

COMING OUT DAY

Rainbow Flags & Doors, PFLAG, and Too Many Letters!

Coming out of the closet, admitting to family and friends, and to oneself that one is different from others, is one of the hardest things that we can do. We are social beings and we risk the breaking of important relationships when we come out with the ways that we are different. Things have been getting better for LGBT persons generally, especially here in California, but it can still be very hard to tell family members and friends that we are different. And it often is hard for family and friends to know how to respond. In families with strong conservative religious beliefs there may be a lot of sin language thrown around and it may be even harder to get to a point of acceptance. Some people coming out may still lose their religious community, family, jobs, and friends. Even so, most people find that there is a freedom in telling others who we really are.

As a congregation, and as allies, friends, and family members, we may be surprised when a loved one comes out of the closet, but we have an opportunity to show acceptance, support and love. As a congregation, we have gone through a process of becoming a Welcoming Congregation to LGBT persons and we have committed to being open and welcoming to all people.

PFLAG, which started out as a support group for Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays and which has broadened its perspective to include support for transgender persons and their families and friends, is an excellent resource for families and friends of those coming out, as well as for those coming out themselves.

RAINBOW FLAGS AND DOORS

Our rainbow flag gets noticed by lots of people in the community. It is a great symbol of our commitment to be welcoming to LGBTQ persons. According to Wikipedia, San Francisco artist Gilbert Baker first produced an 8 color rainbow flag for the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade on June 25, 1978.

The flag consisted of eight stripes; Baker assigned specific meaning to each of the colors:

hot pink: sexuality
red: life
orange: healing
yellow: sunlight
green: nature
turquoise: magic/art
indigo/blue: serenity/harmony
violet: spirit

Thirty volunteers hand-dyed and stitched the first two flags for the parade.^[7]

Hot pink and Turquoise were later dropped leaving the 6 color flag most common today, which is displayed with the red band at the top.

The rainbow and various forms of the rainbow flag has become widely used to symbolize support for LGBT persons.

A few years ago at the UU church in Little Rock, we invited people to come out of a Rainbow Door! We encouraged everyone who was a supportive friend, family member, or other ally to join the group coming out and everyone stepped through the rainbow door in our Coming Out Day service! Here at 1st UU Stockton, we have invited people to come out the doorway with the Rainbow Flag!

TOO MANY LETTERS:

The matter of too many letters was addressed in a New York Times article which appeared in print on January 10, 2013, on page E1 of the New York edition with the headline: LGBTQIA. I want to share a couple of snippets:

If the gay-rights movement today seems to revolve around same-sex marriage, this generation is seeking something more radical: an upending of gender roles beyond the binary of male/female. The core question isn't whom they love, but who they are — that is, identity as distinct from sexual orientation.

But what to call this movement? Whereas “gay and lesbian” was once used to lump together various sexual minorities — and more recently “L.G.B.T.” to include bisexual and transgender — the new vanguard wants a broader, more inclusive abbreviation. “Youth today do not define themselves on the spectrum of L.G.B.T.,” said Shane Windmeyer, a founder of Campus Pride, a national student advocacy group based in Charlotte, N.C.

Part of the solution has been to add more letters, and in recent years the post-post-post-gay-rights banner has gotten significantly longer, some might say unwieldy. The emerging rubric is “L.G.B.T.Q.I.A.,” which stands for different things, depending on whom you ask.

“Q” can mean “questioning” or “queer,” an umbrella term itself, formerly derogatory before it was appropriated by gay activists in the 1990s. “I” is for “intersex,” someone whose anatomy is not exclusively male or female. And “A” stands for “ally” (a friend of the cause) or “asexual,” characterized by the absence of sexual attraction.

It may be a mouthful, but it's catching on, especially on liberal-arts campuses.

At one point, Santiago, a curly-haired freshman from Colombia, stood before the crowd. He and a friend had been pondering the limits of what he calls “L.G.B.T.Q. plus.”

“Why do only certain letters get to be in the full acronym?” he asked.

Then he rattled off a list of gender identities, many culled from Wikipedia. “We have our lesbians, our gays,” he said, before adding, “bisexual, transsexual, queer, homosexual, asexual.” He took a breath and continued. “Pansexual. Omnisexual. Trisexual. Agender. Bi-gender. Third gender. Transgender. Transvestite. Intersexual. Two-spirit. Hijra. Polyamorous.”

By now, the list had turned into free verse. He ended: “Undecided. Questioning. Other. Human.”

The room burst into applause.

So, are you confused yet? With LGBTQIA friends and parishoners, a gay cousin and a transgender son-in-law, and my involvement in PFLAG, I try to keep up, but sometimes it leaves my head spinning! I don't always get it right, but I believe that it is important to try. LGBTQQIAA persons are valuable human beings, who are worthy of respect, appreciation, and my effort to acknowledge their inherent worth and dignity. That is what being a Welcoming Congregation is about, and what it means to express our Unitarian Universalist Principles and Values. So I am going to keep trying to get it right, both in my effort to understand and support LGBTQQIAA persons, and also in my advocacy for their full human and civil rights, including marriage, health benefits, and the right to identify themselves in whatever way seems most honest to them without negative consequences in society, families, the workplace or this church.

COMING OUT DAY!

Coming Out may not be as big a step in society as it once was, but it still can be surrounded by fear of rejection and possible loss of important relationships. Because of that, I would like to see us continue to offer the chance for people to tell their stories, at least for the foreseeable future. Even if nobody new has come out in more than a year in our congregation, we are affirming the value of all persons when we offer such an opportunity, and we are reminding ourselves that there are still those who are in the closet, and may be afraid to admit, even to friends, or to themselves that they are different, unique.

And Coming Out Day gives us a chance to celebrate the beauty and wonder of each unique individual, to express our appreciation for each person without regard to confining categories that may not fit. And in the process, we may remind ourselves that we are each odd in some way, each imbued with interesting and perhaps annoying quirks! Our stories of coming to Unitarian Universalism are as much discovery stories as any, and as we come to accept those who are coming out, we also learn to accept ourselves and each other more deeply and broadly.

May we continue to reach beyond tolerance to embrace each other with love and acceptance, no matter who or what we are, and may all persons be free to be themselves here! So may it always be! Shalom, Salaam, Blessed Be, Namaste, and Amen!