

# Welcoming Congregation Certification Committee Program Review

Prepared by members of the Welcoming Congregation Certification Committee: Barbara Allen, Antoinette Scully, Nancy Holland, Jolly Hollamon, Nicole Thibadeaux, Laurel Ross, Ken Ross, Terry Hassman Paulin, Amber Brown and Rachel Bennett Steury.

## ***Our Mission and Goals***

---

Our mission was to engage our church community through our UU Principles to become more welcoming and inclusive to the LGBTQIA community, especially to Transgender individuals.

Using all of the resources at our disposal, our goal was to educate our members about the transgender community so that they would be able to find a home in our congregation. Our ultimate goal was to complete the requirements and apply for recertification in the Welcoming Congregation Renewal Program with the UUA.

## ***The Renewal Process***

---

What follows is a chronology of our work to date:

- October 13, 2019: Turning Tides Service Presentation  
Our Turning Tides youth gave a presentation to the congregation sharing their perspective on the book *Sissy*. Their presentation included the history and evolution of both the Trans and Pride Flags. They also presented the Time for All Ages. Based upon the suggestion of our DRE, Jason Taksony Hewitt, both the congregation and the Youth RE program read this memoir concurrently during the summer.
- November 3, 2019: First of a total of five committee presentations during services, which were presented monthly by Barbara Allen, Antoinette Scully, Jolly Hollamon, and Brandi Prime.
- November 24, 2019: Congregational Common Read of *Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story by LGBTQIA activist Jacob Tobia*, we held a group discussion of this book. Number attended: 13

- January 19, 2020: Our Committee participated in a *Teach-In* hosted by the Social Justice Support Group in which we made a presentation about our ongoing committee work to encourage participation.
- February 23, 2020: Transforming Hearts Collective Series, Module 1, first viewing with discussion. We purchased and presented the Transforming Hearts Collective Series: *Transgender Inclusion in Congregations*. This was the only viewing that took place in person at the church building. Number attended: 44
- March 31, 2020: *Transgender Day of Visibility*  
We posted announcements about the holiday on our website, public Facebook page(s) and in our enews mailer.
- June 14, 2020: film presentation during Pride service  
We collaborated with the Youth RE program and Kate Eales to create and present a short, dynamic film of our youth explaining what Pride means to them
- June 28, 2020: *The Stonewall Uprising*  
We posted announcements about the holiday on our website, public Facebook page(s) and in our enews mailer.
- July 8, 2020: *Transforming Hearts Collective*, Module 1, second viewing with discussion. First viewing that took place on Zoom. All other viewings took place on Zoom. Number attended: 16
- July 12, 2020: *Transforming Hearts Collective*, Module 1, third viewing with discussion on Zoom. Number attended: 36
- July 22, 2020: *Transforming Hearts Collective*, Module 2, first viewing with discussion on Zoom. Number attended: 8
- July 26, 2020: *Transforming Hearts Collective*, Module 2, second viewing with discussion on Zoom. Number attended: 47
- August 23, 2020: *Transforming Hearts Collective*, Module 3, first viewing with discussion on Zoom. Number attended: 32
- August 26, 2020: *Transforming Hearts Collective*, Module 3, second viewing with discussion on Zoom. Number attended: 19

- September 19-23, 2020: *BiSexual Week*  
We posted announcements about the holiday on our website, public Facebook page(s) and in our enews mailer.
- September 23, 2020: *Transforming Hearts Collective*, Module 4, first viewing with discussion on Zoom. Number attended: 7
- September 27, 2020: *Transforming Hearts Collective*, Module 4, second viewing with discussion on Zoom. Number attended: 39
- October 11, 2020: Hosted a Zoom screening of the documentary *Disclosure* with discussion following. Number attended approximately: 10
- October 11, 2020: *National Coming Out Day*  
We posted announcements about the holiday on our website, public Facebook page(s) and in our enews mailer.
- October 25, 2020: *Transforming Hearts Collective*, Module 5, first viewing with discussion on Zoom. Number attended: 27
- October 26, 2020: *Intersex Awareness Day*  
We posted announcements about the holiday on our website, public Facebook page(s) and in our enews mailer.
- October 28, 2020: *Transforming Hearts Collective*, Module 5, second viewing with discussion on Zoom. Number attended: 25
- November 19, 2020: *Transforming Hearts Collective*, Module 6, first viewing with discussion on Zoom. Number attended: 4
- November 20, 2020: *Transgender Day of Remembrance*  
We posted announcements about the holiday on our website, public Facebook page(s) and in our enews mailer.
- November 22, 2020: *Transforming Hearts Collective*, Module 6, second viewing with discussion on Zoom. Number attended: 38 Overall, we had approximately 56 participants join our viewings/discussions for one or more of the six modules. Survey results and corresponding open-ended feedback, can be found [here](#).
- December 1, 2020: *World AIDS Day*

We posted announcements about the holiday on our website, public Facebook page(s) and in our enews mailer.

- January 3, 2021: Open feedback discussion on the *Transforming Hearts Collective* Series Number attended: 24
- January 24, 2021 : Discussion based on the Iceberg template from *Transforming Hearts Collective* Module #5 In our latest "Iceberg" discussion, about 30 people participated fully, out of a 100-member congregation. Number attended: 34
- February 7, 2021: *National Black HIV/Aids Awareness Day*  
We posted announcements about the holiday on our website, public facebook page(s) and in our enews mailer.

### ***Other Actions***

---

We created a page on the church website for our [Welcoming Congregation Committee](#), to share LGBTQIA information and to inform church members of opportunities to engage. This includes descriptions and links to all the *Transforming Hearts Collective* Modules (available to members with a password.).

Over 60 booklets, titled *Guide to Being a Trans Ally*, were donated from PFLAG and we made them available free of charge to members of our congregation.

It bears mentioning that the Youth RE program under Jason's leadership was also focusing on Gender Identity and Inclusion during this time. This includes the Time for All Ages during the service.

### ***What We Discovered***

---

Engaging the congregation in LGBTQIA group discussions proved fruitful and lively. We were encouraged by those who showed up but discouraged that more did not choose to be a part of the process.

We were able to inform and engage a small but growing group of members and friends on how inclusivity and being a Welcoming Congregation aligns with our Seven Principles and the values we hold as Unitarian Universalists.

Our youth and parents are fully engaged due largely to our former DRE's leadership. In fact, they are looking forward to expanding the discussion to include

the 8th Principle as a foundational tenet of the Youth RE Program, educating themselves to end oppression in all its forms.

Covid-19 / Zoom fatigue - It is real and made it challenging to find times to schedule the Transforming Hearts viewings. Until time and vaccines allow us to meet in person, we anticipate this to be an ongoing problem and are actively seeking creative ways to work around this issue.

Near the beginning of our process, a member of our church leadership came to the WCC committee with a proposal for an event that was exclusive, which was then revealed to also be explicitly trans-exclusive. That conversation quickly exploded into a divisive controversy in the congregation after a public censuring of this member by the leadership and, after a few more congregational meetings, resulted in beginning a process of restorative justice between some of the involved parties, including some of the church leadership, with the intent of healing the rift in the congregation.

Members of our committee had varied perspectives over the unfolding of those events, as had the rest of the congregation. However, our job, our goal, is the education of our members and friends toward a more radically welcoming and multicultural church culture, and we were ultimately able to refocus our energies on completing the Transforming Hearts Modules and entering into discussion that would encourage the opening of minds and hearts to a more inclusive church culture, rather than focusing on a single individual or a single event. It is through the work of our committee that we can resolve these kinds of events/occurrences while remaining in right relationship. From the Transforming Hearts Modules:

*"It's really about building relationships that are strong enough to withstand disagreement and even hurt and pain, and that there will also be opportunities to work through those things and move through conflict, disagreement, hurt or pain in ways that ultimately offer healing and wholeness for everyone."*

Based upon private conversations, we know that the recent controversy in our congregation and the restorative justice process that followed negatively impacted participation in the *Transforming Hearts Collective* Modules. This prompted us to make all the modules available to members to view at their convenience so that we can continue to reach out to our members and engage in meaningful conversations that allow us to work toward a more inclusive congregation.

## ***Moving Forward for the Committee***

---

As we all continue to learn and grow in our efforts to become more welcoming, we are committed to:

Continue to build our knowledge and understanding of how we sometimes contribute to an unwelcoming environment in our congregation and the broader world through self-education, reflection, and discussion

Collaborate with our church leadership and partner committees to discover the ways in which our policies, processes, and systems can be made more inclusive. We will work with Buildings and Grounds to create gender neutral signage for all restrooms.

Addendum: The WCC Committee recommends the removal of the Transgender flag and the BLM flag from the front of the church. The flags were put up as “aspirational” and until we have re-certification of our Welcoming Congregation status, our space cannot be considered a safe space for those marginalized communities and luring them in with those flags is false advertising and dangerous for them. Instead, we propose creating an educational display in our narthex as well as on our website portraying the Progressive Flag with explanation of the symbolism of the various colors and the demographics they represent

Create new and bold ways to engage our membership with information and programs to help us fully embrace the LGBTQIA community within and beyond our membership base. Our goal is to educate our congregation on the importance of this work for each individual, the future of our church and the wholeness of our community and world.

## ***Next Steps for the Congregation***

---

- ❑ Continue ongoing discussions with members and friends using the Iceberg and Bull’s Eye templates from *Transforming Hearts Modules* to explore our personal and congregational culture with the goal of developing our Radical Welcome toward the realization of a multicultural Beloved Community. The *Transforming Hearts Collective Series* has provided the tools we need to evaluate and shift our culture to be more welcoming, not just inviting, both in our values and in the way we present ourselves to the world.

- ❑ Create and complete a Congregational Outreach Project focusing on the LGBTQIA community as part of the Welcoming Congregation Renewal process.

- ❑ Schedule a “common read” to discuss what it means to be Radically Welcoming. This community book read would follow a similar timeline to the congregational reading of *Sissy* last year, with one or more gatherings for discussion, depending upon the length of the book.

Possible titles include:

- ❑ *Radical Welcome* by Stephanie Spellers

- ❑ Various memoirs available by parents/family of transgender individuals