

## 1. Engage with the Welcoming Congregation Program.

The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) offers a volunteer program for congregations that want to take intentional steps to be more welcoming and inclusive of LGBT people. No matter what the unique circumstances of your congregation are, you can become recognized for your work around education, congregational life, and community outreach in regards to LGBT issues.

If your congregation is already recognized as a Welcoming Congregation, do a refresher course if it's been more than five years, and/or consider engaging with Living the Welcoming Congregation, a curriculum for Welcoming Congregations that is designed to help deepen your welcome.

## 2. Proclaim your welcome!

Advertise in local and regional LGBT publications, including online. Also advertise in general venues: local newspapers, bulletin boards in community gathering places, and online publications with a local focus.

Place a note in all of your Orders of Service that states your welcome. You may want to make a general statement that you welcome all people, or you may want to use more specific language. If your congregation has a website, add a note there as well and consider how else you can make your website welcoming to LGBT visitors.

## 3. Make information about LGBT people and issues available.

In your literature area, on your bulletin boards, and/or on your website, include literature about LGBT people and issues and what LGBT outreach and public witness your congregation is doing.



### Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Ministries

25 Beacon St., Boston, MA 02108  
[lgbt@uua.org](mailto:lgbt@uua.org) (617) 948-6461

LGBT Ministries is part of the UUA's Multicultural Growth & Witness staff group and offers the **Welcoming Congregation** and **Living the Welcoming Congregation** programs, as well as providing general LGBT resources.

Check out [www.uua.org/lgbt](http://www.uua.org/lgbt) for more resources and ideas for how to deepen your congregation's welcome.



### Interweave: Unitarian Universalists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns

156 Massapoag Ave. Sharon, MA 02067  
[info@interweaveuu.org](mailto:info@interweaveuu.org)

Interweave is a member-based, related organization of the UUA. It sponsors worship and workshops that address LGBT issues and their interrelationship with other forms of oppression. Interweave also publishes a newsletter. Check out [www.interweaveuu.org](http://www.interweaveuu.org) for more.

This pamphlet is a joint project of Interweave and LGBT Ministries. It was last updated September 2011. You are encouraged to reproduce and distribute it as you see fit. It is available online at [www.uua.org/lgbt/welcoming](http://www.uua.org/lgbt/welcoming)

# 10 Things Your Congregation Can Do To Become More Welcoming

*When people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender (LGBT) first come to your congregation, they may be uneasy until they know they are welcome.*

*Many religious denominations and individual churches are actively hostile to and condemning of LGBT people, ignore them, and/or claim to treat everyone the same regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, refusing to acknowledge that LGBT people face additional issues in society and around matters of faith and religion. Because of this, many LGBT people will assume that you and your congregation don't want them unless you clearly invite them in.*

*To feel welcome in your congregation, members of oppressed groups need to know that the congregation is aware of their issues, and that they are welcome as their full selves. Little things are often the most important. What will really make people feel welcome, and what will make them want to return, is inclusion in all aspects of church life. You can make it clear that they are welcome without their having to ask.*

#### **4. Take steps toward inclusive language.**

Inclusive language is about more than stating a welcome to all. It's about intentionally understanding and challenging the ways that our language unconsciously assumes certain things and unintentionally makes people with marginalized identities feel unwelcome.

Provide written guidelines for inclusive language to all people who write for and edit the church newsletter and/or website; participate in your worship services (including ministers, lay leaders, guest speakers, and readers of announcements and readings); lead your religious education programs for all ages, and other programs in the church. Also, give special attention to the role of your greeters (check out the Multicultural Welcome resource available online at [www.uua.org/multicultural](http://www.uua.org/multicultural)).

#### **5. Acknowledge and respect individuals and families.**

Accord full acknowledgment and respect to each person and family, as defined by the person/family. This includes the definition of pledging units, listings in the church directory, family events, and all other aspects of church life.

If your services include a time for people to participate as a family (such as lighting a candle to start the service), invite families of all descriptions to take a turn in that part of the service. Over time, you can include a wide variety of families: single people, single people with children, same and mixed gender couples with and without children, families of choice, etc.

#### **6. Avoid assumptions.**

Avoid making assumptions about the sexual orientation or gender identity of any of your members or visitors, and be open to challenges to assumptions that you do make. Respect each person's identity, self-labels, and pronoun preferences.

#### **7. Take special steps toward transgender welcome.**

Do education around understanding the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity, and take special steps toward transgender welcome and inclusion. For example, create single stall bathrooms and signs directing people to them. Use the words "children" instead of "boys and girls"; "people" instead of "women and men"; and "siblings" instead of "brothers and sisters." Don't split the congregation up by gender, such as during responsive readings, for example.

Find out more at [www.uua.org/lgbt/identity](http://www.uua.org/lgbt/identity).

#### **8. Make LGBT issues a part of your worship.**

Hold services and sermons that address LGBT issues. Ask your Minister(s) and Director(s) of Religious Education to do supportive sermons. If LGBT people are out in your congregation, you could invite them to do a lay-led service or just the sermon, or you could invite friends and family members of LGBT people to discuss their experiences, invite community leaders to lead you in worship around LGBT issues, or arrange for a panel discussion on an LGBT topic. There are many possibilities.

#### **9. Do outreach and public witness around LGBT issues**

There are a multitude of ways to take action and show your support for LGBT people, no matter how large or small your congregation is, or where you're located. If there are LGBT groups or organizations in your area, build relationships with them—ask them what they need and how you can help. If your congregation has out LGBT members, respect their guidance and leadership.

#### **10. Extend your welcome beyond sexual orientation and gender identity.**

Emphasize the interrelatedness of all forms of oppression and weave this into everything that your congregation does. LGBT people, like all people, have multifaceted identities. They are people of color, they are working class, they have disabilities, they are immigrants, they are children and youth and single parents and elders. Is your congregation a welcoming congregation to all of these people also?

Homophobia and transphobia affect people with multiple oppressed identities differently. Explore this. Offer the UUA adult education curriculum Building the World We Dream About, which discusses oppression on the basis of race and ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, ability, and age. Emphasize that oppression (the use of power and privilege to restrict the rights of a labeled group) often goes unaddressed without intentional work.

**For more resources on all of the above things you can do to deepen your welcome, please visit [www.uua.org/lgbt](http://www.uua.org/lgbt).**