

## Some Newsletter Articles

### Becoming A 'Welcoming Congregation'

For more than 35 years, the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations (UUA) has adopted policies and Social Justice statements with the particular aim to end all discrimination against people based on their sexual orientation. In 1989, the UUA General Assembly initiated the Welcoming Congregation Program to educate it's members about bisexual, gay, and lesbian people and help people explore their attitudes towards those of different sexual orientations than themselves.

The Welcoming Congregation Program is a completely voluntary program for congregations that want to become more inclusive towards bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender (BGLT) people. This adult religious education curriculum consists of a series of workshops developed by the UUA. The goal of the workshops is to reduce prejudice by increasing understanding and acceptance among people of different sexual orientations. Rev. Stephenson led our first "Welcoming Congregation" interactive workshop on Sunday, September 23, 2007. Since then, we have had two lay-led "Welcoming Congregation" workshops. Jenn Mason led the January 13 workshop, and Alison Fleming led the most recent on March 2. Some of the workshop titles include: How Homophobia Hurts Heterosexuals; Connections to Other Forms of Oppression; Gender Socialization and Homophobia; and Biblical Perspectives on Homosexuality.

While the Foxborough Universalist Church voted to support the signing of the Religious Coalition for the Freedom to Marry's Declaration of Religious Support for Same -Sex Marriage in Massachusetts, Rev. Fayre Stephenson officiates at same gender unions and weddings, and the church welcomes all, becoming a Welcoming Congregation is another step in the church's ongoing commitment to publicly and successfully welcome bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender people into their spiritual community. By confronting our prejudices in a non-judgmental, non-threatening group, workshop participants are allowed to explore the origins of their prejudices and offers an opportunity to replace those prejudices with knowledge. Understanding our prejudices leads to individual spiritual growth and congregational unity, and will act as a catalyst to both learn more about ourselves and to end exclusion. Only when we are truly open to the wealth of diversity in our world will the inherent worth and dignity of every person be affirmed with a large voice.

Since we are a small church the program guidelines allow us to cover the curriculum during four worship services rather than through fourteen evening workshops. We have had three Welcoming Congregation worship services. At our March Board meeting, after some discussion, the consensus was that, to do the Welcoming Congregation justice, we should have an evening Welcoming Congregation program (perhaps a potluck supper, appropriate movie, and discussion) in addition to the fourth worship service. The Board conclusion was that, noting our busy calendar, we might not be able to fit in the evening event this spring and that the evening event could be scheduled in the fall.

After completing the fourth workshop, a review of the requirements will be undertaken to determine if the congregation has appropriately covered all the curriculum topics. If there is a feeling that we have more to delve into, more workshops will be held. If no more workshops are required at the moment, a congregational vote will be taken on whether or not to become an official "Welcoming Congregation" and request certification from the UUA. There are official commitments that a Welcoming Congregation makes when it votes to become one. Additionally, we also would need the support of our new minister in this ongoing endeavour.

Additional information about the "The Welcoming Congregation" can be found on-line via [www.uufoxborough.org/Welcoming\\_Congregation.html](http://www.uufoxborough.org/Welcoming_Congregation.html) or [www.uua.org/obgltc](http://www.uua.org/obgltc). Available in the pamphlet rack are two the UUA Pamphlets: "Unitarian Universalism, A Religious Home for Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender People" by Barbara L. Pescan and "Unitarian Universalism A Welcoming Place for Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender People" by Scott W. Alexander.

- from *BEV* April 2008

## Being A “Welcoming Congregation”

As mentioned in last month’s newsletter article, the UUA has some expectations for congregations that vote to become a Welcoming Congregation and are certified as such by the UUA.

Congregations who publicly and successfully welcome bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender people have the following qualities:

- Includes and address the needs of b/g/l/t persons at every level of congregational life—in worship, in programs, in social occasions, and in rites of passage—welcoming not only their presence, but the gifts and particularities of their lives as well.
- Assumes the presence of b/g/l/t people and celebrates this diversity by having inclusive language and content in their worship.
- Fully incorporates the experiences of b/g/l/t persons throughout all programs, including religious education.
- Includes an affirmation and nondiscrimination clause in our by-laws and other official documents affecting all dimensions of congregational life, including membership, hiring practices, and the calling of religious professionals.
- Engages in outreach into the b/g/l/t community in its advertising and by actively supporting b/g/l/t affirmative groups.
- Offers congregational and ministerial support for union and memorial services for b/g/l/t persons, and for celebrations of family definitions.
- Celebrates the lives of all people and welcomes same-sex couples, recognizing their committed relationships, and equally affirms displays of caring and affections without regard to sexual orientation.
- Seeks to nurture ongoing dialogue between bisexual, gay, lesbian, transgender, and heterosexual persons and to create deeper trust and sharing.
- Encourages the presence of a chapter of Interweave.
- Affirms and celebrates b/g/l/t issues and history during the church year.
- Attends to legislative developments and works to promote justice, freedom, and equality in the larger society.
- Speaks out when the rights of bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender people are at stake.
- Celebrates the lives of all people and their ways of expressing their love for each other.

*- from BEV May 2008*

## The Welcoming Congregation

In 1989, after having finished a study which found profound levels of discrimination towards gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people in Unitarian Universalist congregations, the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) instituted the Welcoming Congregation program. The purpose of the program was to give congregations a process by which to examine their own prejudices and to work towards greater inclusivity. A congregation which has completed that process and then votes in favor becomes a Welcoming Congregation. This designation moves a church into a more intentional relationship to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues. Instead of merely being hospitable towards GLBT people, the congregation is dedicated to advocating for their needs and creating an environment that is hospitable for them and their families.

For example a Welcoming Congregation agrees to:

- Reach out by advertising in local GLBT presses
- Maintain a Welcoming Congregation committee
- Change official church documents so that they contain a non-discrimination clause that includes GLBT people
- Use language that is inclusive of GLBT people and their families in worship
- Ensure that the religious education program is inclusive in its curriculum and language with regard to GLBT families.

Last year, Foxborough Universalist Church began the process towards becoming a Welcoming Congregation. As a part of that process the congregation was surveyed about its views regarding GLBT issues and dedicated two services to exploration of gay and lesbian issues. At the beginning of this year, Katie continued our exploration with a service on radical hospitality (“Leave a Little Light”). In the spring, at our congregational meeting we will vote on whether we would like to be identified as a Welcoming Congregation. Until that time, it is important that we continue to educate ourselves and engage in discussion around issues related to taking this stand.

The Welcoming Congregation Committee (WCC) will sponsor events throughout the year to help us actively explore our own biases and grow in our understanding. Amongst those will be a workshop directed towards parents on how to talk about GLBT issues with kids and a panel consisting of GLBT people from another church. What the committee hopes it will continue to promote is an environment in which honest discussion and respectful dialogue can occur. Towards that end, if you have ideas about how to shape this process or would like to participate in organizing, please talk to any member of the Welcoming Congregation Committee (names will be posted in the front of the church).

Thank you!  
The WCC

- from *BEV* Jan 2009

## Some Newspaper Articles

### *Foxborough Universalist Church begins first step in receiving 'Welcoming Congregation' certification from UUA*

For more than 35 years, the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations (UUA) has adopted policies and Social Justice statements with the particular aim to end all discrimination against people based on their sexual orientation. In 1989, the UUA General Assembly initiated the Welcoming Congregation Program to educate it's members about bisexual, gay, and lesbian people and help people explore their attitudes towards those of different sexual orientations than themselves.

The Welcoming Congregation Program is a completely volunteer program for congregations that want to become more inclusive towards bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender (BGLT) people. This adult religious education curriculum consists of a series of workshops developed by the UUA. The goal of the workshops is to reduce prejudice by increasing understanding and acceptance among people of different sexual orientations. Some of the workshop titles include: How Homophobia Hurts Heterosexuals; Connections to Other Forms of Oppression; Gender Socialization and Homophobia; and Biblical Perspectives on Homosexuality.

The Rev. Douglas Morgan Strong notes "For centuries, the church has been a leading force against sexual minorities. It is not surprising that gay people are reluctant to reach out to the very institution that oppresses them. Yet, gay, lesbian, [transgender], and bisexual people have no less need for warmth, caring, and affirmation than anyone else who calls the liberal church their religious home. In fact, as a subculture in society gay, lesbian, [transgender], and bisexual people may need our support more than the general population."

While the Foxborough Universalist Church voted to support the signing of the Religious Coalition for the Freedom to Marry's Declaration of Religious Support for SameSex Marriage in Massachusetts, Rev. Fayre Stephenson officiates at same gender unions and weddings, and the church welcomes all, becoming a Welcoming Congregation is another step in their ongoing commitment to publicly and successfully welcome bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender people into their spiritual community. By confronting our prejudices in a non-judgmental, non-threatening group, workshop participants are allowed to explore the origins of their prejudices and offers an opportunity to replace those prejudices with knowledge. Understanding our prejudices leads to individual spiritual growth and congregational unity, and will act as a catalyst to both learn more about ourselves and to end exclusion. Only when we are truly open to the wealth of diversity in our world will the inherent worth and dignity of every person be affirmed with a large voice.

The Foxborough Universalist Church, a Unitarian Universalist congregation, is holding their first "Welcoming Congregation" interactive workshop at 10:00 a.m. on Sunday, September 23. The church is located at 6 Bird Street (on the common/Route 140); directions and additional information about the church, UUA, and "The Welcoming Congregation" can be found on-line via [www.uufoxborough.org](http://www.uufoxborough.org).

- Sept. 17, 2007

## **Second Phase Begins**

During the second phase of the Foxborough Universalist Church's efforts to become a Unitarian Universalist Association "Welcoming Congregation", Jenn Mason will lead participants in an interactive workshop about stereotypes.

Many times discrimination is subtle and people are unaware that they are doing it. One of our goals is to help increase awareness and reduce discrimination in the church and our communities. Participants in the hour-long workshop beginning at 10:00 a.m. on January 13, will explore the stages of understanding, learning goals, the process, participation guidelines, and some of the psychology behind stereotypes. We'll also discuss our assumptions concerning lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and talk of our fears and gains that we hope to make through the Welcoming Congregation process.

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- *January 2008*