

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Waco
Welcoming Congregations Initiative

Welcoming Congregation Committee
Kristen Cervantes, Minister, Board Liaison, Inclusive Language
Marty Van Wagner, Co-Chair
Carmen Saenz, Co-Chair, Community Outreach/Social Action
Ron Hagar/Carmen Saenz, Adult RE
Joy Hayes Gates, Children's RE, Youth RE
Jane Kittner, Worship Team Liaison
Rachel Crawford, Inclusive Language
Youth Representative, Gabe Cervantes
Children's Representative, Haley Nafe

I. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

The minimal requirements from UUA are:

(<http://www.uua.org/lgbtq/welcoming/program/23348.shtml>)

1. Measurable achievements in the areas of education, congregational life, and community outreach, using the Welcoming Congregation [Guidelines and Action Steps](#) as a guide.
2. A congregational vote in affirmation of being recognized by the Unitarian Universalist Association as a Welcoming Congregation.

Keep your congregation informed as to what has been accomplished. Many congregations publicize their programming and offer updates on what their congregation has done so far on their website, on a bulletin board, and/or in their newsletter.

In addition, congregations are encouraged to pay particular attention to the following topics: **transgender issues, bisexuality, and race/ethnicity and sexuality**. Because these issues are often glossed over by the mainstream, there is a real need for these discussions in our congregations. Check out [Identity 101](#) for more.

II. ACTION STEPS

We met and reviewed the action steps outlined in the UUA Welcoming Congregations Guidelines and Action Steps: <http://www.uua.org/lgbtq/welcoming/program/23357.shtml>

Education

1. Offer religious education for people of all ages that incorporates lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer life issues.

Our congregation is using the UUA Welcoming Congregations Curriculum for ADULT Religious Education. The Adult RE series was taught by Ron Hagar. Classes met from 9:45 to 10:45 a.m. on Sunday mornings. The Welcoming Congregation Adult RE series met for 9 weeks, July 21, 2013 – September 29, 2013.

We have had between 15 to 22 people attending Adult RE each week.

July 21, 2013-“ Introductions and Expectations”

July 28, 2013 - “What We Know and How We Learned It”

August 4, 2013 “The Common Elements of Oppression”

August 11, 2013 “Gender Socialization and Homophobia”

August 18, 2013 “Transgender Identity: What It Means”

August 25, 2013 “Bisexuality and Biphobia”

September 1, 2013 “The Radical Right”

September 8, 2013 “Religion and Homosexuality”

September 15, 2013 “Experiences of BGLT People”

September 22, 2013 ”How Homophobia Hurts Us All”

September 29, 2013 “ What Now?”

November 10, 2014 Dr. Susan Gore of Interweave presented the Sunday morning reflection on being an intentionally Welcoming Congregation and how that looks.

March 2, 2014 Dr. Susan Gore of Interweave presented the Sunday morning reflection on Connecting the Dots between intention and action, and spoke about what an “intentionally” Welcoming Congregation looks like after service.

Our Adult RE team will continue to incorporate LGBTQ issues into future Adult RE Series.

Our Children and Youth RE leaders have been incorporating LGBTQ issues into lesson plans at age appropriate levels. Our congregation has not had the resources to acquire OWL facilitator training, but money is being raised to send two or four of our RE instructors to an OWL training in the next year.

The Children’s RE teachers are doing an amazing job of naturally incorporating LGBT and multiple family types into the children’s lessons. For example, on August 4, 2013, Kimberly Parsons did a lesson about the Gift of Families and talked about same-sex parents; this was also incorporated into lessons about The Gift of Community. The Pollywogs (our kindergarten – second grade RE class) has also explored age-appropriate books that have been purchased.

On August 4, 2013 Children’s RE did “New York, New York” and spoke about the Stonewall Inn and the beginnings of the gay rights movement and how this fits in with our UUA principles.

Our children’s liaison has read “The Sissy Duckling” and “The Boy Who Cried ‘Fabulous.’” “And Tango Makes Three” was used as the Spark for All Ages and read during an intergenerational service to the entire congregation.

We plan to continue organically incorporating such stories and ideas into lessons and conversations with the children and youth, including the use of inclusive language when speaking about families.

2. Promote participation by congregational leaders, including the minister(s), religious education minister or director, president, moderator, and board members in the Welcoming Congregation Program.

Our Welcoming Congregations Committee is composed of a diverse cross-section of the congregation, which includes our minister, multiple board members, a representative from Adult RE, Children's RE and Youth RE as well as a representative from Social Action and Worship Teams.

3. As part of the Welcoming Congregation Program, offer congregation-wide educational opportunities (such as a workshop series), with follow-up opportunities for study and reflection.

The current Welcoming Congregation Initiative began to be explored after a community-wide education and outreach project. In July 2012 Carmen Saenz spoke with Kris Cervantes, 2012 UUWaco Board President (and now minister), about the possibility of hosting a Waco Equality Project, conducted by field organizer Daniel Williams of Equality Texas (<http://www.equalitytexas.org/content.aspx?id=609>). This event was held on December 8, 2012, and attended by 15+ community members and 5 UUWaco members/friends. For the Waco Equality Project we partnered with Waco Friends of Peace, Spiritual Pride Project, and Edible Lawns in bringing this initiative to Waco (http://hq-equalityfederation.salsalabs.com/o/35034/p/salsa/event/common/public/index.sjs?event_KEY=1914).

This program led to the initiative on the part of members of the Social Action Team in which it was proposed that the City of Waco to add "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" as protected classes in the non-discrimination policy for City Employees. At this time the City of Waco's Equal Employment Opportunity Advisory Committee has unanimously approved it and was approved by Waco City Manager Dale Fissler on June 2, 2014.

We received press coverage from the Waco Tribune, Dallas Voice, KWBU, and the blog "off the Kuff" at each step of the process.

Waco Tribune:

(http://www.wacotrib.com/news/city_of_waco/proposal-would-protect-gay-transgendered-city-employees/article_9ac4f406-db89-5492-8240-2c6e04ddc49e.html),
(http://www.wacotrib.com/news/city_of_waco/city-extends-anti-bias-policy-to-lgbt-employees/article_a7a7b3b0-2a2f-53bd-a05e-6544bbf1e392.html)

KWBU, our local NPR station:

<http://kwbu.org/post/city-waco-adds-lgbts-nondiscrimination-policy>

Dallas Voice:

<http://www.dallasvoice.com/waco-committee-votes-unanimously-add-lgbt-employee-protections-10153694.html>

<http://www.dallasvoice.com/it-do-10174103.html>

Off the Kuff:

<http://offthekuff.com/wp/?p=50344>

<http://offthekuff.com/wp/?p=54806>

<http://offthekuff.com/wp/?p=60956>

KXXV news:

<http://www.kxxv.com/story/22961111/committee-recommends-change-to-citys-employment-policy>

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

See above under Action Step 1

Congregational Life

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

Our Welcoming Congregation Committee is made up of a diverse cross-section of the congregation including members who are lesbian, straight, married, and single. There are subcommittees working on religious education, policies and procedures, buildings and grounds, and community education and outreach.

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

Mary Cunningham and Rachel Crawford have reviewed and revised the congregational bylaws and policies and procedures. Language in our policies and procedures for Religious Education, for instance, has been updated to use non-discriminatory language such as parents/guardians (rather than mother and father).

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

Jane Kittner and Kris Cervantes, Worship Team members, have worked with the worship committee to incorporate inclusive language to the worship services. Our Welcome, for instance, has been intentionally re-crafted to use inclusive language. Continued focus on providing a welcoming space will be part of the Worship Team's agenda for the foreseeable future, to include the language used in services, as well as how we greet newcomers and visitors on Sunday mornings and to other church events.

8. For members and members' families, provide main worship space and ministerial services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer rites of passage, such as services of union, dedications of children, and gender-affirming ceremonies.

UUWaco has long supported, recognized and affirmed LGBTQ rites of passage, including celebrating the wedding reception of two member who were married in Connecticut, as Texas does not yet recognize same sex marriage. Our new minister is committed to providing these services as needed and desired by all within our larger community.

9. Welcome people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer in places such as the congregation's website, brochure, and orders of service.

We have our Welcoming Congregation Program Initiative Updates on our website and the worship team has incorporated inclusive language into the order of service.

10. Ensure that publications, public information, and programming reflect the requested status of all individuals as they see appropriate; recognize same-gender couples and transgender individuals in directories and other publications as they desire.

Our member directory and publications currently list our same-sex couples together, at their request.

Community Outreach

11. Celebrate and affirm lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer issues and history during the church year (possible options include [Pride](#), [Transgender Day of Remembrance](#), and [National Coming Out Day](#)).

We had a great Pride Sunday Sermon June 23, 2013: "Out of the Closet and Down the Aisle" by Kris Cervantes. The following week we had June 30, 2013: Summer Fun Day - Judy Shofner & our Marriage Equality Celebration.

Paul Derrick spoke at the World AIDS Day Celebration on Sunday, December 1, 2013.

A congregational survey was sent out in March 2014 as part of the Welcoming Congregation process; in late April, the results were presented at a congregational meeting by Adam Short, a friend of the Fellowship and invaluable part of our Welcoming Congregation process.

As listed above, Susan Gore spoke twice at the Fellowship regarding Welcoming Congregations.

As part of our discernment process for seeking a new minister, the congregation completed the Beyond Categorical Thinking workshop with Eddy Carroll and Gilbert Guerrero, which focused on overt and covert biases, including those which relate to hiring an LGBTQ minister.

Irene Andrews presented our Sunday reflection on June 1, 2014, titled "A Reflection on Justice."

UUWaco hosted three phone bank events in support of Houston's effort to create a citywide non-discrimination employment policy (HERO - Houston Equal Rights Ordinance). In the future, we would like to adopt the same methods Houston activists used to pass HERO and pass a similar citywide policy in Waco.

Steve Sprinkle will be speaking for our Transgender Day of Remembrance service and workshop, November 23, 2014.

The final Sunday of November 2014 will focus on World AIDS Day (Dec 1, 2014) and speak to the ongoing struggle and global impact of HIV/AIDS.

We will host a second Equality Day workshop on December 13, 2014. The plan is to host these every two years, in advance of Texas legislative sessions.

Our Interweave group, which includes both community members and church congregants, plans to hold a Pride Parade in October 2015 and has begun exploring permits, sponsorships, and logistics. Plans are also in the works for an Interweave meeting which will focus on the intersection of race and sexual identity/expression, as well as a February 2015 Valentine's Dance open to all community members, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

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

We are active members of the Texas Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry, we hosted an Equality Forum, through Equality Texas 12/8/2012 and will be hosting another one this fall prior to the next legislative session.

13. For members of your congregation's larger community, provide main worship space and ministerial services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer rites of passage, such as services of union, dedications of children, and gender-affirming ceremonies.

Curtis Cannon and Dave Verdery had their wedding celebration here. In addition, see #8 above.

14. Establish and maintain contact with local lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer groups and organizations, to build relationships, offer support in whatever ways are needed, and promote dialogue and interaction.

We have built a relationship with Baylor University's Sexual Identity Forum, an LGBTQ student group. We have helped with fundraisers and three members attend their meetings.

The current Welcoming Congregation Initiative began to be explored after a community outreach project. In July 2012 Carmen Saenz spoke with Kris Cervantes, 2012 Board President about the possibility of hosting a Waco Equality Project, this event was held on December 8, 2012 and attended by over 15 community members and 5 UUWaco members/friends. We partnered with Waco Friends of Peace, Spiritual Pride Project and Edible Lawns in bringing this initiative to Waco (http://hq-equalityfederation.salsalabs.com/o/35034/p/salsa/event/common/public/index.sjs?event_KEY=1914). One of the results of this initiative was to bring before the City of Waco Equal Opportunity Advisory Council a proposal to make "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" protected classes in employment policy.

We held a Marriage Equality Forum on March 25, 2013, which was attended by approximately 30 people from UUWaco and the community (<http://m.dallasvoice.com/marriage-equality-rallies-planned-tx-supreme-court-takes-issue-10142792.html?mobile-redirector-transfer=true>) and a celebration of the passage of DOMA on June 30, 2013, which was attended by approximately 35 people, including a gay couple who had their celebration of their marriage at UUWaco in 1998 (http://www.wacotrib.com/news/briefly/waco-area-news-briefs-june/article_3f16d3fb-d991-5e1c-816a-ed6f31964984.html); both events received city, state, and national publicity and were well attended by members of the Central Texas community and members of UUWaco.

A member of UUWaco sponsored a scholarship for Kayley Jackson to attend two camps for LGBT Youth and upcoming leaders in their communities. Kayley attended the Texas GSA (Gay/Straight Alliance) Camp, which is geared to providing tools, supports and material for starting a new GSA Chapter.

We are working with Equality Texas to host another Waco Equality Project this fall and the Transgender Education Network of Texas (TENT) to host a Trans 101 seminar this fall.

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

All of our Interweave and LGBTQ events are published in the Waco Trib, the Dallas Voice and the Act Locally Blog, as well as on multiple Facebook pages.

16. Provide use of building space when requested by members for programs and meetings of groups such as an [Interweave](#) (Unitarian Universalists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns) chapter, and also provide use of building space when requested by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community groups.

Interweave meets at UUWaco the first Thursday of each month. We are also open to other uses for our space, and ready to share.

III. COMMITMENTS

We, as a congregation will be committing to:

1. A Welcoming Congregation is inclusive and expressive of the concerns of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer at every level of congregational life—in worship, in program, and in social occasions—welcoming not only their presence but the unique gifts and particularities of their lives as well.
2. A Welcoming Congregation does not assume anyone's affectional/sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Vocabulary of worship reflects this perception; worship celebrates diversity by [inclusivity of language](#) and content.
3. An understanding of the experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer persons is fully incorporated by a Welcoming Congregation throughout all programs, including religious education.
4. The bylaws and other official documents of a Welcoming Congregation include an [affirmation and nondiscrimination clause](#) affecting all dimensions of congregational life, including membership, hiring practices, and the calling of religious professionals.
5. A Welcoming Congregation engages in outreach into lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer communities, both through its advertising and by actively supporting other lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer affirmative groups.
6. A Welcoming Congregation offers congregational and ministerial support for services of union and memorial services for persons who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer, and celebrations of evolving definitions of family.
7. A Welcoming Congregation celebrates the lives of all people and welcomes same-gender couples, recognizing their committed relationships, and equally affirms displays of caring and affection without regard for sexual orientation.
8. A Welcoming Congregation seeks to nurture ongoing dialogue between people of different affectional/sexual orientations and gender identities, and to create deeper trust and sharing.
9. A Welcoming Congregation encourages the presence of a chapter of [Interweave](#) (Unitarian Universalists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns).
10. A Welcoming Congregation affirms and celebrates lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer issues and history during the church year.
11. A Welcoming Congregation, as an advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people, attends to legislative developments and works to promote justice, freedom, and equality in the larger society. It speaks out when the rights and dignity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people are at stake.
12. A Welcoming Congregation celebrates the lives of all people and their ways of expressing their love for each other.