

# Sharing a Welcome Gospel • April 22

# Creating Your Next Step • May 13

9am–3pm at First Congregational UCC, Akron

The Open and Affirming Prophetic Witness Team is sponsoring trainings for congregation leaders and staff throughout our associations. Congregation leaders and staff in Summit, Portage, Stark, Medina, Wayne and Tuscarawas counties are encouraged to reserve a place by contacting co-chairs Rev. Erik Breddin (ebreddin@gmx.com) or Chaz Henderson (chazwhend@aol.com). We hope to have 20 or more at each session. Later in the summer, trainings will expand through other regions.

The April 22 session, **Sharing a Welcoming Gospel**, is targeted to congregation leaders and church staff who wish to explore welcoming issues, outreach skills, and membership diversity. It will include a worship service, breakout discussions, light lunch, and wrap-up.

The May 13 session, **Creating Your Next Step as a Welcoming, Affirming, Grace-Filled Church**, is targeted to congregations ready to consider commitment as Open And Affirming, or who wish to deepen their ONA presence within their local community through effective organizing of the congregation to achieve community-wide results.

**Andy Lang**, executive director of the Open and Affirming Coalition, and **Alex Shanks**, organizer of faith communities at Equality Ohio, have created these training programs, combining their skills and perspectives on effectively establishing extravagant welcome to reflect God's diverse creation.

Coordinated by the Open and Affirming Prophetic Witness Team.

Sponsored by the Eastern Ohio & Western Reserve Association: [www.eoawraucc.org](http://www.eoawraucc.org)

**Andy Lang**, executive director of the Open and Affirming Coalition of the United Church of Christ, has more than 20 years of experience as a communications professional in the United Church of Christ. He was a daily newspaper reporter and a Congressional press secretary in Washington, D.C., before moving to Cleveland to join the UCC's national communications staff in 1993. Andy built the UCC's first church-wide website at [ucc.org](http://ucc.org) in 1994 and led the church's national web and social media ministry until 2004. Andy has been the Coalition's executive director since 2010: in that capacity, he leads the UCC's Open and Affirming Program. His passion is to reach the nearly 3,600 UCC congregations that have not yet adopted an ONA covenant. He is a member of Plymouth UCC in Shaker Heights. Andy's pronouns are he/him/his.



**Alex Shanks** is a 2010 graduate of Ohio Northern University, where he received a B.A. in organizational communication. Upon graduating he worked for a denominational body of the United Methodist Church where he created resources and trained leaders in youth and young adult educational programming, followed by a short stint in local church ministry where he developed and implemented curriculum. Most recently he made a shift toward LGBT advocacy work when he became the Ohio Field Organizer for Reconciling Ministries Network and the Faith Consultant for Why Marriage Matters Ohio. He is passionate about equipping leaders to engage in competent and compassionate advocacy, especially for the transgender community. Alex accomplishes this primarily through offering training opportunities for and promoting the voices of affirming faith communities, small business owners, educators, and corporate employee resource groups. Alex's pronouns of choice are he/him/his.

