

Action Steps to Become a Welcoming Congregation

Education

1. Offer religious education that incorporates bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender life issues, including the workshop series from the Welcoming Congregation Program.

HUU has begun the process of scheduled workshops both formal and informal. We have also been fortunate to have a supportive board and congregational members that are dedicated to providing a welcoming environment for all individuals. In 2009 our Cycore leader Julie Caran and Cycore team coordinated a trip to DC for Standing On The Side of Love March that was well represented by our youth. In the late 80's members of HUU began the process of taking action steps to becoming officially certified. Through the years we have continued to seek a welcoming congregation for all. In December of 2010 the board unanimously approved the continued move towards completion of the remaining action steps with a goal of becoming certified in 2011 as part of our 20 year anniversary celebration.

Here are samples of some of our recent services:

We recently featured Michael Quayle a past minister who just performed his first service as an openly gay man.

Chris Gatesman has been with his partner for over 30 years and delivered a very moving service titled "A Welcoming Congregation – Hospitality or a Call to Action?" along with co-speaker Tammy Adams. They are both members of the Unitarian Universalist church of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Michael Quayle also presented us with a Sunday Service on "Shower of Stoles". This also included a beautiful display of Stoles and informational handouts.

Pride Sunday-Michael Quayle delivered a dynamic Sunday Service that touched the hearts of all that gathered. Attached you will find a beautiful service written by Michael.

2. Promote participation by the congregation's minister, religious education minister or director, president, and/or moderator in the Welcoming Congregation Program.

HUU is a lay led congregation. We are fortunate to have 2 openly gay guest speakers that provide Sunday Services on a regular basis. Reverend Emma Chattin and Michael

Quayle share personal stories that are spiritually uplifting as well as being educational and motivating.

3. Offer a congregation-wide workshop program(s), with follow-up opportunities for study and reflection.

This Summer HUU offered 2 workshops from The Welcoming Congregational Handbook. Workshops 11 and 12 on Bisexuality and Transgender identity. Richard Wolf a member of our task force led the discussion on Bisexuality. After attending GA I was happy to lead an informal workshop on Transgender identity which allowed me to share my GA workshop experiences with our congregation. Both of these workshops took place at a designated table at our monthly potluck. Richard had sent out announcements through our weekly member emails with links to study material. Handouts were also provided at a table near the front door .

Formal workshops are being scheduled for a Fall series using the Welcoming Congregation Handbook.

4. Use the Unitarian Universalist sexuality education program, [*Our Whole Lives*](#).

HUU has ordered all books in this series. A curriculum is being discussed with parents to determine what our needs are for our small but growing population of children. We are making arrangements for a representative from our congregation to attend the district meeting in the near future for a training event.

Congregational Life

5. Form a broad-based Welcoming Congregation committee to offer programs and monitor progress.

Our most recent task force was formed in January 2011. I am currently serving as Chairwoman with a task force that includes Michael Quayle, Richard Wolf and Jeanine Sellers. Linda Royster and David Lane have also been valued mentors as we have moved forward. Richard Wolf will be taking over as Chairperson once we are certified and will continue to hold regular task force meetings along with scheduled workshops.

6. Adjust congregational bylaws and other relevant documents to include an affirmative nondiscrimination clause concerning membership, hiring practices, and the calling of religious professionals.

See attached adjusted bylaws.

7. Use inclusive language and content as a regular part of worship services, and provide worship coordinators and speakers with guidelines on inclusive language.

Below is the section of the Sunday Services Committee minutes from yesterday that relate to your request that we have an inclusive announcement during our welcome in Sunday services. Hope this works for you. Please let me know if you have questions or concerns.

Thank you all for the work you have done to create a more welcoming atmosphere at HUU--and completing the paperwork to have our congregation officially designated as welcoming.

Here are the minutes:

The Committee agreed to include the language requested by the Welcoming Congregation Task Force in our suggested text for facilitators: "HUU is a Welcoming Congregation, embracing the diversity of all persons including those who have been traditionally excluded based on gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mental or physical abilities. All are welcome here." As facilitators are free to adapt their comments within the structures of our on-line templates and because any words repeated every week can lose their power, we cannot promise that this text will be included in every service at HUU, but it will be included often.

Bernie

8. Provide main worship space and ministerial services for bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender rites of passage, such as services of union and dedications of children.

Both Reverend Emma and Michael Quayle are available for conducting a wide variety of services. We also have Willow Kelly on our team to perform pagan rituals as well.

9. Welcome bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender persons in the congregation's brochure.

HUU welcome brochure (the page entitled "Our Affirmation"). We try to keep this brochure in every hymnal and to give a copy of it to every visitor.

See attached Visitor information

10. Ensure that publications, public information, and programming reflect the requested status of any individual as s/he sees appropriate; recognize same-gender couples in directories and other publications as they desire.

HUU has several same-gender couples that are very active in our community. Publications and directories as well as pledge forms reflect each couples commitment as they desire.

Community Outreach

11. Celebrate and affirm bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender issues and history during the church year (possibly including Gay Pride Week in June or [National Coming Out Day](#) in October).

HUU has been a very proud annual sponsor of the Shenandoah Gay Pride in the Park Celebrations. Sunday July 24th marked our communities 5th year of festivities. The Welcoming Congregation presented “Pride Sunday”.

We are also in support of Elton’s first “Annual Pride Celebration” on October 9th, 2011.

12. Participate in and/or support efforts to create justice, freedom, and equality for bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender people in the larger society.

HUU participates in many social events. At our most recent GA our congregation was represented by 21 members. It was a great experience to participate in the North Carolina march for equality. We interact regularly with **Shenandoah Valley Gay and Lesbian Association** and continue to stay informed on issues that affect the equality for all. Many of our members are also involved with Equality of Virginia.

13. (*again*) Provide main worship space and ministerial services for bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender rites of passage, such as services of union and dedications of children. (This guideline is also listed as number 8 under Congregational Life.)

Reverend Emma Chattin has been an active supportive of our congregation and one of our favorite visiting ministers. After many years together Emma and her partner Heather recently celebrated their commitment by legally becoming married.

14. Establish and maintain contact with local bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender groups to offer support and promote dialogue and interaction.

Our congregation has several members involved with SVGLA. Several of our members participate and host the First Friday Events.

15. Advertise in the local press and/or other media that reaches the bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender communities.

In March 2011 HUU placed an ad in the SVGLA newsletter. We will be continuing to advertise our presence in the community.

See attached SVGLA advert

16. Provide use of building space on an equivalent basis with other Unitarian Universalist organizations when requested by members for programs and meetings of an [Interweave](#) (Unitarian Universalists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns) chapter.

HUU meeting house has been used for many years as a venue for SVGLA dances, potlucks, and advocacy meetings. No need for a local chapter in Interweave-SVGLA has effectively served in its place for many HUU members.

An additional note:

Once a congregation feels it has achieved all applicable action steps and **has taken a congregational vote in affirmation of being recognized as a *Welcoming Congregation***, a brief description of how each action step was met should be sent to the OBGLTC along with notification of the congregation's completion of their process. Upon receipt of this information the Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Concerns will send the congregation a letter of congratulations, along with a poster that proclaims that they are a *Welcoming Congregation*.

Please note that the OBGLTC does not ask for a brief description of how each action step was met in order to "rate" a congregation's work, but rather to keep ourselves informed as to the good work being done in our congregations and to provide ideas for other congregations involved in the Welcoming Congregation process.

For more information contact <mailto:obgltc@uaa.org>.