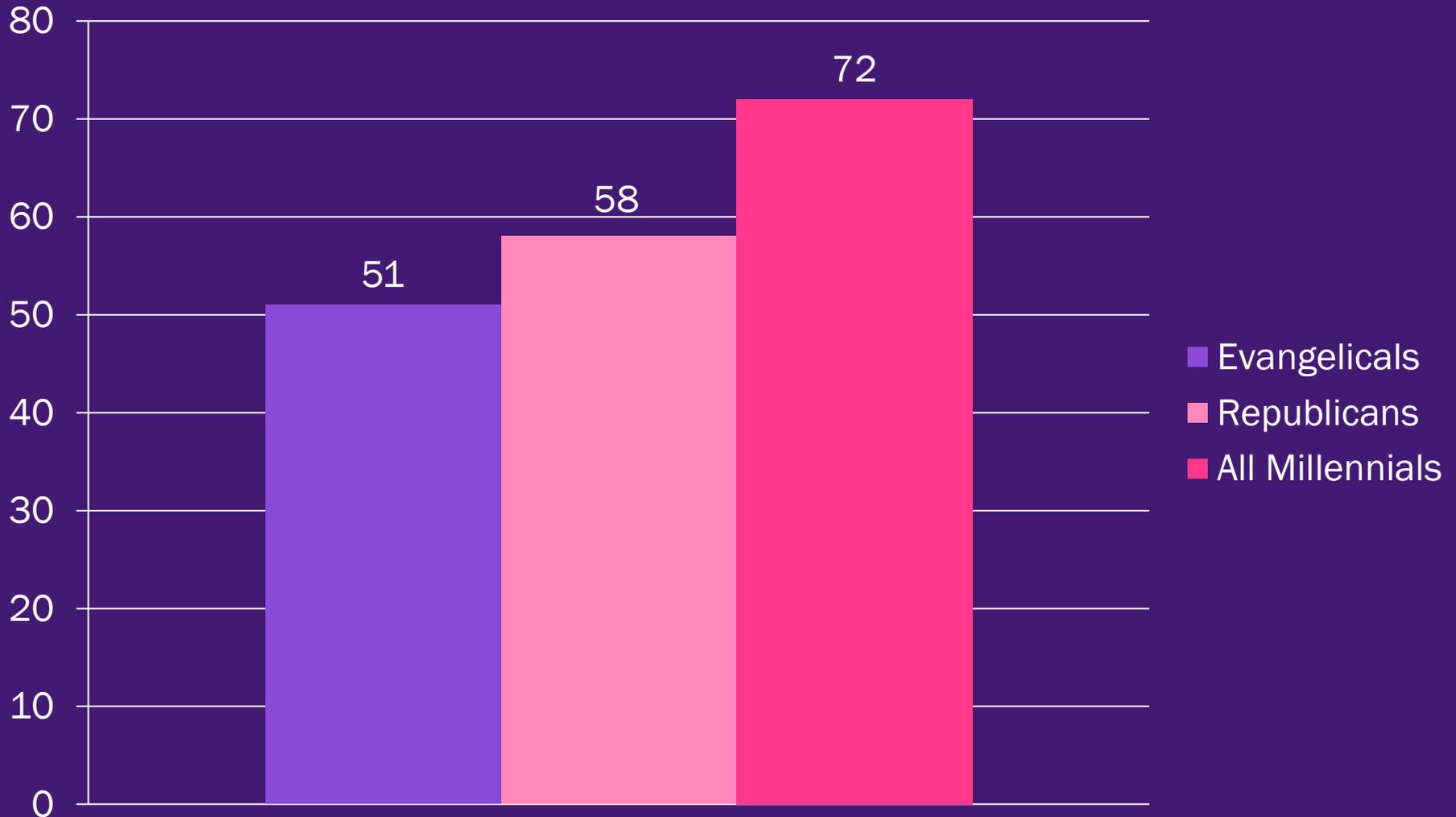


(Source: GLAAD, 2017)

# REACHING MILLENNIALS



Most millennials support marriage equality



# REACHING MILLENNIALS



So, a confident and well-informed welcome to LGBTQ seekers also welcomes straight millennials and the younger “Generation Z” (ages 18-24), and therefore can be an essential element of a congregation’s growth strategy.

**HOW**



**COVENANT**

# COVENANT



The General Synod ONA resolution (1985) urged congregations to adopt “Open and Affirming Covenants.”

But somehow that word was sidelined, and in the past 30 years ONA churches have adopted ONA

- ▼ statements.
- ▼ declarations.
- ▼ policies.
- ▼ amendments to by-laws.

# COVENANT



But a congregation's ONA commitment is best understood as a "covenant"—a value deeply rooted in the Bible and in the theology of our Reformed ancestors.

# COVENANT



“Accept one another, just as  
Christ accepted you,  
in order to bring praise  
to God”

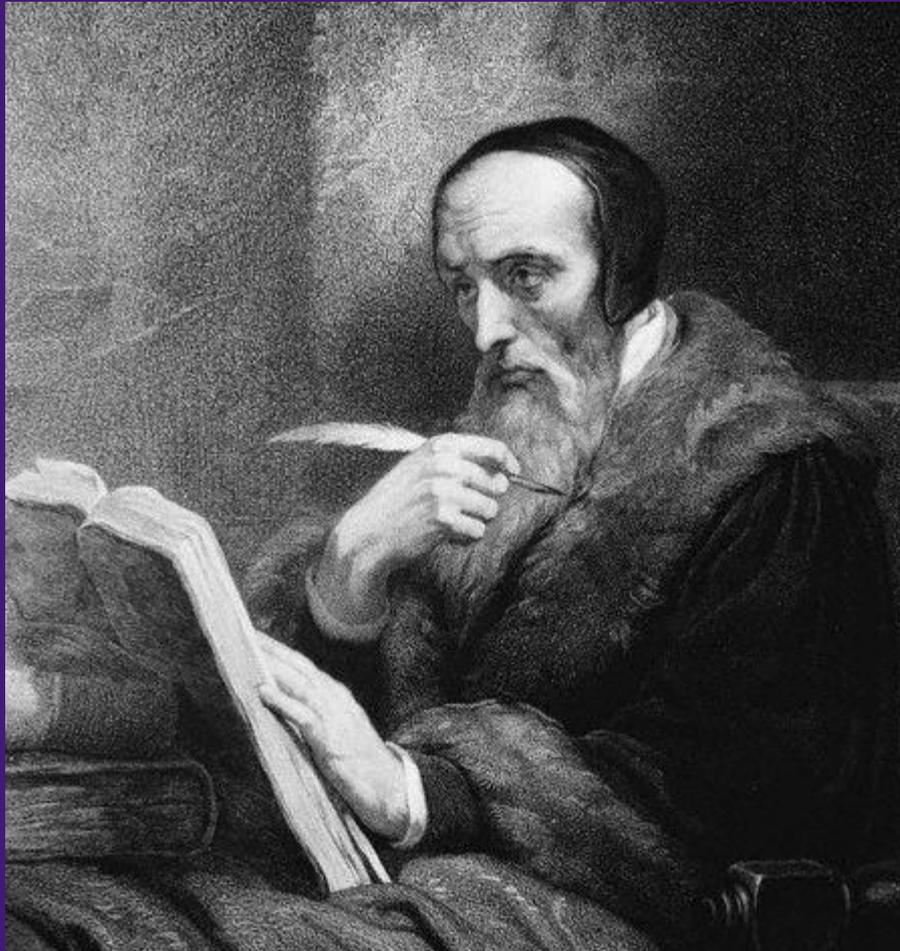
Romans 15:7 NIV

# COVENANT



“Acceptance” for Paul is more than a “welcome.” The Greek verb he uses means “to take” others into our lives—not a transitory welcome but enduring relationship.

# COVENANT



John Calvin

# COVENANT



“For Christ, having received, not one or two of us, but all together, has thus connected us, so that we ought to cherish one another.”

John Calvin on Romans 15:7

# COVENANT



So covenants are about connection:

- ▼ Mayflower Compact (1620): “[We] solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God, and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together....”
- ▼ Dedham, Massachusetts, Church Covenant (1638): “[We covenant] through the help of the Lord to live together in this our holy fellowship according to the rule of love.”
- ▼ Thomas Shephard (1648): “Members [of the church are] bound to cleave only to Christ, their head ... and to one another by mutual love, which they are bound to strengthen and confirm ... by a Solemn Covenant.”

# COVENANT



What are the values our ancestors in faith associated with covenants?

- ▼ connection
- ▼ mutual love in community
- ▼ experience of God's presence
- ▼ listening to God's word

# COVENANT



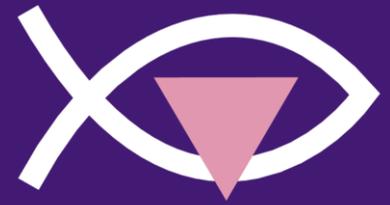
A congregation's journey to an ONA covenant begins with *listening*: to the Word of God in the Bible and in the stories we share with each other. "Holy listening" in 1638 helped the Dedham church discern their future as a congregation. Your personal stories will open hearts and minds as you continue on this journey of discovery.

# COVENANT



That means an Open and Affirming covenant is Bible-based. Churches become ONA not in spite of, but because of the Bible. An ONA journey focuses on Biblical values members of your church hold in common.

# COVENANT



Your members already know how to be a welcoming congregation:

- ▼ gathering around a sick member who needs care and comfort.
- ▼ supporting married couples and sharing their joys.
- ▼ welcoming children into the congregation.
- ▼ recognizing the joys and sorrows of members in public prayer, celebrating anniversaries and other life-events.

Members of your congregation already know how to welcome and support each other! An ONA commitment simply deepens a church's ministry of caring.

**COVENANT**



Covenant=Blessing

# COVENANT



The journey towards an ONA covenant can:

- ▼ deepen your relationships with God and each other.
- ▼ open doors to new ways of living in faithful response to God's plan for your church.
- ▼ revive your congregation's passion for mission and ministry.
- ▼ Enrich your congregation with the gifts of LGBTQ members.

In other words, your Open and Affirming covenant is not only for your LGBTQ neighbors, but also for you. It's a path that can revive your church and create new possibilities for mission, ministry and evangelism.

**COVENANT**



ONA Covenant=Revival

# COVENANT



And because this is a journey the congregation is taking “in the presence of God” (Mayflower Compact) every step begins and ends with prayer.

HOW



HOW?

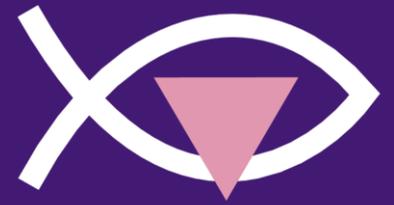
**HOW**



# “Graceful Engagement”

[openandaffirming.org/graceful-engagement](https://openandaffirming.org/graceful-engagement)

# HOW



“Grace” in Reformed tradition is the self-giving of God. God’s grace is generous, radical and liberating, and calls us into community where we can be grace-ful to others.

“Engagement” means that we choose to stay in relationship even when conflict threatens to separate us.

# HOW



So, “Graceful Engagement” as the foundation for an ONA experience means that we accept each other as God accepts us, forgive each other as God forgives us, and remain faithful to each other as God is faithful to us.

# HOW



Three applications of “Graceful Engagement” in your ONA experience:

1. A successful ONA process should build consensus and reduce conflict.

*Goal: to unite, not divide the congregation.*

2. Everyone should feel safe, and everyone should be heard with respect.

*No one should feel they’ve been shamed into silence.*

3. Every congregation is unique.

*The BIC Toolkit helps you plan an ONA process that works for you.*

# HOW



Basics for a successful ONA journey:

- ▼ Take as much time as you need.
- ▼ Plan ahead.
- ▼ Ask questions.
- ▼ Build relationships.
- ▼ Share stories.
- ▼ Communicate!
- ▼ Provide pastoral care.
- ▼ Worship and pray!

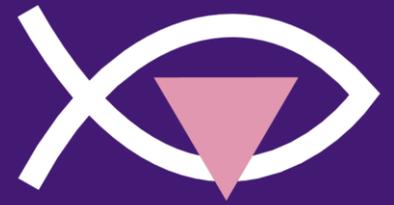
# HOW



And two other points to remember!

- ▼ ONA isn't just about sexual orientation and same-sex relationships, but about gender identity, too. Your welcome as an ONA church to LGBTQ people should include an authentic and well-informed welcome to your transgender, gender-fluid, and non-binary members and neighbors.
- ▼ You're not taking this journey alone!

**HOW**



# Pastoral Care and Lay Leadership

# HOW



A successful ONA process should be lay-led:

- ▼ When the pastor takes charge, the result often is an ONA commitment that doesn't put down roots in the life of the congregation. Faltering ONA churches are often those who voted to become ONA without active lay leadership.
- ▼ The pastor should support the conversation, but not lobby for a particular outcome. In fact, it's important for members to know that the conversation itself does not guarantee a particular outcome. It will be the congregation's decision whether to draft an ONA covenant and schedule a vote.

# HOW



- ▼ The minister's role is as “pastor” and “teacher.” The minister will provide pastoral care to the members of the ONA team and the LGBTQ members of the congregation (and their allies), but will also be pastorally available to members who are skeptical or opposition. The minister will normally lead Bible study—not only on the “clobber passages,” but also on biblical values of hospitality and mutual care.
- ▼ Remember: an ONA process is always Bible-based. Churches become ONA because of biblical values the congregation already holds in common.

**HOW**



**1-to-1 Conversations**

# HOW



- ▼ Helps ONA planning teams to deepen understanding of what the congregation's members need as you begin to design the ONA process.
- ▼ Helps engage members who might otherwise be oppositional and refuse to participate in the ONA process.
- ▼ Strengthens relationships in the congregation.
- ▼ 1-to-1 Conversations webinar Nov. 9:  
[www.frontlinefaith.org/courses/category/ona](http://www.frontlinefaith.org/courses/category/ona)

**ONA 101**



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**ONA 101**



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# FUTURE WEBINARS



**ONA**  
**101**

**ONA**  
**AND THE  
BIBLE**

**1-TO-1**  
**CONVERSATIONS  
ABOUT  
ONA**

**TRANS**  
**101**

**BI**  
**101**

**ONA**  
**201**

# ONA 101



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