

COMING OUT DAY 2015

Thoughts from an Ally

I just wanted to share a few thoughts before we close today. Even though First Unitarian Universalist Church has been a Welcoming Congregation to GLBTQ persons for many years, I think it is good that we remind ourselves periodically how important that may be to GLBTQ persons or their friends and family. Many religious groups are not welcoming and some could better be described as condemning. UU Ministers voted to celebrate Gay and Lesbian unions and work toward honoring weddings more than 30 years ago, and we have been one of the most welcoming traditions for more years than that. The UU Welcoming Congregation Curriculum is from the late 1980s or early 1990s, though there are more recent updates. We work hard to be inclusive to all persons of good will who want to join us!

That said, it is still good to remind ourselves of our commitment to be welcoming to GLBTQIA persons! It is easy to just talk to old friends on Sunday mornings or schedule meetings after church when everyone is already here. Being intentional about welcoming newcomers, especially GLBTQ persons who may be church-shy due to previous negative experiences takes time, energy, and commitment! Just because we all know that GLBTQIA persons are welcome here doesn't always get communicated to people who have already taken an emotional risk to walk in the door! And even if we say it in the welcoming words, we also need to embody welcome, respectfully and appropriately! Probably good to wait until at least the second visit to offer a hug, but a handshake and kind word are always appropriate!

Particularly as allies, we need to be clear that we really are welcoming and that we don't expect people to change or hide important parts of

themselves in order to be part of Unitarian Universalism or this congregation. We are glad to offer weddings to gay, lesbian or straight couples and will do our best to bless all persons who want to celebrate their relationships.

The commitment to welcoming GLBTQIA persons is one of the most important things that we offer today. We have some things here that everyone needs: acceptance, respect, and the opportunity to engage within a supportive community. We also accept persons with many different beliefs: Christians and Jews, Buddhists and Hindus, Muslims and Pagans, Atheists and Agnostics. If people can generally agree to our principles and practice respect and acceptance of others, they are more than welcome here. We are potentially one of the most inclusive religious communities imaginable, not that we always live up to our own principles or standards. We strive to accept and respect all who gather here and we usually do a pretty good job of it!

Some religious traditions have included prohibitions against certain relationships for reasons that have long since been forgotten or been rendered counterproductive in a world already overpopulated with humans, and some groups have imposed such prohibitions because of cultural values. Few if any groups have strong evidence that their deity or religious exemplars actually condemned balanced consensual relations. Unitarian Universalists generally support and accept relationships between consenting adults.

Unitarian Universalism includes many GLBTQIA persons, and most of the rest of us are strong allies. Not only are most of our congregations generally supportive, but they have also used the Welcoming Congregation curriculum, made sure their by-laws are inclusive, and taken other steps to be welcoming. This is a serious commitment made by most of our congregations, including First Unitarian Universalist Church of Stockton.

We know that far too many people have been thrown out of churches, families, and lost jobs when they came out of the closet, so we declare again that our movement and this congregation will treat GLBTQIA persons with respect and acceptance. If you have lost family, friends, jobs, or your church because you are GLBTQI or A, you are welcome here. Now because we are not a Christian church even though we welcome and include Christians, if you are Christian, you may decide that we are not the best fit for you, but you are welcome here with us. If you are strongly aligned with another religious tradition, you may similarly find that we are not the best fit, but we want you to know that you are welcome so long as you respect and accept each of us!

To all who gather this day we wish a Happy Coming Out Day! We hope that the acceptance we each find here will help to encourage us all on our journey of life and faith. We acknowledge that we sometimes fail in our commitment to respect and accept others, so we ask forgiveness and hope that we shall each continue to learn from and teach each other!

May we each find courage and strength from the time that we share together. May all our lives be blessed by our gathering and our commitment!

So May it Always Be!

Shalom, Salaam, Namaste, Om, Blessed Be, and Amen!