

## Pride's Past at UUFM

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person
- Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning

Each of the above Unitarian Universalist Principles has led our congregation in its Core Commitment of LGBTQA+ justice, of which we are very proud! Starting probably before 1990, but gaining momentum in the 90's, we at the UUFM have grown and listened and educated ourselves and waved flags and marched for LGBTQA+ rights.

Early efforts by our congregation to support the inherent worth and dignity of all, including all the variety and wonder of gender and sexual expression, began in the early 1990s with a curriculum developed by the UUA (Unitarian Universalist Association) and the UCC (United Church of Christ) called AYS: About Your Sexuality. Volunteers from our congregation offered this curriculum to our 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade youth several times. Later, this curriculum was revised and given a new name, OWL: Our Whole Lives, with lessons for students from early elementary through adults. We continue to offer OWL to our children and youth on a regular basis.

In the early 2000s, we obtained another curriculum developed by the UUA on Welcoming Congregations. At that time, a Welcoming Congregation was described as “a congregation that is being inclusive and expressive of the concerns of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons at every level of congregational life- in worship, in programs, and in social occasions- welcoming not only their presence, but also the unique gifts of their lives as well.” In more recent times, the list would include non-binary, asexual, questioning and other terms that people use to describe themselves.

The initial announcement of the goal to become a Welcoming Congregation (WC) was made in a newsletter article in October 2000. Five members called ourselves the Welcoming Congregation

Committee, formed to provide energy, organization and direction to our fellowship on its path to becoming an official Welcoming Congregation by the UUA. Our hope was that as we learned, stretched, and grew to become more inclusive of this group of often-marginalized people, we would also become more inclusive to all.

In January 2001, we held a 2-day kickoff weekend in January, 2001. From 15-20 people, or a good third of our congregation, participated in the 14 2-hour WC workshops that continued into May of that year. During 2001 and 2002, we experienced a lot of enthusiasm and energy while also: hosting a World Aids Day breakfast and worship service; purchasing buttons, a banner and rainbow ribbons and stickers for nametags; looking at the use of inclusive language in our Sunday services; showing monthly movies on gay/lesbian/transgender topics; publishing questions and answers about LGBT issues in our newsletter; and rewriting our bylaws with words to affirm LGBT people with non-discrimination/inclusion clauses, among other activities. We talked about the spiritual gift of doing anti-oppression work being our own growth.

After the WC workshops were completed in 2001, we recognized that our church was not ready to vote to become a WC. Many of us did not want to be known as the “gay church.” While this acknowledgment was disappointing to many of us, we recognized that, even for a liberal church (!), further growth was needed. We continued to offer many of the actions listed above, and started some new ones. For the inaugural regional Pride Fest in August 2002, the Pride Fest church service was conducted in our building. We had a table at this first Festival with brochures and buttons to hand out. One February, we wrote Valentine notes to our state representatives, encouraging them to vote against restricting marriage in Minnesota to one man/one woman. Despite these efforts, interest was waning and our second goal of applying for WC certification in the spring of 2003 also passed by.

In July 2005, the Social Concerns committee, chaired by Carrie Rice, discussed the focus of the committee. Members of UUFM had filled out ballots the previous May. The focus that received the most votes was “Welcoming Diversity.” This was described as: “A focus on inclusivity vs exclusivity in our community and the nation. Could include achieving status as an official “welcoming congregation” to the GLBT community. Also an opportunity to incorporate our mission statement.” The initial two actions from this meeting were determined to be: 1: approaching groups at Lincoln Community Center to explore partnering with them and 2: to achieve the welcoming congregation status.

In the August 2005 newsletter, a call was put out to revive our effort to be an official WC, with almost 20 members responding! Beginning in February of 2006, we held the WC workshops again, with new and returning participants. Each month in the newsletter, one participant wrote an article about: Why Becoming a Welcoming Congregation is Important to Me.

At our annual meeting on Sunday, May 21, 2006, we voted unanimously, 42 to 0, to become an official Welcoming Congregation! We were so proud of our efforts to become more inclusive and welcoming to all people. On June 30, 2006, The Unitarian Universalist Association officially recognized our church as a Welcoming Congregation. At that time, we were one of 10 such congregations in Minnesota.

For the past three years the Pride Team, along with Rev. Rita, has worked to complete the 5 tasks required by the Unitarian Universalist Association to renew our Welcoming Congregation status yearly. This renewal process includes two worship services on LGBTQA+ concerns, 6 Days of Observance, a learning module, and a donation to a local LGBTQA+ ally organization. Rev. Rita finds people to speak with us on two Sunday mornings during the year. The Days of Observance include topics such as National Coming Out Day and Transgender Day of Remembrance. Our learning modules have included two evening

sessions on Transgender 101 by transgender activist Ellie Krug, an LGBTQA+ panel of MSU graduate students who shared with our youth group, and a showing of the film *Disclosure* on the portrayal of transgender folk in film and on TV. For both the Transgender 101 course and the film *Disclosure*, people from our Mankato area were invited and many attended.

The importance of this work and our dedication to support and sustain our LGBTQA+ friends and family and community continues to this day!

