

**First Unitarian Church Of Alton**  
**Board Policy on being a Welcoming Congregation**

**Purpose:** To participate in the UU Welcoming Congregation Program and to use the resources of that program to become more welcoming and inclusive of people with marginalized sexual orientations and gender identities.

**Action taken:** Approved at 5/18/07 semi-annual congregational meeting

## **The Welcoming Congregation Program**

From UUA.org web site

<http://www.uua.org/lgbtq/welcoming/program/index.shtml>

The Welcoming Congregation Program is a volunteer program for Unitarian Universalist congregations that want to take intentional steps to become more welcoming and inclusive of people with marginalized sexual orientations and gender identities.

First launched in 1990, the program grew out of an understanding that widespread prejudices and ignorance about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people existed within Unitarian Universalism, which resulted in the exclusion of LGBTQ people from our congregations.

Today, 66% of U.S. Unitarian Universalist (UU) congregations and 94% of Canadian UU congregations are recognized as Welcoming Congregations. The program is supported by [LGBTQ Ministries](#).

## **Guidelines and Action Steps for Welcoming Congregations**

No set of guidelines can address the diverse needs of the wide range of Unitarian Universalist congregations, but the following Commitments to inclusiveness and Actions for achieving those Commitments were adopted by the delegates of the 1989 General Assembly as the outline for the [Welcoming Congregation Program](#), and have been revised slightly over the years.

These guidelines are not offered as a blueprint but rather as a suggestive road map for congregations beginning the journey toward becoming truly welcoming of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. You can also check out [ten ways to be more welcoming](#).

### **Commitments**

1. A Welcoming Congregation is inclusive and expressive of the concerns of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender 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, and transgender 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, and transgender communities, both through its advertising and by actively supporting other lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender 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, and/or transgender, 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 identifications, 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, and transgender issues and history during the church year.
11. A Welcoming Congregation, as an advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender 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, and transgender people are at stake.
12. A Welcoming Congregation celebrates the lives of all people and their ways of expressing their love for each other.

## **Action Steps**

The below steps are offered in the hope that all congregations [going through a Welcoming Congregation Program](#) will consider incorporating them into their work. Not all steps are appropriate for all congregations; it is up to each congregation to adjust its goals according to its unique situation and needs. However, every Welcoming Congregation Program must cover the three areas of education, congregational life, and community outreach.

When [submitting an application for recognition](#) as a Welcoming Congregation, it is often helpful to address how your congregation met the Action Steps, how you altered the steps to suit your needs, and what additional steps you took in each area—not so that your work can be “rated” but rather to keep the Unitarian Universalist Association informed of all you’ve done, in order to help support all of our congregations in their welcome and inclusion.

## Education

1. Offer religious education for people of all ages that incorporates lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender life issues.
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.
3. As part of the Welcoming Congregation Program, offer a congregation-wide workshop series, with follow-up opportunities for study and reflection.
4. Use the Unitarian Universalist sexuality education program [Our Whole Lives](#).

## Congregational Life

5. Form a broad-based Welcoming Congregation committee to design and offer programming and monitor progress.
6. Adjust congregational bylaws and other relevant documents to include an [affirmative nondiscrimination clause](#) concerning membership, hiring practices, and the calling of religious professionals.
7. Use [inclusive language](#) and content as a regular part of worship services, and provide worship coordinators and speakers with guidelines on inclusive language.
8. For members and members' families, provide main worship space and ministerial services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rites of passage, such as services of union and dedications of children.
9. Welcome people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender in places such as the congregation's website, brochure, and orders 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 in directories and other publications as they desire.

## Community Outreach

11. Celebrate and affirm lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues and history during the church year (possible options include [Pride](#), [Transgender Day of Remembrance](#), and [National Coming Out Day](#)).
12. Participate in and/or support efforts to create justice, freedom, and equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in the larger society.
13. For members of your congregation's larger community, provide main worship space and ministerial services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rites of passage, such as services of union and dedications of children.
14. Establish and maintain contact with local lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender groups and organizations, to build relationships, offer support in whatever ways are needed, and promote dialogue and interaction.
15. Advertise in the local press and/or other media that reaches lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities.
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, and transgender community groups.

For more information contact [lgbt @ uua.org](mailto:lgbt@uua.org).