



# 10 Things Your Congregation Can Do To Become More Welcoming of LGBTQ People

*When people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (LGBTQ) 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 LGBTQ people, ignore them, and/or claim to treat everyone the same regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, refusing to acknowledge that LGBTQ people face additional issues in society and around matters of faith and religion. Because of this, many people who are marginalized on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity 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 congregational life. You can make it clear that they are welcome without their having to ask.*

## 1. Engage or reengage 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 LGBTQ 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 LGBTQ issues.

If your congregation is already recognized as a Welcoming Congregation, do a refresher program! LGBTQ Ministries recommends that all congregations go through a Welcoming Congregation Program or refresher course every five years. Visit [www.uua.org/lgbtq/welcoming/program](http://www.uua.org/lgbtq/welcoming/program) for more.

## 2. Proclaim your welcome!

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

Place a note in your Orders of Service that states your welcome. You can make a general statement that you welcome all people, or you can 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 LGBTQ visitors.

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

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

## 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 participate in your Sunday

services (including ministers, lay leaders, guest speakers, and readers of announcements and readings), contribute to your newsletter and/or website, lead your religious education programs for all ages, and lead other programs. Also, give special attention to the role of your greeters (check out the Multicultural Welcome resource for greeters available online by going to [www.uua.org/lgbtq/welcoming/ways](http://www.uua.org/lgbtq/welcoming/ways)).

## **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 directory, family events, and all other aspects of congregational life. Take time to ask how individuals and families prefer to be acknowledged and referred to, rather than assuming things like family structure, preferred gender pronouns, and labels and other words people use to refer to themselves.

If your services include a time for people to participate as a family, invite families of all descriptions to take a turn in that part of the service: single people with or without 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. Take time to ask, and then always respect, each person's identity, self-labels, and pronoun preferences.

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

Do education around understanding the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity, and take intentional steps toward transgender welcome and inclusion. For example, avoid dividing people into two genders in practice or in language. Create single occupancy bathrooms and signs directing people to them. Make education on gender diversity and transgender identity and welcome a priority, whether through a Sunday service, film screening, workshop, small group ministry, religious education programming, or more. Find out more at [www.uua.org/lgbtq/identity](http://www.uua.org/lgbtq/identity).

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

Hold services and sermons that address LGBTQ issues. Ask worship leaders to do supportive sermons. If there are openly LGBTQ people 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 LGBTQ people to discuss their experiences, invite community leaders to lead you in worship around LGBTQ issues, or arrange for a panel discussion on an LGBTQ topic.

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

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

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

Increasing your welcome of LGBTQ people is just one entry point into the conversation about how to truly be a Welcoming Congregation. LGBTQ 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?

Emphasize the fact that all people are multifaceted and that all oppressions are inter-related—weave this into everything that your congregation does. Explore how homophobia and transphobia affect people with multiple oppressed identities differently. Offer Building the World We Dream About, a program about race and ethnicity, or check out [www.uua.org/growth/inclusivity](http://www.uua.org/growth/inclusivity) for more next steps to deepen your welcome.

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