

“The Welcoming Dictionary”

Midcoast Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
June 26, 2016

Opening Words

This is the mission of our faith:
To teach the fragile art of hospitality;
To revere both the critical mind
 And the generous heart;
To prove that diversity need not
 Mean divisiveness;
And to witness to all that we
 Must hold the whole world
 In our hands.

-- William F. Schultz

Congregational Response (from the Midcoast UU Fellowship bylaws):

The Fellowship welcomes all persons, and invites everyone into our faith community, without regard to race, color, age, gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, ethnicity, national origin, or socioeconomic status. We commit to honoring human diversity, and structuring congregational life in ways that empower and enhance everyone’s participation.

Reading

“WORTHY OF LOVE”

by Karen Madrone

Read by Sandra BAarth, MUUF Welcoming Congregation Committee member

One night [a couple of years ago], I found myself at a dinner party in the home of a male-to-female transgender woman and her friend, the wife of a male-to-female-transgender woman. I was surrounded by people transitioning between genders. Some had fully transitioned, whatever that means, some were still toying with the idea, and others were comfortable with the in-between stages, still learning their way. The people who had more experience on the journey gave sage advice to those just beginning, and those just beginning listened and asked questions with reverence given for wise words. I got to experience one person talking about how, when he finally began to allow himself to present as male in public, it was both terrifying and it felt absolutely right. I felt the support in the room when others said, yes, yes, it felt the same for me, too. It was especially poignant when a male to female transgender woman affirmed this experience for my new friend. She was saying, “I understand why being female wasn’t right for

you and at the same time it is right for me.”

There were so many stories of rejection and pain in the room. Of not being accepted for who they were. On a very basic human level we all need love and acceptance. These new friends of mine had to “prove” their worth, prove they were worthy of love regardless of the gender they presented as, on a daily basis. Many of them faced divorce and loss of their children and their jobs; things that contribute to our identities, to who we say we are as people.

And yet, they carry on because they know they are living in the way that is right for them. They know that living any other way would literally kill them from the inside out and so that is a path they can no longer take, that door is shut to them. They have to take a new harder road, but it is one that brings great joy because it is the road of self-acceptance and self-love. It is the road where you finally know, “Yes, I’m living the life I’m supposed to live. It is the right one for me.”

That night, I got to experience my own discomfort. I got to just be with my own questions and know that we are all deserving of love just for being human. And I got to experience love as they accepted me into their world, honored my discomfort, and loved me as I am. I am grateful for that evening and for that experience.

If you should find yourself at a dinner party and you are uncomfortable for whatever reason, remember we’re all on our life journey just trying to live life the best way we know how right now. Let us remember that we do not have to understand to love and that sitting in the discomfort is a radical act that has the potential to heal.

Reflections

“GLBTQ etc.: Why All Those Letters?”

by John D. Adams, MUUF Welcoming Congregation Committee member

LGBT or LGBTQ. You hear it everywhere now. Why all those letters, and what do they mean? What happened to just Gay -- Gay liberation, gay pride?

In the beginning there was...well...there wasn’t anything. Before the 1960s, there were homosexuals, lesbians, deviants, perverts, queers. And even then, “those” people were talked about only in hushed or mocking tones, and rarely discussed openly in polite society. In the course of my own life, there was a time when being able talk openly about these issues -- or even say these words -- from a church pulpit was unthinkable.

Forced invisibility, of course fosters and enables oppression, and those we recognize now as sexual or gender minorities suffered that oppression – and worse – for a very long time, and unfortunately still suffer oppression today.

In June of 1969, following yet another raid on the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City, the “gay” community – as the story goes --fought back, beginning what became known as the “Gay” Liberation movement, *and I am happy to note here that just this week President Obama declared the Stonewall Inn and environs a National Monument.*

The word “Gay” became commonly associated with only gay men. But at the Stonewall riots, it was more than just gay men fighting for respect: there were lesbians, bisexuals, transvestites, and transgender. For years since, all these groups continued their own fight for identity, recognition, and respect. It was more than “Gay” liberation.

When I attended my first Pride parade 36 years ago in San Francisco in 1980, it was simply called Gay Freedom Day and the Gay Freedom Day Parade. This name was used until 1981 – 12 years after Stonewall -- until the Lesbian community demanded equal recognition for their unique contributions. In that year, it became International Lesbian and Gay Freedom Day.

Yet even with a rainbow flag to symbolize the movement and claiming to celebrate diversity, “Lesbian and Gay” still excluded many people who did not fit those categories, and who remained marginalized, even by the Lesbian and Gay communities, who themselves had for years fought for their own identity. It took another 14 years, until 1995, for title to be broadened to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender – or LGBT -- Pride. Not just Gay and Lesbian, and not just freedom. Now it is a matter of Pride.

The term LGBT is widely used today, and you may have seen it used most recently in news coverage of civil rights legislation, or the terrible mass shooting in Orlando. LGBT has become the currently accepted shorthand.

And yet that adopted label still doesn’t fit everyone. There are still many who feel excluded, invisible, voiceless, and powerless.

In the early 1990s, a movement began among a younger generation who adopted the formerly pejorative term of “queer” to apply to all people who do not fit the norms of sexual orientation, practice, or gender identity. So, beginning in the past decade or so, you are likely to see the initials LGBTQ, to incorporate the supposedly catch-all phrase “queer.” This term, though widely adopted and used since then, continues to be controversial, especially among an older generation for whom the term carries a painful legacy. But I should note that for some, the Q also stand for “questioning” for those who are still exploring their sexual and/or gender identity.

There are other initials that have been – and continue to be – added to the list: “I” can mean intersex, or inter-gender. “A” can be asexual or allied.

“2s” is one I just learned this past week, meaning “2 spirit” to represent Native American belief systems. And “+” is sometimes used to show that there are more definitions beyond those listed.

I encourage you to visit our Fellowship website’s Celebrating Diversity page (<http://www.uumidcoast.org/celebrating-diversity.html>) for a very thorough glossary of these terms and more.

All of this may seem like overkill, or slicing the pie into too many slices. But when you understand it represents people’s need for representation and recognition and all the rights and benefits that come with it, you will also understand why we as a progressive and inclusive society, and especially we as Unitarian Universalists, make every attempt to honor these initials, learn and adopt ever-changing terminologies, and seek to educate one another during this continued evolution of awareness and empowerment.

Happy Pride Month *everyone*.

“Don’t Worry, You’ve Got a Label Too!”

by Kate Pennington, MUUF Welcoming Congregation Committee member

With all the terms and letters being talked about, if you’re not LGBT or Q, maybe you’re feeling left out. Don’t worry - you have a label too!

If, like me, you identify as the gender you were assigned at birth, if your biological sex matches your gender identity and expression, you are **cisgender**, sometimes shorted to just “**cis**.” The term comes from the prefix “**cis**,” meaning “**on this side of**,” which is the opposite of “trans,” as in “transgender.”

I am cisgender. I also can be labeled as “**straight**” or “**heterosexual**,” which means that my sexual and relational attraction is to individuals of the opposite gender. You should know, though, that the term “straight” sometimes has a negative connotation within the LGBTQ population, because it can suggest that non- heterosexual individuals are “crooked” or “unnatural”.

There’s another label that applies to most of us in this room, and that is the label of **privileged**. As a cisgender, heterosexual woman, I am privileged in many ways:

- I do not risk being rejected by my family just because of who I am.
- I know I can’t be fired or denied housing or medical services just because of who I love or how I present my gender.

- I am not likely to be harassed or bullied if I'm out in public and I show affection to the man I love.
- I can use the women's restroom in public places without fear of verbal abuse, physical intimidation, or arrest.
- Strangers don't assume they can ask me what my genitals look like and how I have sex.
- I have the ability to walk through the world and generally blend in, not being constantly stared or gawked at, whispered about, pointed at, or laughed at because of my gender expression.

So, yes, I am privileged, and most of us in this room today are. And that leads to another label we can choose – that of **ally**. An ally is someone who advocates and supports a community other than their own. Allies are not part of the communities they help. A person should not self-identify as an ally but show that they are one through action.

Here are some ways you can be an ally:

- Be a listener.
- Be open-minded.
- Be willing to talk.
- Be inclusive and invite LGBTQ friends to hang out with your friends and family.
- Don't assume that all your friends and co-workers are straight or cisgender. Someone close to you could be looking for support in their coming-out process. Not making assumptions will give them the space they need.
- Anti-LGBTQ comments and jokes are harmful. Let your friends, family and co-workers know that you find them offensive.
- Confront your own prejudices and bias, even if it is uncomfortable to do so.
- With identity terms, trust the person who is using the term and their definition of it above any dictionary.
- Believe that all people, regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation, should be treated with dignity and respect.

The bottom line is that we at MUUF welcome and include all individuals, whoever they are and no matter how they choose to define themselves. We also respect the labels they choose to take on themselves, and we work to recognize the significance of those labels to each individual.

In closing, I'd like to share a brief story by Jennifer Finney Boylan, a transgender writer and professor at Colby College. She writes:

I remember my days of struggling to “pass” in the world. Once, I went to L. L. Bean, in Freeport, to buy some jeans. It wasn't a good gender day, and other shoppers kept casting glances at me with mingled shock and dismay. In the afternoon, a mother holding her child's hand walked toward me, and the boy's eyes grew wide. “Mom,” he said, in a voice of astonishment, as they passed me. “Who was that?”

I am still grateful for the mother's reply. “That,” she said, “was a human being.”

“ANY OTHER QUESTIONS?”

by Victoria E. Safford

Read by Dr. Tim Goltz, MUUF member

People ask me sometimes, “Is this a gay church?”

It is a privilege to answer: “Ours is absolutely, gladly, hopefully and humbly, gaily, a gay church, a gay tradition, where everyone, including heterosexual members and friends, is welcome, where everyone is needed, where everyone's experience is cherished as a sacred text, because no one's experience of living or loving can be comprehensive, because each of us holds clues the others need about how to live with dignity and joy as a human person, and none of us knows enough about that yet to be considered whole.

“It is absolutely a gay church, even as ours is a gay world, if you would look around. Gay church, straight church, peoples' church, a human congregation made holy by the holy hopes and fears and dreams of all who wish to come. Come in, we say. Come out, come in. We're all in this together.”

I will not speak of “tolerance,” with its courteous clenched teeth and bitter resignation. I will not speak about “acceptance,” of “other” people and some “other” kind of “lifestyle.” I can only look in laughing wonder at human life in all its incarnations. I can taste only in passing the breath of the spirit of life on my mouth and understand our common longing to breathe in deep, deep gulps of it. I cannot think of being anybody else's “ally,” even, because even that implies some degree of separation—some degree of safety for some of us, not all. We are “allied” with no one and with nothing but love—the larger Love transcending all our understanding, within which all the different, differing, gorgeously various, variant, beautifully deviant aspects of ourselves are bound in elegant unity.

I know that on some sad and disappointing days these words describe the church that yet shall be and not the church that is. I know, I know....But I know too that to answer is an act of creation. To answer this question, and some others, is a privilege, a prophetic imperative, a joy, a duty, and a holy sacrament.

Closing Words

Whatever you proclaim as your identity here in the material realm is also your drag. You are not your religion. You are not your skin color. You are not your gender, your politics, your career, or your marital status. You are none of the superficial things that this world deems important. The real you is the energy force that created the entire universe!

— RuPaul